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Public Speaking for Introverts: 6 Essential Tips

Susan Cain is the author of the New York Times bestselling book [QUIET: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking](#), which is being translated into 30 languages. Her record-smashing TED talk has been viewed more than 3 million times and was named by Bill Gates as one of his all-time favorite TED talks and by the New Yorker magazine as one of five key talks.

Susan is developing an online course on Public Speaking for Introverts (you can go [here](#) for more info). Here are six of her favorite tips.

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Lessons from TED: 5

1) Be yourself; good speakers are not necessarily “naturals.”

Have you ever watched a fiery orator or a speaker who has the audience in stitches, and thought, “I can’t do that”? You might be right – and that’s OK. The best speakers are not necessarily dynamic or hilarious – they are simply interesting. They communicate valuable information. “People think that being a good speaker means being funny or glib,” says David Lavin of the [Lavin Agency](#) (who happens to be my lecture agent). “But that’s wrong. The best speakers are compelling. People underestimate the power of content and of storytelling.”

2) What do Malcolm Gladwell and Lady Gaga Have in Common?

At the same time, public speaking is a performance, and that’s a good thing, even if you’re not a natural actor. Have you ever wondered why people enjoy costume parties? It’s because they feel liberated when interacting from behind a mask. Dressing up as Cinderella or Don Draper removes inhibitions as effectively as a glass of wine. Think of your onstage persona the same way. Surprisingly, both Gladwell and Lady Gaga have this in common. Gladwell, a world-class speaker, says he isn’t chatty at dinner parties, but he becomes a storyteller on stage. As for Gaga? “When I wake up in the morning, I

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feel just like any other insecure 24-year old girl. Then I say, ‘Bitch, you’re Lady Gaga, you get up and walk the walk today.’”

3) Serve the audience.

Introverts are phenomenal listeners, which attunes them to the needs of others. And that’s why speaking (instead of listening) can feel uncomfortable – unnatural, even. But remember that public speaking is not about you. It’s about the audience. Your job is to take care of the audience, not to be judged by it or even to entertain it. Remind yourself that you are not seeking approval or love. You are a teacher, a giver, an enlightener.

4) Accept your nerves.

Not all introverts are afraid of public speaking – a subset of them loves it – but introverts are disproportionately likely to fear the spotlight. That’s OK. As the public speaking trainer Charles di Cagno says, “There are only a few people in the world who have completely overcome their fears, and they all live in Tibet.” If you have stage fright, accept it and learn how to work with it.

5) Calm your body.

According to Gina Barnett, who coaches many TED speakers, if you have trouble calming your mind before a speech, try calming your body first. When you relax your body, your head will follow suit. Here are a few tips:

- Shake out every limb in your body. This gets your blood flowing and makes you tingle all over.
- Stand up straight. Shift back and forth, putting your weight first on your heels, then on the balls of your feet. Find the place that’s evenly distributed between both, then gently press your toes on the floor. This will give you the sensation of forward momentum.
- Yawn.
- Talk with your tongue out. You’ll sound ridiculous, but it will loosen you up vocally.

6) Smile.

After all of your preparation, relaxation exercises and affirmations, there’s one thing left to do, and it’s the simplest thing – smile. Smile at your audience as they enter the room, and smile at them when you begin speaking. This will make you feel relaxed, confident, and connected.

Good luck. You have something valuable to say, and the world needs to hear it!

(Some of these tips have appeared in modified form on my blog.)

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Mack Collier · a year ago

Hi Susan, love these tips, and as an introvert that loves speaking, I can attest to the value of this post. Here's a few additional tips that have worked for me:

1 - Arrive early at the location where you will speak. You want time to not only become familiar with the setup and space, but to also make sure you have all the hookups you'll need, etc.

2 - Realize that even if you make a mistake, your audience probably won't notice it. I am big on scripting out the flow of my presentations, and sometimes I will mix up the order of the points I want to cover, etc. I finally learned that when this happens, to just take a second to pause, and re-center myself and move on. Even if I 'mess up', the audience doesn't know what's coming next, so they aren't aware that I may have covered my points out of order, etc.

