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# Enhancing public speaking skills using improvisation techniques

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# In this session

we will cover the following topics:

- Fear of public speaking
  - Why is public speaking important?
  - Improvisation and public speaking
  - Editing your presentation or speech
  - Improvisation exercises to enhance public speaking skills
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trembling

stuttering

rapid heartbeat

looking nervous

blushing

imposter syndrome

dry mouth

fidgeting

anxiety

being judged

sweating palms

talking too fast

squeaky voice

# 75%

Of all people experience some degree of anxiety/nervousness when public speaking



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STAGE CRYSTAL

# Why is public speaking important?

- Immediate response from audience
- Opportunity for discussion or clarification
- Can be less formal, draw on personal experience
- More persuasive
- Voice and body language – more tools to convey your message

# What is improvisation?

- Made up on the spot
- Fast-paced and funny
- Stories and characters
- Different styles
- Communication skills

# How can it help with public speaking?

## Comedy

'Improv saved my life': the comedy classes helping people with anxiety

Once the domain of aspiring performers, improv courses are increasingly being attended by students experiencing mental health problems

Source: The Guardian 20 December 2017



# How can it help with public speaking?

- Approaching situations with a positive attitude and thinking about what you can contribute
- Learning how to connect with your audience and feeling comfortable with them
- Becoming more concise in your speech
- Showing passion and enthusiasm with your words, voice and physicality
- Overcoming the fear of looking or feeling silly

# Mindset

- How will you approach this?

# Content

- What can you bring to this?
- What does your audience want?

# Delivery

- How will you connect with your audience?
- What might you need to change?

# Warm-up

You wouldn't run a marathon  
without warming up...

- Face
  - Breathing
  - Voice
  - Brain
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## Exercise: Yes, but...

- In small groups, you are planning an event
- Each time someone makes a suggestion, someone else must respond with “Yes, but...” and outline a reason why that suggestion wouldn’t work
- Continue suggesting and rejecting until time is up

## Exercise: Yes, and...

- Same as above but this time, someone responds with “Yes, and” accepting the idea and adding to it

# Takeaways from Yes, but...

- It can be easier to shoot down ideas than to accept and build on them
- Having your ideas shot down doesn't feel great and is not very productive  
- how far did your party planning get?
- How often do you dismiss to your own ideas? Or phrase them negatively?  
"This may be a silly question..." "I don't know if this would work but..."
- Taking the time to find a justification for an idea promotes creativity and collaboration
- By using "Yes, and..." you can develop the parts of the idea that work

# Developing your presentation/speech

Content



“Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away.”

Antoine de Saint-Exupery  
Writer and pioneering aviator

# Editing your presentation/speech

- Focus – everything should support your core message
- Clarity – find an order that makes sense
- Concision – remove anything you don't need
- Continuity – keep a flow throughout
- Variety – break up a long speech with humour or interaction
- Impact – create vivid images or memorable lines

# Say more with less

- Take a section of your speech or presentation that is 5 minutes in length and practice delivering it
- Rework this so that it fits into 3 minutes, then 1 minute, then 30 seconds, then 10 seconds
- Practice it out loud each time, trying not to speed up your delivery - in the final round you should just have a few keywords
- This will help you identify what is important, what can be left out and get you more comfortable with adapting your delivery



Look into my eyes...



# Eye contact

- Creates a sense of connection – even in images
- Instinctive – newborn babies lock eyes with caregivers
- Good eye contact - more believable, confident and competent
- Poor eye contact – uneasy, unprepared or insincere
- 30-60% depending on whether you are speaking or listening

# Make your garden grow

- One person is the sun
- Everyone else is a beautiful flower waiting to bloom
- As the sun speaks, they shine on the flowers by making eye contact
- If the sun is shining on you, bloom!
- If the sun doesn't shine on you for a while, wither
- The sun needs to keep the whole garden in bloom

# Takeaways from Make your garden grow

- Eye contact gets easier with practice
- Treat it like a game
- Frame it in a positive way
- You are giving and your audience are receiving

# Commit to the bit

- Practice delivering parts of your speech in different ways - vary the pace and volume of your voice
- Try delivering it in different emotions e.g. excited, angry, as if you are letting someone in on a secret
- Play around with different styles e.g. Shakespearean, gangster, musical
- Doing this will make you more comfortable with performing and will help you find where to put the emphasis in your speech

# Dropping the ball

- With a group of people, form a circle. One person mimes throwing a ball to someone else. That person mimes failing to catch the ball. Everyone cheers and claps to celebrate this fantastic failure
- Once people start to get used to the idea of failing to catch the ball, their failures will become more and more ridiculous
- This exercise feels a bit strange at first but helps you to embrace the idea of failure and get more comfortable in feeling silly

# Final thoughts...

- Positive attitude – think ‘Yes and...’
- Practice – play around with your material
- Eye contact – connect with your audience
- Don’t beat yourself up – there’s no such thing as a perfect speaker
- Enjoy it – show them your enthusiasm and passion

# Thanks!

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**“A book may give you excellent suggestions on how best to conduct yourself in the water, but sooner or later you must get wet...”**

**Dale Carnegie**

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