JUST BEFORE THE BIG SPEECH:

FIVE SURE-FIRE POINTERS

One

If, say, you’re speaking at a three-day conference resist the temptation to arrive just before your presentation and leave right after it. Instead, show up for the whole thing. There’s no better way to get a feel for the issues the participants are facing, how they relate to their leadership, what they’re already good at, what their major concerns are. These issues ooze out of the pores of every conference. You don’t need to say much of anything: just keep your eyes and ears open. It’s called “servant leadership in action,” right?

TWO

Spend some time in the room where you’re to speak well before you’re to speak. Walk the stage, get a feel for the geography. This way the first time you are there is not the first time you have to speak from there. Since your speaking area is now familiar territory you’ll be able to concentrate more on your audience, less on your nerves.

THREE

Just before your presentation, if you haven’t already, meet and shake hands with your audience members. Ask outright, "What are the issues you grapple with that you want this talk to address?" Presumably you’ve already asked that question of the meeting planner in your Pre-event Questionnaire, but do it again with the rank and file. Then delve into their answer. Doing this with as many people as possible is irresistibly effective - the way we humans are wired, they're going to pay attention to you for the simple reason that you started the relationship by first paying attention to them. It works every time - like people smiling back at you after you first smile at them. If nothing else, it’s a way of countering the fear of the audience because you’ve met some of them already. Conclusion: they probably don’t bite!

FOUR

Just before you go on be aware that the nerves are there, even for the most experienced presenters. So find a private spot and shake out the nerves, literally. Reach up as far as possible and tickle the ceiling; roll your head from side to side; shake your legs one at a time. Let the tension flow out. There’s a straight line between “relax before you talk” and “dynamic while you talk,” isn’t there?

FIVE

If, say, your go-on time is an hour into the program, sit in the back of the room so you can get up and walk around without disturbing anyone. If possible, imitate Robin Williams [jumping jacks back stage before going onstage] and Mick Jagger [tread mill back stage before going onstage].