

The Most Important Part of a Speech

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The most important part of the speech is also one of the most neglected parts of the speech. You can improve your storytelling, establish interesting conflicts, make fascinating points, sell them with the push, pull, and passion approach, and use all of the nuts & bolts suggested in future newsletters, and yet you will fail to be effective if you do not put into practice the most important part of the speech. Let's look at it in detail.

When I give a 45-minute workshop on the art of public speaking, I usually open by thanking my introducer and making a comment such as, *"That was a great introduction. It was fabulous. It was...just how I wrote it!"* This gets a laugh. Then I go into a self-deprecating humorous story about a terrible public speaking experience I had in which I failed miserably. Then I have the audience do a very quick 15-second activity while standing. Then they sit. After I have spoken for about 4 minutes, I ask the audience, *"Have I made any points yet?"* They think about it for a second and answer, *"No!"* *"Why not?"* I ask. Someone will eventually say, *"You were building rapport!"* *"Absolutely!"*

I then explain that it is extremely difficult to give people advice without first knowing them. Therefore, it is critical to use what I call **get-to-know-you-time**. This is the time you take at the very beginning of your speech to simply get to know the audience and let them get to know you. I am sure that you would not go up to a stranger on the street tomorrow, stop him in his tracks and say, *"You know...you should really start setting some goals in your life!"* That person would call the cops on you! Well, audiences are similar when you do not spend any get-to-know-you time with them. If you dive immediately into your points, the audience will ask themselves, *"Who does he think he is?"* Or, *"She doesn't even know me at all so why is she bombarding me with suggestions?"*

The way to avoid this is by developing some material for the get-to-know-you time and using it for approximately the first 5-10% of your speech. In a 45-minute speech I may use the first 3-5 minutes for the rapport building. What should you do during this time? That is completely up to you, but the one thing you should not do is make any significant points. It's not the time for that yet. This time is simply used for one thing . to connect! I call it the most important part of the speech because

If you do not connect up front, your audience will not be around (mentally or sometimes physically) for the remainder of your speech no matter how powerful it may be.

Here are some suggestions for things you can do during these first few make-or-break-your-speech moments:

- Give thanks to the people who brought you in to speak and mention them by name.

- Talk about something interesting that happened on the way to the engagement (perhaps while traveling).
- Share something funny that one of the participants said to you and call them by name to make a greater connection.
- Share a humorous (self-deprecating) story without attaching a point to it. This works great because your humility will attract the audience to you.
- Speak about the city or even the specific location of the event.
- Do a very quick activity (15-30 seconds) that involves them in some kind of physical movement such as crossing their arms and then re-crossing them with the opposite arm on top. These types of activities work because they make a kinesthetic connection with the audience.
- If the group's energy is already sky high, go ahead and do a call and response, or at least ask them how they are doing and possibly put your hand to your ear so that they will respond verbally.
- Mention something positive about the speakers who spoke before you, if there were any speakers
- Do whatever builds a connection without making any points.

Why is this so important? Check out the Aristotle quote:

Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself.

~ Aristotle

Aristotle wrote, way back around 350 BC, about the importance of putting the audience into a certain frame of mind. The get-to-know-you time empowers you to put the audience into a certain frame of mind while establishing a solid connection with them.



Craig Valentine is the 1999 World Champion of Public Speaking. Do you want to increase your number of speaking opportunities, maximize each engagement, and become a speaker in high demand? Great! Visit www.craigvalentine.com and receive the information you need to make that happen. Sign up for Craig's newsletter TODAY and receive audio lessons that will help you keep your next audience on the edge of their seats!