

Getting The Message Across

Are Your Speeches an Asset or Liability to Your Company?

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When the question is asked: "Are we getting our message across," that is no idle topic for discussion. The unfortunate and ironical situation today is the fact that people most closely allied to the speech field are often careless in their approach to speech-making.

It has been a standing joke among speech professors for years that the place to go to hear a poorly-delivered speech is to a speech convention where the speakers are considered experts. While the statement is considered a facetious one, it is not completely false. This carelessness or neglect is seen at times in the speech patterns of certain speakers who represent their companies on the public platform. Each time they appear their companies benefit or suffer.

We realize that there are pressures and time-consuming tasks that often interfere with their development as public speakers. We are aware of the endless paper work, telephone calls, luncheons of various types, staff meetings and other responsibilities inherent in the business world. Nevertheless, something can be done about the situation with proper cooperation and devotion to improvement.

It has been pointed out that much of the oral communication that occurs involves only a few people, one or two quite often, and therefore formalized procedures and techniques of speech are not considered absolutely necessary. A closer examination of interviews, small groups, and large audiences, however, reveals common characteristics for all. You may be called

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on to deliver an address at a major meeting or appear before a small budget committee. In either case adaptation is the key word, but there cannot be proper adaptation unless good habits have been learned previously. Therefore, it is a challenge to all of us to be aware of our oral communications including the areas of research, organization and eventual presentation.

Selective Research

Let us examine some of the basic ingredients of speech preparation and delivery. The initial steps include serious research and careful organization. Both steps are vital and should not be bypassed with an excuse called expediency. All of us are aware that a considerable amount of your work involves research and that you have materials pertaining to your business or industry readily available. Nevertheless, I have known speakers who surround themselves with a multitudinous amount of evidence and then find themselves overwhelmed by the magnitude of it. Many of the best college debaters whom I have coached through the years have not been those who have assembled the greatest amount of content. The effective and successful debaters generally have been those who learned to be selective in their choice of materials. Those materials must be relevant to the particular topic in question.

Therefore, my advice concerning research for people in the business world, who are normally research-minded, is to be more highly selective of materials that are chosen for audiences whether they be composed of 500 people or one face looking back at you over a desk. Be organized and thereby communicate with preciseness and clarity. The battle may be won at that stage. If it is lost there, the use of a mellifluous voice or pleas-

ant smile may be wasted efforts. To attempt to substitute human relations for well-organized ideas is a serious mistake despite its popularity in some quarters. I have known speakers with wonderful, ethical appeal who are completely unsuccessful.

Outlining Important

Since it is true most of us are surrounded by large amounts of materials that can be presented in some form to the general public, it is your job to be as selective as if you were preparing communications for written publication. You must because of necessity concentrate into capsule form the written materials that publicize your company in a favorable manner to the general public.

The same theory and procedure should be employed in preparing a different type of copy called the speech outline. Within the framework of that outline, there should be types of evidence chosen with utmost precision. It is my belief, and commonly shared by the large majority of speech instructors, that speakers should have a prepared outline for each speech. Naturally, any outline becomes adaptable for a particular audience and occasion. There are too many speakers who believe that because they concern themselves each day with materials of their agencies they need not organize the content for oral presentation to the general public. Don't be led into that trap. Don't be beguiled by the fact that you are fluent. It is possible to be fluent and say little or nothing.

In industry, for example, we have the supervisor who quietly confides to the speech instructor: "I can speak clearly and precisely to my employees in an off-the-cuff manner, but cannot do so when I attempt to outline the materials." The supervisor is generally wrong on two counts when he emits

that statement. First, many of us who teach in industry, find that the supervisor, despite his confidence, normally does not say exactly what he thinks he has said although he may be fluent. Secondly, he has trouble with the outline because he hasn't devoted himself to the proper methods of outlining. It may seem like hard work and wasted effort for all of us to assemble materials carefully in structured pattern, but it is worth all of the effort.

Outline Ingredients

As a company representative you are expected to do an effective job of oral communication. The public expects effective public speaking from you. I believe it is justified in that expectation. You must take pride in your ability to communicate. You should never give a poor speech. It is impossible to do so, in my opinion, if you have carefully planned your address. It may not be a memorable one. You may not be completely satisfied with it. Nevertheless, if you have spent the time to do research and organized the materials into a logical pattern of some type, you are well on your way to effective public speaking.

