

SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

"THE FIRST TWO MINUTES"

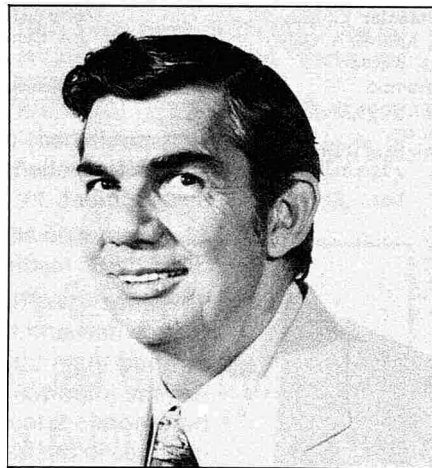
BY ART "Mr. Lucky" FETTIG

The other night I was the keynote speaker for an annual meeting of Credit Union Managers for the Indiana Credit Union League. As I sat at the head table toying with my dinner the fellow next to me asked, "What do you do the first two minutes to warm an audience up? Is there any technique I could learn to make it easier?"

That was no new question to me. I have been trying to find the answer to that one for years. Recently, I made a videotape for executives of the Canadian National Railways and one idea kept throbbing in my mind. "What can be done to make speakers better accepted by an audience right from the start?"

I told my dinner partner that I would attempt five things in the first two minutes; that by following these five steps we should have a great audience from then on. These are the five steps and within two minutes we had a marvelous audience to work with.

1. Respond to the introduction with humor.
2. Do a bit of humor that ties in directly with the audience or the occasion.
3. Get your audience to join you in applauding something.
4. Ask the audience a question.
5. Physically invade their territory.



Art "Mr. Lucky" Fettig

Now perhaps as a member of ASTD you are wondering about now what this has to do with you. Possibly you do your training on a one-to-one basis. Or maybe you never find yourself in front of a hundred or a thousand or ten thousand people. Let me suggest that just maybe you would be more effective if you did get out once in a while and share your know-how with larger groups. Let me challenge you to reach out to larger groups for the good of your employer, community and yourself.

Too often the reason we shy away from speaking assignments is the fact, although we will not admit it, that we just don't like to face all of that coldness and hostility that audiences often convey when we face them. I honestly believe that these five steps will help

you get the warmth and acceptance from the audiences that will make public speaking a welcome challenge and a real joy.

Now, let's go over what happened in Indiana the other night. The program chairman ignored the canned introduction I had provided and spoke about me from his own personal experience. It was a very touching introduction. Since I was in Indiana I did a line that I had stolen from my dear friend Herb True. I said, "Thank you Mike Sharp. That is the kind of introduction that put Earl Butz where he is today." They laughed. I followed with . . . "I understand that Mr. Butz is now doing a tour of our leading universities speaking as an expert on ethnic humor." Again they laughed. We had accomplished step number one. Some of the audience were beginning to think, "Hey, maybe this won't be as boring as we expected."

Now I went straight to step two. "Mike," I said, "I don't know about this audience. These people are wild. Just a few minutes ago I was listening to them at their cocktail hour and I heard one fellow say to the other, "Charlie . . . I see you brought your wife." And Charlie said, "Big deal, twice the expense and half the fun." Charlie says, "I see you brought your wife." And the other guy says, "Yeah man,

I'd rather bring her than kiss her goodbye." Two more great laughs.

If they were playing golf or tennis just before the meeting I could have done short jokes on those subjects. If they had a wild cocktail party the night before, jokes on that party would fit. Any good humor that is quick and ties in with that audience will work.

Step three involves getting the audience to applaud. In this case, I simply walked over to the program chairman and said, "Ladies and gentlemen, this fellow is responsible for that great piece of beef I just enjoyed. Isn't this a great banquet? Let's have a nice hand for your chairman, Mike Sharp." When you get them applauding very early in your talk you will find that they participate more in your presentation. They laugh harder and stop you with applause during your speech. They get more involved.

Ask a Question

To accomplish step four, I said, "Ladies and gentlemen, would you raise your hands, how many of you are engaged in the business of selling?" A lot of hands went up. Then I asked, "And how many of you are engaged in the business of selling America?" Most of the audience raised their hands. I slowly looked around the room and said, "And what country are the rest of you turkeys selling?" You don't do that when you have an international audience. It brought a laugh. Then I continued. "I have discovered that nearly all of the truly successful people I meet, teachers, managers, great parents . . . you name it . . . all have one thing in common. They have learned how to sell themselves to other people and have learned to sell their ideas."

The reason for the question is this. When you stand in front of an audience the pressure is on you. You are on the spot. Sometimes you can almost see them sitting back and thinking, "OK kid. Let's see how well you can dance."

When you ask a question the pressure goes from you to them. They are on the spot. If you can conclude with humor and swing into your theme all the better.

You must physically invade their territory. I use a hand mike. I love to move around and if I can possibly set up the room so that I can move out into the audience . . . great! In this case, I had a long cord on the hand mike, I walked around the end of the head table and right out among the audience. I did a vignette on selling people to one another while making introductions. I shook hands with a few people as an illustration and while I was out there I took care of another problem.

One man was sitting with his back to me and so I went over to his table, held out my hand in a way so that he would have to turn around and that involved him enough to make him a really attentive listener for the rest of the evening. When you physically invade their territory they get personally involved in your performance. They lose some of that aloof security that separates you.

In less than two minutes we had that audience laughing and applauding and right there with us. I immediately went back to the lectern and did most of my speech from there. Nothing went more than a few minutes without humor worked in. I moved around enough to keep them guessing. But what really made that a successful speech was what happened that first two minutes.

Why don't you try these five easy steps? Or if you are in a small-group training situation then try a couple of them. Let me know, will you? Let me know how they work for you. Write me, Art "Mr. Lucky" Fettig, 31 East Ave. S., Battle Creek, Michigan, 49017.

Art Fettig is known as the "Mr. Lucky of the American Platform." He appears on over 100 programs a year giving speeches and conducting seminars in the field of sales, management, creativity, communications and safety. He is currently employed as Company Relations Officer for Grand Trunk Western Railroad Company in Michigan. Author of the popular humor book, "It Only Hurts When I Frown," his newest book, "Selling Lucky! A Guide to Greater Success and Happiness — just released — is already going into its second edition.



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