

# Let the Good Times Roll by Guy Kawasaki

Blogger. n. Someone with nothing to say writing for someone with nothing to do.

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JANUARY 18, 2006

## How to Get a Standing Ovation

When I started public speaking in about 1986, I was deathly afraid of public speaking--for one thing, working for the division run by Steve Jobs was hugely intimidating: How could you possibly compete with Steve? It's taken me twenty years to get comfortable at it. I hope that many of you are called upon to give speeches--it's the closest thing to being a professional athlete that many of us will achieve. The purpose of this blog entry is to help you give great speeches.



1. **Have something interesting to say.** This is 80% of the battle. If you have something interesting to say, then it's much easier to give a great speech. If you have nothing to say, you should not speak. End of discussion. It's better to decline the opportunity so that no one knows you don't have anything to say than it is to make the speech and prove it.
2. **Cut the sales pitch.** The purpose of most keynotes is to entertain and inform the audience. It is seldom to provide you with an opportunity to pitch your product, service, or company. For example, if you're invited to speak about the future of digital music, you shouldn't talk about the latest MP3 player that your company is selling.
3. **Focus on entertaining.** Many speech coaches will disagree with this, but the goal of a speech is to entertain the audience. If people are entertained, you can slip in a few nuggets of information. But if your speech is deathly dull, no amount of information will make it a great speech. If I had to pick between entertaining and informing an audience, I would pick entertaining--knowing that informing will probably happen too.
4. **Understand the audience.** If you can prove to your audience in the first five minutes that you understand who they are, you've got them for the rest of the speech. All you need to understand is the trends, competition, and key issues that the audience faces. This simply requires consultation with the host organization and a willingness to customize your introductory remarks. This ain't that hard.
5. **Overdress.** My father was a politician in Hawaii. He was a very good

speaker. When I started speaking he gave me a piece of advice: Never dress beneath the level of the audience. That is, if they're wearing suits, then you should wear a suit. To underdress is communicate the following message: "I'm smarter/richer/more powerful than you. I can insult you and not take you serious, and there's nothing you can do about it." This is hardly the way to get an audience to like you.

6. **Don't denigrate the competition.** If you truly do cut the sales pitch, then this won't even come up. But just in case, never denigrate the competition because by doing so, you are taking undue advantage of the privilege of giving a speech. You're not doing the audience a favor. The audience is doing you a favor, so do not stoop so low as to use this opportunity to slander your competition.
7. **Tell stories.** The best way to relax when giving a speech is to tell stories. Any stories. Stories about your youth. Stories about your kids. Stories about your customers. Stories about things that you read about. When you tell a story, you lose yourself in the storytelling. You're not "making a speech" anymore. You're simply having a conversation. Good speakers are good storytellers; great speakers tell stories that support their message.
8. **Pre-circulate with the audience.** True or false: the audience wants your speech to go well. The answer is True. Audiences don't want to see you fail--for one thing, why would people want to waste their time listening to you fail? And here's the way to heighten your audience's concern for you: circulate with the audience before the speech. Meet people. Talk to them. Let them make contact with you. Especially the ones in the first few rows; then, when you're on the podium, you'll see these friendly faces. Your confidence will soar. You will relax. And you will be great.
9. **Speak at the start of an event.** If you have the choice, get in the beginning part of the agenda. The audience is fresher then. They're more apt to listen to you, laugh at your jokes, and follow along with your stories. On the third day of a three-day conference, the audience is tired, and all they're thinking about is going home. It's hard enough to give a great speech--why increase the challenge by having to lift the audience out of the doldrums?
10. **Ask for a small room.** If you have a choice, get the smallest room possible for your speech. If it's a large room, ask that it be set "classroom style" --ie, with tables and chairs--instead of theatre style. A packed room is a more emotional room. It is better to have 200 people in a 200 person room than 500 people in a 1,000 person room. You want people to remember, "It was standing room only."
11. **Practice and speak all the time.** This is a "duhism," but nonetheless relevant. My theory is that it takes giving a speech at least twenty times to get decent at it. You can give it nineteen times to your dog if you like, but it takes practice and repetition. There is no shortcut to Carnegie Hall. As Jascha Heifitz said, "If I

don't practice one day, I know it. If I don't practice two days, my critics know it. If I don't practice three days, everyone knows it." Read [this article](#) to learn what Steve Jobs does.

