

The 21 Commandments of Mr. Mike Row Phone

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I'd like to introduce a friend of mine to you,
Mr. Mike Row Phone.

Mr. Mike can be your best friend or he can be your worst nightmare. It all depends on how you treat him.

In our Toastmaster's club, no one pays much attention to Mr. Mike. That's understandable, because our rooms are small enough that most people don't need Mr. Mike. But if you ever speak in large room or to a large audience, you'd better pay attention to Mr. Mike. He then becomes very important, because if your audience can't hear you, they get upset.

To illustrate that point, I once attended a presentation at a local hospital with my wife. It was held in a large room with a big audience, all spread out. The main speakers were doctors who treat cancer patients. Now I know these doctors are excellent surgeons, oncologists and radiologists, but they were terrible when it came to using Mr. Mike. It looked more like a 3-Stooges convention than a panel of professionals.

One surgeon in particular was rather inept when it came to using Mr. Mike. He was using a hand-held wireless microphone which had two on-off switches on the side.

Unfortunately, the pressure from his fingers was just enough to keep turning off the switch. The doctor would be fine for a while, then the pressure from his hands would switch off Mr. Mike, and people in the back would start yelling, "WE CAN'T HEAR YOU." Then he'd fumble around trying the different switches, saying, "Can you hear me? Is this ok? Is it on now?" This happened a number of times.

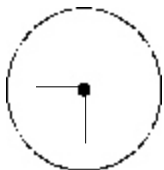
This same doctor repeatedly failed to speak into the microphone. He would be ok for a while, then he would tip the microphone away from his body, or even worse, he would turn his head and talk to the blackboard and not into Mr. Mike. It was a very amateurish performance, which was a shame considering the importance of his subject to the audience.

All Mikes are not created equal. There are many different types of microphones a speaker can use, but the two types you're likely to encounter are: cardioid and omni-directional.



Cardioid

1. The cardioid microphone is called "cardioid" because the pickup pattern of the microphone is shaped like a heart. As long as you're speaking within the heart pattern, you're ok, but if you move the microphone away or turn your head, you're out of the pattern and Mr. Mike goes silent. The main advantage of the cardioid microphone is that it has fewer problems with feedback.



Omni-Directional

2. The omni-directional microphone picks up sounds from all directions. It's less critical how you hold the microphone or where you place it relative to your mouth. That said, this type of microphone picks up everything; air-conditioning noise, movement of the lectern and audience chatter.

These days, microphones are either wired or wireless. Which one you use will depend on your speaking situation.

If you're interested in all the other differences among microphones and their specific uses, I recommend a catalog from "Full Compass." You may order it online. They have good descriptions of the different types of microphones and their specific applications.

Their web site is www.fullcompass.com.

After that comical night with the doctors, I put together the following:
"The 21 Commandments of Mr. Mike Row Phone."

1. Mr. Mike is a very sensitive guy.

He needs to be treated carefully. Don't tap on him, don't drop him or throw him around, don't blow into him. All of these cause damage. Also, don't do your Frank Sinatra imitation by swinging Mr. Mike in a circle. I've seen microphones that look like they've been used as hammers to pound in nails. Mr. Mike is a sensitive guy, be gentle with him.

2. Get to know Mr. Mike ahead of time.

Get to the room early and check out Mr. Mike ahead of time. Don't assume someone else will take care of this. If you're the speaker, take the responsibility.

What type of microphone is it . . . a cardioid or omnidirectional?

Does it have an on/off switch?

How far away from your mouth should Mr. Mike be?

What's the best distance for this room and this amplifier? Experiment.

How long is the microphone cord? Can you get a longer cord that allows you to move away from the lectern and interact with the audience?

Where's the amplifier? Where's the control for the volume?

You need to know how loudly you should speak. Practice at your usual speech volume.

Realize that during your check the audio level should be loud. The presence of people will absorb the sound once the audience enters the room.

3. Get a helper in the back to signal if changes are needed after you've started speaking.

Show them how to adjust the amplifier controls. They can indicate to you by using hands signals whether you need to increase or decrease your volume.

