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Courtney A. Harris, MBA Candidate
Social interaction specialist and international bestselling author Patrick King deems social, conversation, and communication skills the “greasy crowbars” of life, as they give you access – access to others and access to opportunities. In his book, Fearless Public Speaking, King explains exactly what it takes for you to confidently prepare for a talk or presentation and command the stage once you’re there. Most real estate professionals are tasked with addressing a local community group and/or business networking group along the journey of building their clientele. If you consistently apply King’s tips, you will undoubtedly overcome fears, learn to captivate an audience, become a memorable and impactful speaker, and build a strong base for generating business.

THINK POINT #1: Nail Your Opener

Scientific research shows that a person’s memory tends to fixate or anchor on two points in time: the beginning and the end. This anchoring means that your audience will tend to remember the beginning and ending of your talk more than they remember the middle. During the beginning of your presentation, King claims, you have approximately thirty seconds to make a first impression. In these thirty seconds, often before you have even uttered a word, your audience is making decisions regarding your credibility, competence, and trustworthiness.

Therefore, it is crucial that you have a strong opening, and a strong opening begins with a strong biography. If you are given the opportunity to submit a biography to be read prior to your talk, use it as a chance to amplify excitement before you even take the stage. King provides the following basic structure to create a compelling introductory biography:

- Two sentences explaining your work, why you’re speaking, and what makes you relevant. Keep in mind that other professionals are in the audience and want to be connected to important others. Be that person in your opening.
- One sentence about your background and your most pertinent and impressive credentials. Again, now is the time to reflect your best person. Position yourself as positively as possible.
One sentence about something unique or interesting from your personal life. This interesting element can help the audience personify you and connect to you at an interpersonal level.

In addition to an interesting brief biography, successful openers employ at least one of the following five methods:

1. A Shocking Statistic
2. A Personal Story
3. A Rhetorical Question
4. A Direct Question
5. A What If? Scenario

Not only can you utilize these methods to grab your audience’s attention at the beginning of your talk, but, King says, you can also use them to ensure that you close your presentation on a high note. Your closing must answer the question, “what was your main point?” and must be catchy and memorable. Think about your closing as giving those in the audience a sense of urgency for doing business with you. You may find mirroring your introduction in the close to be a useful and compelling approach.

THINK POINT #2: Don’t Be Boring

If you’re going to ask people to give you their undivided attention for more than five minutes, you have a duty to deliver value and not bore them. Beginning with a strong, exciting opener will make your audience curious and ready to hear more, but one major key in not boring your audience during the middle part of your presentation is to MOVE because motion creates emotion. Real estate – particularly residential real estate -- is an emotional topic. Move from behind the podium and work the stage as much as possible, making sure to walk over and address the people to your left, to your right, and in the middle. Consider even leaving the stage entirely and walking into the audience. Moving around will add excitement and energy to your voice and provide you audience something interesting to look at besides your slide deck. Lastly, you can combat being boring by remembering this acronym: D.E.M.O.-T. Demonstrate, Entertain, Make it Brief, be Outrageous, Original and/or Over the Top, and Tell Them What to Do Next.

THINK POINT #3: Visualize, Rehearse, Memorize, and Get in the Zone

But, before you can D.E.M.O.-T, you must visualize, rehearse, memorize, and get in the zone. King asserts that one of the most powerful, yet underrated, rehearsal techniques is visualization. With effective visualization, you can mentally rehearse every single step necessary to reach your goal. The value in visualization is that exercising your mental pathways prior to actually performing the tasks allows you to spot and correct any mistakes and inconsistencies you would
have otherwise missed and ultimately made. King offers two main ways to effectively use visualization to mentally rehearse:

1. **First-person perspective** - Walk through every step required to achieve your goal. Evaluate every nuance and perform every minute part. Mentally and emotionally place yourself in your presentation.

2. **Third-person perspective** – Walk through every step required to achieve your goal, but, this time, perform each action from a third-person perspective. This will allow you to focus on the technical steps involved and remember the feeling of doing it correctly.

However, King notes, all your visualization and mental rehearsal will be for nothing if you fail to memorize your material. To prevent this, King offers an easy, low-resistance technique to memorize your material called a memory palace. To build your memory palace, follow these steps:

1. Visualize your home. Walk through it in your mind. This is your memory palace. Choose a route to take upon entering, such as going to the kitchen or your bedroom. Do not change the route.
2. Next, identify six specific items along your route. These will be “storage locations” in which you’ll place memories to be picked up later.
3. Next, assign things you want to memorize to these “storage locations” using symbols, drawings, or other vivid concepts that are associated with what you wish to remember.
4. Lastly, walk through your memory palace taking the route you chose earlier. Along the way, you will encounter your six storage locations. Seeing them and the vivid imagery you assigned to them will inevitably evoke what you wished to memorize.

