

10 TIPS TO HELP INTERNATIONALLY EDUCATED PROFESSIONALS IMPROVE PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILLS

With their talents, abilities and unique perspectives, internationally educated professionals (IEPs) are making significant contributions to our multicultural workplace. However, in a new language and cultural environment, they also face challenges. The biggest challenge for many, as our research and experience attest, is public speaking. Many come to Canada with wonderful technical skills and knowledge of written English. The difficulty occurs when they speak in front of their bosses and colleagues, or give a presentation to their clients.

Internationally educated staff may be reluctant to speak in front of their bosses or clients because they feel their accents are too heavy; that they speak too fast or too slow; or that they use too many filler words such as “ums” and “ahs.” These are valid concerns; an accent is not necessarily a bad thing—some people like certain accents because of the distinctive flavour or because of a link with a mother tongue. However, when an accent is too heavy, listeners may have difficulty understanding what is being said. A similar confusion may arise due to improper sentence structure or unusual rates of speech.

KATHY KEYI JIA-JONES

Kathy Keyi Jia-Jones is the founder/ owner of Cross-Cultural Biz, a training and consulting company specializing in cross-cultural business solutions. She is the author of Effective Cross-Cultural Communication and Conflict Solving and has taught business and cross-cultural business communication courses at university and community college levels. An award-winning speaker, she is currently an area governor of Toastmasters, helping others overcome speech anxiety and improve communication skills. She discusses how to help new Canadians with public speaking, on page 22.



These factors can all hamper career progress, affect the company's communications and productivity, as well as customer relations and sales.

Our experience working with IEPs shows that the best way to improve business speaking skills is through the concerted efforts of both those individuals and the organization. Here are 10 practical tips for both to consider adopting:

Five tips for organizations:

1. Create a supportive and safe environment for the

practice of public speaking skills. English is a complex language, and learning it can be intimidating. Public speaking for an ESL (English as a Second Language) person can be scary—when all of their “inadequacies” will be revealed in a public forum.

2. Encourage employees to step out of their comfort zones. Support interactions between first language and second language English speakers; organize parties and activities so employees can talk more freely about topics

of their choice. These efforts can help staff overcome many psychological barriers.

3. Set up English-speaking clubs or groups. For instance, start a Toastmasters club. Toastmasters is a world-wide, non-profit organization that helps people enhance their public speaking skills.

4. Assign a patient and empathetic mentor to someone who is struggling with public speaking. The mentor can help the person prepare a presentation, for example, which in turn helps the speaker boost confidence and alleviate speech anxiety.

5. Partner with business communication instructors, trainers and coaches who understand the challenges and needs of the staff. These experienced professionals can help them increase business vocabulary, adopt the Canadian style of business communication and improve public speaking skills. Proper coaching can help reduce accents and form a proper English speaking style.

Five tips for individuals:

1. Don't compare yourself with others at the beginning.

2. When speaking, focus on your message or story, not on yourself, your performance or what others might say about your speech.

3. Don't be afraid of making mistakes.

4. Be consistent. Find opportunities to speak regularly.

5. Make efforts to step out of your comfort zone. Do set high standards for yourself as you progress.

Improving communication skills does not happen in a day. With the efforts of both organization and individual, as well as proper training and coaching, the staff and company will see the desired results. **HR**

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