

Speaking of success, here are some David Smorgon tips to make it happen

By Leo D'Angelo Fisher Published 03 September 2013



Fear of public speaking is understandable but ultimately bad for business says David Smorgon.

Photo: Josh Robenstone

David Smorgon has worn many hats in his very full life: former long-time president of the Western Bulldogs AFL club, founding chairman of Family Business Australia, lawyer, businessman, investor, philanthropist and scion of Melbourne's Smorgon dynasty.

The combined \$2.64 billion wealth of the Smorgon family places it at the top of the BRW Rich Families list.

More recently Smorgon has donned a new hat: principal of presentation and public speaking training business PointMade. At a reception in Melbourne to welcome US presentation and communications coach Richard Greene, with whom PointMade has formed an alliance, Smorgon discussed the importance of speaking in public, and what makes a winning presentation.

Smorgon should know. In his many and diverse roles, one defining skill has come to the fore again and again: public speaking. Selling, pitching, inspiring, motivating, explaining, defending – Smorgon has had to call on his communication skills many times. And he insists that for anyone in business communication is an essential component of doing business.

“So much of what we do in business is around communication,” he says. “Yet providing training in presentation and communication skills, developing those skills, is not a priority for most organisations.”

Since stepping down as Bulldogs president in 2012 after 16 years in the position, Smorgon has pursued a successful career as an in-demand conference and motivational speaker in his own right. He also formed PointMade “to help organisations explain themselves to their employees, their customers and their potential customers”.

“Imagine if you were confident that every member of your team could explain succinctly why [a potential customer] should do business with your company,” he says.

Power of communication

Smorgon was a senior executive of Smorgon Consolidated Industries for 25 years. The multi-billion dollar conglomerate of meat processing, canning, glass, paper and packaging, plastics and steel interests was broken up when the family voted to sell off the business in 1995. Smorgon strongly opposed the move, but the importance of communication stayed with him.

“My first experience with communications was in the family business at the age of 22 or 23,” he says.

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“The fact that our family had the ability to communicate among ourselves, with our employees and with our customers was critical to our success,” he recalls. “Around the [family boardroom] table everybody was equal – although some were more equal than others – but everyone was entitled to be heard in a non-threatening environment.

“Sometimes it did seem a bit threatening [when conversations got heated] because everyone had a passion about the business, but everyone remained friends afterwards; everyone understood.”

Communication is the lifeblood of any business, Smorgon says. Whether it’s internal communication or communication with external stakeholders, it is essential. Fear of public speaking, whether at the boardroom table or before a conference audience, is understandable, Smorgon concedes, but it’s bad for careers and bad for business. It’s also unnecessary.

Smorgon's top talking tips:

Smorgon believes anyone can be an effective public speaker. These are some tips from a man who has delivered hundreds, possibly thousands, of presentations:

- 01 Preparation:** the more you prepare, the better you will be.
- 02 Confidence:** be confident about what you will be talking about. Know your subject matter.
- 03 Passion:** be prepared to show your passion and emotions.
- 04 Sincerity:** if you believe it, if it comes from the heart, your audience will believe it too.
- 05 Due diligence:** the people listening to your presentation will be making an assessment about what you have to say; you should submit your presentation to analysis before making it; discuss and test your presentation with people you trust beforehand and be prepared to fine tune.
- 06 Make every presentation count:** you are only as good as your last presentation.

Richard Greene: 'It's more fun than law'

Smorgon's guest, Richard Greene, speaking to a select audience of executives, professionals and businesspeople also discussed some of these points, while providing his own unique insight into the "secrets" of public speaking.

Greene was the lawyer of motivational speaker and author Anthony Robbins when he decided that "what Anthony was doing was more fun than practising law". So he became a full-time presentation trainer, analyst and commentator.

As a communication and speech coach, Greene has had an impressive array of private and corporate clients – he was engaged by Princess Diana in 1996 to overcome her fear of public speaking – as well as regularly appearing as a media analyst probing body language and political speeches. He is also the author of the 2002 book *Words That Shook the World* and his new book, *Words that Shook the World: the 1st Decade of the 21st century*.

Here's a dozen tips for making your presence (and words) felt as a public speaker from "the master of charisma" (according to The Sunday Times of London), gleaned from the Melbourne reception:

- 01 The three keys to messages that resonate: words, voice tone and body language.**
- 02 The weighting of these factors:** words 7 per cent, voice tone 38 per cent and body language 55 per cent .
- 03 Make your words user-friendly:** don't use jargon.
- 04 Ensure there is variation:** in your voice tone, including volume, pace and pitch. (A monotone is only useful if you are intending to hypnotise your audience.)
- 05 Be yourself:** variation is important for keeping an audience interested, but it has to be authentic. Don't become a slave to technique. "What's genuinely inside of you, that's the key," Greene says. "Find your own style."
- 06 Voice tone:** reflects confidence, authority and gravitas.
- 07 The power of the pause:** "the pause is the difference between a good speaker and a great speaker," Greene says.
- 08 Body language:** "the body never lies," Greene says. "The body always speaks first."
- 09 Body language:** the elements of body language include posture, eye contact, gesture and movement.
- 10 Use your ears:** "the most powerful communication tool is listening." Greene also stressed "the body language of listening".
- 11 Passion:** is critical, but make sure the passion is authentic.
- 12 What's in it for them?** "What is unique about this presentation? How does the uniqueness of my presentation benefit members of the audience? It's always about them."