I would like to suggest that the outline contain at least the following ingredients: audience analysis, specific purpose, introduction, body, and conclusion. Notice that audience analysis ranks first on my speech outline for public speakers. The fundamental interests of the audience, desires, prejudices, experiences, training, economic, social, and cultural backgrounds, are only a few of the items that will help us in devising an appropriate speech.

Introductions

Now in organizing the speech itself, I would advise you to have attractive introductions. Devise them ahead of time. They should attract attention and establish rapport between speaker

and audience. Keep away from the general statement. Don't say "I would like to tell you about my company." Use humor, questions, quotations, personal greetings, startling statements and other exordiums that will alert the audience.

There was a businessman in one of my adult classes who had a tremendous sense of humor. He could tell a story with great effectiveness. Nevertheless, he could not easily visualize a relationship between the introduction and body of the speech. He would relate a traveling salesman joke, usually off color, and then when the laughs subsided would exclaim something like "The question is: shall we attack Russia before she attacks us?" Then there was the salesman who, after being introduced, suddenly broke an old-fashioned 78 RPM record on the edge of the desk and the pieces flew violently about the room. His opening remark was "My company is breaking records every day." A spectacular introduction, yes! Effective, well, you decide. He caught attention but did not necessarily establish good will between speaker and audience.

The main points of the body of the speech should be limited—two, three, or possibly four points should be sufficient. Organize them into a logical pattern. They should not be constructed in random fashion. One point should lead inevitably into the next one with proper transitions, of course. Finally, be sure to have a conclusion that is brief and that gracefully concludes the speech. Don't give a second speech as a peroration. A brief summary or a short appeal is all that is necessary in most cases.

Language

May I suggest that you choose your language very carefully to express your ideas throughout the speech. Dependence on the cliché or trite expres-

sion shows an absence of resourcefulness that leads to dull speech.

A short time ago I stood where many of you have stood, at the base of a great monument known as the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D. C. Glancing to the side of the great President I re-read the inscribed words of the immortal Gettysburg Address. I marveled once again at the resourceful ideas, structure and language. Had Lincoln presented the prosaic expressions representative of certain contemporaries, his speech would not be revered today. The man put forth an effort. He was resourceful.

It is possible, too, that a speaker's vocabulary is unfamiliar or extremely technical for the listener to comprehend. During the period that I instructed electrical engineers at the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company, I demanded that the language of their speeches be made clear to me, since I was not trained in that field. I made the request that technical terms not be left undefined.

You must be aware continually that you are not talking to experts in your own fields of specialization within your companies. I had a steelworker from the Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation in Cleveland who attempted one night to explain the fantastic basic oxygen furnace in operation there. He spoke the technical language of the steelworker who had spent his life in the mill. His assignment for the following week was to use the same topic and to employ language that was readily comprehensible to the average citizen in the community. It was a difficult assignment for him, but he was able to accomplish it and in the process the class learned something in language usage from that experience.

Rehearse

The next suggestion is to rehearse

your speeches carefully. Every main and minor point should be reiterated several times. Naturally, the language is adjustable and flexible, but certain words and phrases become a part of the speech without any deliberate attempt at memorization. As a matter of fact, speech instructors discourage the memorized speech, but do not discourage rehearsal of the outlined speech as many times as necessary for the speaker to have control of the ideas and the proper sequence of them. When you rehearse the speech, do it on your feet. That is the way you will present it in public. Therefore, set up a realistic situation.

Delivery

Let us move into the area of the presentation of the speech on the platform. All of us have delivery faults. No perfect speech has ever been delivered. Let me offer a few suggestions concerning common faults. Be sure to speak loudly and clearly.

In Berea, Ohio, where I teach, there is a problem when airplanes are coming in for a landing at the Cleveland-Hopkins Airport.

We know, too, that it is hard to hear some speakers at the rear of a large auditorium that is not equipped with a public address system. Even smaller rooms, not acoustically treated, sometimes provide trouble for certain speakers. These, and many others, might be called physical barriers to communication.

How can these barriers of voice and articulation be alleviated or in some cases completely overcome. One procedure that appears to be working effectively is the use of tape recorders in our homes to improve voice and diction. It might be wise for you as public speakers to make greater use of tape recorders. It has been my experience that self-analysis and correction through tape recorders have oc-

curred successfully in a number of cases. The recorders pick up all mistakes in voice and diction and help us to visualize them.

