

**Training News Interview Transcript**  
**Presented by, Governors State University School of Extended Learning**  
**Interviewer: Dr. Felicia L. Townsend**  
**Interviewee: Jeanne Sparrow**  
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*(Introduction Music)*

FLT: My name is Dr. Felicia Townsend. I'm the Director of Corporate and Community Education at Governors State University School of Extended Learning in University Park, Illinois. During today's Training News episode, we will highlight some of the topics that will be covered in the School of Extended Learning's workshop called Avoiding Pitfalls in Public Speaking: Conversations, Presentations, and Speeches. I would now like to introduce to you the workshop instructor, Jeanne Sparrow. Jeanne has spent three decades in media as an Emmy-winning television host, reporter, radio personality, and voice over artists in Chicago. She is also the founder of a communications consulting firm called The Spoken Bird. Jeanne, thank you for joining me today.

JS: Thank you for having me. Good morning, Felicia.

FLT: Good morning. Alright, let's get started. Every day, you know, people are presenting something either as an idea they're presenting to their boss or they're presenting information to a prospective client or they're presenting a class project, for example. What are some of the pitfalls that people make when they present information?

JS: There's so many things that can go wrong. I think anybody that has ever stood up in front of people to speak, knows that there's so many things that can happen and so many pitfalls. What most people don't realize, I think is that you can avoid most of them and or plan for when they happen. I think that most of the preparation that people do when they are planning to speak is just about the information that they're giving out and they don't consider the environment, the audience, and all the other things that affect and probably affect more than anything else. Your content is always important, but it is not the only thing. And I think that is the biggest doorway into all the things that could possibly go wrong when you're presenting information to people.

FLT: Name a couple of ways a presenter can engage their audience.

JS: Well, I think the first thing to do is to make sure they're with you. You know, I think a lot of times we assume that an audience is ready to hear what we have to say, but we haven't warmed them up at all. I mean, you think about, if you've ever been to a live television show taping, like say you've gone out to Hollywood or to New York and seeing one of the night

shows or even one of the talk shows here in Chicago, there are always warm up people, comedians or just greeters and people who are talking to folks and kind of getting them ready to hear whatever's about to happen that day. And we have to do that ourselves anytime we talk to someone. Small talk is important. It's not that small, you know, in fact, I'd say that it's probably more important than anything else because it sets the stage. Maybe it's not more important than the content you're giving, but it's definitely important in that it prepares the runway.

JS: If you don't say good morning or good afternoon or hey, how y'all doing today or however it is that you feel comfortable with, everybody has a different style. But if you don't talk to your audience or the people you're talking to, even if it's just one or two people as if they're people first, when you get into business right away, it just feels harsh and you're not ready to listen. Think about who you are as an audience member and how you like to be brought into something and treat your audience the same way.

FLT: Jeanne, what is one of the biggest public speaking mistakes that people make when they are networking or just having a one-on-one conversation with someone?

JS: The first thing people forget, especially in a networking situation where you're encountering people you don't know, but I think it's just as important when you're having one-on-one conversations with colleagues, co-workers, team members and or people who report to you is that they are your audience and that you do have to engage them and that is public speaking. Even though it's not announcing things to a whole group of people, they are still your audience even if it's just one person. That I think is the biggest mistake people make.

The second thing I think people do that they forget is they forget the niceties. The small talk that I mentioned earlier, you know, they just kind of launch right into it with, you know, no sort of preamble and it's not like you have to have a long preamble. Sometimes at work we are rushed and we're like, okay, hey listen I got something I need to run by you real quick. Do you have a moment? Checking in to make sure that whoever it is that you're talking to is actually with you in that moment. And then the last mistake I think people make is that they're more concerned with what their goals are for the conversation. Whether that's to give information or receive information or get something from the person that they're talking to as opposed to the fact that the other person may have goals as well. And this is especially important, I think, in networking. I believe that a lot of times, and I've seen it happen a lot in networking events where you've met someone and then you engage with them at a later time, you have your agenda but there's no space for the other person's agenda. And I don't mean agenda as in you know, big overarching plans, but there's a reason

why you want to connect with this person and there's something you want from them or something you want to show them. Sometimes the networking is just about getting to know each other and deciding whether or not there is some synergy or some connection in what it is that you both do and whether or not you actually like the person enough to do business with.

JS: Too often I think we forget about that factor that we like to do business with people we like and you have to let that relationship get going and that begins with the very first networking event or meeting that you have and it can't always be about business.

FLT: I love that Jeanne. That is such great advice. Can you provide us with a couple of tips that can help someone to overcome their fear of public speaking?

JS: Fear of public speaking is so common. I would say the first thing is about addressing the physical symptoms of why you're afraid. Maybe it's because this is high stakes. Maybe you're fine in small groups, but when you get to big groups it's a problem. Maybe it's you're fine in small groups unless your boss is there. Every time the stakes go up for you, whatever that means, you have to prepare for that particular eventuality for you.

FLT: Now that you're mentioning all these things, how important is it for the person to prepare for the speech? Do you think lack of preparation may be the cause of the fear?

