How to Polish Your Public Speaking

Almost everyone is guilty of exhibiting superfluous words, sounds or gestures while presenting, but you may want to say goodbye to them.

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Do you unknowingly touch your hair when you speak on Zoom or in conference rooms? Do you speak with your hands when the movements have no value? Or perhaps you put your hands in your pockets while delivering important messages.

Almost everyone betrays superfluous gestures, words or sounds (think: “uh huh,” “and…”). We often tend to stop using them when appearing in front of an audience, but if a gesture supports your message, use it. It is part of you. It’s only when a gesture is repeated too frequently — even if unconciously — that it harms you and the message you’re conveying. An audience may even become distracted by counting the times you repeat certain gestures. These are the ones you need to lose. Watch a recording of yourself or ask friends to identify reptitious tendencies you don’t easily recognize. Awareness is the first step. Later, practice speaking before an audience without them.

Other examples of superfluous gestures could include:

- Playing with keys while speaking;
- Scratching your beard;

- Touching your ear from time to time;
- Licking your lips;
- Standing center stage and walking forwards and backwards regardless of what you're saying;
- Touching your nose numerous times.

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As a rule, repeated touching of the head and face is superfluous. However, everything should be taken in proportion. We are all human. Our nose itches sometimes. And while it's best not to speak while your hands are in your pockets, there is at least one successful person who's made that his trademark: Jay Leno.

After cleaning up the "noise" from your body language, you'll be able to focus on adding movements and gestures that all have one purpose: supporting the effectiveness of your message. This could be a strategically repeated verbal mantra or a slogan. Or you can deploy a unique gesture for maximum impact, like Churchill's trademark "V for Victory" sign.

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How to get rid of your superfluous gestures

Here are a few basic tips:

1. Ask a colleague to whistle every time you make a superfluous gesture.
2. Consider the timing of your gestures and what purpose

they serve. Consider what you can do to achieve the same goal without them.

3. Before every speech, set a goal for yourself to improve one of your movements or gestures.
4. Watch a recording of yourself with no sound. Focus on your body language.
5. Take time to improve. Mark Twain once said, “Habit is habit and not to be flung out of the window by any man, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time.” Some research suggest it takes 30 consecutive days (and perhaps more) to change a habit, so be patient. It’s your personal brand, so work at your pace.
6. Whenever you feel you have made an improvement, celebrate it.

And most importantly, don’t tell yourself what *not* to do, because the subconscious doesn’t distinguish between a negative and a positive command. Formulate the goal in a positive way by determining which gestures will be intentional and not superfluous, and then get out there and motivate and convert.

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