The ability to communicate effectively is a vital and powerful tool for any person. The Hon. Jon Olsen, AO, explains the skill set it takes to be an effective communicator.

Communication is one of the most powerful tools available to any person in any walk of life. Understanding how to use communication skills is particularly important. You can learn so much by the textbook, but it is practical experience that hones the skills, to understand when to speak up, when to retreat, when to give oxygen to a story that you don’t wish to, and when to starve it of oxygen so it will die. That skill set can only be founded on experience, over time, with individual examples. It’s where life experience actually develops the skill set to enable you to be successful in a powerful communicator.

Always communicate with strength, belief, conviction, because if you don’t display that, the audience won’t believe you. A compelling presentation is where you are able to engage at eye level with your audience. In moving around to ensure that you are comfortable, take a stance behind the lectern or the microphone, look at it before you do the presentation, look at the surroundings that you’re going to be in, understand it, have it in the back of your mind. And then, when undertaking that, be relaxed as you can be, to show a human side, and interact with your audience with eye contact from all sections of the audience—the back, the front, and at the sides. And with hand gestures—talk to your audience, bring them in. And look—demonstrate, rather, that you are open to their questioning, open to their wanting the information that you are going to impart to them.

Speaking to different audiences depends on the subject nature, who the audience is, what the purpose of the meeting is, and what you’re wanting to communicate. And to transpose yourself into the audience, as if you were listening to the presentation, and therefore, make a judgment as to the presentation you’ve prepared. Is it relevant? Will they understand? Does it address the questions that they would have? Will it be motivating? Will it bring about change? Will it establish a foundation upon which to work from in the future?