3 - Focus on the members of the audience that you are connecting with. When I talk as I scan the audience I'll come across someone that's nodding along as I'm talking. Or maybe they are bright-eyed and you can tell they are listening intently. I try to keep focusing on these people to 'reward' their attention, but also it re-inforces to me that the audience is responding positively to my talk, which gives me more energy and helps me do a better job.

Thanks again for the great post, Susan, and good luck with your course!

7 ^ | ▾ · Reply · Share >



Craig Hadden · a year ago

Thanks for your tips, Susan.

Like you, I've begun really valuing speakers just being themselves (tip #1). Recently I joined Toastmasters, and a common outside view is that some TM members "ham it up" with cheesy body language and voice.

(Ham and cheese are good on your plate, but not in your face!) Anyway, being aware of that trap is the 1st step to avoiding it and to being yourself on stage.

Like you've done before, I do recommend Toastmasters, as it's such a great place to practice and to refine skills. (Here's a professional video that shows people what TM meetings are like: <http://wp.me/p1PHR3-qD>)

And on the subject of bodily calm (tip #5), the content of this video by Harvard researcher Amy Cuddy really works for me: <http://wp.me/p1PHR3-hl>

So thanks again. Your work has rightly brought introverts more recognition – even from themselves!

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Jeanie Kelley · a year ago

Loved reading these tips you had.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Don McAllister · a year ago

Awesome tips! I think of myself as an ambivert, but my wife would say I'm definitely introverted :)

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



histerius · a year ago

You helped me a lot, thank you :-)

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



outtahere78 · a year ago

Reminds me of, "Don't fake it til you make it, fake it til you BECOME it."

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



AppleGazin · a year ago

Hi Susan, your post is so relevant. Your Inc. article asks how we came out of our shells. There are so many contributors. For me the real boost was after I joined Toastmasters. The safe & comfortable and encouraging environment that offers constructive feedback, helped crack open the shell with the real growth came after taking on leadership roles outside the club. Second, having a good mentor who believes in you. Third, learning to tell stories and finally, taking every opportunity to speak when you can. As a tech columnist, The Gadget Guy @gadgetgreg, it took me out from behind the keyboard. Amazingly, 2 years ago I became a District Governor (Alberta/Saskatchewan Canada), akin to being a CEO of a non-profit with 4000 members and 250 branches. In any event, you need to take that first step and amazing

things can happen.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Zia · a year ago

Hi, it is also a perception that introvert can not become a sales person is it true?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



themashazine · a year ago

smile and serve the audience... - that's what helped me most :)

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Susan Cain · 11 months ago

Thanks all, I so appreciated your comments! @Zia, definitely not true that introverts can't make good salespeople. In my book QUIET, I actually profile a guy named Jon Berghoff who is a superstar sales guy by virtue of using his talents for listening and asking questions. And in his book TO SELL IS HUMAN, author Dan Pink argues that the best salespeople are neither introverts nor extroverts but somewhere in between. And @Mack, I love your tips, agree with them all. (3) for me was a huge one. I used to focus on the people who looked bored, and feel unnerved by them. Now I focus on the ones who seem engaged.

Thanks again, all, and to Nancy Duarte for running this post!

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Jared · 8 months ago

Loved this article. Its very encouraging for those people who don't necessarily feel like they are extroverted. Its true - presenting is just an act! I like your examples from successful speakers and presenters like Gladwell and Gaga :)

<http://artofpublicspeaking.net>

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Shaan Goerge · 7 months ago

Great tips for improving your public speaking skills. Speakers need to constantly be learning and updating their knowledge, skills and abilities.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Guest · 15 days ago

Great advice!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Kiran Garimella · 15 days ago

I'd like to share the following tip. I do this to relate better to my audience



and understand their expectations, not to conquer any fear of public speaking (which fortunately I don't have). But I think this will help those who are afraid of public speaking:

Arrive early enough at the location to first get set up, then mingle with the audience. Shake hands, make eye contact, make small talk. Do this

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