

## **Getting to Know Your Elected Leaders – Part 5**

By Alan Smith

Library trustees/commissioners often need to speak in public advocating for improved library services. Although many do not enjoy public speaking, with practice you can become quite successful with your advocacy efforts. One key point to remember is that you are an SME (subject matter expert). In other words, just by being a library trustee/commissioner you know more about your library than does your audience, thus congratulations! You're an expert!

So now you're faced with making some remarks. Here are some pointers to help get you on your way.

- Know your audience. What is the occasion and who are the key leaders/members of the group that you are addressing?
- Know your time limits. If they have not told you in advance, ask before speaking. In the event you are speaking too long look at the person who introduced you for signs that perhaps its time to wrap it up.
- Organize your thoughts. What are the key points you want to get across? What action do you want your audience to take?
- Practice in advance and time yourself. Write key points, however do not write out everything and then read your remarks. It is very important that you are looking at the audience and not at your paper.
- Tell them what you'll be talking about and sum up your key points at the end.
- Never say "I'm nervous" or that "It's my first time speaking in public." Even the most polished speakers get butterflies at times, but your audience doesn't need to know.
- Think of your audience as your friends. You've been invited to speak because they want to hear your message.

When you are in a more formal venue (city council meeting, etc.), remember to use their titles when addressing or referring to them by name. You speak much differently to them in such an environment than you would in casual conversation.

There may even be times you are asked to speak at a press conference. Since you hold an appointed office you most likely will be the last speaker. The speaking order usually is from the highest ranking elected official on down. In other words, a state senator out ranks an assembly member followed by a mayor, etc.

If others are speaking on the same subject listen to what has already been said and try to avoid repetition. Also think in terms of "catch phrases" that might sound good on the radio or in the newspaper. Further, if radio or TV media is

present speak slower than you normally would so as to be clear.

If you are being interviewed by a newspaper writer and they are taking notes or you can hear the keyboard in the background, speak slowly so they will get your remarks correctly. When you are asked a question it is quite acceptable to pause a few seconds in order to formulate an articulate answer. Knee jerk responses can often backfire.

Lastly, when a newspaper writer calls, you have the right to know their identity and the name of the paper they represent. If their first contact with you is on your phone recorder you might want to discuss with your library director what is going on so that you have a consistent message.

With experience public speaking can truly be fun, rewarding and lead to positive results for your library. Even though the election will shortly be over this does not end the need for library experts to be advocating for improved service. By raising your voice you will make a difference! Remember in advocacy whining is not allowed and when you take the "h" out of whining you become a winner.

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