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Program offers tips to speak without fear

By Tom Murnane

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SAN MARCOS — When Dana Bristol-Smith began giving speeches, she had stage fright. Now, as the founder of Oceanside-based Speak for Success, she helps others to conquer the fear of giving presentations.

"Studies that I continue to see say that public speaking is the number one fear," said Bristol-Smith. "It comes up higher than death, divorce and taxes, all of those things."

If you work for a business, it's important to overcome that fear if you want to advance, said Bristol-Smith. "Presenters are the ones who are getting promoted in their organizations. Managers need to have good public speaking skills. If you don't it's going to hold you back in your career."

Bristol-Smith will teach a Business Presentations for Professionals Certificate program at Cal State San Marcos starting June 10. One of the first subjects the class will cover is how to deal with the fear of public speaking.

Bristol-Smith said she uses three steps to help her students overcome anxiety. "The first step, while you are standing at the front of the room is to feel your feet on the floor to help bring your awareness to the moment. The second step is to breathe and notice that you are breathing. Many people will tend to hold their breath when they feel



Dana Bristol-Smith helps fearful presenters.

anxious. If you hold your breath for too long, you faint."

The third step is "to speak every word to the eyes and heart of another human being," said Bristol-Smith. "That's how we connect with our audience. We speak to people as if we're having a one-on-one conversation, no matter how many people are in the room. If I'm giving a presentation to 10 people or 100 people, I can only look at one person at a time."

Another approach that Bristol-Smith uses that helps her students to overcome fear is to have them focus on the audience as they prepare the presentation. The phrase she says to get this across is: "It's not about you." Bristol-Smith explained, "If I

think about myself too much, I'm getting in the way. When I shift my thinking from what the audience needs to know rather than what I need to present, it really changes the paradigm."

Bristol-Smith first began giving presentations when she was hired by an educational company to handle school relations. That required her to conduct assemblies.

"I had to learn on the job how to give presentations, and it was a pretty painful way to learn because I made a lot of mistakes along the way," recalled Bristol-Smith.

She gave programs to more than 100,000 to students and teachers, then decided she wanted to work with business organizations. By then Bristol-Smith enjoyed giving presentations and she wanted to help other people learn how to give speeches. She started developing a speech training program, and she began delivering it to organizations. "I found out that there are a lot of people out there that want to be better communicators," she said.

The program she will teach at Cal State San Marcos has three parts. The first part is called Business Presentation Fundamentals and covers using the voice properly, body language and how to feel comfortable and confident while giving a presentation. The second part, Developing Persuasive Business Presentations, focuses on one-on-one as well as audience

presentations. The final part of the class focuses on working with audio-visual technology.

"Most organizations today use Power Point as a visual aid for presenters and audiences," said Bristol-Smith. "The biggest mistake people make is that they put too much information up on a slide and then they stand with their backs to the audience and they read the slide to the audience." Videotaping of students in Bristol-Smith's class is done to give them a better understanding of how they look to audiences. "One of the things that I noticed when I was taped back in the beginning was that I had a habit of swaying back and forth," said Bristol-Smith. "After seeing that video, I stopped rocking back and forth."

Bristol-Smith is a member of the National Speakers Association, is a past Toastmasters chapter president and has received the Golden Gavel and Competent Toastmaster awards.

The Business Presentations for Professionals Certificate program begins on Friday, June 10, and continues for nine sessions through Friday, Aug. 5. For more information or to register, call the Cal State San Marcos Extended Studies office at 750-4020. The fee for the program is \$899.

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