

Mike Drop

Your next speech will be *that* good.

The #1 Work Skill You Need

It's public speaking, and—stay with us here—you're going to be *awesome*.
By Jennifer Breheny Wallace

Public speaking may seem terrifying, but *no* highly placed woman has gotten where she is without doing it. "It's particularly important for young women, many of whom don't speak up for fear of being tongue-tied or ignored," says Kim Cole, cofounder of the executive recruiting firm The Sales Zone. Yet get this: The majority of people surveyed by Harvard University researchers said they would rather endure minor electrical shocks than give a five-minute speech! Talking in front of a group should *not* be akin to torture. Six (painless) ways to nail your next presentation:

Interact with your audience. "If it's a small meeting, get there early and greet peo-

ple as they come in the door," suggests performance coach and psychologist Nancy Cetlin. "If you think of your talk as just a continuation of that conversation, you'll wind up using the same voice and tone—meaning you'll be yourself, which is key to any successful presentation."

Memorize your start. "I tell my clients, 'Don't just have an idea of what you'll say; literally memorize those first 60 seconds,'" says Bill McGowan, communications coach and author of *Pitch Perfect: How to Say It Right the First Time, Every Time*. "You're most nervous then, so acing that portion will build confidence that will carry over into the rest of your presentation."

Fake it till you feel it. In a series of studies involving karaoke, public speaking, and

math performance, Harvard Business School researchers found that when participants thought of their nervousness as excitement, they actually performed better. "Just telling yourself, Wow, I'm excited!, can turn stress into something positive," says study author Alison Wood Brooks, Ph.D.

Breathe. "If you start to stutter, stumble, or speed-talk, don't acknowledge it," says Cetlin. "Just pause, breathe out a quiet, exaggerated sigh, and focus for a second or two on the soles of your feet. This will ground you. Then turn your attention to the one point the audience needs to hear next. If you put the spotlight on them and what *they* need, there won't be any room in your head to worry about you."

Pause. A lot. "Speaking slowly steadies your pace and smooths your delivery," says Lisa Wentz, founder of the San Francisco Voice Center. "Pauses also help the audience process the information, which will make them more attentive and responsive. Those little stops exude authority and confidence—even if you're not actually feeling it in the moment."

Forget perfection. "Some of my clients, women in particular, tend to focus on giving the 'perfect' speech or presentation," says Matt Abrahams, cofounder of and public-speaking coach for Bold Echo, a Silicon Valley communications coaching firm. "The reality is, there's no one right way to give a speech. Give up on being perfect and try to do well. Remember: Your audience is there to learn, not to see a flawless performance." 