

A Two-Hour Course In Speaking

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"Mr. Johnson, your topic is 'An Education,' develop it on the Past, Present, Future plan!" Mr. Johnson rises, goes to the lectern, looks his audience over confidently, pauses, then begins. After two minutes the instructor interrupts Mr. Johnson and calls on Mr. Sloan to discuss "A Citizen's Responsibility in a Democracy," arranging his ideas under three sub-topics: Political, Social and Economic.

Is this the final exercise in a thirty or forty hour speech course? No, this is the last of seven exercises Mr. Johnson and his sixteen classmates have experienced in just two hours. Then Mr. Johnson and his classmates must have been accomplished speakers to start with! No again, they are just average adults interested in becoming competent in the public speaking situation. What's the secret then? What's the trick? The secret, the trick, if there is one, is nothing more than a solid two hours of concentrated speech training tailor-made for each class taught; a series of short, meaningful, progressively more difficult exercises aimed at making the participants as skillful in the public speaking situation as they are in face-to-face conversations.

It is impossible to design a single plan of training to suit all groups. It is even impossible to present a single complete

plan here. Nonetheless, the following skeletal account illustrates how a short, even a two-hour period, can produce under competent guidance what instructor and student alike will view as remarkable results.

The first speech made is not really a speech because nothing is spoken. This first exercise is based on the idea that speeches begin before the speaker says his first word. Audiences judge speakers as soon as they get up from their chair. How the speaker rises, walks to the lectern, looks his audience over, and pauses to get his thoughts in order not only gives the audience concrete clues as to the speaker's competency, but at least partially determines his talk's effectiveness.

If the speaker doesn't stand straight, meet his audience's gaze directly, and as soon as possible, get his breathing under control, and think his first idea through before he starts talking, he speaks with less than total effectiveness. It is not enough to lecture the beginning speaker about these things; he must experience them. Although in this first exercise the speaker says nothing, the instructor makes up for this with his comments and instructions, "stand straight, look at us, all of us, that's it, now pause, get your hands around where you can use

them, good, get ready, wait until you have perfect attention, okay, that's fine, next please." The first appearance of the whole class takes five minutes; participants, although they haven't said a word, have already learned something about speaking.

The challenge in the second assignment is to repeat the first exercise but speak just one sentence. Sound too simple? Perhaps, but the success of the whole training session depends on practicing well all preceding challenges as new ones are introduced.

ONE reason people dislike, even hate, speaking in public is that they are overcome with excess physical energy for which they can't find meaningful outlets. The accomplished speaker knows how to release his tensions, the novice must learn how. Hence, throughout any speech training program bodily action, meaningful physical activity, must be stressed, must be practiced and even "overpracticed." How can trainees experience the value of getting active physically early in a talk? By this method: the teacher draws a large rectangle on the board, representing the floor plan of a house, locating just a front and rear door. Each student then goes to the board and draws in what he would want in his own house, it might be a fancy fireplace, a play room, or a screened-in porch. After everyone has drawn something, the instructor leads a short discussion on the values of meaningful bodily action.

Among other benefits, the instructor shows how meaningful, planned gestures dissipate excess nervous energy,

and how by initiating physical movement early, the speaker becomes much more natural in delivery. Physical movements, which usually bother the beginning speaker, are shown necessary, for added emphasis as well as for releasing energy through meaningful channels.

From this point on, an instructional checklist explaining each exercise, its purposes, methods, and crucial features is given to each student. Time restrictions usually prevent full discussion of each exercise, but if the teacher provides this explanation and a checklist enabling each participant to keep a running account of how well the assignment was done, time limitations are less penalizing.

With each exercise the students gain more assurance, more poise in the speaking situation. One or two more exercises are usually all that are needed to solidify this increased assurance, this increased self-confidence. But, poise alone doesn't make an effective speaker. There is much left to do. In fact, so much to do that the teacher must decide, after introductory exercises like those described above, just what his particular group needs practice in.

IF the group needs more practice in the use of bodily action, he asks them to demonstrate the most complex operation or process they know. Sounds formidable at first, but, interesting enough, students have much less trouble meeting this assignment than they do with many which appear less formidable. Class members are cautioned to choose subjects from their own experience, subjects which demand physical movement either to describe the process or emphasize its

complexity or importance. Topics like "Adjusting a Fishing Reel," or "How To Read A Micrometer," work well.

