

GREAT ADVICE FROM GREAT SPEAKERS

Here are some tips from two top NSANZ speakers, Morgan McArthur and Phil Baldey.

- * Want to put humour across? Here's how your audience should be – 'relaxed, packed and in the dark'. In other words, put them at ease, use a room which is the right size for the numbers you're expecting so it will be comfortably full, and keep the lighting low.
- * Don't drink iced water during your presentation – it can make your throat tighten up. Ask the hotel or venue staff for warm or room-temperature water.
- * By all means use email to confirm your booking and supply all the details of your gig. But if you don't hear back from them, always ring to make sure they've got your message. Emails don't always get through
- * Do you write down salient details of your talk on sheets of paper which you then spread around the walls? Forget the butcher's paper – you can buy much smarter 3M chart paper with sticky strips on the back for easy adhesion.
- * Get the seating right. Lose the straight, stiff rows so beloved of most conference venues. Use herring-bone or semi-circle seating patterns so that attendees aren't having to screw their necks around to see you, or each other. And put a little space in between the chairs so that people aren't squeezed up against each other.
- * If necessary, get attendees to move their own chairs into a configuration you want. Maybe your aim might be to coax people accustomed to linear ways of thinking to sit in a circle in order to encourage more open communication. Initially, they won't want to do that – it's too different for them to be at ease with. But a physical game or exercise can get them into that sort of seating pattern. 'The trick,' says Phil, 'is to get people sitting in a circle without them even realising they've moved their chairs.'
- * Think carefully about what you're bringing as guest speaker at a conference. How is it going to merge with what others are going to be talking about ?
- * Always ask who they've heard at previous conferences. Were they any good? This will give you a benchmark on knowing what they're looking for and how you can best meet their needs.
- * If your content is a little challenging or radical, start off safely to put attendees at ease. Move smoothly and slowly into your more challenging stuff. It may take them 20 minutes to suss out who you are and be comfortable with you, before you can tell them with what you really want to impart. Upset them early on and you'll lose them.
- * At the end of your talk you'll want to sum up to ensure that they've got the message. A good way to lodge it in their minds is to say to them, 'If there's one thing I want you to take away, it's this...'

* Some of us are consciously competent. Some of us are unconsciously competent. Some of us are unconsciously incompetent. The aim in speaking should be to walk the stage as one of the first group – the conscious competents – being aware, alert, always on top of problems and taking steps to smoothe them out.

* Be clear about the groups you want to work with. And if you're approached to work with some outfit that doesn't fit your values or area of competency, don't hesitate to say no and recommend someone who might do the job better. Know that some audiences will not be right for you.

* If you're a family person, have days in your diary that are earmarked for family time. And keep them that way.

* In hotels or venues where you're speaking, get to know the staff – the barman, the porter, waiters etc. Talk to them, get close to them. Realise they can make or break it in the way they meet your requests re seating, lighting, meal-serving times, extraneous noise levels etc.

* Check out the venue early – not an hour early, but a day or two before. Do things like walking the stage or podium to make sure it doesn't squeak. Make sure that if you'll be standing close to or in front of windows, the shades will be drawn to avoid glare. Finding these things out gives you time to make sure things are done to your satisfaction. Remember, you're the pro. Hotel staff will just do things they way they've done it before. You need to take charge if you want to be seen at your best.

* Once you've got a booking, enhance your performance by moving past the booking person to talk to the clients and likely attendees. If it's a sales conference, for instance, ask to meet with some of the sales people who'll be there to get a handle on what their issues are. That way they'll feel, 'you know us, you're in tune with us.'

* Sometimes when you're looking for audience response, people are shy about putting up their hands. So if you know if one person has a story to share, ask them ahead of time if they mind speaking up when you call for response. It's a good way to get the ball rolling.

* Have free things to give away.

* You've got goods to sell as well? Have them at the back of the room on what you call your 'resource table', not the 'product table'.

* Instead of lugging a credit card gizmo around with you, have order forms for people to fill in so you can process the sale later. And if a customer doesn't even have a credit card on them, let them have the goods on the promise of a cheque in the mail. Trust people and they'll appreciate it and will rarely let you down.

* Be wary of Powerpoint's ability to take centre stage. Speakers often speak to the screen robotically while attendees simply watch the slides. It can be powerful but if it fails, you're sunk, unless you have the ability to take over with ease.

- * Props can be very simple. Even the glass of water on your podium can be held up to demonstrate the glass-half-empty or half-full theory of optimism and pessimism.
- * Don't use small props in front of big audiences unless you can describe them clearly or they're so familiar (eg a box of matches or a pack of cards) that they're identifiable.
- * Your props can even be part of you. (Phil uses his shoulder-length hair, shaken out, in leather-clad, biker mode, or can pull it smartly back with a business suit to become Mr Executive.)
- * If there's an opportunity for amplification, then use it. There's something more authoritative about a voice boosted by a mike. And it can give you more intimacy. It means that you don't have to strain -- that you can just have a chat without having to project your voice. As a rule of thumb, if your audience is going to be 40 people or more, always use a mike.
- * You have three choices. 1. Lectern – okay if you have lots of technical stuff, and figures, you need to impart, but it makes for a more formal approach and the lectern can be a barrier between you and the audience. 2. Lavalier – (lapel mike), usually clipped on to your jacket with a wire to a small radio transmitter sending your voice to a receiver plugged into the sound system. Women have to be careful with clothing. A straight, unwaisted dress for instance, means you have no belt to hook the transmitter to. Carry one with you, or wear a jacket with a pocket. NB Some new lavaliers have a magnet instead of a clip, so you can place the mike against a metal disc worn inside your shirt or blouse. Lapel mikes are wonderfully hands-free, giving you plenty of freedom to play with props or wave your arms around. 3. Hand-held mike (preferred by Morgan) gives you sensitive control over depth and pitch of your voice. It means that even if you're speaking really quietly your voice can still be heard -- and in his case it's essential for the vocal sound-effects he's so good at!
- * The secret to getting asked back, and to expanding your client base, is getting close to your clients. Know them as people, know their problems, and you'll be doing your best for them