

6 mistakes public speakers should avoid

By Diana Booher | Posted: November 5, 2014



Whether you're talking football, engineering, or acting, you've seen the best and brightest make mistakes. Fumbles, crashes, and bloopers—the losses can be minor or tragic.

Likewise, they can be in business presentations. Mistakes can cost a sale, a promotion, or a career. The best business presenters and public speakers never fumble in the following six ways:

1. Make the audience feel small. Speakers, of course, don't *intend* to irritate audience members and set their teeth on edge. But let them unintentionally deliver a few lines like these and watch what happens:

"As I travel around the globe each year..."

"In my interactions with Fortune 500 CEOs weekly, they say to me, John, you've got to help me solve..."

"So I pulled out a \$100 bill, handed it to the bell captain, and told him that package had better be in my room before I was."

"My spouse and I were at the Ritz Carlton last weekend when...."

Douse people with a few of these comments, and see how fast they shrink emotionally.

2. Demonstrate arrogance. The previous lines may flow from ignorance rather than arrogance. In addition to ego-filled references that the audience can't relate to, arrogance rears its head in many other ways:

Overly complex explanations meant to confuse rather than clarify.

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Inflexibility when things need to be adjusted, including schedules, timing, or setting.

Disrespecting people they consider “unimportant.”

Audience members notice behavior both on and off stage. Personality often drowns out the message.

3. Outsmart the smart alec. All things being equal, audiences generally side with one of their own because the audience members are the “underdogs.”

A speaker holds the position of power at the beginning of an encounter, including the microphone, attention, an introduction, and credibility. But once a speaker jumps into the fray and becomes confrontational with someone, he or she loses that original position of credibility. Better responses include:

“I see things differently.”

“My take on that issue is...”

“My experience with that software tells me...”

Bouncing angry barbs back and forth lowers, rather than raises, authority and respect.

4. Apologize for things you can control. Be prepared.

There's no excuse for lack of preparation on things within your control: data you should have gathered, numbers you should have crunched, calls you should have made, interviews you should have done.

If you don't have it and aren't prepared to share it, don't wave that flag. Apologizing for lack of preparation doesn't help.

5. Mishandle a Q&A period. Never make statements like, “I'll take two more questions.” What if your audience has only one more question? The impression created is that the group isn't all that interested in what you have to say.

Or worse, what if the second question is a negative one? You certainly don't want to end your Q-and-A period on a negative issue.

When you've decided to stop taking questions, just stop. No need to give a warning.

6. End with questions. Always deliver your polished wrap-up comments *after* the informal question session. Otherwise, your presentation or speech simply limps to a close.

End with a wallop, not a whimper.

Dianna Booher is a bestselling author, speaker, syndicated blogger, and founder of both international communications training firm Booher Consultants and Booher Research. A version of this story originally appeared on Booher Research Institute's blog.

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Excellent tips. Thanks, Dianna.

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Every public speaking class should make sure to cover these tips.... This is extremely beneficial to those that are new to this concept or who are refreshing their skills. A speech can quickly transition from well done to terrible if these types of tips are used... I really enjoyed this article.