

Incredible Speech Topics

Mr. Churchill's American Mentor



viewpoint

BUILDING A BETTER WORLD

"...the building of a better world, through the building of a better society, is made up of individuals who must act in groups." RALPH SMEDLEY

ver the past year, my messages have emphasized basic operating principles for our clubs. Not my principles, but the principles expounded by Dr. Smedley. We all like to think we can add to and improve a basic concept, and to some extent, we can. Yet, I believe his basic concept of a dynamic Toastmasters club is as valid today as it was in 1924 to the very first Toastmasters club in Santa Ana, California.

Dr. Smedley did not envision an international organization. He started at the local level, bringing people together to develop skills in the art of communication. His concept was simple: give speeches and receive feedback. As with all organizations, a basic concept becomes more and more complicated. This year, I have tried to get "Back to the Basics" - by

focusing on the club and the building of dynamic club environments.

At the beginning of the year, I asked each member to join me by taking one club and making it into a dynamic club. In my visits across the country, time and time again, I heard the positive results of this effort, which has reinforced my belief that "Dynamic Clubs Deliver..."

In my messages, I have emphasized the following values from Dr. Smedley's article "The Toastmasters Club...its meaning and values":

- "Education is our business." This basic fact cannot be ignored. Our clubs were formed on the principle of learning by doing. The operational tenets of these clubs must be, as Dr. Smedley envisioned: "Keep it simple."
 - "Toastmasters is a do-it-yourself activity."
- "Toastmasters is based on belief in the individual."
- "We learn in moments of enjoyment."

We know that our leaders are obligated to help every member of every club gain what he or she needs, and that training for this task is indispensable. Toastmasters from dynamic clubs are satisfied with their membership, enabling all members to develop their communication skills and apply these skills in their workplaces, families and social affairs. We also discovered that Dr. Smedley was right - member satisfaction is the key to retention. If we follow these principles, we will have dynamic clubs.

Why dynamic clubs? Dynamic clubs deliver member satisfaction. Dynamic clubs deliver enthusiastic Toastmasters. Dynamic clubs deliver changed human beings.

The success of the organization depends on our focus, our emphasis and our actions in building new clubs and, more importantly, developing club environments that bring out the best in each of us.

Thus, dynamic clubs deliver members who think clearly, listen attentively and speak effectively so that their messages can be used to build a better world.

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BENNIE E. BOUGH. DTM International President

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INDEX AVAILABLE

Are you preparing a speech and wishing you could remember which issue of the Toastmaster contained related information? Now you can find out.

I have a user-friendly index covering all the articles printed January 1980 through July 1993, and it's updated monthly. The index lists each article by topic and sub-topic, with a reference to the year. month, page number and author. If you don't have your copy of the referenced magazine, I can provide you with photocopied articles. The only cost involved is for postage, printing and any related telephone calls or facsimile transmissions.

If you want further information, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to:

491 Tall Ship Drive, Unit #226 Salem, South Carolina 29676-9207 Phone #: (803) 944-1366 FAX: (803) 944-2028 CARL W. MILLER, DTM INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR 1986-88

BETTER LATE THAN NEVER

I have just completed my first Toastmasters manual and I'm very excited to know that I am now a "Competent Toastmaster." If only I had listened to a co-worker 15 years ago, when he urged me to come with him to a Toastmasters meeting. I regret the wonderful opportunities I've missed by not joining sooner.

The My Turn article, "Homemakers and Toastmasters: A Perfect Match" (May 1993) is a long-awaited message for people like me who always thought Toastmasters clubs were for professional people only.

I have been a secretary most of my life, and although I consider myself a "professional" and have arranged many meetings. I never imagined being the speaker at any of those meetings. As much as I wanted to join a Toastmasters club, it never occurred to me that I would qualify. because I thought membership was for qualified professional speakers only. I enjoyed this article very much, and will circulate it to my friends who still believe that Toastmasters International is only for professionals in the speaking field.

