

Women's Committee

Taking the floor with confidence



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Women's Committee

On Friday, October 10th, about 30 women from all sectors and all regions turned out to Montréal's *Centre Saint-Pierre* to take part in *Prendre la parole avec confiance*, a workshop organized by the FNEEQ Women's Committee on a matter essential to the democratic life of our organizations: public speaking.

This workshop was a key element in the 2012-2015 mandate of the Women's Committee, which has been focusing for the last several years on the presence of women in representative bodies.

Together, we took this day as an opportunity to step back and reflect on the importance of public speaking, to acquire tools to help us express ourselves with greater assurance, to demystify some of the fears and obstacles that can get in the way of speaking in public and to put what we learned into practice, all within a friendly atmosphere conducive to learning and to constructive feedback. In the morning session, workshop leader Marielle Raiche generously shared with us her lengthy experience as a communications trainer and consultant as she delved into such vital themes as stage fright, voice projection, the microphone, organization of ideas, and speaking from the head and the heart.

"Recent surveys show that Canadians are twice as afraid of public speaking as they are of dying," noted Ms. Raiche. But to take the floor is to take one's place, she added, and it's important to rise to the challenge. If we constantly ask those who are good at public speaking to take the microphone in our place, they'll always be better at it because they'll be

getting all the practice! And if stage fright sets in, the trick is not so much to try to beat it as it is to learn how to bring it under control. "Slow your breathing. Take the time to settle yourself in comfortably at the microphone and adjust it properly before beginning

to speak. Be well prepared. Have key words written on an index card." When it comes to the structuring of ideas, keep it practical, speak in the first person, drive home points using concrete examples, provide the whys, use references that are common to your audience, all from the very first sentence.

"I now plan to venture into public speaking."

With examples and anecdotes richly illustrating the morning's explanations and practical tips, the afternoon was spent putting what had been learned into application. Every participant rose to the challenge of preparing a two-minute speech on a randomly-selected union- or feminist-related topic and delivering it at the microphone to a subgroup. Each speaker was then able to benefit from feedback on such things as their voice, stance, delivery, etc. For example—as simple as it might sound—many of us needed a reminder to pause more often to take a breath while we were speaking.

The day concluded with a plenary session during which the clear consensus



was that the workshop had been extremely beneficial, that taking the time to listen to one another is an invaluable exercise, and that this had been a pivotal experience for many participants.

In the survey filled out by participants at the end of the day, 92% felt the objectives of the workshop had been fully met, while the 8% who answered "partly" said they would have liked the session to last two days. All agreed with the statement that they emerged better able to manage their stage fright as well as its physical manifestations and to more effectively structure their message.

"This has encouraged me to engage in activism."

So where to next with this workshop? Repeating it again for second group or offering a more advanced session that includes a dimension and exercise on addressing a hostile audience or a feminist perspective on public speaking are among the many ideas proposed by the members who took part.