



10
steps

to Releasing Your Inner Public Speaker

How to conquer your fear and add to your job skills

by Jennifer S. Murray

There are many aspects of being a law librarian that took me by surprise. One in particular was the vast amount of public speaking that I and other law librarians do. In library school nobody told me that I'd teach legal research in a lecture hall filled with 70 students. And nobody told me that I'd present to my peers at law librarian conferences.

When I first started as an academic law librarian, public speaking was an intimidating thought. I was sure the law students would want to throw tomatoes at me. Although the first few times I spoke the thought probably crossed their minds, thankfully they didn't.

This involvement in public speaking isn't unique to academic law librarianship. Whatever type of law librarianship you do, public speaking is involved. As a firm librarian, I have presented national training sessions to attorneys at my law firm. You haven't lived until you've presented in the virtual environment—what a challenge!

If I sound like an old pro at public speaking, well, I'm not. I still have a lot to learn. But I have managed to pick up a few pointers through the years that I'd like to pass along to those who have the same fear of public speaking that I did. Call me an optimist, but I think everyone can release their inner public speaker.

1 Seek it Out

The best thing I did to obtain a comfort level with public speaking was to seek out opportunities to do it. I know that this is like using eye drops. It goes against your instincts. But the best way to get over your fear is to face it. And the more you do it, the easier it gets. It even becomes fun. I promise.

2 Practice Makes Perfect

As comfortable as I am with public speaking, I still get nervous if I haven't been able to do a dry run of my presentation. I always rehearse my presentations if I can. My cat has heard so much about legal research that she would be an expert researcher if she had opposable thumbs.

3 Own It

You know the subject matter. But if you don't own it and speak with

confidence, it's not going to seem like it. Even if you don't know every single thing there is to know about the topic, you still know more than your audience. Believe in yourself.

4 Prepare for the Worst

Don't rely on technology to work. Always have a back up.

5 Don't be Afraid of the Pause

You know the pause. You ask a question, and no one responds immediately. If you wait long enough, someone is going to say something. No one in the audience likes the pause either. So they'll likely give up and answer your question. I have no statistical evidence of this, but I'm willing to bet this strategy works 80 percent of the time.

6 Learn Tricks to Deal with Regular Difficulties

There are always going to be difficult situations in public speaking. For example, perhaps you have a person in the audience who asks tons of questions. Then that person starts asking too many questions and begins to disrupt the presentation for the entire group. There are many books, Web sites, and other resources that will give you examples of how to handle this exact problem. My favorite way to handle this problem is to ask the person to contact you afterward to answer his or her questions in depth. If you encounter a difficult problem, read up on how to resolve it.

7 Be Enthusiastic

I received some feedback after one session of teaching legal research to first-year law students that really hit home with me. If you aren't

enthusiastic about your topic, the audience isn't going to be either. Legal research isn't always the sexiest topic. But if you're a law librarian, chances are it's fascinating to you. And it's okay to let that fascination shine through in your presentation.

8 The Butterflies are a Good Thing

I think a good speaker never gets over the nervousness. It's what motivates you to do a good job. You just have to learn how to harness the butterflies to create positive energy.

9 Got Water?

Nothing is worse than getting a dry mouth while you're speaking. Having water, or your non-alcoholic beverage of choice, available is a necessity if you're going to talk for a while.

10 Keep Track of When You Speak

Ten months from now, you're not going to remember when you did what, and we all need to maintain our resume or curriculum vitae. Develop a system that works for you to keep track of your presentations as you give them. Calendar them in Outlook. Write them down and stick them in a folder—whatever works for you. But if you do nothing, I promise that you'll scratch your head at some point while looking at a calendar trying to figure out when exactly you talked to that group of fourth graders. ■

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