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TEN TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR PRESENTATIONS

Speaking is a crucial part of the legal profession. However, rarely do attorneys have the opportunity to learn about how to command the space when talking to an audience. Here are a few simple tips that can make a huge difference in how you come across when you are speaking.

1. Be prepared. Be certain you know your topic and are organized in terms of what you intend to present. Don't just wing it.

2. Don't read your notes or speech. One of the worst things a speaker can do is read notes or a Power Point presentation. As soon as you stop engaging your audience and look down at your notes, your audience is gone.

3. Focus on three main points and the concepts you want to present. One reason people read their notes is to make sure they get every point across. However, if you focus on the concepts you want to be sure to address instead of the exact way in which you address them, you will have a successful talk without having to prepare and read it word-for-word.

4. Avoid PowerPoint slide presentations and their ilk. You want your audience to focus on you, not your screen.

5. Come out from behind the podium. Most people prefer to speak behind a podium because it seems to offer a certain amount of comfort. But the podium also hampers your ability to connect with the audience. Consider standing in front of the audience and using a wireless lavalier microphone, or sitting on a high stool.

6. Use a microphone. Not infrequently at a seminar, a speaker will announce he doesn't need the microphone because his voice is loud enough. But the microphone isn't

for you, it is for your audience, and unless you are all seated around a table, you need one.

7. Create an introduction that grabs your audience's attention. A boring introduction means you already have an uphill battle to get the audience on your side. Keep your introduction short and relevant.

8. Repeat questions. If you are presenting at a seminar, be sure you repeat the audience's questions. This lets you make sure that you understand what the questioner is asking, and ensures that the audience knows what you are answering.

9. Make eye contact. This is one you have heard all your life. Making eye contact with your audience means slowly looking around the room, and stopping your gaze to look at various members of the audience. Each member of the audience will think you are actually looking at him or her.

10. Vary your speaking tone, speed, and volume for emphasis. A monotone voice is extremely dull and will quickly drive your audience away. Vary your tone to help people stay engaged. Use pausing, speaking quickly or slowly, louder or softer, to emphasize important points.

Speaking is a skill that can be learned, just like writing. If you take the time to learn how to do it better, you will improve. ■

Courtesy of Faith Pincus, Esq. of Pincus Professional Education and Finz Advance Tapes

Pincus is an accomplished and experienced speaker who has trained CEOs, attorneys, elected and appointed officials, candidates, and managers at nonprofit associations for more than two decades. She is the founder of Pincus Professional Education [www.PincusProEd.com], owns Finz Advance Tapes [www.Advance-Tapes.com] and writes SpeechAdvice.com, a blog about public speaking.

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