Perhaps the most practical method of improving our voice and articulation is asking friends or members of the family to criticize our efforts in privacy, of course. I am referring to criticizing some of our conversations as well as our speech rehearsals. I find that helpful, too, in improving grammar, word usage, and rapid pacing. I am aware that some of you currently are employing that method of improvement. If you find you need special help from professionals, there are speech instructors who specialize in that area.

Enthusiasm

One of the most important suggestions concerning delivery of the speech is for all of us to be enthusiastic while speaking. I am not talking about the phony, bubbling-over type of enthusiasm. I am referring to proper, restrained animation and alertness on the part of the speaker. There are speakers who do not experience emotions or at least give the impression that they do not. They are indifferent speakers (poker-faced, bored, pseudo-sophisticated). When they limit emotions they establish a hurdle to their communication.

Speakers must experience emotions in order to communicate them to others. As instructors, we encourage improvement in facial expressions and vocal expressions, but practicing facial expression before the mirror or speaking with pebbles in one's oral cavity are not solutions. We must go beyond the physical reactions and be enthusiastic and delighted with our own platform efforts. All listeners share with me the experience of hearing a speaker exclaim: "Let me tell you about an exciting feature of our company" and

not once change his faraway, unimpaired, facial and vocal expressions. We must enjoy what we are saying and that enjoyment must carry over to the audience. I find lack of enthusiasm to be at the root of many bad habits of speech.

Other Suggestions

There are many other suggestions concerning the delivery of the speech and let me list a few of them. An important one is to concentrate on what you have to say. I find that speakers have mental-blackout periods because they are not thinking ahead. Even if you have rehearsed the speech many times, don't depend on the content to flow through the brain without effort. Mental alertness during the speech is vital.

Be sure to speak in a conversational tone of voice. Speaking in public has been called "enlarged conversation." Keep away from dramatic presentation. That form of oratory is outdated.

Use gestures when you feel you need them. Don't make them look artificial by forcing them, but don't hold them back if they are needed or if you wish to relax by taking a step toward your audience, using a hand gesture, or brightening your listeners' day with a smile.

In presenting the speech, you can make some ideas appear more significant than others by emphasizing important words and phrases with your voice in several ways. You may raise the intensity of your voice; you may use greater inflection; or you may speak more slowly than usual and thereby through pacing emphasize the ideas to be expressed.

Finally, you must be critical of your own speech patterns involved in delivery. Your faults might be shared by others to a degree, but they are personal to you because you must correct them. Be hard on yourself. Push

yourselves a little. Great violinists, such as Isaac Stern, drive themselves toward perfection which they never reach, but we must agree that they come very close at times. As speakers we can strive to correct our faults and

become more effective public speakers. Self-analysis is the final step and the most important one. We can advise you, as the writer has done in this article, but only through your efforts can the job be done.

College Placement Computer System Now in Operation

The job-hunting computers of the GRAD system are now in full operation.

Introduced earlier this year by the College Placement Council, GRAD promises to revolutionize the art of job-hunting. The new service utilizes time-sharing computers to match resumes of college-trained job applicants with countless queries received daily from employers in business, industry, and government.

GRAD (meaning Graduate Resume Accumulation and Distribution is the newest service of the College Placement Council, a non-profit organization serving over a thousand college placement offices across the country. The service is offered at no cost to job applicants.

At the GRAD Data Center, thousands of resumes of college graduates are recorded on magnetic storage discs. Employers specify their manpower needs by speedy teletypewriters or by mail. GRAD's computers, capable of scanning thousands of resumes in a matter of seconds, select the most qualified applicants and rush their resumes to employers from coast-to-coast.

Any graduate of an accredited, 4-year college is eligible to fill out the special resumes available at his college placement office. Called GRAD PACKS, the resumes feature 21 key questions that help sketch an applicant profile which the computer uses to find the right man for the right job.

GRAD is simple in operation. The employer dials the computer directly by teletype and gives his code number and manpower requirements. All teletype conversation with the computer is conducted in English. Resumes selected by the computer are sent to the prospective employer and the company contacts the applicant for an interview. From this point on, getting the job is up to the applicant.

For men and women serving in the armed forces, GRAD resumes will be available at base education offices in the United States and overseas. If not, the GRAD PACKS and information about the computerized GRAD service may be obtained by writing directly to the placement office of one's alma mater or to the College Placement Council, 65 E. Elizabeth Avenue, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania 18018.