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Ways of Delivering an Impressive Presentation

For most of the time, people find themselves struggling with public speaking or presentation. I discovered that I have a certain talent in making speech in primary school. Since then, I have participated a lot of hosting events. Now, I am the chairman of the host group of Inspiration Forum of Shanghai Jiao Tong University. Relatively speaking, I have more chance of making public speech toward thousands of audiences. This experience greatly helps my engineering speaking as well, but still, I have a lot to learn since making a presentation is not exactly the same as hosting big events. In the book *Engineering Speaking by Design*, Rothwell proposed how to deliver engineering presentations in a formal way by focusing of technical talk skills. Rothwell states that “whether this is your first talk in front of an audience or your two hundredth, you’ll need to give it your all to achieve the lasting impact that is the goal of all meaningful presentations” (119).

* **Showtime: Delivering Your Presentation**

In the 6th chapter of *Engineering Speaking by Design*, the authors put emphasis on how to make an excellent presentation on the stage when many eyes are staring at you. This chapter contains many of the common situation that may occur during the presentation. It offers suggestions like how to cope with nervousness, how to deal with audiences’ questions, how should the presenters do after the presentation, etc.

**If You’re Nervous**

Nervousness is the most common situation that happens on almost every presenter. The most regrettable moment is that you have already prepared a topic for a very long time and ready for almost everything, however, you are getting so nervous on the stage which cause some logical disorder in presenting and may lead to fail of completing the presentation on time. Rothwell gives the following five tips (120-121):

1. Envision yourself as a successful presenter.
2. View your audience as friends and colleagues.
3. Don’t tell the audience how nervous you are.
4. Focus on your message and information.
5. Forgive yourself for glitches.

These suggestions are very helpful especially when you are about to make a presentation and during your presentation. In my own presentation needs, I find the 2nd, 4th and 5th tips are the most helpful for me. On June 1st I have been to Beijing for a conference called International Conference of Display Technology (ICDT 2021). It’s my first time of attending a conference and make such a technical symposium. My task is to make a presentation on the paper I had just published which is called “Simultaneous Tagging, Tracking and Mapping for Augmented Reality”. This is a scientific research which I had been working on for a year and a half. So, when I finally need to make a 15-minute presentation toward the scholars all over the world, I’m more than just nervous. To be honest, I even feel a little panic. The reason is that although I’m very clear with every technical detail about this project, I may not be able to cover every aspect in this discipline.

Luckily, a professor also from SJTU recognize me and chat with me before my presentation. This seems has nothing to do with my presentation, but actually, when I look back to this presentation, I find it greatly eliminates my anxiety. According to the 2nd tips given by *Engineering Speaking by Design*, treating the audience as friends do help you to ease the stress (120). For many of the presenters, the source of the nervousness comes from the “imaginary” audience. This means, a presenter may focus too much on the audiences reacts. For my personal example, at the time when I’m going to give presentation, I’m too worried about these scholars may point out my mistakes in this paper since they are the people with the most discourse power and cutting-edge knowledge in this AR discipline. Thinking of this will do nothing but increase my anxiety and nervousness. After that, I realize the stress is not given by the audience but how you think of your audience. Therefore, no matter how technical and cutting-edge the symposium is, presenter can always treat or imagine the audience as friends, which will greatly help to ease the nervousness.

Also, for the tips 4 and 5 that is “focus on your message and information” and “forgive yourself for glitches” are very useful suggestions when you are already on the stage. When you are giving presentation, the pressure comes from the fear of making mistakes. Let me take another example, which is my very first hosting experience in SJTU Inspiration Forum. At the beginning, I need to make a brief introduction to the topic of this event and our forum. I’m not very nervous at the beginning but things came very bad after I made a small mistake in the welcome speech. At that moment, I suddenly realize that this is a very important event since this lecture was on behalf of SJTU to promote high school enrollment. The whole process was broadcasted by Xinhua News Agency. The audience was about 400,000 people, and the principal was also sitting in the audience. All those information came to my mind at no time, making me almost suffocated. But luckily, this doesn’t cause even bigger disaster in the end. When I look back after learning the suggestion given in *Engineering Speaking by Design*, I realize the importance of forgiving myself for making small mistakes and just focus on the content. Those small mistakes are quite normal in a presentation, when you worry too much about them, it’s very likely that you will make greater mistakes later since your mind is thinking about the bad results rather than the information you are going to present.

**Handling Questions**

This is also one of the most important but difficult part during the presentation for me. In this book, authors give a very detailed process of handling questions. It suggests that the process of handling question should start with a careful listening to the question, then presenter should decide “whether and how to answer the question”. Finally, ask whether the answer is well accepted by the listener (123-124).

In my own presentation needs, I feel it is very important to have confirmation before and after I answer the question. In many of my previous presentation, when a listener raised a question, I just simply reply to him/her in my own understanding. However, this may not be a good way because there exists the probability that I misunderstood the question, and the listener is not quite satisfied with my answer. Also, this process seems awkward since it’s more like finishing a task rather than communicate with the audiences. By applying the suggestions given by the book, we can first listen to the question and repeat it back with my understanding. This can not only make the listener to confirm this is the point he wants to ask, but also make other listeners clear what he/she is asking in case those sitting in the back row miss it. Also, after answering the question, do remember to confirm whether the answer is appreciated by the listener. This not only add connections with the listener but also shows more respect.

* **Summary**

The chapter 6 of *Engineering Speaking by Design* provides many suggestions of making a good presentation. It talks not only what to do and prepare before you go on the stage, but also how you cope with nervousness during the presentation. For me, I benefit most from the way of ease anxiety by treating the listeners as friends before you make presentation, and when the presentation begin, ignore the small mistake you already made and just focus on the content rather than thinking of the “virtual catastrophe” of the previous mistake. Another point I learned is closely related to the Q&A part. This is the part I used to ignored and put less emphasize on. However, the communication before and after you answer the question are critical to the quality you handle this question.

Works Cited

1. Rothwell, Edward J., and Michael J. Cloud. *Engineering Speaking by Design: Delivering Technical Presentations with Real Impact*. CRC Press, 2017.