

Speaking in Public

by Rev. Peter R. Hook, Eastern States Chaplain, from email dated May 6, 2015

The Chaplain, and for that matter the Commander or anyone else, when called upon to speak or make a public presentation of some kind, is like an actor on stage at a theater, with the audience watching every move that is made and listening intently to every word that is spoken. Every actor knows his or her role in the production. And, whether the main star or one who makes a cameo appearance, everything an actor does has been well thought-out and rehearsed before the curtain goes up. No actor ever adlibs! Even when it appears that the communication or action is spontaneous, it almost always has been planned. It is called “planned spontaneity.” When the person is prepared and the presentation is done well, the speaker has poise and there is smoothness and a seamless flow that emanates from the person that makes the delivery seem so natural.

Whether we like it or not, we represent ourselves, our Post, our District, our Department, and the VFW as a whole when we are called upon to speak in public. It may be unfair, but we and the VFW are being judged by those in the audience. Therefore, it is important that we are prepared and represent ourselves and our great organization well.

Here are a few pointers, which if taken seriously and followed, will greatly enhance your public speaking skills:

1. Be prepared! Think about why you have been asked to speak and what is expected of you on this occasion. Whether it is to offer a prayer, make an introduction, or some other presentation, write out what you are going to say. Then, rewrite and edit what you plan to say. Then, read what you are going to say out loud and make final changes if needed. Eliminate all unnecessary information. Those who are prepared communicate clearly and concisely.
2. When making a presentation look at your audience and focus on communicating and ministering to them – not on reading your notes.
3. Practice pronouncing names of recipients and those you are introducing correctly.
4. Speak loud enough so people can hear you.
5. Speak with clarity. It is always the responsibility of the speaker to communicate in a way that the audience can understand what is being said.

6. Rehearse, rehearse, and rehearse. When well-prepared, you should know what you will be saying without having memorized it, and how you are going to say it.

Finally, remember those who speak well at public occasions observe other speakers and are good listeners. They listen carefully, patiently, and even kindly to others and learn from them -- what to do, what not to do, and how to do it, -- so the next time they are called upon to participate in a program and speak in public, they will do it well.