

How to Stand Out from the Herd and Be Heard.

What makes the difference between an average presentation and one that rocks your world? What makes the difference between a memorable speech and one that fades into oblivion as soon as the presenter steps off the stage? The answer sits in four building blocks that are essential for crafting a speech into a work of art rather than hum-drum blather.

Building Block Number One: Add context to your content.

Every word we utter, every gesture we make take its nuance and meaning from the context of the moment. Consider context to be the background or the stage setting for what is being spoken. Small wonder that Congress recoiled with the Big Three Automakers arrived in individual corporate jets to ask for money. The context made their mode of travel ludicrous.

If Astronaut Neil Armstrong had said, "One small step for a man; one giant leap for mankind" while standing on the 16th hole of Pebble Beach with a #3 wood in his hand, that statement would have been destined for locker room chatter rather than heard as a defining moment in placing the U.S. on the moon. Context is everything.

While this is a rather silly scenario, speakers face an audience with a background that brings them together. To connect with an audience, a speaker must state the context for the gathering, the context for the message. If President Obama had failed to summarize the concern, anger, and frustration of the average American as a preamble to his major addresses given during the long election process, he might very well have never been chosen to lead this nation. When a speaker sets the stage by providing a context for his words, the audience settles in to listen, believing "Ah. He understands what I am going through."

Often, the speaker can put into words what the audience has been experiencing yet is unable-for political or personal reasons-to express. In one keynote address, I summarized the anxiety and uncertainty the group faced with an unprecedented spinoff. Being able to put a humorous twist by way of an analogy also got the group laughing and nodding. Now, we can get down to business!

Building Block Number Two: Remember facts tell but emotion sells.

Statistics, flow charts, and diagrams belong in handouts. What brings data to life is the emotion behind the information. If Martin Luther King had given his "I have a dream speech" but recited all the facts and figures behind segregation, the audience would have gone to sleep. Instead, he painted a picture and portrayed his own emotion about seeing races sitting beside each other. You saw and felt his intensity.

If you think this only belongs in political or religious arenas, think again. Rita Davenport, president of one of the most profitable direct sales organizations in the world, Arbonne, never addresses her audience in terms of dollars and cents. She talks about individuals and what happened in their lives as a result of having their own business. I've watched this petite and very funny woman bring crowds to their feet because she captured the emotion of success-not the facts.

Imagine the buy-in when an executive stands up, relays her story about what it is like to be a female executive in an 98% male organization. Facts about organizational life? Yes. But also plenty of emotion that captures the attention of everyone at the conference. Big stuff.

Building Block Number Three: Share what's behind the curtain.

In The Wizard of Oz, the little wizard created a persona that was basically a sham. He projected a larger-than-life image on a curtain that both awed and scared the folks in the Emerald City.

He thought that in order to lead others, he had to be something he was not. In the end, the curtain was pulled away and we saw him manipulating an image of himself. In truth, by ripping aside the curtain, the wizard turned out to be a wise man with keen powers of observation and the "audience" of Dorothy and her friends ended up listening to him.

What was an incident of fiction is exactly what Pine and Gilmore, authors of The Authentic Economy, insist is the exactly what consumers and employees are looking for: authentic people! We're tired of phony baloneys. We're tired of slick and silly. We're tired of speakers who act as if they have all the answers and then behave off stage in a manner totally opposite to their presentation. We are hungry for REAL people.

If a presenter can build in personal examples of failure and success, or emotional high and lows-as fitting the topic-the audience also relaxes into a listening mode. One of the best-and shortest speeches-I ever heard would have had 300 people up in a standing ovation were it not for the fact we were held fast by seatbelts.

United Flight 1180 left Denver for New Orleans. Denver was snowbound. De-icing was easy. New Orleans --- another matter as huge thunderstorms kept rolling in from the Gulf of Mexico. Diversion after diversion. All the while, the pilot kept us updated on our progress. We learned that he had been a pilot in Vietnam.

And when he finally announced after many futile attempts to land, "I am an old pilot. Not a bold pilot," the cabin erupted in cheers. He shared what was behind the curtain and in the end, we knew he didn't like the situation any more than we did.

Building Block Number Four: Practice storytelling instead of telling.

"Man cannot live without story any more than he can live without bread." - Dr. Warren Bennis

Since ancient times when humanity gathered around a fire ring, painted on cave walls, marked tombs, or wrote on hides and papyrus, we've been enamored by the stories these drawings tell. The drawings captured what our ear can no longer hear. All of human history has, at some point, been summarized through stories that reveal everything from creation mythology to Biblical lessons to exploits in outer space.

We just plain love story. We like detail, action, and words that **SHOW** us what happens rather than **TELLS** us what happens. In coaching executives for presentations, our challenge is to constantly ask, "What story would show this point?" When I want to make a point about the potential downfall of knee jerk reactions, I tell the story (and act out) cutting down the **WRONG** fire alarm from the ceiling. I wiped out a perfectly good piece of equipment because I did not stop to **THINK!**

That story captures the imagination, makes the point, and becomes memorable because it also shares what's behind the curtain. We've all made the too-fast-dumb move. So now, we also have an emotional response as well!

By incorporating these four building blocks into a presentation, you'll not only be heard but remembered. This makes you stand out from the herd. And that's no bull!