

What to do with your hands when you are giving a speech

by Robert Hayes-McCoy – www.need-a-speech.com

If you are giving a speech for the first time, keep in mind that the body language of your hands can sometimes convey a more powerful message than the words that you say in your speech

Ever notice how some people look relaxed and totally at ease when they are standing in front of an audience giving a speech, even if what they are saying is not quite so great? While others, who have prepared their speech carefully and have many words of genuine substance to say, look almost dejected and beaten before they start. It's like as if they are apologising for being there. And the longer their speech goes on, the more apologetic they look and sound.

Ok, there's no question about it, what a speaker says is important. But how they say it can be even more important. Next time you are listening to someone giving a speech, have a look at where they put their hands. The professional speaker knows exactly where to put his or her hands. But the 'once in a blue moon' amateur speaker, like a best man at a wedding, a father of a bride, a person making his/her retirement speech, or whoever, usually has no idea about what to do with his or her hands.

In fact, people sometimes tell me that they had no idea that their hands could be the cause of so many problems until they were actually standing up and facing an audience and found that their arms and their hands kept on getting in their way. By then, it was too late, of course, for them to ask anyone for help or advice.

Some professional speech coaches will tell you things of great engineering complexity like: hold your hands in front of you in a prayer-like stance, positioning the palm of your hands slightly above your elbows, and throughout your speech open and close your arms and hands from time to time for emphasis. This is, actually, a very effective stance, but it's not one that comes naturally to someone who is nervous about making a speech.

Others will say: put one hand in your pocket from time to time to add a studied air of casualness to your stance. But they advise you not to try and walk with your hand in your pocket for fear that you might trip up. My advice to you is 'never put your hand in your pocket'. It conveys a far too laid-back body language message.

Then there's the real professional coaching guideline which advises you to grip the rostrum with both your hands to add power to your stance and to bring an extra gravitas to what you are saying. This works, but first you need a rostrum and that's something that's not always available. You could stand behind your chair and use the back of the chair as an impromptu rostrum. This can work very well, provided you are not looking for somewhere to rest your notes.



Twist it. Twiddle it. Fiddle it... a pen in the hand is your perfect friend. But take care!

Some historic speakers, like Hitler, would constantly fling their hand up in the air for emphasis. Nowadays, if you do too much of this you can end up looking downright silly, especially at something like a retirement function. Other historic names like Mussolini would wag their finger at their listeners. If you take my advice, avoid wagging your finger as your listeners. Nobody likes being at the receiving end of a wagging finger.

Far and away the best, and the easiest, thing for a 'once in a blue moon' speaker to do with their hands, in my opinion, is to grip something small, like a pen, or your glasses, with them. You'll be amazed at what a difference it makes to you.

Take a pen: Put it up. Place it down. Grip it with one hand. Hold it with two hands. Pass it from the left hand to the right hand. Pass it back again. Turn it. Twist it. Twiddle it. Fiddle it... it's your perfect friend.

But take care! Two things that you must not do with it are: don't snap it in two. And don't toss it up in the air, because nine times out of ten you'll miss the catch.