IF the group needs work on starting and ending a talk, and most groups do, an exercise should be designed to fit this need. "Choose any subject you wish, but in every one of the first four sentences mention your audience!" is one way to teach the principle that the effective speaker speaks from his audience's point of view. If time is ample, similar exercises pointed at other speech principles can be devised. Usually groups are eager to discuss each new exercise and the way they performed it, but, because of the time restrictions, the instructor necessarily must cut discussion to the barest minimum. By careful planning, the instructor can arrange the exercise so that the ideas and comments brought to mind by the last exercise are used in the subsequent exercise. Not a completely satisfying experience, but combined with the pass-out check list materials, it adequately meets the group's needs.

Each set of exercises representing successive stages of development must be narrow in purpose yet enable the participants to re-practice what they have already learned.

About the last half-hour of the two-hour training period is reserved for the most complex and difficult set of exercises. Here the student is expected to deliver brief, yet complete speeches.

There are many methods used to organize speeches; they range from the elementary four-term process of Richard Borden to the complicated page-on-page

instruction of the advanced speech texts. Most speeches that the non-professional speaker makes, however, can be organized on the basis of one of the following plans: the Past, Present, Future plan; the Good-Bad plan; the Who, What, Why, Where, When plan; and the Cause-Effect plan.

The problem when one is called on to speak is not to think of a topic because that can be found in the occasion, the surroundings, or the people in attendance. The problem really is a problem of getting started, because once the speaker gets started, it seems the ideas will flow as well as they do in everyday conversations. Knowing key words like the above gives the novice speaker confidence that he can speak more than just a line or two. Once he gains this confidence, he usually finds that it is a problem of selecting what he wishes to say, not thinking of what to say. But this must be demonstrated, and the laboratory-like situation that a speech class provides is the best place.

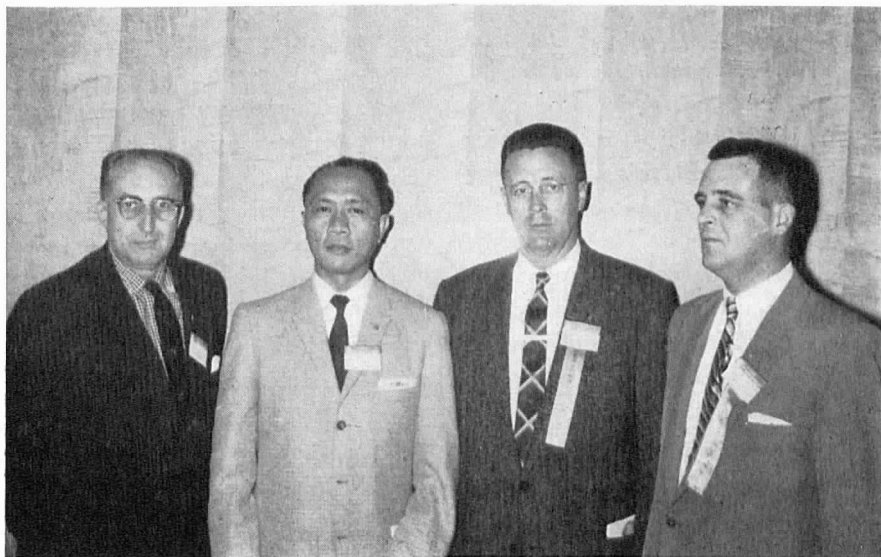
THE goal of any public speaking course is to train the participants to think as fluently, and as straight, and talk as effectively, as they do in the everyday situations where they feel entirely at ease. What prevents this? Two things: the fear of speaking longer than usual and the fear of speaking to many rather than to a few.

Any training program to make people better speakers must be designed around exercises which will build skills in these two areas. The above program is designed for this very purpose. Admittedly, it will not work equally well for all

groups, but it can be changed and implemented without too much trouble. No matter how the exercises are selected or the class discussion conducted, the following rules or principles should be observed.

First, the class must at once be brought along according to the ability of the slowest member yet never inhibiting the progress of the faster members. Two, each succeeding exercise must be more difficult than the preceding. Three, each exercise must not only have its own specific goals but must also give the opportunity of practicing the specific goals

of the preceding exercise. Four, each specific goal must be introduced clearly, and, if desirable, with written instructions or check-lists which participants mark while listening to the rest of the class. Five, in any speech class, the students spend at least ten times as much time listening as they do speaking. In a short training period like the one described here it is even more important than usual to make this listening period a productive learning situation. Six, the student must never be challenged beyond his capacity; if a risk be taken it must be the risk of going too slow.



Another international ASTD link may develop through a chapter in the Philippines. Dr. Hernani P. Esteban, of Manila (second from left) discussed the organization of a new chapter at the Fort Worth Conference with Cloyd Steinmetz, Chairman of Chapter Promotion Committee; "Win" Crawford, Vice President, Region V; and "Drew" Daly, ASTD President.