Now that I've joined, I've feel good about being able to speak my mind. My fellow Toastmasters made me realize that I do, in fact, have something to contribute. Lately, I've even broken one of our societal rules – that of not speaking to anyone while riding in elevators. Thank you Toastmasters for being there! URSULA PILATO, CTM MOON LIGHTERS CLUB 6319-16

MOON LIGHTERS CLUB 6319-16 MIDWEST CITY, OKLAHOMA

MEN ARE HOMEMAKERS, TOO

I was disappointed in the article "Homemakers and Toastmasters: A Perfect Match" because the author completely ignored male homemakers. Believe it or not, there are men who have been full-time homemakers for years! The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics in March 1992 reported that 521,000 two-parent families had a working mother and an unemployed father. Also, a Grey Advertising study found that the father is the primary homemaker/caretaker in one out of every six households. There's even a bi-monthly journal called *Full-Time Dads*.

Since Ms. Orr is concerned about homemakers and selfesteem, she ought to be an ally of full-time fathers. Homemakers have self-esteem problems mainly because household management is viewed by society as "women's work." I look forward to the day when fulltime homemakers returning to the work force will be treated with the same honor as the American soldiers coming back from World War II. However, that will not happen until authors like Tamra Orr stop assuming househusbands don't exist.

JOANNE CALLEHAN, CTM RICHARDSON EVENING CLUB 2690-25 RICHARDSON, TEXAS

NO NEED FOR MAKEUP

I've been a Toastmaster for almost two years, and I recently earned my CTM. Like so many members, I wish I had joined earlier.

With so many women involved in Toastmasters, I feel they are underrepresented in the educational manuals. For example, *Gestures: Your Body Speaks* contains a section called "Advice from the Experts" that includes five men and only one woman, Suzy Sutton. All offer useful information, but I do not like Ms. Sutton's remark, "For a woman, eye makeup is a must." I never wear makeup, and although I readily have made many changes in the interest of becoming a better speaker, this is one aspect I don't want to change. How does makeup affect my abilities as a speaker? And if eye makeup is "a must" for women, why not for men? (I do understand the need for makeup in television appearances – for both men and women).

Ms. Sutton also advises against wearing glasses, yet two of the male experts, Cavett Robert and Zig Ziglar, are pictured wearing glasses while speaking. Stereotypes like these do not belong in our organization.

REGINA S. LITMAN, CTM AON AT TREVOSE CLUB 8482-13 TREVOSE, PENNSYLVANIA

SAVE THE STOMPING FOR THE FOOTBALL STANDS!

I have been uncomfortable at some recent Toastmasters contests and events. Club members enthusiastically hoot, yell, applaud and stomp their feet for their representative. It might make those club members feel good, but you can imagine how intimidating and insulting it is for members of other clubs. I have even seen instances when judges were influenced by displays more appropriate to a bar or football game. Toastmasters should remember that everyone deserves sincere, enthusiastic encouragement and support.

BETSY MILL, ATM LIBERTY CLUB 4152-5 SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA



EVERY SPEECH SHOULD BE

SINCERE AND SERVE A

by Dr. Ralph C. Smedley

DEFINITE PURPOSE.

Life is full of intriguing problems to be discussed. No one needs to waste time on unimportant themes.

A speech, to be really good, must have in it the element of emotional sincerity. It must give the appearance of earnest purpose on the

It Takes More Than a Speech

■ MERELY TO MAKE A speech is not enough. The speech must mean something – lead to something – stir up someone to know or do or attempt something.

One of the fairest and most frequent criticisms of Toastmasters clubs is that the speeches do not get anywhere. This is properly true of the speeches of the beginner, who is completely engaged in trying to maintain his confidence, keep his hands out of his pockets and remember what he meant to talk about, but the experienced speaker, reasonably well schooled in the technique of talking, has no right to waste his own time and that of his audience with a mere "speech."

