

## My TEDx Experience

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Like most people, I had a wishlist of things I wanted to achieve and check off in my lifetime. Many of which are sky blue dreams to be chased and attained far into the future, for me, speaking on a TED stage has always been on that bucket list. In reality, though, I've never truly imagined that it's something I'd get to achieve in my 20s because it felt so unattainable. So imagine my shock when on the 5th of October in 2018 on what was promising to be an uneventful Friday afternoon, I received an email from **TEDxPretoria**. I was still at the office where I worked at the time, sitting outside the building catching up on the week's events with a few people I worked with instead of going home. A few days earlier, **TEDxPretoria** had sent a mass email to alert us that they'd be announcing speakers for that year's event. I had spent that entire week anticipating and agonizing over this email, with dismal hope that I'd make the cut for that year.

Even before I opened the email, a sick feeling settled in the pit of my belly. I remember warming myself up to hear that I hadn't made the cut, I was mentally preparing myself for the disappointment. I convinced myself that although it seemed like such an incredible opportunity, I wasn't even ready for such an event at that stage in my career. The idea of speaking on a TED stage seemed daunting and intimidating. So I took my time to open the email when I realized who it was from. All I saw was a preview, with the subject: **TEDxPretoria 2018|You have been selected to speak!** This was one of the most surreal experiences of my adult life so far, I had to read through the subject of the email a few times just to make sure it was real. The thought and reality of this literally took my breath away. I still remember forcing myself to stand up from where I was sitting to go searching for a friend that I worked with at the time because I needed someone else to confirm that I wasn't, in fact, losing my mind. I couldn't even use my words once I found her, so instead, I gave her my phone so she could read the email herself. I was too terrified to get excited, it took a while for this to sink in. Her excitement made it real for me. I remember calling my mother to share the news with her just before I drove home, and she had no idea what or who TED was. But she was excited because she understood what it meant for me and my career to be able to do this.

As I drove home after all the excitement, I remember calling a close friend of mine to share the news with her. I wanted to stand on a mountain and scream from the top of my lungs, I wanted people to know but I was also insanely terrified. This felt like the beginning of one of the most nerve-wracking, exciting but challenging experience I was to embark on. I've seen what TED as a brand and a platform could do to help elevate people. So time flew very quickly from the time I received that email about being on the list to the day of the event. As part of the preparation, we had to do a mock-up presentation to our speaker coach who was helping us get ready for the stage, along with wooing the woman who was the primary organizer of **TEDxPretoria** and had seen dozen of such talks.

Linda had seen many speakers fumble their way to the stage in preparation for this task since she got the license to host **TEDxPretoria**, she too had constructive advice around powerfully landing the actual content and overall navigation of the stage on the day. It was about establishing a human connection with the crowd from the beginning to avoid alienating some of the audience, even those who may not agree with your point of view on whatever the subject is. It was key to also have a global approach by way of giving context to the content, not assume that all people know and understand your references, especially if the subject matter is more South Africa focused. Always reminding us that TED's biggest mission is to share knowledge around ideas worth spreading, but in a way that's concise and to the point. Having to remind ourselves that this wasn't a lecture, and not to talk down at people during our delivery. I became a more considerate storyteller as a result of the platform, acquiring skills I generally took for granted, like what to do with my hands when I present, my body movements, making sure that I pause, breathe and etc.

There was personal pressure to be profound on that stage because I had consumed enough talks to know that there is an expectation to inspire. Some of the best talks of all time were not just profound, but authentic, personal, relatable with universal appeal. Like Chimamanda Adichie's talk on 'The danger of a single story' and Roxane Gay on 'Bad Feminist', I too

wanted to be remembered. And on the 17th of November 2018, I finally got the opportunity to boldly stand on a TED stage and say: 'Welcome to my Talk'.