

The Medical Cannabis Advocate's Handbook

PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society supports legislation to remove criminal and civil sanctions for the doctor-advised, medical use of marijuana by patients with serious physical medical conditions...

—Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Giving speeches and presentations is one of the most basic ways that an activist can communicate ideas. Every activist should have at least a little experience with public speaking, whether it is at a public meeting, chapter meeting, community group or elsewhere. Public speaking is not the same as casual conversation—although it is always OK to be yourself. Public speaking in the context of advocacy is specifically intended to inform, motivate, and persuade. But do not think you have to be a great orator to be an effective speaker. Just use these tips and keep practicing. For most of us, it is an acquired skill.



The key to being more comfortable with public speaking is to keep practicing. No one starts off as an expert. You just have to keep doing it until you feel relatively comfortable speaking in front of others. Don't feel bad if you're nervous. Even the best and most experienced public speakers feel butterflies in their stomach when they step up to the podium. The famous writer and lecturer Mark Twain once said, "There are two types of speakers: those that are nervous and those that are

liars." Feeling some nervousness before giving a speech is natural and healthy. It shows you care about doing well.

SPEAKING TIPS

Here's how you can control your nervousness and make effective, memorable presentations:

1. Know the room. Be familiar with the place in which you will speak. Arrive early, walk around the speaking area and try practicing using the microphone and any visual aids.
2. Know the audience. Greet some of the audience as they arrive. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to a group of strangers.
3. Know your material. If you're not familiar with your material or are uncomfortable with it, your nervousness will increase. Practice your speech and revise it if necessary.
4. Relax. Ease tension by going for a walk, doing some basic stretching, chatting with colleagues.
5. Realize that people want you to succeed. Audiences want you to be interesting, stimulating, and informative. They don't want you to fail.
6. Don't apologize. If you mention your nervousness or apologize for any problems you think you have with your speech, you may be calling the audience's attention to something they hadn't noticed. Avoid pointing out your own imagined inadequacies; your audience has a higher opinion of you than you think.
7. Concentrate on the message -- not the medium. Focus your attention away from your own anxieties, and outwardly toward your message and your audience. Your nervousness will dissipate.
8. Turn nervousness into positive energy. Harness your nervous energy and transform it into vitality and enthusiasm.

9. Gain experience. Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking.

[Adapted from "10 Tips for Successful Public Speaking" www.toastmasters.org/tips.htm.]

TIPS FOR HANDLING Q & A

- If you don't hear the question or understand it, ask the questioner to repeat it.
 - Try to keep calm, even if your audience is hostile or upset.
 - Always respect the questioner, even if you do not like the question or the manner in which it is posed.
 - Don't feel offended if someone asks you a question that you feel you already answered in your presentation or a previous question. They may not have heard or understood the information previously presented.
- Honesty is the best policy. If you don't know the answer to something, admit it—you can always offer to contact the person later with an answer.

[From "Handling Q & A" www.ecn.ab.ca/toast/qa.html]

There are also some very basic precautions you can take when you have to speak:

- Plan your comments in advance and take notes with you, even if you don't need them.
- Practice in front of a mirror, on tape, or with friends in advance.
- Offer eye contact with the audience, but don't get fixated on any one individual.
- Smile when you speak. Listeners can "hear" a smile.
- Go slow, pause when needed, and remember to breathe deeply.
- Do not panic if you mess up. Just start again as if nothing happened. Most listeners will not remember.