

Missionaries and Microphones

Proper Microphone Technique

You've been doing your work for a long time, and now you have the opportunity to share your ministry with churches. Here are some tips on how to use microphones effectively so that everyone can hear and understand what you want to share.

#1 Pointing the Microphone

You've spent a lot of time perfecting your presentation. But if you don't use the microphone correctly, the congregation won't be able to hear what you have to share! The sound system operator can't amplify what the microphone is not picking up. Make sure the microphone is pointing at what you want to amplify - your mouth. If the microphone is mounted on a lectern or microphone stand, don't leave it pointing at your chest or above your forehead. Go ahead and adjust it. If you're holding a handheld mic, remember to keep it up in front of your mouth, not down by your bellybutton. If you turn your head, make sure the microphone stays by your mouth; otherwise it will be amplifying your ear.

Remember that pointing microphones at the monitor loudspeakers, and sometimes even the main loudspeakers, is an easy way to generate feedback, the squealing-in-your-ears type! If you do get feedback, don't cup your hand over the mic. (Sometimes, that only prolongs the feedback.) Step away from the monitor loudspeaker, and get under/behind the main loudspeaker.

#2 Optimum Distance

In general, hold the microphone as close to your mouth as comfortable – at most, about a fist away in distance. For gooseneck microphones mounted to a lectern, make sure you're standing close enough to the lectern. If you have to reach out to touch the microphone (elbow not bent), you are **definitely** too far away! But please don't "eat" the mic or slobber on it from getting too close! If you have strong plosives when you speak, keep the mic a bit below your mouth and pointed more towards your nose so that the plosives go 'over' the mic and not directly into it.

An alternate method is to touch the 'ball' of the microphone to the cleft of your chin – and keep it there. So no matter which way you turn your head, the mic is always the same distance away from your lips.

Sound systems don't magically cure a soft-spoken voice. Please speak up. Sound system operators will be happy when you give them a nice strong voice - they can always turn down the volume, but they can't turn up a very soft voice without getting poor quality or feedback.

If what you're doing requires dramatic changes in the volume of your voice (drama – whispering to shouting, or singing soft and loud verses/choruses), practice adjusting the distance of the microphone from you. For example, if you're singing a loud climactic ending, put more distance between the mic and your mouth. Becoming skilled at self-adjusting your microphone volume levels makes you look (and sound!) more professional, and it calms the nerves of the sound operator trying to anticipate what you're going to do next.

#3 Lapel (Lavalier) Microphones

These microphones can be trickier than the usual handheld mic. Typically, the proper placement for a lavalier mic would be directly below the chin, several finger-widths below where the knot of a man's necktie would be. Most wireless lavalier mics have two switches: power and mute. The correct order to turn on the mic is to turn on the power, then unmute it. Reverse order to turn it off - mute the mic, and then turn off the power. Ask the sound operator if he/she has any other preferences of where to place, or how to operate, the mic.

The same principles to use a handheld mic apply to a lavalier mic. Turning your head left & right, or up and down, will vary the volume level of your voice, and can be very distracting. So, when you want to talk to one side of the room or the other, turn your entire body towards that direction so that the microphone will still be in the same relative position and distance to your mouth. And be careful when you look down at your notes or pray - bowing your head will significantly reduce the distance between your mouth and the microphone - your voice will suddenly be much louder when you start your prayer!

#4 Take Care of the Microphone

The microphone is your public speaking friend; take care of it! The mic is a fragile (and expensive!) piece of equipment. It converts the physical vibrations of your voice into electrical signals that are amplified by the sound system. If the mic is abused and damaged, you will no longer sound like yourself! Please don't hit the mic or blow into it, you can damage the fragile element inside. Whether for applause or clapping to a praise song, don't clap your hands while holding the mic. If necessary, first put the mic back on its mic stand, or only pretend to clap.

Everyone loves a child telling a story or singing a song (into the microphone). Please teach children to respect the microphone, and to use it correctly as the tool it's meant to be. It's not a toy. The prices on good quality mics typically start at \$100 each, and high-end mics can easily exceed \$1000. Rock stars can afford to abuse their mics, the average church can't.

#5 Microphone Stands

If there's one thing that gets abused more often than microphones, it's the microphone stands. Mic stands have clamps, screws and/or clutches to adjust the position of the mic to where you want it. But people keep using brute force to adjust the mic stands. This leads to the various clamps and clutches to quickly wear out or break. Make some time to practice adjusting a mic stand, especially "boom" stands, those with an extension arm. Otherwise, you could be losing valuable presentation time while you wrestle (unsuccessfully?) with the mic stand, and appear clueless in the process. How's that for making an impression with the congregation?

Remember, "righty-tighty, lefty-loosey"; clockwise tightens the clamp, counter-clockwise loosens it. There's also a new-fangled mic stand on the market that has a squeeze handle. You squeeze the handle, raise or lower the mic to the desired position, and release the handle. Ahead of time, practice adjusting the mic stand to your height and position. You'll look more like a 'pro', and you'll extend the life of the mic stand.

Practice your presentation while using a microphone (and mic stand). In the excitement, it's easy to forget these common sense tips.

The sound system operator will thank you, and your audience will be able to understand you without (audio) distractions.

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