

From...

The Public Relations Practitioner's Playbook
A Synergized Approach to Effective Two-Way Communication*

By M. Larry Litwin

(The whole works better than any one of its parts) © 2003

Researching, Writing and Delivering Effective Speeches

So, you have to prepare a speech for an executive in your firm or organization. What should a public relations practitioner do to guarantee the speech won't disappoint the audience?

Opinion surveys continue to reveal that public speaking is the number one human fear – even more than death. In fact, at least one poll shows twice as many people were more afraid of speaking in public than of dying.

Are you up to meeting the challenge of researching and preparing a speech that effectively communicates the intended message by hitting the bull's eye or will it be uninspiring and miss the mark?

Communications trainer, Steve Adubato says superior public speaking skills are learned. He and such others as television executive, Roger Ailes and his associate, Jon Kraushar earn their livings evaluating people and working with them to overcome their fears, build confidence and develop a “can-do” attitude.

Organization is crucial. Most speeches have three parts: an introduction, body and conclusion. Start by explaining to the audience what your message will be, deliver the message and conclude by reminding them of the two or three major points they were just told.

One of your challenges as the organization's communication specialist is that you are probably writing the speech (personalizing it) for someone other than yourself.

Therefore it takes another one of those step-by-step plans that public relations practitioners prepare for such situations.

Ingredients of a Successful Speech

- What message do we want to get across (communicate)?
- Who is our audience?
 - Why are they here (did they choose to attend or were they forced)?
 - What are the demographics?
 - Are they expecting a particular topic?
 - Are there any subjects to avoid (be politically correct)?
- What type of speech are “we” going to deliver? (Will it inform, entertain, inspire or all three?)
 - Informative – offering information that can be easily understood by the audience.
 - Persuasive (or promotional) – attempts to convince an audience of an idea, an action or support for a person.
 - Goodwill – leaves listeners feeling good about company, organization, topic or product and it helps to build audience confidence. Uses numerous positive examples.
 - Entertaining – intended to entertain by giving the audience a pleasant experience while communicating your organization’s message.
 - Technical – goes beyond basic information. It might need visuals to support oral presentation.

- Brief remarks – might be welcoming remarks, thank yous or words of acceptance.
- Where is our speaker on the agenda?
 - Is he first, middle, last or the only speaker?
 - Will the audience still be listening when it is our turn to speak?
- Now it is time to sit down with the person actually giving the speech (the person you are writing for). Interview him or her.
- Research
 - Listen to previous speeches.
- Speech itself (style is important).
 - Put yourself in the deliverer's shoes.
 - Get a feel for the audience and localize the message to meet its needs (it doesn't hurt to flatter or play to the audience).
 - Establish the speech with some light humor early. (More may be interspersed throughout body of the speech, as well.)
 - Humor:
 - Creates interest.
 - Makes speaker appear more human.
 - Must be relevant.
 - Should help reinforce a point rather than confuse it or interrupt the train of thought.
 - Should be in good taste and politically correct (know your audience).

- Should be current.
- Establish subject matter (Introduction).
- Be a namedropper of local people known by many.
- Go deeper into subject matter (Body).
- Stress the points that must be made.
 - Use real-life situations or experiences to stress some points.
 - Use some more light humor, but don't belittle subject matter.
- Intersperse simple and complex sentences – long and short sentences.
- Choose the “right” words.
- Speak to communicate not to impress.
 - Use easy to understand words.
 - Avoid jargon (unless research indicates that is what the audience expects – usually in technical speeches).
 - Repetition – don't be afraid of repeating to stress some points.
 - Identify with the audience by using “we,” “our,” “us.”
 - When using statistics, keep them simple and use visuals.

The ear cannot process as quickly without the assistance of visuals.

- Use only to enhance the speech.
- Be certain of effectiveness.

- Must be easily seen and read by audience
(sometimes difficult with large audiences).
- Use bullets to make visual information more organized.
- Today's speeches are interactive – short bites, flip charts, Q&A, etc.
- Wind down.
- This is the homestretch (Conclusion).
 - Summarize, by stressing those main points the audience should remember most. In other words, bring the audience back – much as radio and television news writers do. Some refer to this as a “tie back” to the introduction.
 - Rephrase the statement of purpose.
 - Give the audience a challenge, a plan of action or something specific they can do.
- End on a very positive UP note.

As part of the training and preparation for giving the speech, which should include using video, have the speech giver practice eye contact with someone or several people in the audience. Many people have difficulty focusing on others. If (your) speaker can't look someone directly in the eye, use the practice of focusing on one's nose or chin. When delivering a speech, by selecting one or two people to look at in each section of the room, it communicates to the audience that the speech giver is talking directly to each of them.

Former KYW-TV magazine host, Ray Murray once said, “Television is about a single viewer. The producer (or host) and viewer have a direct relationship.” Much the same can be said for the person who delivers the successful speech. Look back at Presidents Clinton, Reagan and Kennedy. Each has been dubbed a “great communicator” because they possessed the special ability to engage viewers in what some thought was a one on one conversation.

“Most of the time, public speaking is a learned skill which people are trained to do well,” says Aduvato. It requires what he calls the three Ps: preparation, practice and a positive “can-do” attitude.

PR Play 11-1

“Television is one on one. It’s just you and me, my friend.”

Fred Rogers (Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood).

Rowan University graduate students Melissa Connell and Joseph White have compiled some basic considerations once the decision has been made to prepare a speech:

- Show your pearly whites
 - Typically, a smile deems the speaker intelligent and confident.
 - A smile indicates warmth and compassion.
- Eye contact
 - Speaker should focus on individuals, not the audience as a whole.
 - Implies speaker respects audience and views them as individuals.
 - Allows presenter to read the audience's reaction.

