

Profile of Success: Linda Descano, Managing Director & Head of Branded Content & Social at Citi – Part One

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In part one of this series, Managing Director & Head of Branded Content & Social at Citi Linda Descano tells you how her “curvy career” has unlocked new opportunities and key elements to deliver a top notch speech in any venue.

Check out her top tips below for helping women in every industry see success!

Question: You received your Bachelors in Geology. How or why did you go from that to head of social media and content marketing for one of the world’s largest banks?

A: My “curvy” career path, as I’ve described it in a [LinkedIn Influencer](#) post, wasn’t by design. I simply have always been open to exploring new opportunities to learn and grow. Living in curiosity and believing in my abilities has enabled me, over the course of my career, to explore the earthquake zones of Southern California, the halls of K-12 STEM education, the world of autonomous underwater vehicles, the frenetic trading floors of Wall Street and, most recently as you noted, the world of 140-character tweets in social media. And tomorrow, as technology and innovation unlock new opportunities to learn and grow, I will raise my hand and step up yet again.

My story is consistent with what Citi and LinkedIn learned in the [3rd wave of our research](#) that inspired my “[curvy career](#)” post – men are much more likely to have a linear career path, while women’s paths tend to take many twists, turns and transitions throughout their professional lives. Not only are more women employed in careers that differ from what they expected when graduating college, but women are also more likely to think that they might work at a different company or a totally different industry in 10 years. This may explain why the average Baby Boomer man has had six jobs in his lifetime and doesn’t expect to have any more; meanwhile the average Baby Boomer woman has had eight jobs, and expects to have 10 jobs over the course of her career.

Question: Since you do tons of public speaking and have spoken at hundreds of conferences, what are top tips for women preparing to speak to the public?

A: At this point in my career, I’ve probably spoken at 1,000+ events and by no means do I consider myself a five-star speaker – although I do pretty well. The top tips I would offer to aspiring public speakers are these:

1. *Focus on the privilege, rather than the “pain.”* You get to share a message you are passionate about with others, which is pretty cool. That shift in mindset will do wonders to calm your nerves – and boost your confidence.
2. *Before you start preparing, probe.* Talk to your host about who will be in the audience,

what key messages they are looking for, what the theme of the overall conference is (if you are speaking at one session), format of the session (e.g., lecture vs fireside chat), timing for your presentation, how Q&A will be handled (if at all), and the set-up of the room, AV capabilities, podium, microphones, etc. The more you know, the more effective you will be in terms of delivering a relevant message. You don't want to show up with a PowerPoint presentation only to find the room set up for a fireside chat with no AV support.

3. *Prepare, practice and then prepare and practice some more.* For me, showing up prepared is the #1 way to calm my nerves. I recommend preparing more than just what you are going to say and how you are going to say it. Give thought to potential questions from the audience and how you would like to respond to them. And remember, less is more when it comes to public speaking: I believe the average listening attention span is on the order of 20 minutes or so.
4. *Be present in the moment.* I always arrive to a public speaking event 30-45 minutes early. I walk the room to confirm the set up and spend a few moments mingling with the audience, learning about why they've come to the program and what they are hoping to take away. Inevitably, they are excited, which boosts my energy and excitement. Making these personal connections enables me to speak with the audience rather than at or to them – I can achieve a much deeper level of engagement. I then spend 10 minutes alone to check my appearance, take a few deep breaths, and clear my mind of all distractions so I can focus on the job at hand.
5. *Embrace the pause.* Managing my breath and pausing to gather my thoughts help me manage my nerves and pace delivery, and also help keep the audience's attention.
6. *Forget perfection and expect the unexpected.* No matter how much you prepare, you will forget a few stats or factoids. No matter how many times you discussed the room set-up, there will be times you show up and the audience isn't at all what you expected or the room isn't remotely similar to what was described. You've got to smile and go with the flow. What helps me pivot is having a contingency plan in place. As part of my preparation, I think about the various what-ifs that could throw me off base and I have a game plan for how to handle.

[Click here](#) for part two of this exciting series!