

public speaking

Last May I had to give the commencement address at the high school where I teach students about literature, art and cinema. The seniors had asked me the previous October to give the talk. So for nearly seven months I fretted and freaked not only about what I would say but how in the world I could actually say anything in front of a few hundred folks there to see their children, grandchildren and friends on one of the more significant days of their lives.

Ironical as it sounds, even though I speak in front of 15 to 20 kids several times a day, if I have to get in front of more than 30 people, I basically lose my ability to function as a normal human.

Despite my jitters, I actually survived the speech and made some people laugh. At the conclusion, people even clapped (custom dictates such niceties). While I don't ever want to do such a thing again, chances are that sometime soon I will be in front of a group and my knees will wobble, my palms will leak and I'll really want a White Russian. That said, I wanted to pass along some advice — much learned the hard way — about how to approach a public speech or presentation.

1. KISS — As in all things, keep it simple, stupid. In speeches and presenta-

DAZZLING YOUR AUDIENCE (OR AT LEAST SURVIVING THE MOMENT)

DEPENDS ON PACE, PRACTICE AND SIMPLICITY **BY MARK LUCE**



(hopefully in 20 minutes or less), and while a lot may be riding on it, it will not, by itself, cause your death.

5. Hit the brakes — Many speeches fail because the speaker talks a million miles an hour. The key to effectiveness is to enunciate each word and pause between points. To help, write **SLOW DOWN** on the top of each page of your presentation.

6. Practice — Whether in front of the mirror or your spouse, practice the speech. The more comfortable you are with the language, the more confident you will sound.

7. Be yourself — No one really wants you to bomb, nor does anyone expect that you will have the rhetorical flourishes of a Kennedy or King. Instead, concentrate on speaking like you normally do, saying things that you would normally say. Remember, play to your strengths — and you are your best strength.

Oh, and slow down, you are speaking too fast.

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tions, less is more. Make a list of the three things you need/want to accomplish in the talk. Stick to it.

2. Golden Throat — Do not read your speech, as it will sound cold and distant. You want your audience to respond with interest, not slumber. Speak with confidence, and use your arms for emphasis.

3. A-ha-ha-ha — The universal winner remains humor. If you can keep it light and make sure to make fun of yourself, you'll be much better off. People like to laugh, especially in serious situations.

4. The death factor — Contrary to popular belief, making a mistake will not send you to the gulag or the hangman. Remember, your speech will be over

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