JS: You are preaching to the choir. That is exactly what part of it is. But I don't know that necessarily it's just about the preparation itself. Sometimes I think it's about how you prepare because everyone doesn't know how to prepare for performance if they're not performers. I look at any time you're standing in front of an audience, no matter who it is as a performance. This conversation is a performance of sorts. Right? So if I haven't gotten prepared for what I need to say to you, or if I don't know what I'm talking about, then I'm going to be less comfortable with it. But I think a lot of times we go into things thinking, oh, it'll be fine and then we get there and we go oh...

FLT: And you have 5,000 people in the audience. *(laughter)*

JS: *Right or maybe the owner of your company came into a meeting that you thought was just going to be a run of the mill meeting and you're like, oh, wait a minute I should have brought things with me. I should have done this. So sometimes it's, you know how they have that saying, "you don't have to get ready if you stay ready"?* I think that's part of it. And also understanding, getting as much information in advance about what you're

going to be going into, making yourself mentally prepared for it. But preparation is key. I just think that everybody doesn't know how to prepare. Like you've prepared your slides and you prepared what you have to say, but you haven't prepared to talk in front of people or in front of people that are really important. You haven't done the right kind of practicing. So that is where the disconnect is. We haven't prepared in the way that we need to get the results that we want and then we're surprised by everything else that happens and then you have a bad experience and you want to avoid it.

FLT: Yes, yes. This is great information Jeanne. I'm getting excited about this! So for those who would like to attend your workshop at Governors State University called, Avoiding Pitfalls in Public Speaking: Conversations, Presentations and Speeches, tell us some of the topics that you will cover in the workshop.

JS: I'm going to cover everything we've talked about so far...I have sort of a four step plan of how to approach speaking, how to think about yourself, how to think about what you're talking about, how to think about the people you're talking to. We're going to talk about visual presentations, PowerPoint slides and whatever it is that you use. Because I think a lot of times we miss the mark on those sorts of things and they end up doing more damage to what we're saying or distracting our audience from what we're saying instead of having them focus on us. We'll talk about audiences, how to read what's going on, how to win them over, how to connect with them. We'll talk about fear and how to minimize some of your nerves. I'll give some strategies but clearly a lot of that stuff is personal, so I'll do the most common ones that people have. Also, part of preparation is learning how to critique yourself, how to get better and improve at what you're doing. If this is something you want to do on a regular basis or need to do on a regular basis especially if you don't like it.

JS: I often say the people who need to talk about public speaking are the people who are least likely to do so because it has such bad connotations for them and that's unfortunate and I hope to change that for people to kind of shift how they think about the stuff that they have to do that they don't like. So many people avoid it and there's so many little things you can do to make it easier for yourself.

FLT: Okay. Well, you know it's going to be a very exciting workshop. We're so used to hearing you on the radio or seeing you on tv, but what can participants expect from you in the workshop?

JS: The same thing you get from me on the radio and TV. I'm pretty consistent with who I am across the board. There will be different parts of me that you will see in person that you probably wouldn't see on the radio or

television just because of time constraints. So I hope not to surprise people too much, but you'll recognize me if you've ever listened to me or watched me.

FLT: Yes. Yes. I am excited. I think I will attend as well. This is going to be a fabulous workshop Jeanne...it's going to be great. I'm a big proponent of being able to transfer what I've learned during a training session to my work. Name a few things that you hope people will take away from the workshop and apply to their professional or their personal lives.

JS: I find it interesting that you bring up personal lives too because there is something I find that happens with my clients when we talk about the things we talk about in my training, especially the way that I train and how I approach it. All of them say that it helps them in their communication, in their personal lives too. Because if you think about it, most of the issues that we have in life are based around our communication, right? I mean, yes, things go wrong, but a lot of times it's about misunderstandings. It's about things we said that we didn't say the way we meant to or came out in a way that we didn't expect and something about the process I have does affect that as well. But I do hope even if that doesn't happen, I hope that people who attend the workshop are able to make their lives easier when they have to present in whatever way they do. Because they're people I know who are a little shy and don't do well at networking events or avoid them and don't make the connections they need to expand their network and expand their reach even when they want to.

JS: I hope that this can make that a little easier for them. There's some people who are salespeople...they may be very charming or know their product really well, but there's a disconnect when they go to present the technical details to a client because maybe they know too much about the information. The client is not getting it and the relationship doesn't develop in the way that they needed to convey that information so that they can sell some more stuff. Some people are leading teams for the first time, you know, or maybe they've been leading a team and they're having issues with it. Sometimes it's about how you communicate to your team and understanding that you need to adjust to the people on your team and how to do that because they are an audience. So it's all about shifting how you think about the way you communicate, the way you talk, the way you speak to people in a way that serves everybody that's involved in that exchange.

FLT: Fantastic Jeanne! Thank you for taking time to highlight the features of the Avoiding Pitfalls in Public Speaking workshop which will take place at Governors State University on Wednesday, April 10th from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. that's April 10th from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. We are still accepting registrations. You can register online at [www.govst.edu/oce](http://www.govst.edu/oce),

that's [govst.edu/oce](http://govst.edu/oce) and click the professional development courses box, or you can click the link at the end of this video. Thank you and we look forward to receiving your registration.

JS: Thank you so much.

*(Closing Music)*