



PODCAST #75

Interview with Stefania Lucchetti (SL) by Carma Spence (CS)

This transcript has been edited for readability.

CS: Hello, and welcome to *Public Speaking Super Powers*. This is your host, Carma Spence. Today I'm speaking with Stefania Lucchetti. Stefania is an author, speaker, consultant, and coach. In addition, she is also an attorney, qualified in three jurisdictions and has been practicing corporate law for more than 10 years in Europe and Asia, focusing on the telecoms, IT, media, and Internet industries. Stefania regularly speaks at corporate trainings and events, and she writes for Technorati.com. Welcome to *Public Speaking Super Powers*, Stefania!

SL: Thank you, Carma. Thank you for inviting me.

CS: You're very welcome! Just so listeners can get a feel for your unique expertise, could you tell us a little bit about your journey to success in public speaking?

SL: Yes. Well, I have been speaking for a while on technical themes related to my job as an attorney in the last few years. And then, I published a book called [*The Principle of Relevance*](#), which is a book dedicated to information overload and time management. And since then, I've started speaking about my book at book launches and book signings, and I saw people's interests being developed in themes related to the content of my book, and also, other themes that I could develop and other things that I enjoyed speaking about. And slowly, I started being invited by corporations to speak, initially, just about the content of *The Principle of Relevance*, and then on related topics.

And now, I regularly speak on themes related to time management, leadership, making ideas happen, and leadership for women for clients like Citi Bank, Time Warner, Bank of New York, and generally, Fortune 500 companies. This has developed over time. It hasn't been something that happened from one day to the other. But it was a regular and consistent escalation into developing more themes that I could talk about, that I was interested in, that I wanted to research, and that I want to plug in into my speaking CV. It also gave me an idea for a new book, so it's a continuous process of growth.

CS: How fun! Now, given your particular background, do you believe that public speaking is a learned skill or something that you are born being able to do, and why do you feel that way?

SL: My opinion is that anyone can learn to be a good public speaker. Some people are more natural at the beginning, because maybe they are more extroverted, or they are more comfortable speaking in front of an audience, but it doesn't mean that they are necessarily more effective or more engaging than a speaker who is an introvert and doesn't have a lot of confidence speaking in front of an audience.

It is a skill can be learned by practicing and developing those areas that are most uncomfortable for the particular person who wants to speak, and everyone has different sides that they could need to develop. My personal experience is I'm actually an introvert myself. I like to think a lot before I speak. I don't have the easiness of saying things out loud immediately as they come to my mind that other people have. I like to reflect first. At the beginning, I thought that this was going to be a disadvantage when speaking, but then, as it turns out, everyone has particular qualities that they can bring to their speaking, and being able to think before you speak can give you an advantage in certain situations where you actually want to be sure about what you're saying. It allows you to spend more time preparing your materials. So, everyone can use their strengths to their advantage and work on their weaknesses and slowly become a really good public speaker.

- CS:** Very good! It was interesting that you mentioned that, because so many people feel that, once you get up on stage, you have to sound like you know what you're talking about, and everything just has to flow smoothly and easily, and yet, what I've learned from interviewing so many people for this project is that everybody has their own style, and each style, although different from the others, is just as valid and just as effective as all the others.
- SL:** I agree, and that's what makes you unique. That's what makes it valuable for people to listen to you, because you have that particular style that is so different from everyone else.
- CS:** Right. Now, imagine that you are a public speaking super hero. What do you believe would be your main super powers?
- SL:** That's a really interesting question! I would say my particular super power is that of being able to be in touch with the audience and understand what the audience needs and wants and what they're interested in, so, tuning in with the audience's particular needs.
- CS:** And what kind of advice would you give someone if they wanted to develop that particular super power?
- SL:** Well, it requires three steps. The first thing is homework that a speaker needs to do at home before preparing a presentation for that particular audience. You have to know who the attendees will be and really think long and hard about what their needs could be and what they could be interested in their perspective, where they come from. Speaking from an audience for consumers is very different from speaking for a corporate audience. And, again, speaking for a corporate office can be totally different depending on what industry you're speaking to, the seniority of the people you're speaking to. If you're speaking to people in the technology industry, they will be tuned into particular things, and they will be very critical about other things; if you're speaking to people in the banking industry, they have other requirements, and they will be attentive to other parts of your presentation. Also, if your audience is very senior, they will react to certain issues and won't be interested in others; if your audience is more junior, you may need to change the language of your presentation to make it a little more fun, a little more young. And this is the homework you need to do before you even decide what to speak about and how to speak.

Then, there is a second set of homework that needs to be done when you get to the presentation of the event venue. If you arrive a little early and take the time to have a few conversations with people who will be attending your event, it's very interesting to ask people what they would like you to talk about. What they would like you to develop in your speech? It's not always easy to speak to everyone. You may need to speak to just two or three persons that you will have time to develop a conversation with, and just ask, "What are you expecting from today? What would you like to learn? What would you like to bring home?" And usually, it's very interesting. People come up with some amazing perspectives that you can then incorporate into the speech you've prepared.

