



Live with David Sandler: Getting the Butterflies to Fly in Formation While Public Speaking

SPEAKERS

David Sandler, Tierney King

Tierney King 00:01

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast sponsored by the Teaching Professor. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. Today, we have David Sandler with us, who is an adjunct professor who has taught public speaking at Raritan Valley Community College for over a decade. So today, we're going to talk about one of the things that a lot of students may dread, and that's public speaking. Why do you believe public speaking is such a vital topic that we should teach to students in college?

David Sandler 00:42

Well, thank you for having me, Tierney. I think it's a vital topic, because it's a life skill. It's something that people have done before they reach my class, and it's something that people will continue to do after they leave my class. The focus is that, you know, what we're doing right now is public speaking. When you go to a job interview, that's public speaking. If you're a waitress or waiter, you know, trying to place an order to establish rapport with the customers, that's public speaking. If you're a corporate leader of some type, or in a group setting in a corporation, and you're having some sort of team meeting, you're all public speaking. Most people, you know, there's an unfortunate stereotype I think of public speaking, where people think of this podium and someone standing behind it, and they're talking to a group of 100 or 200 people. And that's important to be able to do, but the fact of the matter is, most people actually will probably never even have that opportunity. So the kind of public speaking that people are really going to encounter on a day-to-day basis is that one-on-one conversation, small groups, maybe little larger groups, maybe they lead team meetings. So it's a life skill, and it's going to impact your ability to influence the conversation to articulate your thoughts. You know, I like to say that if you're unable to articulate what's going on in your unique brain, then two things happen. One, you lose out, because you're unable to contribute to whatever situation you're involved in, so proud of personal level, you know, part of you just isn't getting as developed as it might be. And then secondly, the world loses out on whatever good ideas you may have to share. So the ability to articulate what's going on in your unique mind, it's a life skill. And that's kind of the paradigm that I used to have people think about this course.

Tierney King 02:56

And so public speaking, it's hard no matter whether you're in front of 200 people, or whether it's just a one-on-one meeting. It's full of anxiety for some, some of us dread doing it, how do you help students

kind of confront those fears and anxieties? And kind of what tools do you teach students that help them confront those?

David Sandler 03:16

Good question, and definitely a common concern. That feeling, that anxiety, that stress, whatever you want to call it, that people are feeling on a physical level, it's very similar to the feeling you get when you're excited. And it's like, if you're about to take a roller coaster ride, or you're maybe thinking about kissing someone on a first date, right? The feeling is very similar. But when we're thinking about it only as anxiety, as opposed to excitement, that's where the problem comes in. So I actually make it very clear that I'm not going to be able to eradicate those feelings. And in fact, you don't want to eradicate those feelings. You want to have those feelings. If you don't have those feelings you're not in touch with what you're feeling, or you've numbed yourself and then you're unable to use that passion, that adrenaline, to help you present whatever it is, you know, whatever point of view you're trying to present. The key is to manage that anxiety/excitement and not try to dismiss it or try to tamper it down, but try to learn to ultimately use it. Our textbook, *The Confidence Speakers Handbook* by Tom Valasek, talks about the butterflies that everybody feels and trying to get those butterflies to fly in formation. And that's that's a pretty good analogy. That's kind of the idea that you're not going to lose that nor do you want to lose that because if you do, you lose any juice, any passion, the enthusiasm, the adrenaline that helps you make, you know, make a good presentation.

Tierney King 05:11

And I feel like for me personally, public speaking, the class was something that I dreaded. I know that a lot of my peers, they dreaded it, or they're dropped out of class even. What's the response after your students make it through your class? And kind of what feedback do you get from students when they make it to the end, and they're like, "Oh, this is, you know, what I've gained," or "These are the techniques that I've gained from this public speaking class."

