

SpeakWell Partners Presents

five deadly sins

of public speakers



If you want to be a better speaker, watch others in action. It's a great (and inexpensive) way to reinforce the dos and don'ts of excellent communication. Sadly, there is an abundance of bad speeches out there and last week's keynote address at a national conference in Philadelphia was no exception. Once again, what seems fundamental cannot be over-stated. We offer the following five deadly sins of public speaking as a cautionary tale so that none of you commit these heinous infractions and find yourself with a hefty ticket from the presentation police!

Thou shalt not...

Sin #1

Submit a photo that is more than five years old.

Unless you are Madonna, you probably looked a lot better in photos from 15 years ago. But when the speaker looks nothing like the photo in the conference program, it is a huge disconnect for the audience. Creating cognitive dissonance in your audience can undermine your credibility. Swallow your vanity or better yet, have a professional shot taken that captures the best of the current you.

Sin #2

Wear clothes or jewelry that distract from your message.

Women: let's leave the glitter and the sparkle to Olympic gymnasts. This particular keynote speaker was wearing an ill-fitting, knee-length jacket that had a metallic weave and rhinestone buttons. Men: let's leave the loud ties and big rings to anchorman Ron Burgundy.

Sin #3

Ramble or repeat yourself when you lose your place.

When the speaker repeated the same sentence three times, we all understood the problem...she had lost her place in her memorized speech. If it happens to you, take a pause, refer to your notes that are on a table or lectern nearby, or share an anecdote. You will eventually remember what you wanted to say next...which brings us to the next deadly sin.

Sin #4

Tell a story you don't fully remember.

Stories are powerful connectors to your content and your audience. We love them. However, they need detail and a connection to the larger point to be effective. The speaker's instinct was good, but her story left us on third base with no one waving us in.

Sin #5

Leave your opening lines to chance.

You must nail the first few sentences of your presentation. Never start with the word "um." Second worst word? "So..." First impressions are critical. Be sharp, focused, and captivating. Memorize your first three sentences.

SpeakWell Partners

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We wish this speaker had hired us to help her deliver a great speech.
Our final piece of advice: call us before your next big presentation!