



Speak easy

SAY IT LOUD, SAY IT PROUD, WITH THESE SPEECH-GIVING TIPS

IF YOU WERE asked to give a speech to a roomful of people, could you do it? For lots of women, public speaking is scary stuff. But if you back away from the challenge, you may be missing out on things like impressing your boss with a killer presentation or giving a moving toast at your BFF's wedding. Anyone can be a good public speaker, even if the thought makes your palms sweat and your heart pound. I know because over the past six years, I've traveled across the country with the Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership—a non-profit dedicated to professional development for women—teaching hundreds of mic-shy gals how to deliver a speech. The hardest part is saying yes when given the opportunity. Once you've done that, focus on one or two of the following tips at a time while practicing your speech and pretty soon, you'll feel like a pro.

ENTER WITH ENERGY Leave your fear behind by walking into the space with enthusiasm and eagerness to share your message, even if you feel hesitant. Spend time visualizing yourself beginning the speech in this way, and imagine the audience smiling back at you with friendly attentiveness.

SPEAK UP Women tend to speak in soft, high-pitched voices that get even higher when we're nervous. Talk in a deep, clear voice to convey confidence, and remember to project.

PACE YOURSELF If you are a speedy speaker, your audience won't have time to process what you're saying. Taking deep, even breaths will help control the pace of your speech and calm your nerves. Pay attention to punctuation by pausing at the ends of your sentences. Pauses can be very powerful.

GIVE UP THE VALLEY-GIRL TALK Many of us fill our speech with *like* and end-definitive sentences with an upward inflection, as if asking a question. In a speech, this keeps people from taking you seriously. Also, stay away from other fillers, such as *um* and *you know*.

CONNECT WITH THE CROWD Make eye contact with your listeners, and use purposeful gestures to engage them. Avoid pacing the room and using excessive hand movements because it will distract from what you're saying.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS Whether you wear a new suit or your favorite frock, have a dress rehearsal to make sure your outfit is comfortable. You want to be able to focus entirely on your speech, not on whether your skirt is riding up or how much your feet hurt. [TARA BRACCO]