

4.5.7: Presenting or Accepting an Award

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss the purpose of an award.
2. Describe the process of presenting an award.
3. Describe the process of accepting an award.

There is nothing more gratifying than recognition from your peers and colleagues for a job well done. We all strive for acceptance, and recognition is a reflection of belonging, a basic human need (Schutz, W., 1966). In this chapter we will discuss how to present or accept an award tactfully, graciously, and professionally.

First, make sure that you have all the information correct before you get up to speak: the honoree's correct name and how it is pronounced, the correct title of the award, and the details about the honoree's accomplishments that you are about to share. The spotlight will be on you, and your accurate delivery will be crucial to the happiness of the occasion.

When presenting an award, the key is to focus attention on the honor and the person receiving it—not on yourself. You may have been part of the committee that chose the winner, or involved in some other way, but your role should never upstage that of the person being honored.

You can focus the attention on the recipient in two ways: surprise or direct acknowledgement. In the surprise approach, you mention characteristics of the person receiving the award without initially mentioning their name—allowing the audience to start guessing who it might be. You may mention a list of accomplishments, or perhaps a positive story. With the surprise approach, you share the information that is sure to reveal the recipient's identity right before you present the award.

You may prefer, however, a direct acknowledgement of the honoree's performance or service and simply announce his or her name. The direct acknowledgement approach is typically followed by the reasons for choosing this person to receive the award, or include his or her past accomplishments. This direct strategy may be preferred if the audience is not familiar with the recipient.

Table 4.5.7.1 summarizes the process of presenting an award.

Table 4.5.7.1: Presenting an Award

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| Preparation | Verify the recipient's name, the correct title of the award, and details about the recipient. |
| Focus | Keep the focus on the honoree, not on yourself or the awards committee. |
| Surprise Approach | Build suspense by listing the winner's accomplishments from general to more and more specific; end by disclosing a unique accomplishment that identifies the winner, and finally announcing his or her name. |
| Direct Approach | Announce the award winner and follow with a list of his or her accomplishments. |
| Exit | Step aside and let the honoree have the spotlight. |

If you are the award recipient, be aware that the acceptance of an award often provides a moment of influence on the audience that can serve to advance your position or cause. Use of the limelight is an important skill, and much like any speech or presentation, it requires planning and preparation. You don't want to be caught speechless, and you want to project a professional presence that corresponds to the award or recognition.

If you know you are being considered for an award, first consider what the award recognizes within your professional community. An award is a symbol of approval, recognition, or distinction that honors the recipient in public. As the recipient, it is your role to convey recognition of that honor with your gracious acceptance.

Perhaps you have seen an awards ceremony on television, where a producer, composer, actor, or musician has received public recognition. Sometimes the acceptance unifies the community and serves as an inspiration to others. Other times the recipient

stumbles, talks as fast as they can to list all the people who helped them reach their goal (often forgetting several, which can hurt feelings), or they use the spotlight to address an unrelated issue, like a political protest. They may mumble, and their nervousness may be so obvious that it impacts their credibility. Accepting an award is an honor, an opportunity, and a challenge.

The first step in accepting an award is to say thank you. You can connect with the audience with your heartfelt emotional displays and enthusiasm. Raised arms, clasped hands, and a bow are universal symbols of respect and gratitude. Note that rambunctious displays of emotion such as jumping up and down or large, sweeping gestures are better left for the athletic fields. An award ceremony is a formal event, and your professionalism will be on display for all to see.

Next, you should consider giving credit where credit is due, noting its relevance to your field or community. If you name one person, you have to be sure to not leave anyone out, or you run the risk of hurting feelings and perhaps even making professional enemies. If you confine your credit list to a couple of key people, it is wise to extend the credit beyond the individual mentions by saying something like, “There are so many people who made this possible. Thank you all!” You should link your response to the award organization and your field, industry, or business. Don’t apologize or use terms that can be interpreted as negative. The acceptance of an award is a joyous, uplifting affair, and your role is to maintain and perpetuate that perception.

You may also consider linking your award to a motivational anecdote. A brief, personal story about how a teacher or neighbor in your community motivated you to do better than you thought you could and how you hope this can serve to motivate up-and-coming members to strive for their very best, can often stimulate an audience. Don’t exaggerate or stretch the story. The simple facts speak for themselves and the award serves as a powerful visual aid.

Say “thank you again” as you leave the stage, facilitating the transition to the next part of the ceremony while acknowledging the honor. You may need to take note where previous recipients have exited the stage to proceed without error, or simply return to your seat. Your brief comments combined with a graceful entrance and exit will communicate professionalism. Table 4.5.7.2 summarizes the steps we have outlined.

Table 4.5.7.2: Accepting an Award

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| Acceptance | Say “thank you.” |
| Relevance | Indicate where credit is due, what the award means to you, and how it relates to the awarding organization or your community. |
| Acknowledgment | Show your honor with dignity and respect as you say “thank you” again and exit the stage. |

Key Takeaway

Awards are public recognitions of success, and tact and grace are required both in presenting and receiving them.

Exercises

1. Who needs to be prepared to present an award in a business and why? Discuss your ideas with the class.
2. This can be a fun two-minute oral communication exercise. In the exercise, you will alternate between the role of the award announcer and the recipient. You will be paired up into teams where you will need to create a business or industry award, prepare a brief script and notes on acceptance, and then demonstrate your results for your class. The introduction of the speaker should last no more than thirty seconds and the acceptance should also be completed in less than a minute. If you are at a distance from your class, you may be assigned a particular role that fits your situation. Record your performance and post it in class.
3. Find one example of an award acceptance speech that you perceive as particularly effective. Indicate why and share the link. Compare with your classmates.
4. Find one example of an award acceptance speech that you perceive as particularly ineffective. Indicate why and share the link. Compare with classmates.

References

Schutz, W. (1966). *The interpersonal underworld*. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.

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