

Women's Ministries Seminar Series

Developing Your Public Speaking

by
Carla Gober

**Produced by the
General Conference
Department of Women's Ministries**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carla Gober is a committed Christian and professional speaker who addresses issues and concerns facing today's Christian woman and family. Counseling from Loma Linda University, M. P. H. degree from Loma Linda University, and a B. B. degree in Nursing from Southern Adventist University. She has been honored with many awards, the most recent being in the World's Who's Who of Women and Who's Who in American Nursing in 1993. Her audiences describe her as "real" and inspiring as she presents challenging topics with humor and conviction.

Throughout the United States, she speaks to various professional and nonprofessional audiences. Currently Carla is employed by Loma Linda University Medical Center as a Spiritual Care Nursing Specialist. She also works halftime in the faculty of Religion at Loma Linda as an assistant professor of religion (teaching relational studies).

Developing Your Public Speaking Skills

Many women have wanted to speak for God but have been unsure of how to get started. Following are some guidelines that may help.

BEFORE BEGINNING

1. ***Pray.*** God knows you, your talents, the words He wants you to say and the best arena in the world in which to get started. He knows your limitations, your time constraints and your priorities. If you are married, have children, are involved in a career or have other obligations, these all need to be placed before God as you talk to Him about speaking on His behalf.
2. ***Develop a heart relationship with God.*** This is your greatest source of inspiration and it cannot be neglected. This must take priority. You want people to hear God through you.
3. ***Collect materials.***
 - a. In your own devotions, spend time with passages of Scripture. Ask questions about the passage, look at the context, apply it to your own life, make it come alive for others. When you are later developing talks, these devotional times will come back and provide material for sharing.
 - b. Collect newspaper articles, quotes and passages from good books.
 - c. Read. Read. Read.
 - d. Learn something from everyone you meet. Even if you are more of an introvert, you can learn the art of asking questions. People are incredibly interesting. If they make a statement about something you know nothing about, ask questions about it. This will enable you to relate to people of varied interests, backgrounds, and ages as well as provide you with a broader range of knowledge from which to glean illustrations.
4. ***Let people know you are willing to speak.*** Some people say they will speak "when God asks me," or "when someone asks me to speak." I have made these statements myself. But if you are confident God is encouraging you to speak, there is nothing wrong with letting others know, so when an opportunity arises, they will think of you.

DEVELOPING THE TALK

1. **Consider that any speech you give is important.** Many people treat “small speeches” as unimportant, such as scripture, introductions, call for offering, etc. However, these are very important parts of the service and need to be prepared as such. A well read Scripture can be extremely powerful and even life changing.
2. **Prepare.** No matter how important the content, the deliver will always add to or detract from the message. These are several ways to prepare:
 - a) Write out a full manuscript. This is especially helpful when making transitions in a speech. However, never give a talk from a full manuscript. Once it is written, then review, edit, and read aloud. Then make an outline or list of the main points and deliver the talk from the outline, not the manuscript.
 - b) Make an outline. Some people do not like to write out the full manuscript. If you work best from an outline, be sure and work on the transitions between points, stories, and illustrations.
3. **Practice.** Whether you begin with a full manuscript or an outline, always practice the talk out loud. I rarely practice the talk in its entirety more than once because some parts need more work than others. Separate the talk into parts and practice those parts. Scripture reading, stories, and illustrations sometimes take more practice than other parts. Once each part is put together well, you will be amazed at how easily the whole talk comes together.
 - a) Practice in front of a mirror. This may feel awkward to you, but it helps you to look into the face of someone when you are speaking. Many people only scan an audience when they are speaking. It is much more effective when you are able to look into the faces of the audience. This will help each person feel as if you are speaking directly to him or her. Speaking in front of a mirror can also help you to see your own facial expressions and body gestures. Once when I was practicing a talk in front of a mirror I noticed how anxious and tense my face was. I never realized this before, but I remembered people telling me how serious I looked sometimes. At that point, I understood what they were talking about and was able to correct it.
 - b) Tape yourself and play it back, either video or cassette. I frequently do this to practice transitions. It also helps me evaluate the clarity of my own talk.
 - c) Practice in front of a friend. I had a mentor that I spent two hours a week with who gave me feedback on my speaking. She was an elderly lady who had been a speech teacher and was my friend. It is sometimes difficult to welcome feedback, but it can be extremely helpful.

