

SUMMARY

AS WE SPEAK

PETER MEYERS AND SHANN NIX



Summary of “As We Speak” by Peter Meyers and Shann Nix

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Learn how to make your point and have it stick.

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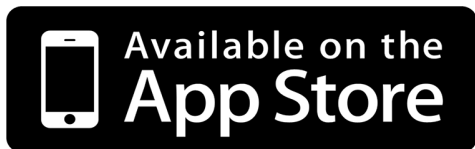


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Introduction

You know the feeling you get moments before a presentation. Your palms are sweaty and you begin pacing back and forth. As you pace around, you begin to think of everything that could go wrong, “*I should’ve spent more time preparing,*” “*What if I forget what I’m going to say?*” “*What if they don’t like me?*” and the worst, “*What if they find out that I’m not as smart as I think I am?*” You begin to doubt yourself, your face feels hot as you begin to wonder if you’re just a fraud. If speaking in public is your worst nightmare, if speaking in front of a group of people is terrifying, then you’re not alone. In fact, there’s nothing wrong with you at all. The problem is that humans are *hardwired to fail* in situations like this. But why? Well, the two tiny, almond-shaped structures in your brain called the amygdalae, whose only job is to keep you alive, are to blame. So when you’re standing on that stage, your amygdalae is scanning for danger, sending alerts to your body that you’re under threat. They take control of your brain and put you into survival mode. Adrenaline is pumping through your system, you breathe rapidly, your heartbeat speeds, you begin to sweat, your vision sharpens in preparation for battle, blood flows directly to your arms and legs to help you fight or run. Any organ not immediately necessary for survival is robbed of the blood it needs. One of those nonessentials is your frontal cortex, the area of the brain where language is processed. So as you stand on stage, blood drains away from your forebrain causing you to blank on what you’re about to say. This is what we call an *amygdala hijack*.

An Amygdala hijack can take down even the most powerful members of society. So when someone needs help overcoming their fear of public speaking, they call on Peter Meyers and Shann Nix. They’ve coached people in high-stakes situations, written speeches for powerful CEOs, and even helped smart midlevel people overcome their fear of simply speaking up in meetings. Now, the dynamic duo aims to spill everything they know about speaking and communication to arm you with the tools you need to get out there, face your fears, and become victorious. They’ll change the way you think about speaking and teach you strategies for *High-Performance*

Communication. So if you struggle at giving presentations or simply want to speak up in a meeting, it's time to learn the strategies of expert communicators, overcome your fears, and master the art of speaking.

Prepare for Any Conversation with a Three-Step Strategy

There may be many reasons why you want to improve your communication skills. Perhaps you have to deliver an important presentation at your company. What's your first step? You likely spend hours rehearsing and practicing, running through your presentation in your head. When it comes time to give your presentation, everything is going smoothly and you think the content of your speech will be well-received. You nailed it! Just one problem. Everyone looks bored. They look as if they would rather be anywhere else but here. Where did you go wrong?

The problem is that you didn't consider the needs of your listeners. You didn't have a strategy. Even if you spew seventy-thousand words a week, few of them will have any real impact if you don't prepare a strategy. Therefore, you should think of your presentation like a dinner party. Would you invite people over for dinner, only to wait until their arrival to think about what you're serving? No! Good hosts prepare. They think about who is coming, the occasion, the appropriate menu. It's not about providing a meal, but providing an experience. The secret is in the preparation and communication is just the same.

To prepare for any speaking engagement, you should use three steps: Outcome, Relevance, and Point. These three steps are critical for avoiding complaints like the speech is too long, irrelevant, or has no point. All it takes is thirty seconds to run through this process in your mind before your next phone call. Let's take a closer look at the process. When thinking about the outcome, ask yourself, "*What do you want to accomplish?*" Do you want the listener to shift her mindset, make a decision, or take action? Be specific about what you want and write it down. Avoid outcomes that involve the listener understanding more about *x* or telling them about *x*. These outcomes are simply too vague. You need an outcome that is achievable and measurable to have a successful conversation or presentation.

Next, it's time to make sure the content you are presenting is relevant. One of the biggest mistakes many speakers make is jumping right into the information without first identifying why anyone should care. If no one cares, then one's going to listen. Simply ask yourself, "*Why should the listener care?*" Give yourself three solid reasons why the listener should care about what you have to say. Why does it matter? What's in it for him? Finally, it's time to make your point. Many times speakers desire to divulge everything they know about a topic, which makes them fail to clarify the point! Quite simply, your point is your message which can be boiled down to one memorable phrase or sentence. So to clarify your point, write down your message in just one sentence.

Now that you've gone through the process that will prepare you for any conversation, presentation, phone call, or e-mail, you can apply these steps just moments before to dramatically raise your level of influence. In the long run, it'll even save you time. "One minute of preparation could transform a potentially painful, hour-long conversation into an efficient, ten-minute exchange."

