

## **Public Speaking: An Accounting Marketing Tool**

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What's more efficient—making 50 separate contacts or meeting 50 contacts at once?

What's more useful—one person who knows you or many people who know you?

What's more effective—sending a diluted message or conveying a strong one?

Public speaking is a cost-effective and time-effective way to market yourself and your firm. You can reach more people in less time, convey a strong message to a specific market, and influence thinking in a given area. In other words, public speaking can bring you and your firm visibility, respect, and clients—but only if you do it well.

Whether you are speaking at a luncheon for a local business group about tax changes or conducting a seminar for clients about income allocation for physicians, what you say and how you say it matters. No one is impressed or moved to action by a dull, lifeless presentation. So don't squander the opportunities you have to establish credibility, create value, and convey expertise by speaking with power and impact before groups.

Develop skill in three areas: meeting your audience's needs, structuring your ideas, and bringing your ideas to life.

***Meeting your audience's needs:*** Too often speakers spend too much time talking about their firm, their niche, their services without tying them to their audience's needs.

Audiences don't care much about what you do unless they believe they can benefit from it. They want to know how they can benefit from what you know and do.

So your first speaking responsibility is to analyze your audience before you speak so you can provide information that will help them. For instance, you may be addressing a group of attorneys with the hope of establishing strategic alliances with them. They don't want to know the intricate details about how you go about doing a tax return, business valuation, or estate planning. They want to know why they should choose you over other sources, what you are like to work with, and how you will benefit them and their clients. Give audiences what they want, and you'll come out a winner because audiences appreciate and remember speakers who meet their needs. .

Three factors influence your effectiveness to meet your audience's needs: substance, response, and image. Before your next presentation to your partners, associates, staff, clients, board, or business community, be clear in your own mind about what substance you want to convey, what response you want to evoke, and what image you want to project. Then craft your message accordingly. This will not only help you give your audience something of value, it will influence their response and project a positive image.

**Structuring your ideas:** When asked to speak, accountants are often given a broad topic such as tax law, accounting procedures, or consulting services to cover. It's impossible to thoroughly cover such broad topics in a short time to a lay audience, but it's entirely possible to narrow the scope and drive a few points home with clarity and precision.

The more complex your topic, the more important it is to pare it down into something manageable. Too often accountants start with details and move to the main point—losing their audience in the process. This creates the “so what” syndrome in audiences: They hear a lot of detail, don't know where the speaker is heading, and think “so what.” By the time speaker gets to the “so what,” the listeners have tuned out and thus miss the point completely.

It is more effective to develop a core message which requires you to break your information down into three elements: a central theme, several key points, and an action statement. These are the most important things you want your audience to remember, and everything else in your presentation revolves around them.

The central theme is the bottom-line, most important point you want to make; it is the anchor for the entire presentation. The key points are “big ideas” that prove your central theme is true and important; they are usually limited to two or three. The action statement is what you want your listeners to do as a result of hearing what you have to say; it helps them see the value in your message. The central theme, key points, and action statement create a memorable message that is strong and powerful. The most effective ones are short, complete, conversational sentences that are easy to remember. They enable you to structure your ideas into an easy-to-follow format for your audience.

**Bring ideas to life:** Here is the biggest challenge of all: taking complex, dry topics such as taxes, profit sharing, pension planning, cost segregation, etc. and making them exciting, engaging, and entertaining. Yes, audiences do expect you to find a way to do this. And when you do, you will be rewarded generously with their positive word of mouth marketing for you and your firm.

So how do you make your presentations interesting and earn this reward? Once you have your content and structure prepared, you need to pull in humor, analogies, and stories to give your ideas life. Humor does not mean you have to be a stand-up comedian; it does mean that you need to keep a lighthearted, enjoyable tone to your presentations. You might be able to weave in a joke, an anecdote, a cartoon, a saying, or a personal experience that brings a smile to you and your audience.

Analogies are great for taking people from the known to the unknown and from foggy to clarity. By comparing something familiar to something unfamiliar, you're able to bridge the gap between your in-depth body of knowledge and your audience's limited knowledge about your area of expertise. When thinking of analogies, think of everyday things that most people are familiar with: homes, cars, children, work, traffic, etc. and then compare your complex idea to a simple, everyday experience most people have had.

You'll know you've made a good analogy when the audience says "that's a good way to put it" or "now I understand what you mean."

Stories are an excellent way to bring mundane ideas to life. And the most effective stories are the ones that are derived from your personal experiences. Think about your past experiences—good and bad—and see how you can incorporate them into your presentations to make specific points.

It's also a good idea to begin developing your own resource library. Start collecting cartoons, sayings, quotes, humorous lists, etc. so when it's time to prepare a presentation, you have something to draw from. The best speakers draw on their personality, experiences, and humorous resources to make their presentations interesting.

One more thing about bringing your ideas to life. Remember, that you are your own greatest "interest" tool. Use your voice, facial expression, eye contact, gestures, and movement to keep the pace lively and your audience engaged. Show conviction, passion, and enthusiasm about what you're talking about and it'll help you connect with who you are talking to.

Being able to speak well before groups is a highly sought after skill that reaps great personal and professional benefits. If you meet your audience's needs, structure your ideas so they're easy to follow, and bring your ideas to life, you'll influence others positively, build credibility with your audience, and attract more business to you and your firm.