

Five Sure-Fire Tips for Great Speeches

Written by Patricia Fripp

1. Come out punching!

Grab your audience's attention. One way is to make a startling statement. For a recent speech to the National Speakers Association, I walked out and immediately started building a word picture: "Columbus, Ohio, December, zero degrees, 2,000 people trudging through the snow to hear four speakers..."

Don't waste your audience's time with trivialities. I heard a speaker addressing a San Francisco Sales and Marketing Executives audience, starting with how nice it was to be there, how great the weather was, and how he loves our restaurants. Who cares? I didn't race across town to hear him talk about weather and restaurants. I was there to hear about sales and marketing ideas and he was supposed to be an expert.

2. Monitor your "who cares?" factor

Tape your talks, then listen to them, asking "Who cares?" after every statement or segment of material. If no one really does, don't say it. This is a great way to see if you are saying anything of value.

3. Be funny... maybe

Humor can add a lot to your speech, but it must fit you and your topic. If humor is appropriate to your topic, use it, but go for laughs that grow naturally out of your content. Avoid old, tired jokes that may not be appropriate, or that everyone has heard before.

A friend from AT&T called me late one evening. "My boss is giving a speech tomorrow. He needs a joke."

"Is your boss funny?" I asked.

"Well...not really," he replied.

"Then don't try to make him funny," I said. "Get him to be inspiring." I looked through my reference books and found quotes that fit the speaker's points much better than any joke could.

If you decide to risk humor, ask yourself and others, "...but am I really funny?" Be brutally honest.

4. Organize with a three-part outline

A good way for both beginning and advanced speakers to organize their material is to use the three-part Alcoholics Anonymous format:

1. This is where I was.
2. This is where I am now.
3. This is how I got from there to here.

It is a great structure because it is so easy for both speaker and audience to remember. A woman in Yuma, Arizona called me. "I have to give my first speech in three weeks," she said. "Would you send me one of your tapes so I can learn how to do it."

"It doesn't work quite like that," I told her, "but tell me, what group are you addressing?"

"The Yuma Board of Realtors." she said.

"Why have they invited you to speak?" I asked.

"Because I have been very successful in the real estate industry."

So I suggested she use the three-part Alcoholics Anonymous outline. (The first two points can be reversed.)

1. This is where I am: "Last year I sold \$18 million dollars in real estate in a slow market.
2. This is where I was: Eight years ago when I got my license, I had never sold anything but Girl Scout cookies.
3. This is how I got here: "First I..."
4. Develop your content

Content I suggested:

- Advice from her sales manager that worked,
- What she learned from other agents,
- What she did well naturally,
- What she did not know that amazed her once she had learned,
- Sales she fell into,
- Sales she almost lost,

- Sales that were out of the unusual,
- What she would do differently based her 8 years experience,
- Anything really entertaining.

I also suggested she keep a pad on her desk and as ideas came to her she jotted them down. Then, when it came time to sit down and put it all together, it was fine if she lacked some creativity as most of her ideas were written down.

She used the structure and reported later that the talk was a big hit.

Even if you add more sections to your speech, keep your outline simple. You'll remember what you intend to say, and your audience will remember what they heard.



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