Start Strong and Create a Road-Map

How many presentations have you sat through in which you found yourself bored to tears? It happens. You wonder why the speaker is simply rambling on with no end in sight. So if you don't want to put your listeners through the same experience, it's all about how you start. You see, it takes only seven seconds for a listener to decide whether or not they are interested in what you have to say. Therefore, the way you start your speech is critical.

Some powerful openers include opening with the word "you." This is a powerful opener because already you are talking about the audience's favorite topic: themselves. Be direct and demonstrate that you know their situation and that you care about it. Another strategy is using a powerful statistic, or what they call a "sexy number." A sexy number is shocking and makes the listener immediately sit up and take notice. Or you can ask a question, shock the listeners, or even make a confession and become vulnerable. Use the word "imagine" or tell a story or anecdote to grab their attention. All are powerful ways you can get the listeners interested in what you have to say. At the end of the day, you have no second chances so start strong. Once you have their attention, you can then welcome them or address any housekeeping items.

Now it's time to create the road map for the rest of your speech. Imagine as if you are going on a road trip, if you want to keep your passengers happy, you need to tell them where they're going, what route you're going to use, and how long it's going to take to get there. Your speech should do the same three things. Let the people know how long you're going to be speaking by saying something like, *"I'm going to be speaking for fifteen minutes. Then we have fifteen minutes for open discussion and Q&A."* Next, give them a preview of your structure. You may establish this by saying something similar to, *"We're going to look at developing leadership in terms of where we are today, where we need to be five years from now, and what we need to do to get there."* Finally, you'll set up the rules of engagement by

specifying whether questions should be asked during your speech or should be asked at the end during a Q&A session.

Next, it's time to enter the middle of the speech. This is where you need to provide knowledge, whether it's new information or something that needs to be reinforced. But it's more than just simply giving your audience the facts. Instead, this is the discovery section in which you provide insights that stimulate your listener to make discoveries, rather than force information down their throat. Limit yourself to just three Points of Discovery; otherwise, you risk overwhelming your audience and giving them more information than they can process.

Lastly, it's time to end your speech. One critical mistake most presenters make is ending on a Q&A. Here's why that's a bad idea. 1) you risk dead silence in which no one has questions, forcing you to pack up your things and awkwardly leave. All your hard work is now wasted. 2) you risk an aggressive questioner who questions your credibility. Again, your hard work is wasted. Therefore, include a Q&A wherever possible but not at the end. Instead, finish strong. People remember what they last heard. So think of your ending as the dessert, the part where you take back control of the presentation and ensure victory in the end! The best way to do this is by creating an emotion in the listener through a story, metaphor, or image. Perhaps say something like, *"Before we close, I'd like to leave you with this thought..."* Then give it to them and make them remember. Make them feel something that they will associate with your speech forever.

How to Use Your Most Powerful Tool: Your Voice

Have you ever heard yourself in a recording and think, “*Wow, I hate my voice.*”? You’re not alone, but why is this the case? One reason for this is because our voice reveals what we’re *not* saying. Our voice reveals our inner state which makes giving speeches and presentations even more uncomfortable. This is why the delivery of a speech is critical. This doesn’t mean that you have to turn your presentation into a theater performance; instead, you should learn how to use the basic nuances of your voice to your advantage.

Radio hosts and actors spend years studying their voices, they make a living using them. But what if I told you that you also make a living with your voice? Think about it. “Your voice is the vehicle through which your thoughts are made visible.” So yes, your voice is important! So how can you add color to your voice and make it more interesting? Add variety. Imagine your voice is like a PA system in which you can control the volume, pitch, and tempo.

When it comes to volume, raising your voice and getting louder isn’t the only way to emphasize a point. In fact, when you lower your volume, you are signaling that what comes *next* is important. So practice speaking very softly, and then increasing your volume until you are speaking loudly. This is called a *crescendo* and it is used to build to a climax. On the other hand, going from a high volume to a low volume can be effective when making your most important point in the softest voice possible. So practice with the volume of your voice and remember to use variety!

Now it’s time to focus on your pitch. Your pitch is how high or low the tone of your voice is and is the key indicator for identifying and demonstrating your emotions. For instance, when your voice goes up, it signifies emotions like joy, compassion, and sympathy. Imagine talking to a baby or a puppy, your pitch automatically rises, right? However, when we want to

demonstrate confidence, certainty, and power, we drop the pitch of our voice down. Men already have a low pitch which is why they have an easier time being authoritative and establishing dominance. Finally, let's discuss your tempo. Your tempo is how quickly or slowly you move through your speech. Perhaps think about speeding through less important parts and slowing down when you want to make an important point. In the end, however, you must vary the speed and avoid being predictable.

For many of us, varying our voices can be uncomfortable and awkward. So you must practice so that your voice becomes natural. You can practice by reading bedtime stories to your kids in which you vary your voice, emphasize certain words, and pay attention to how your volume can impact the meaning of the story. If you don't have kids, read a book out loud to yourself! Pick your favorite and read it out loud for a half-hour every week. Linger on the notes, find pleasure in the sound of the words, and practice varying your voice.