David Sandler 05:37

Typically, I get very good responses from students by the end of the class, and they'll begin at a certain level, some are much better than others, and I, in fact, on the evaluation at the end, I have them rate on a one to 10, where they began and where they ended. And, you know, people generally raise anywhere from three to six points by the end of the course. And it happens, because, you know, I have them go in little steps at a time. We don't just get up there and start doing speeches. We do little exercises, sometimes little silly things. You know, talk about a pet peeve. For eye contact, for example, I'll have them recite their ABCs. Because that's something certainly they all know them, but they don't have to really think about their content while they're actually working on their eye contact. So it's kind of silly, people laugh, but it loosens people up. But it creates kind of a nice feeling. We have a Q&A section where I have them talk about what's their job, or what's their major and what attracted them to that, and just tell us, you know, 45 to 60 seconds about that, and then I have the class ask questions. And that tends to lead to some great discussion and people get to know each other. And then they ultimately get to the speeches about midway through the course, and they feel pretty confident. I've gotten numerous notes from people. "I was at a wedding, and I was able to speak up when they asked if anybody had any comments." "I was at a funeral, and everybody was very sad, but you know, I wanted to make some comments, I normally wouldn't have done that, and I was able to do that." "I got a job. And I really

used a lot of the things we talked about in class. And that that helped me quite a bit." So you know, that's obviously gratifying to me as as as an instructor, but what's really important is helping the students find their voice. And that is another thing in terms of, you want to find your voice, you don't want to talk like me, you don't want to talk like anybody else. You might use techniques that other people use and it's good to observe other people, observe effective speakers, observe ineffective speakers. But ultimately, you want to find your voice, and be able to use that and be genuine. The analogy I use is, you know, because we're doing extemporaneous speaking, meaning, it's conversational, because that's how most presentations are given in a conversational way. So it's not a whole lot different than if you were in a restaurant speaking to somebody and sharing some story with them, or just talking over a cup of coffee. If you can get to that point where you sort of can envision that, visualize that and sort of find that zone, that comfort zone, that can be quite helpful. So the answer is yes, that by and large students definitely come out much better than they came in.

Tierney King 08:59

Do you think there's a way for, you know, teachers who even if they don't solely focus on public speaking or teach that class to integrate that into their class, still, in just little ways? And how could they do that?

David Sandler 09:13

Yes, I think teachers need to be mindful of what they're doing. They're models, and some of them are very good. Some of them, you know, aren't really thinking about that, and how they are presenting the material. Are they engaging the class? And just think about am I getting this across to people? An example would be, you know, when people use PowerPoints, you know, there are some that use PowerPoints correctly. But so many people will use a PowerPoint and they'll have everything that they're saying on the PowerPoint. So they're reading you a PowerPoint, and we've all been through that and it's pretty dreadful. And it's like, well, if you're going to read us the PowerPoint, what do we need you for? Why don't you just pass the PowerPoint out? So you know, it's using whatever tools you're using effectively. So teachers need to not just be thinking about getting content across and putting layers and layers of content on students because they have that capacity, but finding ways and giving some thought to, you know, am I being engaging? Am I engaging the students? How can I do that? Some are very good at that. But some I don't think I'll give it enough thought.

Tierney King 10:27

And then we transitioned into the online realm for the past few years, how do you still teach public speaking skills online? And how kind of has it changed - you know, in person public speaking skills versus speaking via Zoom or online?

David Sandler 10:46

Yes, I've taught three or four courses online. I'm just back for the first time this semester. So it's been about because 18 months, and I found it actually worked out fine. There were some limitations, certainly, but the students in it, because one of the questions I asked them at the end, you know, was, Did they feel they got out of this what they got in class? And 99, I was actually surprised, you know, 99% of them said yes, because they felt that they were still being seen by other students. They knew that I was watching them. So it's certainly not the same as standing in a room full of people, but they

