

BUSINESS

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Speech coach has plenty to say re: business

by: Azriela Jaffe

Dilip R. Abayasekara, Ph.D., A.S. (Accredited Speaker), helps business and organization leaders in this region learn how to speak more effectively.

You can get your MBA to help you crunch numbers, and attend workshops to learn compliance with the latest human resource laws. You can sign up for a crash course on how to operate that new fancy computer system you just bought. But what are you going to do if the thought of presenting your ideas to your management team or a prospective client gives you a big stomachache?

Toastmasters is a service club with a fine reputation for helping anyone who wants to improve their public speaking abilities to acquire these skills. The problem is, many of the region's top executives are either too busy or too embarrassed to take advantage of the valuable resources offered by local chapters.

I belong to an organization called the National Speakers Association. Most members are professional speakers — you aren't even allowed in for membership until you qualify with a certain number of paid speeches under your belt.

Both of these organizations, however, have difficulty serving company leaders and salespersons who are judged every day by how they appear and sound on their feet. That's where Dilip steps in.

Dilip runs a Mechanicsburg area consulting firm called Speaker Services Unlimited. How did a native of Sri Lanka, a small island near India, become an expert in speaking English, of all things?

After completing high school in Sri Lanka, he came to the United States on an exchange program called "The Experiment in International Living." He was hosted by several families in Dayton, Ohio, and then went on to earn a B.S. in chemistry and a Ph.D. in organic chemistry and polymer science.

For the next 12 years he worked as an industrial scientist. I know good speech making means having good chemistry with the audience, but what's the connection? Dilip explained:

"I became involved with Toastmasters International, and I discovered an aptitude for public speaking. I threw myself into competitive speaking. I was twice a finalist at Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking, placing second in 1992.

"My passion and love for public speaking soon found an outlet in a part-time seminar business. I taught adult education programs in local colleges and public seminars on presentation skills, im-

promptu speaking, and mind mapping. In 1996, I left the chemical industry to throw my full-time energies into building my speaking business."

Dilip has offered seminars to a wide variety of clients in Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Washington, D.C., including the Pentagon, several large banks, a host of community colleges and professional organizations.

But what he loves to do more than anything is to serve as a private speech coach. He has coached company presidents, university professors, physicians, elected officials, scientists, engineers and even speech contestants.

If the idea of hiring a private speech coach intrigues you, Dilip has advice for determining whether you are a good candidate.

**He teaches
public
speaking
privately.**

"Typically, a person who appreciates my speech-coaching services falls into one or more of these categories," he says: "(1) The person is in a high-profile position, realizes that he/she needs to improve their speaking skills, but does not have the time and/or the inclination to attend communication-training work-

shops or join an organization such as Toastmasters (for example, company presidents, executives, elected public officials).

"(2) The person already may have taken, or be in the process of attending, communication seminars/ workshops/training, but feels that he/she needs [to be] focused one-on-one training in order to improve at a faster rate (for example, university professors, professional speakers and trainers, aspiring professional speakers, sales people, marketing people).

"(3) The person has to deliver a very important speech. He/she wants personalized coaching for that one speech (for example, company executives, elected president of an association, executive directors, speech contestants, candidates for public office, speaker at a convention)."

When someone expresses an interest in exploring Dilip's speech coaching services, he sets up a free one hour appointment for a mutual interview, phone, (717) 612-9622; e-mail drdilip@paonline.com.

Depending on the needs, he offers four- to eight-week sessions, usually held at the client's office or home, or at Dilip's home office or a reserved conference room. He concentrates on the emotional issues involved in effective speech making, not just the technique.

"My first focus is to help the client build a solid understanding of the role that their thoughts and attitudes play in effective speaking," Dilip said.



"Effective public speaking is 95 percent mental and 5 percent technique. If only the 5 percent is learned, the client will be a technical robot, and my coaching will not have a long-term impact. I spend time at each session probing the student's understanding and giving them exercises that build up this self-knowledge and motivation. The client understands the 'why' before trying to do the 'how.' My longer-term clients learn to present their 'best selves' when they speak — they do not imitate others."

Dilip has many fans among his previous clients, some who initially questioned spending money and time on something like a professional speech coaching. Frank Felsburg, a seminar leader and previous client, is glad he made the investment.

"As a result of hiring Dilip," he said, "I have grown immensely, not just as a speaker, but as a person as well. He finds gifts in people they don't realize they have. He is a remarkable individual."

Perhaps what makes Dilip valued to his clients is his ability to convince them that they, too, are remarkable individuals, with something of importance to share with an audience. This is the most powerful technique he has to offer to a cadre of professionals who need to convert their self-consciousness to self-confidence.

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