It's taken me twenty years to get to this point. I hope it takes you less. Part of the reason why it took me so long is that no one explained the art of giving a speech to me, and I was too dumb to do the research. And now, twenty years later, I love speaking. My goal, every time I get up to the podium, is to get a standing ovation. I don't succeed very often, but sometimes I do. More importantly, I hope that I'm standing and clapping in the audience of your speech soon.

Written at: Atherton, California.

January 18, 2006 | [Permalink](#)

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Ik praat best wel veel... in het openbaar dan! Voornamelijk lezingen en binnenkort een heuse koerzoes (cursus voor de pietluttigen, of is het kursus?) Islamitisch Recht. In het verleden heb ik me wel eens verdiept in de technieken van presenteren. Veelal w [\[Read More\]](#)

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» [Guy Kawasaki, addicted to Web Traffic](#) from Allthatscool.com

I'm sure that most of you know already that Guy Kawasaki has a new(er) blog. If you don't know who Guy Kawasaki is then you should check out "The Art of The Start" or "Garage.com" or his Wikipedia entry. Anyway,... [\[Read More\]](#)

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» [Kawasaki on getting a standing ovation](#) from Hismethod

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Twenty-two years ago, I heard Guy Kawasaki speak at the first ever Boston-area Apple Macintosh user group meeting. He was a great communicator then, and he's obviously had lots of practice since. This post over at his blog focuses on what the audience is [\[Read More\]](#)

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» [How to improve your public speaking](#) from [The Christian Businessman](#)

In addition to the tips he offers here's a few more: Always frame your speech - Use an opening quote and a closing quote that relate to each other. Or use a story that you begin for your introduction and finish at the end of... [\[Read More\]](#)

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» [Get a standing ovation](#) from [Lifehacker](#)

Author, entrepreneur, and motivator Guy Kawasaki has some great tips that'll help you become a terrific public speaker. When I started public speaking in about 1986, I was deathly afraid of public speaking--for one thing, working for the division... [\[Read More\]](#)

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Guy Kawasaki: Have something interesting to say. Cut the sales pitch. Focus on entertaining. Understand the audience. Overdress. Don't denigrate the competition. Tell stories. Pre-circulate with the audience. Speak at the start... [\[Read More\]](#)

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» [Guy Kawasaki: How to Get a Standing Ovation](#) from [FASTTIE.com](#) - The fastest way to get around the In

Guy Kawasaki writes on How to Get a Standing Ovation. I think this is outstanding advice and one of the hardest things to do. I am not sure how

much value it ultimately brings to most businesses (how much additional revenue do you get from giving a g... [\[Read More\]](#)

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» [Kawasaki: How to get a standing ovation](#) from SodaTonic.com  
Author and venture capitalist [Guy Kawasaki-  
>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy\\_Kawasaki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy_Kawasaki)] talks about how to conquer  
the fear of [public speaking-  
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Tracked on January 21, 2006 at 04:30 AM

#### comments

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Guy, I am a minister and also spent seven years on the road as a speaker. It is easy to get caught up in the need to have a standing ovation. That is more about ego than about serving. Not that you can't have both, but if you're focused on getting the standing ovation, you take your focus off being a blessing. That's my viewpoint anyway. One situation that I had proved this all to me. After I finished speaking to a group one time, there was complete silence at first. I thought that I had bombed. People then broke into applause. Afterwards, many people came to me and said that they were so moved by my talk that applause would have changed the energy and they wanted to just sit quietly with it for a moment and think about what I had said.

Anyway, just something to chew on...

Posted by: [CarlaGolden](#) | [January 21, 2006 at 08:05 AM](#)

Very good creative. Thanks for the great job.

Maybe I translate it in russian. =)

Posted by: [Cris](#) | [January 21, 2006 at 12:05 AM](#)

This blog simply gets better every day.  
Another great article Guy, just keep it comin ;)

Posted by: [Ivan Minic](#) | [January 19, 2006 at 06:58 PM](#)

It occurs to me that these points are dead-on both for my day job as a trainer and also for my evening alter-ego as a musician. It seems a good performance is a good performance, no matter what it is you're performing!

(And Mike, you must be an Eddie Izzard fan!)

Posted by: [tracy](#) | [January 19, 2006 at 05:08 PM](#)

Great list Guy, will take it to my next conference...

Posted by: [Jeremiah Owyang](#) | [January 19, 2006 at 08:48 AM](#)

Brilliant. Shall distribute it to my Toastmasters club members!

