

The Business Connector

A Quarterly Newsletter from AmSpirit™ Business Connections

Speak Slowly

Winter 2004 Vol. 6 No. 4

Commonly known as the “flight or fight” defense mechanism, when we feel threatened our bodies respond. A small pair of glands just above our kidneys releases a hormone referred to as adrenaline. This hormone causes us to become more alert and tense, readying our muscles for what once was an impending decision to battle or flee for our lives.

Although the life preservation aspect of this system seldom comes into play anymore, the mechanism still arms itself when we are faced with a threatening situation. Unfortunately, speaking in public (whether before a large mass of people or simply to one other person we do not know) is a situation most of us find threatening.

Even if you are not one of the many people who view public speaking as our most terrifying fear, most every one of us has some degree of heightened tension when it comes to speaking in front of or to others. Whether mild or severe, this heightened tension causes us to speak faster than we might otherwise hope to.

Speaking too fast is generally a benign problem, as often the worse implication seems to be running out of material before the time we have been allotted expires. Not controlling the pace that we speak, however, may impact our credibility.

In his book, *The 100 Simple Secrets of Successful People*, Dr. David Niven, Ph.D., profiles a 1995 study titled “An Exploratory Investigation of Voice Characteristics and Selling

Effectiveness” (reported in the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*). According to the research conducted by R. Peterson, M. Cannito, and S. Brown, generally individuals “rate speakers who speak more slowly as being 38 percent more knowledgeable than speakers who speak more quickly.”

Not controlling the pace that we speak, however, may impact our credibility.

Assuming this and knowing that it is generally better for us to be considered more knowledgeable (especially as we seek to develop trusting relationships in our network), here are some suggestions for controlling the pace at which we speak:

Have Some Written Material:

Written material – even just an outline or a collection of simple key short phrases – reinforces in our mind what we have to say and serves as a guide, relaxing us.

Review What Is To Be Said: By occasionally reviewing what we plan to say – even in our own mind during a quiet moment in the car or at home – we will make ourselves feel more collected and composed.

We Are The Expert: Tension is natural, but it should not be for lack of knowledge. We should be confident that we are the experts in our chosen field and so it is unlikely that anyone will ever question what we have to say.

Establish Rapport With Someone:

Whenever we speak, there is always at least one person that is extremely attentive to what we have to say. We have a connection. We can put ourselves more at ease by focusing on this individual (or these individuals) rather than being concerned about those with whom we have not connected.

We Are Among Friends: When we speak to others, generally we are doing them a service or providing them value. On this basis we should consider ourselves in the company of friends and for that reason alone we should put our minds at ease.

Use A Little Humor: Laughter has a natural calming effect. So we should poke fun at ourselves or employ some other appropriate humor. Our laughter and the laughter of others will serve to ease tension in our mind and throughout the audience.

Breathe Deeply: Our tension, no matter how slight, creates a demand for oxygen, which in turn creates more tension. We can ease tension and slow the demand for oxygen by simply taking a couple deep breaths every so often as we talk. These breaths will also naturally slow our speaking as this action creates natural pauses for us.

While we may never be able to completely eliminate the tension caused by speaking in public, we can learn to minimize the effect it might have on us. By following some of these simple guidelines we can become more effective at speaking slowly and as a result add more value to what we have to say. ✓

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