Pay Attention to Your Body Language

How do you know when someone is lying? Perhaps they shift their eyes, fidget with their jewelry, or even have a shaky voice. These behaviors are exactly what police officers are looking for when they are questioning suspects, they are looking for a lack of congruence. Congruence is when our eyes, face, body, and words are all in agreement. So when something doesn't match up, we automatically record these incongruent movements as a sign of distrust. And unfortunately, when you're on stage experiencing an amygdala hijack, your body can *make* you incongruent.

The last thing you want to do on stage is to give the audience a reason to not trust you. So here are some simple ways you can ensure that you stay calm and in control. If you are one of those that experience shaky hands when giving a speech on stage, avoid holding loose paper or a laser pointer. These objects will only bring attention to your shaky hands and people will notice your nerves. Instead, try holding a book or even gripping a pen while you speak. Similarly, if you experience shaky legs, then move around the stage and get your circulation moving.

Perhaps you're one of those people who sweats when they're nervous. That's okay. Just keep your jacket and sweater on during your presentation and wear a dark color like black. If you suffer from a sweaty forehead, keep a handkerchief handy and use it as needed. Many people also experience a trembling voice when they're nervous. This nervous tick is a bit harder to mask but it can be done! When this happens, you might notice that your chest and throat tighten up, making it difficult for you to speak clearly. Instead, try breathing from your diaphragm and not from your chest. This might take practice but it'll help you sound calm and confident.

Another sign of incongruence is avoiding eye contact. Have you ever been to a presentation when someone buried their nose in their notes the entire time? Many people do this to avoid looking at the audience, but all it does is show them that you are nervous which weakens your credibility. Therefore,

your notes shouldn't have your entire speech written on them; instead, you should just have a basic outline or bullet points of your main ideas. If you do choose to use note cards, remember to number them so that they stay in order. You should also use a black pen and write in a large, legible script so that you can easily read your notes. Most importantly, don't panic if you end up losing your train of thought or drawing a blank. Simply breathe, drink some water, and calmly refer back to your notes. In this case, people will just assume that you are taking your time to ensure you're giving the correct information.

Think Positive Thoughts and Give Your Gift

Speeches are typically scheduled weeks or even months in advance. The problem that many people face is that they sometimes wake up on the wrong side of the bed the morning of their presentation. No one wants to give a speech while they're in a bad mood, right? That's why you must know how to enter your day in the right frame of mind. The best way to do this is by identifying your positive performance preparation patterns.

Similar to how you have a morning and nightly routine, you should also have a routine before a presentation or meeting. This routine should be certain actions or movements that will make you feel confident and prepared. What makes you confident and happy? Perhaps it's enjoying your favorite beverage, your favorite tea or Starbucks latte. Maybe there's a certain song that makes you feel inspired and confident. Whatever it is, you should repeat this routine to get yourself in the right frame of mind. Additionally, the way you look plays an important role in your confidence. Find that smile and wear something that makes you feel good. Walk around with your head held high and your shoulders back. You'll be surprised how good you'll feel just by getting the right routine down!

Another problem that many people face is their tendency to overthink. Before a big meeting or presentation, we sometimes make ourselves crazy by thinking about everything that can go wrong. *"What if I don't know the answer to someone's question?"* or *"What if I look stupid?"* *"What if they don't trust me?"* This cycle of thinking will only generate negativity and make you self-conscious. Instead, answer these questions positively. Ask yourself, *"How can I use their questions to build trust?"* or *"What's my strongest idea?"* When you ask positive questions, you're programming your brain to move forward. Turn your negativity into positivity, and you'll find that you are more confident than ever going into your next presentation or meeting.

Ultimately, you should think about the power of your words. You have spent time focusing on the needs of the audience and preparing your ideas, voice, and body. All that hard work should be viewed as a gift to your audience. When done properly, you give the audience what they want. You provide them with the information or inspiration they need, sometimes that even has the power to change lives. So “Show the world, Be generous with your voice. Share what you have to say. Give your gift: the world is waiting to receive it.”

Final Summary

The first step in effective communication is identifying the needs of your audience. Once you figure out how you can meet the needs of your listeners and discover how to make them care, then it's time to grab their attention. Tell a story, anecdote, or share a shocking statistic to get your listeners interested in what you have to say. Now it's time to get to the meat of your presentation. Limit your speech to three discovery points and avoid simply telling your audience what they need to know, let them discover it by giving them the tools and clues they need to get there. After all, everyone loves an aha! moment. Of course, what you say is only half of it. You should be mindful of your body and voice to ensure that you gain the trust of your listeners and become a credible speaker. At the end of the day, communication is a powerful tool. Our words and actions have the power to change lives and become powerful motivators. So think of your words as a gift and don't be afraid to share what you have to say.



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