

SPEAKING IN PUBLIC

Throughout the middle ages, the curriculum at our ancient universities included “The Liberal Arts” which consisted of Logic (what we would recognise as mathematics); Grammar and Rhetoric (the art of putting forward an argued point of view). In some shape or form, these continued to be taught at universities until the 1940s although from Victorian times, rhetoric was more about perceived (correct) pronunciation.

Aristotle famously wrote a book on Rhetoric in the 4th Century BC; sometime between 335 BC and his death in 322 BC. His primary arguments are: ethos, pathos and logos. For him, ethos was about the character and credibility of a speaker. This, he suggests, is vital if an audience is to consider a speaker to be believable. Pathos is the ability, through metaphor, amplification or storytelling, of presenting the topic in a way that evokes strong emotions in the audience. Logos, (Logic) is the use of statistics, math, logic, or objectivity to support an argument. For instance, when advertisements claim that their product is *37% more effective than that of a leading competitor*, they are making a logical argument.

The Victorian change in rhetoric from being less about what you say to more about how you say it resonates today; the human voice is one of the most characteristic features of our personality. It can be quite unsettling hearing yourself speak when reviewing a recording – your recorded voice sounds nothing like how you hear your own voice. Actually it is the same, someone who knows you will not discern any difference between you and your recording; because we also hear through the vibrations created in our head as we speak, we hear ourselves very differently from others. Everyday, as we go about our daily lives we will hear voices that cover a wide spectrum from pleasant (I could listen to this person for ages) to grating (get me away from this person as soon as possible). Consequently we closely associate personal and voice characteristics and will recall voices much quicker than we can recall faces. Work on your speaking voice – speak through your throat and not through your nose.

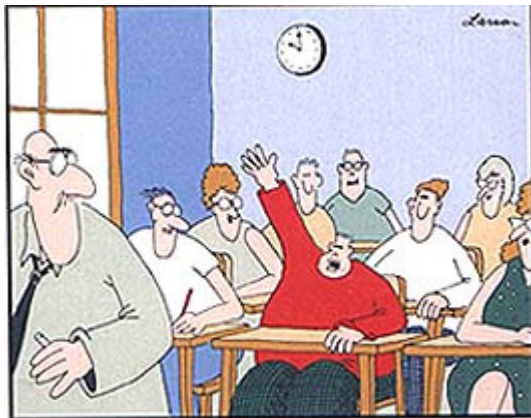
SOME SIMPLE RULES

Rule 1 – Prepare – Prepare – Prepare. You can never prepare enough; even if you suddenly find out you’re going to have to speak in only a few minutes time, you can still find a moment to prepare. Preparation needs to cover 3 things; **Where – What – How**. In a perfect world we’ll have chance to visit the venue and check out the facilities – do I need to bring a lap-top? Or will there be one there and actually all I need is a zip drive containing all the materials I’m likely to use. Then work out what it is you want to say – if time allows, have a run through with the material you intend to use – standing in front of the mirror in the toilet just checking how you look as you go over key points will pay dividends. Finally, how are you going to deliver your message? Are you going to speak to notes on a flip chart (are there enough sheets and do the pens work?) or a PowerPoint presentation (will they need copies?) or may be just speak to a set of notes?

Rule 2 – Never Apologise - I once heard a senior manager start a presentation by apologising because he did not know he was supposed to speak. He told us he was using material he had used before and had not had time to review it. Then he proceeded to deliver a brilliant and entertaining presentation on the issues faced by his business team. If he had not apologized, we would never have known he was unprepared and would simply have appreciated the fine job he did. The moral of

this story: **never apologise** when delivering a presentation. If technology fails or something gets in the way of the audience understanding you then a simple 'sorry' plus a promise to do your best is fine. Thus If you have, for example a sore throat, it is fine to say, "I'm sorry if my voice is hard to understand, but I'll do the best I can." Eliminating statements of apology is one of the earliest points you learn. Certainly never apologise for mistakes made by others, when you do, you are making the person responsible for these things look bad in front of his or her peers. Ignore these elements and move on. Perhaps no one will know the difference if you don't point it out.

Rule 3 – Less is better – Once, my 10 year-old daughter asked my wife a question relating to her homework history. "Ask your dad" was the advice she got, to which she replied "But, I don't want that much information!" There is only so much information the average person can take in at any one time.



"Mr. Osborne, may I be excused?
My brain is full."

There is research which suggests that after 15 minutes, audience attention starts to fall off rapidly and is not sustained after 25 minutes. Never speak continuously on a single topic area for more than 5 minutes. **Never read anything 'word-or-word' on a PP Slide or a flip chart.** Use PP animations with care, they need to add not detract from the message you want to get across.

Rule 4 – Write Up a Flip Chart in Advance – Prepare any flip charts you need in advance, fold them over the top of the easel so you can just flip them over when you need them. Prepare (that word again) a draft using a sheet of A4 to get an idea of proportion and layout; remembering Rule 3 two well laid out flips are better than one 'busy' flip. If you need to record responses – set it out in pencil beforehand; especially if you are likely to have any words which have spelling horrors for you.

Rule 5 – Speak how you speak NOT how you write – We speak and write very differently, always speak from notes and never from a script. Churchill's famous "**We Shall Fight on the Beaches**" is a common title given to a speech delivered by Winston Churchill to the House of Commons on June 4, 1940. This was the second of three major speeches given during (roughly) the period of the Battle of France, with the others designated as the "*Blood, toil, tears, and sweat*" speech of May 13th, and the "*This was their finest hour*" speech of June 18th. The speech itself lasts for a fraction over 25 minutes (it wasn't recorded at the time – Churchill recorded it later using his notes and the official record (Hansard). The final paragraph of his speech went as follows:

We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this Island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.

If this had been written using accepted rules of grammar it is likely that it may well have been written down as follows:

We shall go on to the end. We will fight in France, on the seas and oceans, along with growing confidence and strength in the air. We shall defend our Island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, landing grounds, in the fields, streets and in the hills. We shall never surrender. If, this Island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.

Does not quite have the same effect, does it?

Rule 6 – Its fine to feel nervous – In fact if you don't feel nervous it is likely that you are over confident and will either miss bits or fail to build rapport (pathos) with your audience, who probably want you to succeed rather than fail.

Rule 7 – Comedy is for comedians – It is very difficult to successfully inject comedy into a business presentation, so try hard to resist any attempt to become a Michael McIntyre or a David Mitchell. If you must, then try something short and self deprecating. For example, I've seen presenters begin their talks by saying "What lies at the bottom of the ocean and shakes all over?" Answer: a nervous wreck! This is a very endearing strategy that also helps relieve any speaking anxiety you have.

Rule 8 – Allow time for Questions – It can be tempting to take questions as you go, but this can through out your timings such that you overrun and end up ditching material. Better to make it clear that you'll welcome questions at the end. If you do get a question and you don't want to answer it, then simply acknowledge the question and promise that you'll to come back to it.

Rule 9 – Use Sign Posts – It sometimes helps to set out clearly at the beginning of your session what you are going to cover (or not cover in some situations) before you start on the bulk of your material. Then at the end of your session, give a short summary; this may in turn help generate some questions. There is an old adage: Tell them what you're going to tell them – Tell them – Tell them what you told them.