The last tip King provides to aid in preparing for your presentation is to create a pre-performance ritual. Creating this ritual is all about identifying your optimal state for presenting, and asking yourself the right questions to determine how to get yourself to this state prior to your talk. Consider everything from your food choices, activities, superstitions, social interaction, and final rehearsal. Evaluate and decide what best gets you in the zone and ready to perform.

**THINK POINT #4: Ace the Q&A Session**

So, you’ve managed to successfully visualize, rehearse, memorize, get in the zone, and D.E.M.O.-T your way through your presentation. Congratulations! Now, you’re all finished, right? Not even close. According to King, you should never think you’re off the hook once you finish your talk, instead *always* expect a Q&A session.

Q&A sessions are unpredictable by nature, as you will never know for certain what will be asked. However, you can avoid being blindsided by an unanticipated question by being well-versed in the common concerns, questions, contrasting arguments, and relevant research.
regarding your topic. Prepare a *common questions sheet* for yourself that includes the common arguments that oppose your position, frequent clarifications you’ve had to make in the past and/or any you anticipate having to make, as well responses to each. By considering and answering likely questions and opposing arguments prior to your Q&A session, you will be more polished and less likely to be caught off guard.

**THINK POINT #5: Overcome Fear and Anxiety**

But, alas, all the preparation you put into your talk can all be for naught if you allow anxiety and fear to consume you. King states the first step in defeating any fear of speaking you may have is to adjust your perspective. Your perception of your role, the role of the audience, and the context of your talk has an incredible influence on your comfort level and your approach. Therefore, King suggests using the following reality as a sense of comfort – the audience is there for you, to learn from you, and to see where there might be mutual benefit in working with you. They want to see you succeed and aren’t looking for perfection. In fact, according to the *Pratfall Effect*, the more vulnerable you appear, such as stumbling or stuttering just a little, the more likable you will be. So, as long as the imperfections don’t make you seem incompetent, a few errors are ok and will actually enhance your charisma.

Although overcoming your fear and anxiety is important, according to another principle King talks about, the *Yerkes-Dodson Law*, you actually don’t want to eliminate 100% of the stress or pressure you may feel about speaking. The *Yerkes-Dodson Law* states that there exists an ideal level of stress that directly corresponds to peak performance. To apply Yerkes-Dodson, try finding which levels of pressure allow you to perform highly in different situations. Optimal levels of stress will give you sufficient motivation to work hard but not so much pressure that you feel overloaded and struggle to perform.

**THINK POINT #6: Learn from Yourself**

It’s no secret that becoming a great presenter is a process that involves continuous evolution and learning. You must always be on the lookout for ways to improve and become more polished. King writes that the best way to accomplish this is to record your presentations, watch them, and perform objective postmortem analyses on them. During your analyses, don’t focus on your material, instead, focus on your presence, measure your speech rate, check your emotions and energy level, critique your body language, and observe the audience’s reactions to your stories and key points. Take extensive
notes on your observations. From your notes, you can determine if you are speaking too fast or too slow, if your energy level is too low or too high, if you are accurately and effectively conveying the emotions you wish to convey, if you are using filler words or repeatedly stumbling over certain phrases, and if, and when, you are boring your audience. Your postmortem analysis is your tailor-made roadmap to improving your presentations.

Conclusion

Implementing the above insights to achieve sustainable improvement will take some time, practice, and plain old trial-and-error. Fortunately, King also offers five easy, quick, and actionable tips you can adopt RIGHT NOW for the very next time you have to speak in public. These five easy and quick tips are to use props and/or visuals, speak as if you’re speaking to a single person and not a crowd, observe and learn from the masters, don’t overcorrect your stumbles or errors, and, most importantly, don’t take yourself too seriously. Becoming a more effective, entertaining, polished, and relaxed public speaker can seem like a daunting task, but, by applying King’s tips, it can be done. You can move from just existing on the stage to commanding standing ovations. You can take on public speaking fearlessly.

Recommended Reading


About the Author

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Courtney Harris is a graduate student from Valdosta, Georgia. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Duke University in 2016. Before beginning graduate school at Baylor, Courtney worked with The Fossil Group, a North Carolina-based marketing and investing firm, as an intern, and later, junior executive, in their brand management division. Courtney is seeking an MBA degree with a concentration in marketing and plans to work in the entertainment industry.