

Speaking up

You have the product — but can you sell it? Speaking publicly could be the way, if you can conquer your fear of it

By ERIKA WELZ PRAFDER

BOOKSTORE shelves are saturated with product, but why is it that some authors outsell their competition time and again?

Very often, the factor has less to do with a writer's style and subject matter than it does his media exposure and knack for selling his work.

"Some people fear public speaking more than they do death. There are so many wonderful writers who can't perform in front of the press," said Kim Dower, author of "Life Is a Series of Presentations: Eight Ways to Inspire, Inform, and Influence Anyone, Anywhere, Anytime" (Simon & Schuster, \$13).

She's the owner of Kim-From-

LA.com, a renowned and well regarded literary and media services firm that handles publicity for publishing firms and coaches authors prior to book tours, radio interviews and television appearances.

Ironically, as a young adult, Dower was shy and presentation-phobic.

"The idea of failure in front of a group is terrifying. You're afraid you'll forget what you're going to say. The fear is so real and so physical," she explained.

Fortunately, early in her career, Dower conquered her worst nightmare while working as a publicist.

"I honed my skills of pitching, talking people into things and sharing ideas on the telephone. I learned about what makes people say yes," she said.

Here are Kim's tips for wowing an individual or a crowd:

Make a personal connection

Nothing beats a good laugh. If you can engage someone on a personal



Kim Dower (left) coaches authors to speak fluently about their product, and shows how to improve their public image.

level, even on a cold call, people will always remember a good, fun conversation.

Ask yourself why, before planning how

What's your mission? Once you peel away the obvious reason (selling XYZ) you will get to the heart of why you're putting yourself out there and prompt yourself to speak more passionately.

Prepare your audience

Let them know what you're there to cover right off the bat. This relaxes people and gives your audience an idea of what to expect.

Know your audience

Are you talking to a group of nurses or MBAs? Tailor your talk accordingly.

Breathe

If you find yourself speeding or freezing up, realize these stem from a desire to get things over with. Remember, you have something worthwhile to say. Speak clearly and try to enjoy it.

Rely on your presentation arsenal

This is a big pot of mental notes (personal examples, statistics, jokes) that you can draw from to divert a question or switch gears.

Prepare for the worst

When a question comes at you from left field, don't take it personally. Stick to the three points you want to make. Don't go off message or on a tangent and become boring. Remain fueled by the passion you feel for your ideas.

Learn from the pros

Listen to the radio and watch TV. Discover why you switch from one station to the next. Why are certain guests annoying? Take note of these turn-offs and don't emulate them.

Erika Welz Prafder is the author of "Keep Your Paycheck, Live Your Passion" (Adams Media, \$12.95)