



In honour of my
grandfather René V.

(♥1931- 2023)

*I write because you wrote.
I read because you read.
I speak because you spoke.*

MARNICK VANDEBROEK

FAQ!

I HAVE TO



SPEAK

21 ANSWERS TO THE MOST
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
ON PUBLIC SPEAKING

**Lannoo
Campus**

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BEFORE YOU START READING

Yeah, but...

- **...I don't speak on big stages; I only have three people in a meeting room.**

This book is for everybody who wants to make a bigger impact on their audience in a personal or professional context. You don't have to be a keynote speaker or politician to get value out of this book. Speaking is a skill we all need to master. If you want to take your friends, partner, colleagues, investor, board members,... along with your ideas, you need to be able to speak. Speaking is not just reserved for people who stand on big stages in front of huge crowds. You must be able to apply the same techniques in a video call at work or in front of five people in a meeting. I stand on big stages for a living, but still, most of my own speaking and coaching work with others is within companies for client, board, investor or stakeholder meetings, online and offline.

- **...speaking is not my issue; building a story and presenting my ideas in a clear way is.**

When I use the word 'speaking' in this book, I refer to everything related to it. You can talk about performing, presenting and storytelling. One focuses more on voice and body, the other more on actual presentations and the last one more on content structure. To make it easy, in most cases I will group all these aspects of the trade under the term 'speaking'. So, when you are 'speaking', you need a solid performance, you need great content and a crisp structure, and you need to be able to present your ideas, but also to bring them across in a conversation-like way.

■ **...I mainly work online and have to stand in front of a camera instead of a live audience.**

If you mainly work remotely and spend more time in front of a camera than a live group, this book is just as relevant for you. There is not a lot of difference between online and offline speaking. Online, things will have to be enlarged, which will be discussed in this book, but all the techniques, structures and insights remain the same in essence. Online will flatten emotion and interaction and will add a bit more stress, but once you master the fundamentals of speaking, the online playing field will level itself out.

I KINDLY ASK YOU TO...

... read this book with the goal to 'teach' and not just to 'learn'. When you read a book with the commitment to teach the insights to somebody else afterwards, you will gain more from it.

“To master it, you must create an obligation to teach it.”

THE QUESTION THAT STARTED IT ALL

“Marnick, when we have a budget cut, why do you get budget? And when we have a hiring freeze, why do you get to hire people? What do you do in the boardroom that we aren’t doing?”

I was working as a digital manager for a huge multinational company when one of my former colleagues stopped me in the office hallway and asked me the above question. I didn’t have an answer and had never really thought about it. Why did I experience so much success in the boardroom, while I was responsible for a part of marketing (social media) that was in its early days and got more scepticism and push back from seasoned marketers than anything else? For most executives, my job was a fad, but somehow, I managed to take them along with my ideas. I didn’t give it much thought and quickly dismissed the question with a smile, “Just lucky, I guess.” But the question kept lingering and in the following days I started looking more consciously at my internal presentations. I wasn’t aware of it, but I had been shaped by the hobby I had picked up two years earlier, stand-up comedy.

I realised that I was using a lot of those stand-up comedy techniques in my daily work – techniques I had acquired in comedy workshops, MC (master of ceremony) masterclasses and by performing across Flanders from dodgy bars to cosy theatres. I was unaware that I had started using these comedy techniques in my professional work – not to make people laugh, but to harvest the power of one of the purest forms of storytelling. Hundreds of people, one person with a microphone looking the other way and claiming to be funny. A person literally changing the emotional and physical state of an audience by what he is saying. People laugh, clap, move, shake and enjoy the reward. The reward that comes in the

form of dopamine (The molecule of I feel good, rewarded and I want more of it). Purely by what he says and how he says it, a comedian triggers the same effect in his audience's brain as it would if they took a line of cocaine. Or in the words of famous stand-up comedian Jimmy Carr:

“A stand-up comedian is like a drug dealer. The only difference with a real drug dealer is that the audience already has the drugs on them.”

I started dissecting my presentations and performances. I wanted to know what exactly resonated so well with my corporate audience. To execute my 'develop people target' in my performance review, I decided to organise an internal training for my colleagues, sharing this speaking knowledge. The training filled up in minutes and I quickly planned a second and third one. It was a big success and apparently something a lot of people got value out of. I even got asked to duplicate this work internationally within the company. The impact was so great that at a certain point I was training people more on speaking and giving key-notes myself than doing my job as a digital manager.

I come from a family of entrepreneurs and had always wanted to start my own business, but I never knew what in. Now, it was crystal clear to me. If these professionals needed these speaking insights, others would too. I quit my job, my partner Natalie soon did the same and Stand Up Company (standupcompany.com) was officially born. Now, after that one question, we are more than a decade, two books and hundreds of clients and conferences into the greatest journey of our lives. This awesome adventure makes me think of that memorable quote from Jeff Bezos:

“You don't choose your passion; your passion chooses you.”