And then the third phase, which is probably the most difficult one, but it is very important, is during the presentation. You have to be constantly tuned in to people's reactions to what you are saying – to their faces, to whether they're smiling or laughing, or not paying attention – and continuously tune your presentation to the reactions you're seeing. Be engaged with the audience.

Now, this is only possible if you know your materials well and you're not so concentrated on yourself. The easier it is for you to stop thinking about what you're saying and just go with the flow because you know your materials, the easier it is to tune in with the audience and fine-tune your presentation to their reactions. You can see that if they're very interested in something you've just said, their eyes light up; they laugh; they stay really engaged. You can develop that topic a little more. If you see them get bored, just go a little more quickly, and move on to something else. That really creates an engaging presentation.

CS: So, if I understand this correctly, the first step is to find out who your audience is as much as you can before you step in front of them. The second step is to actually get some interaction with members of your audience before you actually step on stage. And then the third is to constantly check in with the audience, not necessarily verbally, but be aware of the energy that's coming from them, so that you can tailor the speech in the moment.

SL: Exactly. Yes.

CS: Well, that's a tall order!

SL: Yeah. It's difficult, but it's doable. I do it all the time, and I find it gives me a lot of satisfaction, and it really engages the audience. It's just a matter of combining and being able to bring harmonies between preparation and the flow of the speeches in the moment, being in the moment with the audience.

CS: Which means you really need to know your stuff. You need to be prepared, and you don't want to memorize, because if you memorize, you're not going to be able to have that ebb and flow.

SK: Exactly. Yes. You have to know the topic, but you have to be prepared to improvise or add something or explore a slightly different avenue from what you had thought at the beginning. That's what, also, professional athletes do. They're really well prepared, but they also know how to improvise in the moment, when they're playing the game or competing.

- CS:** So, especially in team sports, because there's absolutely no way you can rehearse what the other team is going to do.
- SL:** Exactly, and it's not that different, in the end. Yes, you're speaking to an audience, so the spotlight is on you, but you're engaging with the audience, so it is, in the end, a team event. You have to flow with them. Otherwise, they are not going to take anything away from the presentation.
- CS:** Now, I know that some presentations are very interactive and others not so much. How do you maintain that ebb and flow in a presentation that is not all that interactive?
- SL:** It's a good question. And, it's true, when a presentation is interactive, and you're doing a game or something that involves the audience, it's easier, of course, to go with the flow. When there is no specific interaction, I always try and, first, look at people directly while I'm speaking. You can't concentrate on just one person, because you will make them uncomfortable, but just look at different people and turn to pay attention to each one of them in particular moments during the presentation and see how they're reacting. And I always tell people to ask questions during the presentation, so that they don't feel they have to withhold everything until the end, and it contributes to the flow of the presentation. And I really, really just look at their faces and see how they react. You can really tell when people are engaged, if they sit up on their chair, and they're really engaged. If they are slouching and looking around and looking at other people, then they're not engaged anymore. So, I really try to get what the feeling is, and I even say, sometimes, "I really see that that very, very interested in what I'm talking about right now, so would anyone like to share an experience with it?" So, I ask questions if someone from the audience wants to share something.
- CS:** Now, there's always the chance that when you say, "Would anyone like to share?" no one raises their hand, and I've had that happen myself, and it's kind of like you start listening for crickets. Have you had that happen to you, and if so, how've you handled that?
- SL:** Yes. It has happened, and there's very little you can do there but just graciously say, "Well, maybe later. If you want to think about it during the presentation and share it with us later, when at the end, that would be great," and I just continue on. So, I give them something to think about in the meantime, and sometimes, no one has shared anything, and sometimes someone has, at the end of the presentation, has raised their hand and said, "With regard to the question you asked earlier, I thought about it, and..." blah, blah, blah.
- CS:** So, basically, think on your feet, "What's the best thing to do?" Leave it alone, or if it's something that's important at that moment, I guess you could call on somebody.
- SL:** You could. Well, I try not to do that, because it does make people uncomfortable, unless I have had a conversation with them before the presentation, and they've shared something with me, and I've asked them whether I can bring it up during the presentation. Then, I've done that. I've said, "I've talked to this person earlier, and they've shared an interesting experience. Would you like to repeat it in front of everyone?"

But, if I do that, it's because I've discussed it first with the person. Otherwise, it may end up being a little disastrous: The person is shy, or they just don't want to be there.

CS: Right. Right. Well, thank you so much for sharing your wisdom and experience with us today at *Public Speaking Super Powers*.

SL: Thank you, Carma. It was really a pleasure talking with you.

CS: Well, this is the end of today's episode of *Public Speaking Super Powers*. This is your host, Carma Spence, signing off.

If you would like to learn more about Stefania Lucchetti, visit his profile page at:

<http://publicspeakingssuperpowers.com/featuredspeakers/stefania-lucchetti/>