

Getting over the dread of public speaking



**MERRICK
WEALTH**

**By
Peter
Merrick**

It has been said that many people at a funeral would rather be in the casket than delivering the eulogy. That's how much they dread public speaking.

When I started my financial services career in the early 1990s I luckily came upon a book called *Serious Money – The Art of Marketing Mutual Funds*. This was the era when the mutual fund industry experienced tremendous growth. According to the Investment Fund Institute of Canada, investments in mutual funds from 1990 to 2000 multiplied from \$24 billion to \$424 billion.

For the financial adviser, Nick Murray's book was the bible on how to tap into this mutual fund frenzy. One of Murray's main tenets for achieving success as an adviser was to develop the art of delivering powerful and effective presentations.

Murray's words have always resonated with me and have been my catalyst for wanting to learn how to speak comfortably in front of large

groups, whatever the topic.

Over the last 13 years I have delivered over 400 workshops and seminars, and taught in both the Certified Financial Planning and Certified Employee Benefit Specialist designation programs. I would like to share some of the lessons I learned that will help you become an effective public speaker.

Lesson one: You need to find your own style and your own voice in a safe place, where you feel comfortable enough to practise.

You can't copy someone else's style, it won't work for you. Toastmasters' clubs provide a good public forum and evaluation to help sharpen one's skills. By just reading this article you will never become a great public speaker. There is no getting around practising the craft of public speaking. You have to get up and, as the Nike ad goes, 'Just do it.'

Lesson two: You need to learn how to read your audience, and break through to the crowd.

You do this by making connections with individuals, not by looking at the group as a whole. In every audience there are people who are really supportive and you should make eye contact with them, speak as if you are speaking to them directly and having a personal conversation.

These sympathetic listeners, these supportive people will draw in the other members of your audience with their enthusiasm and interest. They will help you win

over your entire audience. Try it, and I promise it will work miracles for you.

Lesson three: When speaking, introduce yourself and tell a story about why you are there—how you came to be knowledgeable in your field, what you have learned and what you have to share.

That has to be communicated to your audience. At the very least, they want to be entertained, and they want you to succeed in your speech. It doesn't work when the speech is top-down, with you as the only person in the know. Remember, if people show up, it's because they want to hear your message. People want to feel connected and you need to learn to speak with your audiences, not at them.

Lesson four: You need to be comfortable with the silences and pauses.

It took me a long time to learn that when it was really quiet my audience was interested in what I had to say. I learned that when I heard noise, that meant I didn't have their full attention.

It can get scary when there is silence and you are the focal point of that silence. That can be when you begin to panic, get lost and forget what you want to say. It has happened to me more than I want to recall. During those times I have trained myself to smile and look for a supportive face in the audience to encourage me on to my next thought.

Lesson five: If you find yourself using 'umms' and 'ahhhs,' try switching to using 'and' as a connector and attention-getter instead.

The word 'and' allows you to transition effortlessly and smoothly from one thought to the next without missing a beat.

Lesson six: I have learned that many of us can't make people laugh at what we are saying, but we can allow them to find areas in our speeches to laugh.

This is done by making a statement and taking a pause. We may not have intended for something we said to be funny, but our audience may laugh anyway. Remember, our pauses allow audiences to participate and mentally catch up to us.

Lesson seven: Always keep your end in mind. You need to know

what it is you intend to communicate, and not be committed to a specific route to accomplishing your outcome.

What if you are interrupted or the technology doesn't work for you? What then? You have to keep your presentation focused on the subject.

Lesson eight: Most importantly, what you are selling is not your information, but the convictions you have about your information. You are selling yourself.

Peter Merrick, BA, FMA, CFP, FCSI is the President of Merrick Wealth Management Inc., a boutique fee-for-service executive benefit and financial consulting firm in Toronto. He can be contacted at peter@merrickwealth.com or www.merrickwealth.com or (416) 854-1776.

Credit plan seen as positive but limited

By DONALEE MOULTON
Halifax

The Nova Scotia government is trying to give small business a helping hand—and it wants to work with credit unions throughout the province to provide more lending options. It's a smart, but limited move, according to the head of the province's largest small business association.

Having the credit unions as one of the primary referring agencies makes good business sense, said Leanne Hachey, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business's director of provincial affairs for Nova Scotia.

Small business, she noted, likes dealing with credit unions. In an ongoing survey conducted by CFIB, most recently in 2003, members gave their highest stamp of approval to credit unions. "One reason credit unions are looked on favourably is because of service, especially face to face," said Hachey, adding that credit unions seem to have fewer employees moving in and out, another positive attribute.

"In traditional banks, in two years, small businesses may deal with five account executives. Less turnover allows credit union management and small businesses to build a relationship."

That relationship, however, is limited by location. What credit unions don't have, according to the CFIB, is reach. "The credit union is not in every community," said Hachey. "Fewer of our members bank with credit unions."

The game plan, now entrenched in a memorandum of understanding, formally unites Nova Scotia Business Inc. (NSBI), the province's business development agency, Credit Union Central of Nova Scotia, which supports credit unions throughout the province as well as those in Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Nova Scotia Co-operative Council, the economic development arm for co-ops and credit unions in the province.

The goal is to provide enhanced lending options to credit unions and small businesses across the province, said Bernie O'Neil, president of Credit Union Central.

At present, he pointed out, NSBI has a fuller suite of services for business to access, including payroll rebates and tax credits, than is currently available from credit unions alone or under a special loan initiative set up between the provincial government and the credit unions. "This program will create more awareness and give credit unions more access," he said, noting it "has not been done elsewhere."

The Small Business Financing/ Loan Guarantee Program, which has been in place since 2003, enables small business to borrow up to \$150,000, with the government guaranteeing up to 75 per cent. It's a drop in the bucket compared with the resources at NSBI's disposal.

Accessing that full bucket has been haphazard at times, almost impossible at others. What the new agreement is intended to do, said Pat Ryan, NSBI's chief operating officer, is to give business more access to capital and financing options. "It is really a business development agreement. We make cross-referrals."

Hachey noted that many of her members do not do business with NSBI, which is perceived as favouring larger companies.

"Only four to five per cent have ever gone to NSBI. I wouldn't imagine a whole lot of business would be generated by the agreement."

It is too early to tell whether the memorandum of understanding will generate greater understanding – and greater financing, growth and employment – between Nova Scotia's small businesses and those in the business of lending them money. But at the very least, there is something on paper.



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