Every speech should be directed to the accomplishment of some definite purpose. A speech may instruct, persuade, convince, inspire or entertain, but the speaker should know, before saying "Mr. Toastmaster," just what it is that he hopes to accomplish. He should engage upon the speech with the spirit of a crusader, an evangelist, a teacher or an advocate, and he should carry through to the logical accomplishment of his purpose.

part of the speaker. He should give his audience the impression that he really has something to say, and that he wants to say it. He cannot hope to convince his hearers if he lacks conviction.

When you have to make a speech, select a topic on which you have convictions and feelings. Put the convictions and the feeling into your voice and manner. Speak as though your happiness and welfare depend on convincing your audience. Then you will make a good speech, whether you know how to speak or not.

This article by Toastmasters' founder Dr. Ralph C. Smedley was originally published in a 1950 issue of The Toastmaster.





Enthusiastically describe a process, place or activity and the gestures will follow.

by Thomas Leech

Noses made good with two tablets and a burning bush. Ross Perot used some simple charts and graphs. And while Perot's contribution to human history pales in comparison to the Ten Commandments, one fact stands clear: A good presentation can get your name on the ballot, your face in the news, and, at the very least, your words set in stone. No wonder 90 percent of business leaders say the ability to present ideas is critical to their jobs.

As a presentations consultant, independent and corporate, for the past 20 years, I've coached thousands of business people on how to give better presentations and speeches. Without doubt, the single most common question I'm asked is the one about the hands. Getting up before an audience and giving a presentation has transformed many a hardcharging executive into an awkward kid stumbling through a class report.

The problem is that this report may decide whether this kid gets the contract, receives the funding, or convinces the audience the program is in good hands. The speaker may be brilliant, the material excellent, the preparation diligent – but none of that will come through if the delivery is weak.

Emily Dickinson wrote about a fellow writer: "She has the facts, but not the phosphorescence." Many presenters – executives, program managers and engineers – work hard to master the facts, but fall short with the phosphorescence and flat with the presentation.

Columnist William Safire blasted a recent speech by Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan: "Occasionally a speech is written of such apparently stupefying dullness that it rates the accolade `MEGO of the Year.' (My Eyes Glaze Over)... It's stirring title was `Remarks,' a come-on to become comatose." That is not high praise. To keep your presentations out of Safire's MEGO of the Year competition, follow these 10 tips for punching up your delivery:



DO HAVE A COME-ON TITLE. I still recall the eager anticipation of the entire audience for a Toastmaster's speech 25 years ago titled "Sex." (Unfortunately, the speaker delivered his prepared remarks about...roofs. I've never forgiven him.)



BE PREPARED AND PRACTICE. Two valuable old saws that are frequently replaced by another old saw – wing it. I've heard many excuses from presenters about why they didn't take the time to prepare or do a dry run, as they moaned about their poor treatment and lousy success. Add to the value of practice by getting feedback from colleagues or via a video recorder.



GET THERE EARLY. This rule is commonly violated, and a resulting heavy price commonly paid. Have you seen the presenter walk in at the last minute, hurriedly sort through a batch of visuals, and be unable to turn on the projector? It's amateur night in Dixie, folks. GONG.



HAVE YOUR OPENER DOWN PAT, and put some punch in it. The first minute is when the nerves are tightest and the audience still is not tuned in, so get off in style.



TALK, DON'T READ. The fastest way to generate MEGO, and to kill your credibility, is to read.

TALK WITH YOUR AUDIENCE, not with your notes, the screen or ceiling. You may even find it helpful to project a little personality, such as with a smile. What the face and eyes say is perhaps the single-most important factor in interpersonal communication, according to psychologist Albert Mehrabian.

SPEAK SO YOU CAN BE HEARD, even by those in the far corners. You need a sound system? Now you tell us.

