**Moderating and Speaking on a Panel**

**Here are some specific tips when speaking on a panel:**

**How to prepare:** It’s critical to find out who else is speaking on the panel. For instance, does everyone feel the same way about an issue, or are you debating one another? Ask the moderator in advance how much time you’ll have to speak and what types of questions will be covered. Prepare your brief introduction and potential responses, just as you would prepare for a formal speech.

**Think of your main points in advance:**Since you cannot control the questions, make sure you have your main points firmly identified in your mind so you can refer back to them throughout the conversation. It’s OK to bring a piece of paper or notepad with you on stage.

**Think about attire and posture:** Usually, panelists are seated on a raised stage. For women, that means paying attention to the length of your skirt or deciding to wear pants in order to be more comfortable. For men, that means thinking about your posture; I’ve observed some male panelists who spread their legs wide in an overly casual way when sitting on a high stool. For both men and women, sometimes the front row’s line of sight will be right at your legs or shoes, so pay special attention to how the bottom half of your body will appear.

**Think about voice and energy:** I always recommend speaking with a clear, conversational voice. The challenge is that on a panel, we tend to take our cues from others. If the moderator speaks in a low voice, we might subconsciously mirror their voice in order to blend in. At one conference, a client of mine mentioned he was consciously lowering his energy level so he wouldn’t stick out on the panel. But in fact, if he had used his natural energy and enthusiasm, he could have lifted the energy of the entire panel and in turn, the audience.

**Think about eye** **contact**: Where do you look when seated on a panel? You can look at the moderator and at the other panelists, but don’t forget to look out at the audience, especially when answering a question. Some people will answer directly to the moderator, but the real audience comprises all the people in the audience, with whom you are building a relationship of trust. Eye contact builds that relationship.

**If you’re moderating the panel, here are some specific tips:**

Serving as a moderator is a great honor and an intensive experience. Instead of preparing a speech, you act as a facilitator and guide by setting the overall mood and flow of the discussion. You keep panelists on track, ensure all voices are heard, and invite the audience to participate.

Before the conference, consider having a briefing call with all the panelists to make sure everyone understands the goals and format. It also helps the panelists get to know each other. On stage, you can start with a brief overview of the subject, your personal connection, and a brief introduction of each panelist.  If you’ve set strict time limits for discussions, mention that publicly because it gives you permission to politely interrupt panelists when they speak for too long.

**Here are the most common mistakes moderators make:**

1. **Speaking for too long.** The moderator is a facilitator, not another panelist. You should set up the conversation but not dominate it.
2. **Not leaving enough time for audience questions.** Many times, moderators will ask too many questions of the panelists and not allow enough time for audience questions. As someone who nearly always asks a question, that frustrates me in the audience.
3. **Not allowing equal time for all panelists**. Make sure each panelist has an opportunity for air time so they don’t feel like they have to jump in and interrupt someone else in order to speak.
4. **Speaking too softly.** As the moderator, you are setting the tone for the entire discussion. If you speak with a low voice, your panelists will unconsciously mirror that and it will bring down the energy of the entire panel.

Panel discussions are a terrific opportunity for credibility, visibility, and networking. Use these tips to maximize those situations and they will help you become a more confident and more engaging speaker.