- Have a course of action
 - Know what action the speaker wants the audience to take as a result of the speech.
 - Using examples to stress a point is good, but be careful of going off on tangents that could cause a loss in focus.
- Be honest
 - Audiences forgive almost anything if the speaker conveys sincerity, frankness and an obvious interest in the topic.
 - Don't force the audience to relate to the topic.
 - Effective speakers develop their own style.
- Watch the "ahs", "likes ", "ums" and "you knows"
 - Avoid "space-fillers" or voice detractors that do nothing but distract from the speech.
- Avoid aggravating mannerisms
 - Speakers shouldn't "play" with glasses, tap a pencil, scratch their head, adjust their clothing, wobble from side to side or "play" with change in their pocket.
- Homework (research, research, research)
 - Know the audience's background and interests.
 - Preparation communicates sincerity, enthusiasm and confidence.
- Examine the physical setting (could be included with the above)

- Make it a point to visit the actual room in which the speech will be given to become familiar with its layout, sound system and other equipment, etc.
- Gives the opportunity to request changes if necessary.

Presenting the Speech

Memorizing the speech

- Only for those who are comfortable doing so.
- Not necessarily recommended.
- Could take too much time.
- Risky for the inexperienced.

Reading the speech

- Could be boring.

Using note cards

- Good compromise for many presentations.
- Serve as physical and psychological crutch.
- Demonstrates speaker has done his or her homework.
- Speaker is able to maintain eye contact.

The very best speakers memorize their “script” or use bulleted talking points. But they are the minority. That means most will use 8 ½ x 11 sheets of paper or index cards.

Here are a few musts:

- Never use staples to keep speech together. If staples are used, remove them before beginning the speech. Carrying the speech in a folder or

loose-leaf book is acceptable. But try turning the pages inconspicuously. Do not to allow the sheets to make noise as the pages are turned.

- Number the pages whether using full sheets or note cards. (What could be worse than a speech that is dropped or whose pages are out of order?)
- Use larger type. It is much easier to read. It makes no difference to the audience whether the speech is 10 pages or 20 or 100 note cards rather than 50. They do care that it doesn't run too long (20 minutes is a good goal), that the speaker is convincing about the topic and that it is a pleasant experience for all involved (not boring).

PR Play 11-2

Mayo Clinic

Public speaking is many people's number one fear: But the Mayo Clinic HealthQuest newsletter offers easy steps to ease the jitters.

- Determine whom your audience is and what you want to say to them.
- Research your topic and find out what people want to know about it.
- Outline what you want to say.
- Practice your presentation – in the room where you will be giving the speech, if possible. Tape the rehearsal and play it back.
- Shortly before your presentation, make sure the equipment and props are ready.

- Take a short, brisk walk before your presentation. Breathe deeply and slowly. Drink water.
 - Have confidence you will do well.
-

Political consultants James Carville and Mary Matalin, are married to each other, although Carville advises Democrats and Matalin, Republicans. While their political philosophies differ, their approach is the same. As mentioned in Chapter 6 - You, Too, Can Conduct Successful Campaigns, they suggest, “Speakers must be optimistic and communicate a passion for their topic.”

Each issue should be approached in three segments:

- Set up
- Conflict
- Resolution

They suggest some points to keep in mind while delivering the speech (message):

- Simplicity
- Relevance (can audience relate?)
- Repetition (keep hammering away)

PR Play 11-3

Examples of *S-R-R* messages are:

**“Do unto others
as you’d have them
do unto you.”**

The Golden Rule

**“You can pick your friends,
but not your family.”**

**“You can’t judge a book
by its cover.”**

PR Play 11-4

**Communicating
With Older People**

Communicating with older people often requires extra time and patience because of physical, psychological and social changes.

Some suggestions:

- Reduce background noises.
- Talk about familiar subjects.
- Keep your sentences short.
- Give the person a chance to reminisce.
- Allow extra time for a response.

Television executive, Roger Ailes offers these four essentials of a great communicator: Be prepared, make others comfortable, be committed and be interesting. He suggests, "You will get what you want by being who you are."

In Closing

The effective speaker will communicate to an audience he knows his topic as well as he knows his own name. If you are the public relations practitioner and your speaker leaves that impression, you have "hit a home run." It is a wonderful feeling.

SPEECH EVALUATION FORM

Speaker's Name _____

Evaluator's Name or Code No. _____

PART 1: THE SPEAKER (circle the appropriate number)

- | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------------|---|---|---|------------------|
| 1. Eye contact: | 1
poor | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
effective |
| 2. Voice: | 1
monotonous | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
varied |
| 3. Posture: | 1
poor | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
natural |
| 4. Gestures: | 1
disturbing | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
appropriate |
| 5. Self-confidence: | 1
nervous | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
poised |

PART II: THE SPEECH (circle the appropriate number.)

A. Overall performance

1. Speaker's knowledge of the subject – carefully researched; factual errors; missing details:

[illegible]

- 2.** The speaker's language – too technical; filled with clichés or slang expressions; or crisp and descriptive:

[illegible]

3. Use of visuals – too many or too few; well placed; appropriate size; handled with care; interfered with speech:

1	2	3	4	5
poor				superior

B. Parts of the speech

1. The introduction – brief and attention getting; informative about topic:

1 2 3 4 5
poor superior

2. The body – carefully organized and easy to follow; appropriate amount of information; message developed and conveyed clearly:

[illegible]

- 3. The conclusion** – brief, effective summary of the main points:

1 2 3 4 5

poor

superior

PART III: YOUR FINAL REACTIONS (briefly complete the following)

1. The speaker's main strengths were:
2. The speaker needs to improve on: