

“All good TEDx stories are personal ones, very seldomly they’re as personal as Joanneke’s at TEDxDelft. Having an idea worth spreading is often not enough, a TEDx speaker needs to be willing to dig to the centre of it to strip it to its core message. Only then will it touch the (online) audience in the heart. When we first met Joanneke, we knew this was exactly what she was going to do. And she did.

—Rob Speekenbrink, TEDx Senior Ambassador Europe,
Founder, Licensee, Curator, Rule Maven @TEDxDelft

“Joanneke and TEDx: a match made in heaven. A perfect way to learn presentation skills. ”

—Nico Haasbroek, former editor in chief
of Dutch national news broadcasting

“It’s just marvelous to be able to see speaking at TEDx from the speaker’s point of view. Thanks for letting us be the fly on the wall!”

—Caryn ‘t Hart de Wijkerslooth,
curator TEDxDelft

“An essential book for public speakers. This book explains, metaphorically spoken, what the difference is between playing a jazz improvisation, playing a classical piece and singing a familiar song. Joanneke shares, from experience and in great detail, what you need to do to be a great speaker and what the difference is between a corporate speech and a TEDx talk.”

—Henkjan Smits,
Trainer Business X-Factor, TEDxAmsterdam coach,
Ambassador Sharing Success Foundation

ALSO BY JOJANNEKE VAN DEN BOSCH

So, You're An Orphan Now
Zo, nu ben je wees [Dutch]

LIVE YOUR TALKS

**THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PUBLIC SPEAKING
AND PERFORMING AT A TEDx CONFERENCE
AND HOW TO OPTIMIZE YOUR OWN PRESENTATION**

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+31 6 45110845

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For my father, Menno (1925 - 1989),
who could fill a room with himself and his stories.

For my mother, Aleida (1941 - 1990),
whose bright eyes, presence and temperament could outshine many.

For my foster dad, Coen (1945 - 2014),
my foster mom Marianne and my foster sister Eveline,
who have all taught me to be brave and to find home within.

For all my loved ones,
who are part of me and I of them.

JOJANNEKE VAN DEN BOSCH

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I hear it in my deep heart's core.

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INTRODUCTION

Dear You,

Maybe you picked up this book because you are a public speaker or because you want to perform more confidently. Perhaps you just love watching TED and TEDx talks, those inspiring talks that are being performed almost every single day, somewhere in the world. Perhaps you have attended a TED or TEDx conference. And perhaps you have even performed at one of the many TEDx stages and want to compare notes. Maybe you're dreaming of performing on cool big stages and you've even already written your thank you notes. Or maybe you don't know who this guy people call 'Ted' is and you're wondering what the fuss is about. In any case: thank you for reading this book. I appreciate it and I hope you find it to be useful and entertaining.

The question I hear most regarding my performance at TEDxDelft is 'How did you get on that stage? Did you apply or were you invited?'

Many people consider performing at a TEDx conference as some kind of academic degree, an external confirmation of knowledge and skill. In some ways, it is. Far more importantly, it is a station. A stop on a track of a long journey. Not just towards it, but also with a long track afterwards. If you consider your life a long track with many stops, you see an array of expectations, wishes and ambitions. When these expectations, wishes and ambitions are a profound part of you, you're never 'stuck'. You are always able to look beyond any stop on your life track. There's a journey before a every stop, there's a story during a certain stop and there's a journey after every stop. It's up to you what kind of story your stop will be.

In this book, I share my experiences preparing my TEDx talk, the speech that changed the way I prepare for performances in

general. I want you to benefit from my experiences and insights, whether you are actually invited to perform at a TEDx conference or not. I have found that preparing for a TEDx talk is entirely different from working on any other presentation or performance. Having been a seasoned public speaker for over ten years and having performed on corporate stages over three hundred times, I was very thankful to be given the opportunity to learn this. Because I got to learn something new. And I was completely open to the humbling experience.

There is nothing casual or easy about learning how to perform your best at a TEDx conference. It would be unreasonable if I (or any other TEDx performer for that matter) would casually toss in the TEDx talk in any conversation. If you see anyone being blasé about this, please know that deep in their hearts, they were incredibly nervous beforehand. This is also the case if they assure you that they ‘just did it right and it felt comfortable’. These people know that you haven’t seen them back stage. Trust me, we were all nervous back stage. All of us. And that’s the right sentiment. It kept us focused and determined. And it created a bond, in a weird and positive way.

In the end, the bonus was doing the actual performance. The old saying ‘It’s about the road, not about the destination’ is true in some ways. Not in every way, because the destination—the performance itself—really is the main goal. But the things I’ve learned and experienced are so valuable to me, that it would be downright greedy and selfish if I wasn’t willing to share these insights with you.

VERBAL FAMILY

My mother and father both filled any room with their presence the moment they walked in the door. They were eloquent and they loved entertaining. My Dad’s parents were born in the nineteenth century. They were true rhetoricians. During their time in college in Amsterdam, my grandparents participated in reciting contests. They recited medieval scriptures and pieces by Joost van den

Vondel and took pride in doing so without errors. And at our own home, birthdays were always animated verbal feasts. Speaking was my parents' way. And it became my way.

Unfortunately, both my parents passed away prematurely in 1989 and 1990 and left me and my sister orphaned when I was fourteen years of age.

I'd like to share three experiences from my personal history in this introduction. Not to map out my resume, but to show you which three key moments triggered me to pursue the art of speaking in my career and life.

SPEAKING

In 1999, one year after my graduation from art school, one of my high school teachers with whom I am still connected after all these years, asked me to be the day presenter of the 50 year anniversary of the high school I had attended until 1993. This came as a surprise, since I had only attended the school the last eighteen months of my high school career (after my relocation to the other side of the country). So, my former teacher and mentor asked me to be the main presenter for this big event at this school where he had been a pupil himself, many decades ago. This was an honour. But I didn't understand. My teacher looked at me and said: "Listen. You have managed to finish high school despite the hardship you encountered at the time, after your parents passed away. You didn't think we, your teachers, didn't know about that? We believe you have a story to share. We'd like to hear how this was for you. Besides, I think that speaking in front of this strong community will be a good challenge for you. To be seen and...heard. I hear you still have that occasional stutter. Don't worry about it too much. You'll be fine. Oh, and please don't forget to mention all the people who receive credits. They're on the list."

This was an important lesson for me. Being asked to speak at the 50 year anniversary wasn't just an honour. It was a challenge. My former teacher and mentor was still teaching me. He wanted me

to do even better. I took up that challenge. Did it go well? Yes. I shared one or two of my personal experiences of growing up without parents and going to school at the same time. There were even teachers in the room who wanted to talk to me after my presentation, teachers I hadn't connected with when I was still in high school. But did it go phenomenally well? Not by a long shot. I managed to forget to mention half of the list of important people I was told not to forget. My teacher was a bit put out by that. And for good reason. But that day, he taught me several great lessons.

The first lesson was: You may be the one speaking, but your message is not (and shouldn't be) about you. Secondly, don't mistake a challenge for an honour that's been granted to you. And finally, be open to feedback and always stay open to improvement of your skills.

You are never done, and that's a good thing. Even people with a stutter can grow to be public speakers. Forever cherish your mentors, for learning is one of the greatest gifts in life.

PERFORMING

Years later, I worked at a public housing corporation as a communication consultant where I coordinated projects focused on local housing development, economical impulse and technology. We had been working very hard on one particular project. And our efforts paid off: one day, we were invited to present our innovative concept to the mayor and the city council. We had all hands on deck to make this an incredibly cool presentation. I had designed a booklet and a slide deck and I wrote speaker's notes to be able to address all possible questions correctly. I'd invited the press, prepared my talk and accomplished all things necessary. This day wouldn't be just about giving a presentation. It would be about proving that I had potential to do more than was included in my job description. I wanted to grab that moment. This was performing. I knew it!

The evening before the big day, my boss phoned me and said: "My job description says I am the spokesperson for the press and

other external engagements. Give me your speaker's notes. I'll be presenting for the city council tomorrow." "Wait, what?" I replied. "But you haven't been in the project team and can't answer their questions. Do you expect this to work out?" "This is the way it's going to go. You give me your notes, and if they ask piercing questions, I'll just ask for a recess."

I replied: "Okay, I'll give you my notes. Let me add just two more words to them." I quit. This was the beginning of the creation of my business OnlineComm Academy in April 2006.

RESONATING

In 2005, I got my first chance to speak in front of an audience as a presenter at a conference about digital innovation in education. I was the substitute for the original presenter, who had called in sick. In the same year, I had crafted a workshop for my clients called 'Beamer Be Gone!' I had seen dozens of people making a mess of their opportunities to perform on stage. They were reading their cluttered slides out loud (hello, we can read). They were shining the back of their heads towards the audience. They often torpedoed enormous amounts of jargon, which annoyed or intimidated audience members more than it inspired them. Some people were just reading from a paper. Others winged it, but nobody knew what purpose their story had exactly. Glazed eyeballs stared back at the presenter, who was completely happy with his or her performance.

I'm not trying to trash any kind of style in public speaking. It's not my job to do so. Still, many of these unintended messes didn't have to happen. And with my workshop 'Beamer Be Gone,' I offered something that could change bad presentation habits of many speakers. It worked well. But if I were to develop the training all over again, I would change some things that I only discovered by completing this road I traveled.

INTERNALIZED INSIGHTS

These three events have helped me grow as a speaker and performer in my daily professional endeavours. I discovered that speaking, performing and resonating are HOW I do my job,

regardless of WHAT the job is. Currently, my job is to make valuable online instruction from lessons I have learned, internalized and practiced, so that others can benefit from those lessons. That is the core of my ‘body of work’ and the purpose of my career. And yes, this book is part of this way of working: I teach what I have discovered, internalized and practiced about public speaking, so you can benefit from those insights. Furthermore, my company founded OnlineComm Academy, the first online learning platform in Europe with e-courses and blended learning programs about developing online strategy and mastering social media. It contains over twenty-five online courses. I mention this because the way I teach is verbal, for the most part. I use my voice to share ideas, insights and practical instructions, in videos, in livestream performances, on stage and in books. My words and my voice are my tools.

STEEP LEARNING CURVE

I may have been a public speaker for over ten years now, but when I started out, I also had a steep learning curve. I used to be what one calls ‘a natural speaker who loves to improvise and thinks time is a relative concept’. I have worked hard to improve. I’m still a natural speaker and I still love improvising, but many things have changed in my way of performing over the years. Learning the art of performing a well crafted talk for a deserving audience has been a humbling experience and a blessing.

The art of presenting lies in your ability to share a story vividly and in a way that your audience can relate to, so your message resonates. It doesn’t matter which topic—technology, entertainment, design, or puppy care—you cover, as long as you add something new to the equation, you entice people to engage in your story. Even if their engagement is just in their minds because verbal interaction with the audience and vice versa is prohibited during the presentation. You do the story justice and you make sure your message will resonate. You are the medium. The story is not your promotional instrument. This is a big differences between good presentations and great presentations.

So there are good and great presentations. And yes, ‘good’ and ‘great’ are vague qualifications. A great wedding speech is not the same as a great State Of The Union. But in the heart of the one performing the speech, it is. And it should be. So always aim to improve your abilities, no matter the purpose of your presentation. ‘Good’ and ‘great’ are relative qualifications in all stages of learning the craft of public speaking. We’ll just have to be more specific about what ‘good’ and ‘great’ mean to us individually. And, more importantly, to your audience. If you’re just speaking for yourself, you have no business performing. Because let’s face it, you are not speaking for yourself. You are speaking to help other people a little bit further along the way. And if that’s your goal, you better perform well.

In this book, I share happy as well as excruciating moments I experienced while preparing for my TEDx talk, and practical tips and insights that may come in handy for your own performance. An excellent team of experts was willing to share their insights and experiences in interviews. I am deeply grateful for their stories, and to you, for reading this. I hope you find my story, insights and tips useful and entertaining.

Speak, perform, resonate!

Jojanneke van den Bosch, March 2016

If it needs
my mind,
heart and hands,
it is worth
my voice.



LIVE YOUR TALK

Hello TEDx

On a regular working day in April 2014, I received an email from one of the TEDxDelft curators. “We’d like to meet you. We might be interested in inviting you to speak at our TEDx conference.” I stared at the screen.

TEDx. Really? Now that was a stage I was excited about. And impressed with.

I welcomed the curators to my office and we talked about lots of things: Life, work, trying to make a difference, history, places, wishes, online communication, social media, innovations in e-learning. There were various topics in my professional and personal life that I wanted to share. At first, it wasn’t at all clear what my talk would be about. If you’re working on different topics in your career, you know that you will have to choose one, and only one, for a presentation. During this conversation, we trimmed all the topic options down to just one theme. It was the theme I wanted to explore and share with an audience. This is the most important question for selecting a topic to speak about at a TEDx conference. Ask yourself: What is the single most important idea I want to share with the world?

The hours wooshed away as we enjoyed pots of coffee and got to know each other a little better. When we said goodbye, I felt exhilarated and inspired. I knew I’d met some amazing people. That would be true, no matter what the committee’s decision.

After several weeks, I smiled at my inbox. “We’re glad to inform you that you have been selected to perform at TEDxDelft on February 27th 2015” the message read. Whoa!

I signed a contract in which I swore to be silent until January 2015, when the publicity roller coaster would start. It felt like a happy little secret I carried with me. It was something I cherished and I was absolutely determined to be well-prepared for the TEDx stage. My boyfriend was the only one I shared this information with. There was more than enough time to prepare for the talk. Nine months. It felt as if I was pregnant. And in a way, I was.

TED and TEDx talks were my standard go-to place on YouTube. I had been watching them during hours of procrastination, rainy Sunday afternoons and during lunch breaks. My friends and I shared links to talks that had captivated us. We wanted them to reach greater audiences. We all were watching these talks, during good times and not so good times. Most times, they lifted my spirits and made me feel connected to my goals and dreams and to a better world in general. Sometimes, they touched a vulnerable place in my heart. And now I was granted the opportunity to do something like that for others. This came as a surprise and it was an incredible gift. The following two months I became a bit more used to the idea and I planted the seeds of what would eventually become my talk.

After pondering which topic I wanted to cover (innovation in e-learning was the obvious choice), I decided I would talk about how I grew up after my parents died and how I eventually found a good path in life, thanks to my foster parents, Marianne and Coen. The decision was clear and it gave me peace of mind. I was totally going to do this. And I wanted to do it differently from other talks I had seen about overcoming hardships. I had shared my story in my book 'So, You're An Orphan Now', and I wanted more people to know about the struggles that orphans in the Western world experience and how we can help them build a better life for themselves. There was no reason to hold back now. So I planned my summer break, celebrated my thirty-ninth birthday on midsummer's day, and continued helping my e-learning students and corporate clients. And I continued crafting my talk.

One deceptively sunny Saturday morning in July, the phone rang. My foster mother Marianne was calling. She and my foster dad had just returned home from their holiday trip to Ireland.

“Coen is terminally ill and only has a few months to live.”



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Life is what happens while...

I was working on a story that was supposed to be complete, but was actually still developing. One of the most important people in my talk, my foster dad, was walking the roughest journey of his life, the one towards his own death. This was a journey that he could only walk by himself. And there I was, creating my path to TEDx. He was letting go of his precious life, while I was writing the narrative of how he had saved me and taught me how to build a better life for myself. He had empowered me, but now he had to come to terms with his own untimely death.

The oath of secrecy

The moment I signed the TEDx contract, I had agreed to all the terms. One of these terms was that I wouldn't be allowed to tell other people (until a particular date, eight months from the signing of the contract) that I was going to perform at a TEDx conference. Actually, I cherished the confidentiality. It kept me safe from influences from the outside world. No judgments, no expectations, no questions asked. The agreement provided me with the freedom to let my story mature in the most pure and protected way possible. The secret was safe with me, as was the story.

The moment I heard about my foster dad being terminally ill, I stopped working on my presentation. The contrast felt too confronting. The presentation seemed almost banal in comparison. This situation felt like the "ultimate of relativity". The talk was important to me, but my foster dad had an importance that exceeded any accomplishment that I could ever achieve. I was thinking a lot about life. Life is not about achievement. You can achieve things in life, as long as you're alive. But life itself is a completely different matter. Life has been given to you. You didn't create it.

I believe that we are the ones that have to find meaning in our own lives. And now I had to come to terms with this idea once more, in real time. While I was writing the presentation, I was—once more—experiencing the fragility of life.

My foster dad had a hard time in accepting his approaching untimely death. He had always been a proud man, a strong man, who had served his country for many years. Accepting weakness and this ruthless vulnerability was a struggle for him and his loved ones. He chose to deal with the first emotions by himself. This meant that many family members, including me, didn't know whether or not we would ever talk to him or see him again. This was intensely emotional for everyone involved. For at least a week, I could barely function due to grief. After about ten days, I picked up where I left off in writing my speech. The blessing in disguise was that I discovered right then and there that the story I wanted to share was the right one. It would not only become a well-deserved tribute to one of the people who had given me a sense of security in my life when I was a sixteen year old girl. It would also be a gift. His good deeds could become an inspiring and practical example of what anyone could do when encountering a young person struggling to find their way in life. This was my way of giving meaning to the ruthless fact that Coen wasn't going to be with us much longer. And it gave me the motivation to make it the best speech I could ever give.