

The Art of Public Speaking by Richie Dayo Johnson



Nothing is more inspiring than watching seasoned toastmasters in action. They always seem to be in top form from the moment they do the “call to order” and announce the arrival of the special guests and other dignitaries. “How do they do they do it?” You wonder.

The origins of a Toastmaster (also known as a Master of Ceremonies or Guardian of Etiquette) dates back to the 17th century, and has been a traditional fixture at Royal and formal social events for centuries.

Public speaking is an art and effective speakers recognise the power of a dynamic speaking image. They also understand that image is essentially about perception. When you get up to speak, your listeners are observing the entire package – you. How you are perceived determines whether your audience truly listens to you and accepts your message. A well-defined speaking image is what separates the good speaker from a great speaker.

Those who attended a recent *Richmond Johnson Masterclass on Public Speaking* would attest to the fact that developing the speaking image that will work for you isn't difficult. From the moment you walk up to the lectern, you're on display like merchandise in a store window. In the first few minutes, your listeners will consciously and unconsciously analyse your appearance, message and behaviour. How well they accept you depends on how effectively you apply the goals of a well-defined speaking image.

- Know your audience: Every aspect of your speech and the speaking image you want to project depends on who is in your audience. This will not only influence your dressing but your vocabulary, anecdotes and

phraseology. The occasion will also influence the words, stories and slant of your speech.

- Creating a perception of competence: This is an opportunity to share your knowledge and technical mastery of the subject or event. When you understand your topic or event, you will speak with confidence and authority.
- Create the perception of trustworthiness: Trust takes years to build and a moment to lose. Your audience will recognise your honesty as you provide credible sources for your statements. Relevant personal experiences add good flavour to your speech and make you appear sincere and real to your listener. Indulge them.
- Perception of being approachable: Your audience will deem you approachable when they feel they can trust you. Despite the physical distance between you and them, maintain a high energy level and transmit that energy and excitement to your listeners. Use conversational style, facial expression, body language and gesture as tools to make each person feel that you are talking directly to them.
- Don't imitate, initiate: Don't be tempted or fall into the trap of imitating the image of someone you admire. Develop your own distinctive trade mark which reflects your unique personal characteristics. Every individual is unique.
- Thoroughly analyse the physical facilities at the venue, including the seating arrangements, lectern placement, lighting, sound system and positioning of special guests.
- Be as close as possible to the programme or event planner. Learn the value of good timing and avoid communication gaps.
- Practice makes better: Even the professionals practice. Visualise yourself as a success. Concentrate on your vocal variety including pitch, tone and inflection.

Today, most weddings are formal occasions and during the wedding reception require someone to co-ordinate, direct and announce the ceremonial proceedings such as the receiving line, speeches and cake cutting ceremony.

When you open your mouth, you don't only tell the world who you are, you enter into the world of show business. The more you accept that, the more successful you will be.

My best wishes always,

RDJ

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Richie Dayo Johnson is a thought-leader and experiential specialist and consultant on communication and human behaviour.

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