Posted by: [zsarina](#) | [January 19, 2006 at 07:33 AM](#)

i like everything you said. I remember giving pre-games speeches to my kids before the game and you are right about telling a story. They follow you so much more! good job!

Posted by: [alex smith](#) | [January 19, 2006 at 07:30 AM](#)

Hey Guy:

rule number 12 must be after 20 years you get to break your own rules.

I saw you speak at SVAMA in December and you were both underdressed (in a hawaiian shirt) and gave a sales pitch for filmloop breaking both rules number 2 and 5! Also, you poked fun at Microsoft numerous times... does making fun of your former competition count as breaking rule number 6?

That said, it was a great speech and and I seriously doubt anyone wearing a tie in the audience was offended.

Lastly, and because you are such a good speaker, why don't you post your speaking engagements in a calendar on your website?

Posted by: [Andrew Fife](#) | [January 19, 2006 at 12:48 AM](#)

Guy - #5 rang true with me. Last fall, I attended a school alumni/fundraising function in Silicon Valley. Everyone at the event was dressed in business professional attire. The host of the event, a fellow alum and a big Silicon Valley success story, wore topsiders and jeans. He was also had more money than everyone in the room combined. His unspoken message came through loud and clear!

Posted by: [Holly Paige](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 01:57 PM](#)

I was just talking about this yesterday with my parents. Back in high-school and college they taught us very formal and rigid rules of how to give speeches. They never worked for me.

Now, after watching a lot of very good and very bad presentations, I can honestly say your advice is dead-on.

I would especially hammer home the idea of telling stories. Watch any professional. Comedian, politician, keynoter, etc. The best always tell stories and they do it well.

Nice job Guy!

Kevin Stirtz

Posted by: [Kevin Stirtz](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 01:09 PM](#)

Guy,

Great post! I would add that Toastmasters speaking clubs are an excellent

way to improve your presentation skills as well as an opportunity to practice, practice, practice! Toastmasters is also a great way to develop leadership skills and local clubs can be found by visiting [www.Toastmasters.org](http://www.Toastmasters.org). Can you tell that I'm a member? (I also posted a link to your post on my blogs, [www.areaA4.blogspot.com](http://www.areaA4.blogspot.com) and [theshot92.blogspot.com](http://theshot92.blogspot.com))

Posted by: [Dave Wheeler](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 10:07 AM](#)

Dressing in a suit in Hawaii may be true to #5, but loses on #4. A guy in a suit in Hawaii is an outsider. You can still overdress, but you wear an upscale silk Hawaiian shirt instead.

Posted by: [Jinian](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 10:02 AM](#)

On #10, I think it was the political commentator Jeff Greenfield who once said, "If you expect to have seven people show up for your event, hold it in a phone booth."

Posted by: [Michael Sperger](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 09:40 AM](#)

Great insight Guy. I speak about once a month to various groups that involve different demographics and I have found all of these points to be true. Especially understanding and entertaining them. I also wish there were more people that realized that they didn't have anything to say. I heard one too many folk speaking about nothing. And to the guy that asked "should you speak to people that care how you dress." Your dress should never fog up your message, so whether you like it or not, people care how you dress.

Posted by: [kevin](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 09:11 AM](#)

I suggest joining Toastmasters to improve speaking and leadership skills.

I've seen amazing results within my club over the last three years since I joined.

Don

Posted by: [Don Larson](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 08:45 AM](#)

Hm, should you really speak to people who can be offended by the way you dress?

Posted by: [Rimantas](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 08:21 AM](#)

Another great post - I just have a couple points to add:

Make sure your the tone of your voice is conversational. Think about the last chat you had with your best friend and talk just like that. For some reason, I used to (and I've seen it in others) put on a formal, overly loud voice when public speaking. Imagine having a conversation with each member of the audience.

Extending point #8 - try to involve the audience : pose a question or ask for

a volunteer. Break down the barrier between speaker and audience.

Finally it's better to be too short than too long. I'm not advocating a 1 minute speech - just make your points short and snappy. Nothing kills a good speech like rambling.

Posted by: [Brian Ivanovick](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 07:30 AM](#)

On your fifth point (Overdress), how this can be compared with what Steve Jobs does? The guy is dressed like if he went out for a pizza at the corner and in the way he stopped to give you a speech!

I like his style, but what you are saying here is that Steve Jobs must be dressed with suit because his public (some of them) are dressed with suit too.

Great article, I enjoyed every single word of it; if you keep writing like that, I will keep reading them every day.

