See more TEDxUArizona talks and learn how to deal with technical hurdles in your own presentations

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This is the second and final installment in a series of stories spotlighting the inaugural TEDxUArizona event. The first story, "Check out videos of the TEDxUArizona talks and learn how to deal with public speaking nerves," featured three talks from the Jan. 31 event as well as tips on overcoming public speaking anxiety from Diana Leonard, director of public speaking and senior lecturer in the Department of Communication, who coached the speakers on their presentations.

TEDxUArizona, built around the theme “The Messy Middle,” began a three-year pilot program, sparked by the success of the Wonder House at last year's South by Southwest event in Austin, Texas. (The Wonder House returned for the 2023 South by Southwest. You can learn more in this UA@Work story.) Plans call for a TEDxUArizona event each semester; details are coming soon for the edition planned for the fall, including information about how to apply to be a speaker.

You have prepared your PowerPoint presentation with plenty of graphics and visual aids to illustrate your talking points. You have spent the last week rehearsing. Because you are a loyal Lo Que Pasa reader, you have put Diana Leonard's tips for overcoming nerves into practice. And, just as you begin, your screen displays the "spinning wheel of death" – nothing is loading, and now you're on your own.

We are more reliant on technology than we have ever been, and that seems to be most clear when that technology doesn't work. When that happens during your presentation, Leonard says, being genuine is the key.

"Be vulnerable. Be real. Laugh at it," Leonard said. "The whole audience knows this is a pain in the butt for you too."

What you don't want to do, she says, is pretend nothing is happening. That can lead to confusion among audience members. Her fundamental rule is: If it doesn't work, go without it. Summarize the slide that doesn't show up, describe the video that doesn't play and find ways to compensate for equipment that won't work.

"I have lost my mic in a big lecture hall," Leonard recalled. "So, what do I have to do? I have to be big in my voice and movements, because what else am I going to do? Feel small because the technology isn't working?"

As she did when discussing overcoming nerves, Leonard emphasized that practice and preparation are key. The better you know your content, she says, the more easily you'll be able to shake off technical hurdles.

"Embrace the catastrophes that happen as nothing more than life happenstance," Leonard said. "That doesn't mean not to plan or prepare for what to do if things go bad. But don't dwell on it. If you know the gift that you want to give your audience, you'll be able to give it."

Going virtual

Presentations that are partly or fully virtual have a unique set of technological challenges, Leonard says. Here are her tips to help you make the most out of your next virtual or hybrid presentation.

- **Pay attention to the camera.** It is natural during virtual presentations to look at the faces of the other participants. But if you have to look to a screen on your right or left to see their faces, they are seeing the side of your face. Try to look directly at your webcam so they can see your face from the front.

  If you are presenting during a hybrid meeting, alternate between looking into the webcam and looking at the in-person participants. Variety, Leonard says, can help both you and your audience engage.

  "You know when you’re watching television and the host looks into the camera (that) you’re being talked to, and when the host does not look into the camera, he’s talking to the audience and you’re observing," Leonard said. "So, in the Zoom room, you want to use both."

- **Mind your energy.** Often you will naturally have more energy when you are standing. For many virtual presentations, you are sitting, so make sure you don't lose steam. If you can, set yourself up in a place where you can stand. If not, pay attention to your posture. Sit up straight and stay engaged with the audience.

- **Consider your gestures.** For many people, communicating with their hands comes naturally. It's important to be mindful, Leonard says, of how that looks on a Zoom screen.
"In a larger hall, your gestures have to be larger, your facial expressions have to be larger," Leonard said. "On the screen, I look like I'm only a few feet away from you. So, if you're too expressive, it can be a little too much."

- **Don't lose your remote audience.** In hybrid meetings, it is easy to inadvertently overlook those who are not in the room. Leonard says it's important to make an effort to acknowledge and talk directly to remote participants throughout a presentation, not just at the beginning and end. (Read tips from University experts on holding successful hybrid meetings in a previous UA@Work story.)

- **Be prepared.** As is the case with in-person presentations, Leonard says the better you know your material, the more smoothly your talk will go. Rehearsal, she says, is still crucial.

  "Don't read from notes. We see you reading them. You have to know it just as well as you would know if you were standing in front of a group of people. It's the same preparation."

Videos of two of the six presentations are below. Three other TEDxUArizona videos were included in the first story in this series.

**Mónica Ramírez-Andreotta**, Associate Professor, Department of Environmental Science: "Community-based Science for Justice and Action"

Mónica Ramírez-Andreotta considers what it's like to grow up in between cultures, in between art and science, and in between supposed experts and community members. She brings all of these ideas together to empower each of us to challenge inequity and become community scientists – and make sustainable structural change as a result.

**Hona Vaioleti**, Undergraduate Student, College of Engineering: "Life Between Cultures"

Whenever immigration is the topic of conversation or debate, we tend to focus only on the impact for first-generation immigrants. But what are the cultural effects of immigration on the children of immigrants? What does life look like for those who are connected to multiple cultures, and how can they learn to thrive in the in between? In this talk, Hona speaks of his own experience and the stories of others who have lived in this cultural middle, and shares the answer he believes he has found.