OH YES, ABOUT THE WAYWARD HANDS. Well, what do you do with them when you're standing around talking with the gang about something you're enthusiastic about? Say how the Padres smashed the Giants (in your kid's Little League, that is) – do you stand there with your hands gripping tightly in front of you (the fig leaf) or hanging onto the lectern so tightly a tire iron couldn't pry them loose? Of course not. Your hands are an integral part of the communication. (Wasn't that the message from Shakespeare only 400 years back: "Suit the words to the action, the action to the words"?)



get into the action naturally. A prop heightens audience interest and has to be held up, pointed at or operated to be useful, doesn't it? With charts and projected visuals, the hands and pointer are valuable for directing audience attention. (But don't let that pointer become a baton or weapon!) Enthusiastically describe a process, place or activity and the hands will follow. Remember all those movies where the fighter pilots describe how they knocked down enemy planes? That's the idea. Tip: Here's an exercise I've used in seminars for years to help speakers loosen up: Describe a favorite place without visual aids, doing it vividly so that the audience sees, feels and smells the scene.

And a final tip, **BELIEVE IN YOUR MES-SAGE.** What words do you use to describe speakers you enjoy? How about "energetic," "enthusiastic" and "forceful?" These attributes and related qualities of natural body language, vocal inflection, and delivery spark – Dickinson's "phosphorescence" – spring from the speakers' strong feelings about the value of the messages they came to communicate.

So go get 'em, and let those hands in on the action.

Thomas Leech heads a San Diego-based presentations consulting firm, Thomas Leech and Associates. This article is adapted from the recently released second edition of his book, *How To Prepare, Stage & Deliver Winning Presentations* (AMACOM). A former Toastmaster, he provides speaker coaching and training programs for corporations nationwide. "A good presentation can get your name on the ballot, your face in the news, and, at the very least, your words set in stone." by Joe Holmes, ATM

n extremely stimulating speech topic not only rivets an audience to your presentation, but strongly motivates you to do the research. Having an attentive audience also can build your confidence and motivate you to continue improving your presentation skills.

When I joined Toastmasters, I read an article in *The Toastmaster* called "Pick a Topic...any Topic" (April 1990) about selecting topics that might otherwise be considered boring but can be made interesting with good speech delivery. The idea sounded all right for an experienced speaker, but difficult for a novice like me. And who wants to research a topic they find boring?

So I decided to try the contrary: present exciting and original topics that would hold an audience's interest and might even compensate for my lack of public speaking experiCommandments is found in the Bible. A couple years ago, I read a book by Grant Jeffrey that suggested the Ark of the Covenant might be found in Ethiopia. I rented the movie "Raiders of the Lost Ark," and then located all kinds of information from the Apocrypha to the Babylonian Talmud at St Paul's University Theological Library in Ottawa.

From my research, I uncovered five possible locations: in Aksum, Ethiopia; under the Temple Mount in Jerusalem; in Mt. Pisgah or Mt. Nebo in Jordan; in a cave near Ein Gedi, Israel; or Tanis in Egypt. It was so interesting, I wrote a 13page essay to prepare for my speech! Since then, a new book by Graham Hancock titled *The Sign and the Seal* "reveals" the Ethiopian location of the Ark. I had the scoop on the story two years before that book was published!

THAT'S INCREDIBLE! Pursuing fascinating speech topics can have unexpected benefits.

ence. My efforts were successful and, as an added bonus, inspired me to go the extra mile to obtain information. I became an expert on some interesting subjects of which the average person has little or no knowledge. And I learned an important new skill: how to track down information on almost any topic.

I have spent many a lunch hour in the library photocopying articles in preparation for numerous speeches and discovered that research can be exciting – akin to tracking down and capturing a rare butterfly or spotting a rare bird. Besides improving the quality of your speeches, gaining new knowledge can be an end in itself. The facts you gather can be used for stimulating conversation, planning vacations, writing magazine articles, or simply for educating yourself. And the research skills acquired along the way are handy any time you need to find information.