Posted by: [Javier Cabrera \(ClearYourMind\)](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 07:20 AM](#)

#3 is dead on, no matter what kind of speech you're giving. I used to be a teacher. A junior high school teacher. And believe me, it doesn't matter how good your instructional materials are, and how many degrees you have. If you can't capture your students' attention, they're not going to learn anything.

One of the best techniques I found was to ask my audience (class) a question they were sure they could answer, and then tell them the real answer, which was the exact opposite of what they thought. That gives you their attention for a good ten minutes as you explain why the answer is not what they think--longer if you mix in stories related to the subject that entertain the audience as well as further illustrating your point.

If you master this technique, you won't leave anyone in your audience behind. After all, "Hey Joe! Pay attention!" isn't nearly as effective as "Hey Joe, do you think I can use this water to /start/ a fire?"

Posted by: [George](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 07:04 AM](#)

Great advice and much needed for most of the keynotes I sit through. The best piece of advice I have gotten about speaking is keep it simple. I was once told, "if you have more than one point, then you don't have a point." That's simple and stick to this as much as possible, except when I delineate into sub points.

Posted by: [Paul](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 06:48 AM](#)

Great advice. I love how all of these points fall outside the standard public speaking curriculum. In other words, nothing about speech structure, note cards, faking extemporaneousness. Instead we have the practical matters of business speaking. Lots of stuff I wouldn't have thought about including the "dress to the level of the audience" and "earn trust of audience" points. Thanks, Guy!



Posted by: [Daniel Jalkut](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 06:33 AM](#)

about of "standing ovation" or, better, attract attention to biz proposals. There is a myth, an urban legend...or real?

A young man looking for money ask money to one of the most important bankers in Wall St. This man tell to the young that he will don't give him any dollar but he can do it better. He take the young man under is arm and walk together in the NYSE hall. Other bankers see this young man walking so close whit the famous investor and note him. after this walk the young man was overwhelm of financial proposal to support his business...

Sorry for my English but I suppose the story is understandable.

So, Guy, a proposal to add a new BIZ showcase in this blog.

On the web there is

<http://www.thealarmclock.com> that create more people and investors aware of new initiative, but a showcase like this placed here will be more effective. What you think?

Posted by: [Mario bucolo](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 04:20 AM](#)

What about to delivery proceedings before or after the speech?

I prefer in every my speech to delivery slide copies or text proceedings only after the speech. When I see that people try to copy the slides contents I inform audience that at the end of the speech an hard copy of the slides will be available or, better, that the slide will be available for download from my web site.

Posted by: [Mario bucolo](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 04:09 AM](#)

Interesting comments. Regarding point 3, I personally believe that ANY speech is given for one of three reasons:

- 1 to inform
- 2 to persuade
- 3 to entertain

However, any keynote-type of speech would usually be given for a combination of the first and third reason (mostly third).

Posted by: [Craig and Lois Strachan](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 03:17 AM](#)

I totally agree with #5, especially in Hawaii where there is a tendency to be more "laid back," I always made an effort to dress up for my presentations in college.

Steve Jobs doesn't do this, but Steve is Steve. However, I do recall him wearing a suit and tie at a keynote he gave in Japan a few years ago (I think it was 2002...). Anyone know why he dressed up for that one?

Posted by: [Jon Sugai](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 02:42 AM](#)

Great pointers there Guy... thanks for sharing them !

Mike... Guy did say "competition" :D

Posted by: [Raymond Hermans](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 02:23 AM](#)

Guy, I have been reading your new blog for a few days now - I wonder how you'll keep up this amazing flow of brilliant content. Excellent bloggers will have stuff like this twice a year, if their readers are lucky. You have it in every post. That is awesome!

And about that "ech ben ein berlina" comment - I don't know, it never struck me as that, and I am German. If Mike is, too, we can maybe have an argument about that somewhere. ;-)

Posted by: [Martin Oetting](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 01:45 AM](#)

I agree with everything except #1, and #6.

About #1, when JFK gave his speech in Berlin, he said, "ech ben ein berlina", which in German means "i am a doungut". ein berlina was a doungut at the time, the correct way to say it is "ech ben berlina". But he said it very well, so i thinks its more like 20% of what you say, and 80% of how you say it.

And about #6, Jobs makes fun of microsoft all the time in his keynotes.

Posted by: [mike](#) | [January 18, 2006 at 01:10 AM](#)