4. Don't let Mr. Mike trip you up.

One of the problems with a handheld wired microphone is the wire that attaches Mr. Mike to the sound system. If you're in this situation take four or five feet of wire and pull it behind your back and underneath your belt. This way the wire is behind you, but you still have plenty of movement with Mr. Mike.

5. Don't talk behind Mr. Mike's back.

Hand-held microphones must stay with you when you turn your head from side to side. Practice turning your head and body while keeping Mr. Mike close to your mouth. Four to eight inches from your mouth at all times, is ideal.

6. When you ask a question of a specific audience member, direct Mr. Mike toward him/her when it's their turn to speak.

Mr. Mike will only repeat what he hears. The rest of the audience wants to hear the response.

7. When telling jokes, when you get to the punch line, move Mr. Mike a little closer and say it louder and more clearly than the rest of the joke.

You want to make sure the audience can hear the punch line.

8. Practice, practice, practice.

Practice your speech holding Mr. Mike to simulate the exact setting of your presentation. Practice switching the microphone between hands, which could be necessary if you're gesturing, pointing, writing or using visual aids. Find out ahead of time what sort of microphone you're going to use and practice with that type. If you don't have a microphone at home, practice using a piece of wood or suitable object that will simulate the real situation.

9. Don't take cordless lapel microphones out of the speech area.

If a microphone is accidentally left on, comments not meant for the audience's ears could be disastrous. Many speakers tell stories of leaving their wireless microphones on while they visit the bathroom. When they get back, the audience is usually laughing.

10. If the amplifier controls aren't handy after you have started, you can adjust the sound by changing the distance between your mouth and the microphone.

This is one advantage for using a handheld microphone.

11. Try to get rid of feedback ahead of time.

Feedback is the unpleasant squeal that occurs when the speaker system "feeds back" into your microphone and is reamplified. Again, test the sound system beforehand. Have somebody standing by to make adjustments. Try different control settings to eliminate feedback. Cardioid Microphones are better at handling feedback than omni-directionals.

12. Try not to let Mr. Mike cover up your face.

The audience wants to see your beautiful smile and facial expressions. Don't cover them up by holding Mr. Mike up too high. Keep him down low where he can still do his job, but doesn't cover up your face.

13. If the microphone has an on-off switch, which you could accidentally hit while speaking, tape the switch down.

Most switches are high enough to not get in the way, but if your switch is lower, get the tape out.

14. Check for sounds that may be coming in from another room.

Many banquet rooms can be divided in two and you need to be sure that the sound from another room is not coming into your room or vice-versa. Inquire about this before the room assignment is set in stone.

15. If you're taking questions from an audience, but can't get Mr. Mike close enough for them to use, repeat their question yourself.

With a large audience and stage, it's better to have two microphones available; one for you and one for the audience's responses/questions. Get someone to help you with the audience microphone.

Commandments dealing with Mr. Mike attached to a lectern.

16. If the goose neck is too short or you're tall, don't bend down so you can be heard.

Instead remove Mr. Mike from the cradle and use him as a standard hand-held microphone.

17. Check the gooseneck ahead of time.

Is it properly attached or just casually placed on the lectern? From personal experience, I know that goose necks will fall off if not properly attached.

18. Don't play with Mr. Mike or the goose neck during the speech.

Adjust him once and then leave him alone. Playing with the gooseneck or microphone during the speech is an unwanted distraction.

19. You must limit your movement when using a lectern microphone.

Any movement away from the lectern will result in a loss of sound. Stay very close to the lectern especially if you are using a cardioid microphone.

Other miscellaneous commandments:

20. If you're not the speaker, but are in charge of the program, give each speaker a three minute class ahead of time on how to properly use the microphone.

21. Don't lose control of Mr. Mike.

You may be tempted to hand your microphone over to an audience member when they have something to say. Don't do it. Then they have control of the speech and of the audience. You don't want to have to wrestle Mr. Mike away from a talkative audience member.

Bonus Tip:

If you speak on a regular basis, bring your own microphone, complete with a long cord. I like to use a Shure SM58 microphone. I bought the version without an on/off switch.