A passion that serves one purpose:

Helping you break through corporate walls and have you stand up for your ideas, projects, and visions in your own genuine way. For you to find your voice, be seen, heard, appreciated and positively stand out in your life by the way you tell your stories. #standuptostandout

This dedication to the speaking trade led me to discover that speaking, our ability to express ourselves by telling stories, goes to the core of who we are and want to become. There is so much more to speaking than meets the eye. It's not just about controlling nerves and finding the right words. It's about mastering the skill that makes us human, the power of telling stories to others, bringing across value, insight and emotion and to do it in such a way that these stories get retold by others for days, weeks, years to come.

Being able to stand up for what you believe in gives you power, attention and appreciation. It boosts your confidence, energy and eagerness to engage with others. As you will notice in the examples in this book, it affects all aspects of your life. My clients discover that they can do more than they imagined possible. They start walking more upright, start eating more healthily, dressing differently. Not that I have told them to – I'm not a personal trainer or a style guru – but when you are able to express yourself and people listen and take action on your ideas, it will trigger a whole new version of yourself. Still completely you – just an improved and more powerful version that was always there, but has now, through speaking, found a way to literally and figuratively express itself to the fullest.

I have seen a person tear up and shake when asked to introduce themselves in front of a group, only to give their first TV interviews confidently, after a few sessions. With an entrepreneurial couple who had been together for years, I had one of them express amazement at how the other performed during a business pitch: “OMG, I don't know you like this; I love it.” I have had a seasoned leader experience the difference be-

tween being comfortable speaking in front of their team and genuinely inspiring them. I had the shyest engineer become one of the most highly rated speakers at a major technology conference after their first ever speech. Just a few examples of how teaching people to speak is worth every second of the time I have on this earth.

All my keynotes, coaching, and training on public speaking around the world presented me with thousands of questions from people who were not heard, understood or appreciated. After a while, I started seeing a pattern in these speaking challenges. The same questions kept coming up in every workshop. I gathered and simplified them. The result is this book: a collection of the 21 most frequently asked questions and their answers. I hope you have already browsed through the table of contents and said: “Yes, those are exactly the questions I have.”

This book will grant you access to all the techniques you come across from interviewing top speakers, reading many books, or notching up a lot of speaking miles yourself. You are holding the most important insights nicely bundled together in your hands. Presented to you in logical order, but in such a way that you don’t have to read them in that order. You can start with your prominent questions and cherry pick your way through the book. It is however advisable to read chapters 10 –15 in chronological order for maximum value.

It’s now up to you to read them, to become aware of their use and impact. I guarantee they will work and make your next presentation so much more engaging and influential. The very reason they are the universal blueprint for the world’s most successful speakers and the most complete answer to my former colleague’s question.

Now, let me kick off this book with a question for you:

“How much dopamine are you triggering when you speak?”

Are you just transferring a message, or literally changing the emotional and physical state of your audience, leaving them thinking, “I understand it, I feel it and I want more of it!” Whatever the answer, after reading and applying the insights from this book, you most definitely will. You will no longer think, “Fuck, I have to speak!”, because you will know exactly what to do. Time for you to stand up for your ideas and stand out in life and business by the way you share them with the world. Enjoy the read, embrace the journey and welcome the applause.

MINDSET

BASIC

PRINCIPLES

& BELIEFS

OF GREAT

SPEAKERS

1

WHY SHOULD
I LEARN
TO SPEAK
BETTER? I'M
NOT IN SALES.

SHORT ANSWER:

“EVERYTHING IS SALES.”

“Do you even know how smart I am in Spanish?”

A quote from Modern Family actress Sofia Vergara, pointing out during an argument that English is not her native language. She needs to translate everything from Spanish to English in her head. This makes her less effective in heated conversations. This book is not about speaking in different languages, but the quote does capture the essence of this entire chapter: why it is of the utmost importance that each of us spends time and energy on learning and improving our speaking skills and taking away every possible barrier that stops our audience from understanding and embracing an idea.

We are fluent in our own business language (also referred to as nerd language), but fail to translate it into plain English for outsiders (e.g. board, IT, sales,...) due to our curse of knowledge. This makes us sound like a genius in our community, but we are perceived by others as difficult to work with, unclear or even unfit for the job due to an ineffective presentation. The world is full of people who are very good at what they do. People who work hard and are an expert in their trade. Technically they excel, but still run around frustrated:

Management doesn't see the added value of the project.
We are already at meeting five for simple budget approval.
Marketing doesn't understand how important it is that they clean up their data.
Our product is the best, but we aren't getting any investment money.

...

Change projects are in a rut, promotions are missed, budgets aren't approved, and knowledge is lost. All because these messages weren't properly presented. They weren't properly sold to the audience.

