

Iesha's 10 tips for designing a speaking session

On my journey from nervous public speaker to person who connects with a variety of audiences, I've reflected that my most successful talks have the following in common. I've often been asked for tips. I hope this helps you.

1. **What format is it?** Interactive workshop or a straight talk/presentation? Your design will be affected by that. You will need a lot more content than you think if it's a straight speech for, say, 45 mins.
2. **What do you want people to come away with?** What will people learn or take action on as a result of your talk? It's really about your audience, not you.
3. **Get feedback** from people on previous speeches or public talks you've given, or even any time that you have addressed a group of more than 10 people to communicate information. Find somebody you trust and ask which things connected with them and what you can improve.
4. **Be open** and appropriately vulnerable and tell relevant stories about yourself. Always keep in mind how these will affect and benefit your audience
5. **Consider the narrative** of your talk. Have a clear beginning, middle and end. It's a journey you take your audience on with you. The end is empowerment or reflection for them that should lead to change of some sort for those willing to act.
6. **Consider content first.** Save slide design till last, when you could already give the speech without them. I actually don't use power points at all. I find them distracting and I waste time designing them as opposed to making the actual speech better. If the speech is good enough, people will pay attention and remember stuff. I do use a flip chart though. This is personal preference so do what you feel comfortable with.
7. **Practice.** I run mine through a few times to myself, then to my partner. I often also do a dress rehearsal a few days before that I record on my phone. I listen back to this in the car and various places and improve it. I have also sent copies to a friend of mine who is a professional speaker who gives me feedback.
8. **Have prompts but be flexible.** I like to be flexible enough to incorporate something about the audience or event that I couldn't have known in advance. A completely memorised speech doesn't work for my style. So I have prompts. I use small index cards with a sentence or two on. I've seen props used well and pencilled notes on a flip chart that audience can't see but you can go over with pen at the correct point in your talk as a visual aid for them.
9. **Let your personality come through.** Make it a speech that only you could have given. Use examples personal to you that connect with the people who are interested in what you have to communicate.
10. **Don't make it for everyone.** For everybody is bland. Your talk won't suit everybody. Be fine with that but design it so that the people you are targeting feel as if you are talking specifically to them and can see inside their heads. Then you've connected.

If none of the above resonates with you, consider speeches you've seen that connect with you or find ones online. Think about the structure and what they have in common and use them as a basis for yours.

Let me know how using any of this has helped you.

Iesha

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