Some people believe that preparation is not necessary since the Holy Spirit will make the talk go well. Very often I hear statements such as, "The Lord gave me this speech last night," or "The Lord impressed me what to say just as I stood up to talk to you today." I know this happens. It has happened to me, but if this is the case, there should be another talk that is set aside. If there is "nothing to set aside," the reality may be that I didn't prepare soon enough and procrastinated until the last minute, then I blame that (or give the credit to) the Lord. Sometimes, due to unforeseen circumstance, it is necessary to pull something together at the last minute. However, you pull together best those things which have been well put together in the past.

When I first began speaking, I spent hours in front of the mirror, taping myself, looking at myself on video and reading evaluations of my talks. Occasionally, someone will make the comment, "Speaking comes so easily for you," or "You could give a sermon in a minute's notice." They have no idea of the work that has gone into this over the past years. It comes more easily now only because a lot of work has "gone before." And though speaking may at some point come easily, there is no such thing as "arriving." Your life changes daily, and each minute or your life brings new and different things to share.

The most important thing is that a speaker speaks from the heart. All the preparation in the world will not make this happen. It is the every day life, the pains, the joys, the failures and successes that make a person "real" and touchable. Jesus walked among the people and shared His heart with them, illustrating truths from their every day world. He was touchable and knowable. Being in His presence was an experience they never forgot. Our goal is to bring others into the presence of Jesus. Preparation and skill development should be for the purpose of doing this more effectively.

Rules For Effective Speaking

1. Always "join" with an audience before speaking to them. Sharing a short story, talking about a recent significant event to them, letting them know you have something in common with them, etc, can do this
2. Be able to summarize the point of your presentation in one sentence
3. Stay within the allotted time; do not go over

Exceptions:

- When the majority of the audience requests you to speak longer
 - When the person who asked you to speak or those in charge of the overall organization of the program volunteer you more time
 - The speaker who follows you is not there yet
 - What you want to add takes no longer than 5 minutes
4. Use humor that will be funny to most people. This excludes most jokes except those, which show the humorous side of life or those that are made on you
 5. When using stories to illustrate, remember:
 - Keep them short
 - Make sure the point of the story makes the same point as what you are trying to say; there's nothing worse than a good story that doesn't
 - The most interesting stories are those you have lived; what you have lived others have lived and they will be able to identify with you
 - Make you story LIVE; help the audience see, feel, touch and hear your story
 - Never tell the point of the story; if the point isn't obvious, the story probably doesn't fit and shouldn't be used at that point in your presentation
 - Never tell stories about other people unless you have their permission of the facts are changed enough so that people could not be identified (and the audience knows that)
 - People remember stories longer than they remember facts
 6. Trust the majority of the evaluations from the audience; ignore the one that differs from the rest (positive or negative) only after assessing its validity
 7. Be vulnerable/real; a 'perfect' presenter distances him/herself from the audience
 8. Speaker on topics of interest to you; a topic is never boring unless it is boring to you (then it's boring to everybody)

9. Never give the same presentation twice (in the same way); any presentation which you give more than once or twice needs to be continually reviewed for new content, new stories, new style
10. Continually assess you presentation style; be open to change
11. Know your weaknesses; use them to your advantage

Examples: height/personal appearance
speech impediment
softness or loudness of voice
tendency to speak too fast/slow
12. Help you audience interact with you and your presentation; be able to set boundaries if a participant tries to monopolize the time

Resources

Kent, C. (1 987). *Speak Up With Confidence!* Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers

Walters, L. (1 993). *Secrets Of Successful Speakers*. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

White, E. G. (I 988). *The Voice In Speech, And Song* (compilation). Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association

Duduit, Michael, ed. *Communicating With Power*. Baker Books

Hybels, Bill, et al. *Mastering Contemporary Preaching*

Rules For Effective Speaking

1. Always “join” with an audience
2. Be able to summarize your presentation in one sentence
3. Almost never go over your allotted time
4. Use “universal” humor
5. Use stories effectively
6. Trust evaluations
7. Be vulnerable and real
8. Speak on topics that are of interest to you
9. Never give the same presentation twice (exactly the same)
10. Continually assess your presentation style; be open to change
11. Know your weaknesses; use them to your advantage
12. Help your audience interact with your presentation