still have that sense of, you know, I'm the focus. So that was helpful, that, you know, it worked out quite well. The limitations of the in-person course, what I'm doing right now with everyone wearing masks is actually difficult. Because I've always thought, you know, eye contact is so important. And it is, but you know, I now realize also that when you can see someone's lips, and if they're smiling, or this or that, it makes a significant difference in how people are coming across. So yes, there's some definite benefits to being in class. And there's things we can do that we couldn't do online. But the mask makes, it makes a big difference. Right now, I'm sort of on the fence over which works better. But the other thing I will say is that doing it online, is actually something that I'm beginning to think about incorporating into my curriculum into my course. Because that is, I mean, that is a way people communicate. So you're public speaking or communicating via Zoom, or a platform or using these video conferences, and there's ways to do it. And there's things to know. There's things to know about your background, and there's things to know but how you're talking. You know, eye contact is funny, because even though you might think you're looking at someone in the eyes, you're not really because all the cameras are a little bit different. But the point is, it is a thing now that I don't think is going to be leaving us. So the ability to once again, engage to articulate your thoughts over this medium is a new frontier that people need to be thinking about and get some skills in. There's people that are doing job interviews every day over Zoom, and it's not the same as being in person. I've had students who, you know, they're eating while they're, I'm fairly loose about that, but you know, they're eating, you know, and, you know, that's okay. But there was one student who was actually using dental floss to clean his teeth. And it was, so kind of over the top I actually couldn't say anything, because I didn't want to embarrass him. I thought maybe he thought he was off camera - I don't know. But you know, just like that, people need to be aware of what's going on when they're when they're on camera, and they they need to be able to communicate and interview by articulating their thoughts in just the way they would if they were in person. So I think this is a skill that people need to begin to learn more about.

Tierney King 14:23

Absolutely. And then kind of just lastly, to sum it up, I guess for for the students that come in, you know, that absolutely don't really have any experience with public speaking in big crowds, obviously, you know, they may talk to their boss or their friends daily, and the people who really struggle with public speaking, what kind of motivation do you have for them and kind of what kind of inspiration do you have to help ease them into this?

David Sandler 14:54

Well, like I said, I try to ease all students with baby steps. You know, we begin by actually reading an article about getting comfortable with public speaking. So the first class, they're all just reading a paragraph. So that actually does something. And then I have them look for something in that article that kind of resonates with them. And then just say a few words about that. So they're still just sitting in their chair, and they say a few words about that. The next class, we might talk about, well, when does your speech begin? It doesn't begin when you start speaking, it begins when you when you walk up in front of the class. So we practice, just walk up here and turn around, tell us your name, tell us your major, and sit down. So again, it's kind of humorous, it's a very baby step, but you know, that they do that sort of thing. So it's just these little steps that help the people that are having a particularly tough time, even those that don't have that much of a problem, it's still pretty good practice. If I could just add one more thing, you know, people tend to think that they're either, that for public speaking, they're either an

introvert or an extrovert, and the impact that that's going to have on their on their abilities. There's been a lot of research, now, that there's really a third category, it's called an ambivert. An ambivert, is actually someone who's right in the middle. And we're all for the most part, we're all kind of right in the middle, but we lean towards being an introvert, or being an extrovert, and any of those categories, wherever you are on that, on that timeline, so to speak, you can still be a good public speaker. So you may be an introvert. You may be someone who can deal with people but wants a limited amount of contact. So it may seem a little bit harder for you to do public speaking, but you can, you just have to be you have to be cognizant that it's going to take a lot more energy for you to do that. So you need to get your rest, you need to, you know, maybe think about what you've eaten so you feel balanced, and, you know, speak in a way so that you can, you can focus your energy, because it's gonna take more energy out of you to do that. But it doesn't mean you can't be a really effective speaker. And on the other side of the coin is people that really don't have a problem with that, maybe ambiverts who lean towards being extroverts. And they have no problem getting up there talking, which can be very, very helpful as long as they're able to rein it in sometimes, because sometimes you'll have people that just go on and on and on. And we've all we've all seen that. So they need to be able to recognize that they've got to be able to limit what they're saying and do a little bit more self editing, which is something that comes pretty naturally to the introvert. Those are some of the techniques.

Tierney King 18:11

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