

Softball New Zealand acknowledges Tony Burns for allowing it to reproduce the following article. This article the latest in the series of Effective Speaking Tips will help your communication skills when you are presenting training clinics to fellow umpires or rules clinics to clubs in your area.

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## Effective Speaking Tips Newsletter - November 2005

### "Imagination is more important than knowledge" Albert Einstein

I was looking over some presentation web-sites recently and was amazed to see one of them still promoting this ridiculous advice:

#### **"To overcome your nerves, imagine your audience naked."**

This idea has been around for a long time but does it really work? The idea is that if your audience was naked you'd feel superior because they'd look silly or that it shows that they're all just human.

The problem is that, as presenters, we have enough to think about - our notes, PowerPoint, how we want to open our talk - without having to expend the significant mental energy required to remove the clothes of each audience member. It sounds great but it's just too hard.

However, there are some effective ways of using your imagination which don't stretch reality so far and, based on the results we see in our [courses](#), can have an amazing effect on how you come across:

1. **Imagine that your audience knows very little about your topic.** Most of us speak too fast, flick through our slides too quickly and don't pause long enough for our audience to absorb what we're saying. This makes the audience think that we haven't organised our material well enough or that we're very nervous. But if you take on the idea that you're **explaining** ideas to someone, then you'll speak more deliberately - with more control and therefore, with more credibility.
2. **Imagine that you're speaking to one person.** When we speak to one person we use natural communication techniques - eye connection, pausing to allow comprehension, feeding off the listeners reactions. These natural "ways of being" are often lost when we speak to a group because we imagine we are "giving a speech" rather than talking to one person. But if you focus on one person at a time and speak to them as if they are the only person in the room, you'll come across as natural and confident.
3. **Imagine your listener is sitting next to you.** How would you speak if you were sitting and if your listener was right next to you - or just across your desk? For many of us, the act of **standing** in front of an audience creates psychological pressure which can make us nervous, stiff and unnatural. Much of that pressure disappears if we speak sitting down. But it's often inappropriate to speak while sitting and, like it or not, we appear more powerful and compelling if we stand to speak.

So, use your imagination. Imagine that you're sitting. Imagine that your listeners are just a few feet away. And speak in that easy relaxed way that you'd take on in that situation.

The great thing about imagination is that no-one knows you're using it. But it has an immediate and measurable effect on our behaviour which can really improve the way we come across to an audience.

To learn these techniques it's useful to have a coach and an audience, try out these ideas in a safe environment.

Our imagination is a powerful tool - let's not waste it on voyeurism!

