

Four secrets of the world's greatest speakers

 By [James Hurford](#) 7 Aug 2014

John F. Kennedy, Winston Churchill, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and Ronald Reagan... they all learnt that if you want to inspire and motivate people your spirit has to enter the soul of the listener.

To enter the soul of your listener you need to convey four important qualities. Do just one of these well and you'll notice a difference - and so will everyone else:

1. Relax and enjoy it

When the speaker is at ease and seems to be enjoying the presentation, the audience will be at ease. People want to listen to someone who's interesting, relaxed, and comfortable.



JFK doing what he was so good at. (Image: NASA)

In everyday conversations, we have no problem being ourselves. Yet when we stand up to give a speech, we change. We focus too much on the audience rather than what we're saying.

Take the pressure off yourself, think of your presentation more as a conversation between two people. Make it personal, talk directly to people and make a connection.

If you can carry on a relaxed conversation with two or three people, you can also give a great speech.

2. If people don't trust you, they won't listen to you

Building credibility starts even before you've had a chance to open your mouth. Self-presentation is crucial to your credibility.

Visual impact is at least as important as verbal impact, people will very quickly make assumptions based on your facial expressions, the clothes you wear, how well groomed you are and your body language.

Dressing well will enhance your credibility and convey professionalism. Most importantly, it will make you feel more confident. Confidence plays a key role in establishing credibility and giving a successful presentation. If you look good, you feel good.

3. Speak with 'fire in your belly'

Enthusiasm is contagious. Speak with passion and you'll get people excited. You will naturally be more animated and you'll create energy in the room. People are drawn towards people who are enthusiastic about what they are speaking about. They're more interesting, more believable and more likeable.

Energy is created by enthusiasm, and enthusiasm is created by a genuine interest and passion about the topic you're speaking about. You can't fake enthusiasm, it has to come from the heart to be effective.

Just the act of speaking with enthusiasm makes you come across as more confident.

Speak about something that you truly believe in such as a product or a business idea or a cause that you're passionate about, and it'll be easy.

4. Take ownership of the room

Speaking from a place of strength and authority is mostly a mental game. Once you're in the room, recognise that you belong there. Don't approach meetings or presentations as if it's a test. Don't put your head down or nervously flick through papers - be there in body and mind.

Giving a presentation or making a speech is physical. So when you're asked to take the limelight make sure you take it. Stand upright, hold your head up, put your shoulders back, lean slightly forward, and smile. What you're saying with your body language is - "I'm glad to be here."

How you speak matters. If you don't sound like you expect respect, you won't get it. Your eyes, your face, your tone, all part - they're the message givers.

Establish eye contact with several people in the room as you talk, it will help you connect with your audience. Even better, get people to nod their heads as you speak - it's a sign of approval.

Speak clearly and calmly, slowing your pace - it increases your authority as well as your clarity. If you stumble over your words, you're speaking too fast. If you sound hesitant or unsure, people will assume that you either don't have the authority that you're not willing to use it.

Learn from the great speakers

If you want to become a better speaker, it's worth looking at great speeches, the ones that connect with the audience. You find they all have empathy, credibility, enthusiasm, and authority - and their spirit touches your soul.

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