Not everybody is in sales as a function or department, but if you know that 85% of people's jobs revolves around communication (convincing, feedback, leading, inspiring,...) and we ignore this skill, we ignore a big part of what determines our professional success. Only 15% is our technical knowledge, our actual expertise. Your ticket to play. A strong statement for some, but a harsh reality for us all. Everything in this world depends on the success of its presentation. TV commercials, political speeches, movie trailers,... They are all designed to convince and inspire people to take action. The same goes for your projects, ideas, job applications. We are constantly selling. Even our love relationships are based on sales conversations, e.g. selling your idea for a ski trip to your partner who loves beach holidays.

***“85% of your job is communication.
15% is technical skill.”***

I'm not saying everyone needs to share the same passion for speaking as me, but they should at least acknowledge the added value, no matter the activity they are in. Moving a solid block of a couple of tons with hand and rope will take thousands of people. Put a layer of ice under that block, lower the friction and you will only need a handful of people. Speaking skills are that layer of ice under the block of work we all try to move every single day. It makes our life easier and our impact greater. Billionaire investor Warren Buffett summarised it well when he said: “Learn how to speak and increase your professional value with 50%.”

In case you are still a bit sceptical, being a good speaker is not about claiming the spotlight everywhere you go, – boosting your ego and selling people ideas that aren't backed by data, experience or research. There is a wide spectrum between stroking your ego, artificially inflating your image and really making a difference with your stories at the right moment for the audience and yourself. The main purpose is to make yourself and particularly your work visible. No matter how hard it is for some to hear, 'good and hard work is often invisible'. What is easily visible are mistakes. So, it is our responsibility to make speaking a vital part of our day to day lives. It is making your work stand out in such a way that people learn from it, because they understand it. They act after hearing it, because they felt inspired.

People who accept this and are good at it are seen, grab the attention and often get what they want. This doesn't mean that everybody who is good at speaking identifies as a Slick Rick, has watched *Wolf of Wall Street* a few too many times and is a clear extrovert. These are people who understand the significance of transferring ideas in the right way. Mastering this skill is not just meant for keynote speakers, comedians, politicians or sales professionals. It is a must for everybody, of all ages, in all lines of work and all stages of life.

It will take time and effort. A strong story will demand preparation and a solid performance with voice and body will take a lot of practice. Standing in front of people takes courage. But no matter how big the speaking mountain seems, it will always take less time and effort than having to go through meeting after meeting, struggling to take people along in your story. Getting the boardroom door slammed in your face time after time. Missing opportunity after opportunity because nobody sees that you are immensely gifted in your trade and they do not understand why you are of value to them – due to the absence of the right speaking skills = “Do you even know how smart I am in Spanish?”

The fact that you are reading this book tells me that you belong to the group that really wants to work on the development of this skill. If you started reading with the title of this chapter in the back of your mind, I hope you now realise you were right to pick up this copy. You just increased your chances for success in anything you will do in life or business. You do great, hard work and now it is up to you to show this to the world and to inspire people to follow your ideas.

A new client of mine was sent to me by his manager. He was an analyst, and his manager wanted him to improve his speaking skills, because he lacked conviction and influence in meetings with his stakeholders. His work was mostly being ignored. When he entered the first session, his face said it all: “This is mandatory. I don’t want to be here.” He barely looked me in the eye and had a very closed posture. The first sessions were spent purely on discussing this chapter – the relevance and use of this skill for, in this case, an analyst. “My job is analysing data and reporting it, that’s it.”

He thought that taking the stage in meetings and bringing his conclusions across in a more enthusiastic and convincing way was dirty and manipulative, which was against his core values. “The work needs to speak for itself; I’m not in sales.” This conviction held him back in his work and in his ability to develop this skill. Step by step we progressed from fierce discussion to meeting preparation, story structuring and voice/body work. With every small positive reaction from a colleague on his new way of presenting the data, the negative conviction was replaced by a positive one. The figurative applause started to have its effect.

Then came the big day when he was asked by the top management of the entire holding (200 people) to present his predictions for the next year and his personal advice. Of all the analysts, the fact that he was asked was a visibility win. It will probably not surprise you, since this story is in the book, that he completely rocked it. Afterwards the CEO of the holding came to him and shook his hand, saying: “I didn’t know data could be this interesting.” Another board member said, “I have never seen this side of you before. Who knew you could do this.” Two weeks later, he was asked to a smaller board meeting of a member company to do a deep dive.

The next session, a new person walked in: big smile, shoulders back, glowing. He started the conversation with: “Marnick, now I understand what you meant with ‘This will make your life so much easier. You will be seen, heard and will pluck the fruits.’” By the time I started writing this book, he was speaking at conferences and regularly sits at the podcast mic as a guest expert.



AI companion

Why is public speaking so important for my career?

