

Book review

How to be Brilliant at Public Speaking

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Public speaking is an act of leadership”, so states Sarah Lloyd-Hughes, the author.

The audience wants to be led on a journey of inspiration, impact and discovery. This book guides current and prospective public speakers through the art and science of leading an audience along this journey, authentically.

Sarah Lloyd-Hughes is founder of Ginger Training & Coaching. She is a regular speaker on confidence and inspiration. She runs training programs based upon the principles and practices outlined in her book.

The sections of the book derive from the components of what the author calls the “public speaking house”. Each component of the structure forms one of the six qualities that make an inspiring public speaker.

The house’s foundation stone is “awareness”. The pillars rising from the foundations are “empathy”, “balance” and “freshness”. These pillars in turn support the next layer of “fearlessness”. Finally, the pediment topping the “public speaking house” is labelled “authenticity”.

In each of the six parts of the book, there are one to three chapters explaining the specific quality of inspiring public speaking in more detail. Each chapter is concise and easy to read, with friendly illustrations, references, expert tips and links to further research.

Chapters 1 and 12 both deal with authenticity, as all starts and ends with this quality. I will cover this

quality towards the end of this review.

Part one deals with awareness.

Chapter two covers the causes of fear. This affects around 70 per cent of people who are asked to speak in public. Fear is normal and natural. Fear impacts the person in terms of emotions, thoughts, behaviors and/or physiology. The author lists the five causes of fear and the remedy to each of these. For instance, the first cause is negative self-talk. The remedy comes in three steps. One, be aware of this self-talk. Two is the “so what” approach. For example, as a public speaker, the fear may be that “I might be boring”; the counter-response could be “so what if I am boring?”. Three is about positively reframing the fear and own this new perspective. So, “I might be boring” may become “I really care about my message”.

Chapter three is about “finding safety in the body”. At first, the author sets out the five habits of physical anxiety: eye contact; fiddles and fidgets; movement; posture; and vocal spluttering. She explains that all these arise from the “predator reflex”. The many eyes of the audience focused on the speaker raise the fear of predators and so the “fight, flight, freeze” instinct kicks in. Fortunately, the author points to the five gateways to feeling safe: posture; breath; vision; hearing – our reaction to silence – and facial expression. For example, shallow breathing signals to the body that you are not safe. Deep breathing counteracts this in our “[. . .] parasympathetic nervous system”.

Chapter four covers the expressions in the body and voice of the speaker. The author walks us through techniques first to bring credibility, second to create energy in the room and third to create connection with the audience. For instance, powerful, intentional gestures may exhibit gravitas and credibility. On the other hand, dynamic gestures signal energy and charisma. While open, inclusive gestures may demonstrate connection.

Part two considers the quality of empathy.

Chapter five offers tips on preparing with empathy. Here, the author contrasts the egocentric speaker with the servant speaker. The former focuses on his own needs and anxieties. The latter focuses on the audience's perception of his topic, what the audience want or need from the speaker and how the audience regard themselves as individuals and as a group. Finally, she explains how to set up the environment to support the style of the speech.

Chapter six focuses on the different characters in the audience. First, the author encourages us to have a positive attitude toward the audience. As one of the expert tips in this chapters says, "never forget that having an audience listen to you is a great honour and we should treat it as such". Second, she describes the seven different types of participants and how to handle each type: the sheep; the hotshot; the clown; the sniper; the snowman; the black cloud; and the unwanted panelist. Most difficulties arise because of lack of preparation, the speaker being unauthentic and/or forgetting the needs of the audience. Focusing on these three aspects should minimize problems.

Part three tackles the quality of balance. As the quote at the start of this part says, "if you can't write

your message in a sentence, you can't say it in an hour". The balance that the author seeks in this part of the book is authenticity versus empathy; facts versus feelings; telling versus asking; minimalist versus elaborate language; and clarity versus depth. Deciding upon each balance helps the speaker decide what information stays in the speech and what comes out. Getting the balance right determines the power of the speech.

Chapter seven draws on examples from the [TED.com format](http://www.ted.com). The TED principle embedded in this chapter is "[. . .] to offer *one* idea worth spreading to [. . .]" the audience. In other words, "precisely what message would you like you audience to take away?". The author explains that the concepts that make a great talk are: clarity; simplicity; uniqueness; usefulness; and edginess.

Chapter eight is about the structure of the speech itself. The author draws on the concept of the hero's journey made famous by Joseph Campbell. The audience is the hero of the story. The speaker is the guide. The structure mirrors a climb from the valley to the mountain top through the stages of opening and setting out; building; climax; and close. For example, the author suggests that the opening should take approximately 10 per cent of the talk. It should connect the speaker and his audience. It establishes the credentials of the speaker, the plan to get to the mountain top and why staying where we are is not a good option.

Part four considers the quality of freshness. For information to be remembered, it must be relevant *and* unique in the eyes of the audience. Relevance comes from empathy with the audience. Uniqueness comes from delivering the message in a fresh way.

Chapter nine tackles eight devices that help deliver content in an interesting and memorable way. For instance, the “power of three”, for example, “I came, I saw, I conquered”.

Chapter ten deals with interactivity with the audience. Interaction supports learning. The author gives the pros and cons of four levels of interaction: rhetorical interaction; individual tasks; information sharing; and learning by doing.

Part 5 and Chapter 11 are concerned with the quality of fearlessness. This is not the *absence* of fear but the skill of going beyond fear. Giving an inspiring talk is an act of leadership and an attempt to effect change, “[. . .] what is of utmost importance is the *change that is brought about for the audience* [. . .]”. The road to fearlessness starts with the speaker’s personal purpose, that is, the change she wants to make in the world. It culminates in what [Lloyd-Hughes \(2015\)](#) calls the speaker’s promise. This is the promise that the speaker makes to herself as she steps onto the stage. It is the promise that brings forth fearless power in the speaker.

Part 6 and Chapter 12 return to the quality of authenticity that the author introduced in chapter one. The author presents some techniques to build authenticity and how to recover it if the speaker is somehow derailed. Primarily, this is the search for each speaker’s “habitual authentic power” – the qualities that the speaker already has that makes her inspiring.

The book ends with a helpful two-page summary of the arguments set out in the volume and further resources including a link to the author’s website: www.gingerpublicspeaking.com

This book is a comprehensive yet concise guide to becoming an inspirational speaker. It offers a means of demonstrating leadership through the spoken word. It is a worthy introduction on how to make a difference for any audience.

Reference

Lloyd-Hughes, S. (2015), *How to be Brilliant at Public Speaking*, Pearson.

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