If audience members are fascinated by your speech topic, they cannot help but be positive and responsive. An enthusiastic audience is a sure-fire way to improve your self-confidence and motivate you to improve the technical apects of your delivery.

Here are some of my favorite speeches and what I learned from them:

"WHERE IS THE LOST ARK OF THE COVENANT?"

For speech No. 3, "Organize Your Speech," I decided to chronicle the search for the lost Ark of the Covenant. The story of how Moses built the Ark to carry the original Ten

"ONE MAN'S GIFT IS ANOTHER MAN'S POISON"

In speech No. 6, "Working with Words," I explored the blunders and bloopers of international marketing. I studied this subject in college and had learned about the problem of using a brand name or slogan that sounds fine in English, but is humorous or offensive in a foreign language. I went to the university library and found some marketing text books that elaborated on the problem.

For example, an American company marketed tea cups in Germany and called them "giftware." Sales were poor because "gift" in German means "poison." In the 1920s, Coca Cola was sold in China with the name translated into phonetic Chinese characters on the bottles. Sales were flat because in Chinese "Coca Cola" means "bite the wax tadpole!" It was successfully re-introduced as "Lucky Cola" in English, which translates into "happiness in the mouth" in Chinese characters. And Chevrolet discovered that their Nova model was not selling in Puerto Rico because "Nova" meant "no go" in Spanish. My speech was full of humorous and entertaining examples, and included some suggestions for how companies can avoid this problem.

"COULD THE MOON HAVE BEEN RED?"

This topic was for speech No. 9, "Speaking with Knowledge," which was typed and read. I had read a newspaper article about a group of scientists who visited the Soviet Union in November 1989 and uncovered a Soviet manned lunar lander





and huge rocket parts from the late sixties, which proved that the Soviets had been in the manned moon race after all. It seemed like an engaging subject, so I located several articles on the visit and read a book by James Oberg about the Soviet manned space program.

By 1968, the Soviets had trained some of their cosmonauts, and had developed a lunar lander and large booster rocket called the N1. They were ready to go to the moon, but because of four N1 launch failures, the Soviets instead opted for earth orbital fights, and the program was completely covered up. Six months after my speech, there was an episode of NOVA on TV which documented details of the Soviet manned moon program, just as I had researched it!

"KILLER RABBITS OF OZ"

I used this topic for the last speech for my ATM and the No. 2 speech in the Entertaining Speaker manual, "Resources for Entertaining." After traveling to Australia in 1983, I devel-

oped a special interest in the country and had heard about packet of in

oped a special interest in the country and had heard about their ongoing rabbit plague. I contacted the Australian Embassy in Ottawa for research material and even wrote to the National Archives in Canberra for additional information.

According to my sources, the more than 400 million rabbits in Australia constitute an ongoing environmental and economic disaster of Biblical proportions. Seven rabbits will eat as much grass as one sheep, and they pull the grass by the roots, killing off native species. They were introduced in 1859 from England, and there are no natural predators (the dingos prefer sheep). Because of the favorable climate and vegetation, they breed at an incredible rate. Control methods have been met with limited success.

When I delivered the speech, I used props such as toy rabbits and an Australian hat to provide humor, yet convey a serious environmental message. As a byproduct, I used my research material to write an article for a local environmental newspaper, in which I was also able to promote my Toastmasters club.

WHERE TO FIND INCREDIBLE TOPICS?

I like to select topics which neither myself nor my intended audience know very much about, but are really interesting. It motivates me to do the research, and people love to hear "fascinating facts." Recent archaelogical and scientific discoveries, inventions, history and the unusual make choice speech topics. Keep your eyes and ears open and add some imagination – coming up with a good topic is not always easy and often occurs by chance. The best sources for speech topics are media reports on recent discoveries, inventions or events. Other good sources include recent magazine articles, movies, new books, personal travel experiences, and university or college courses. Here are some of my favorite magazines: *Astronomy, Biblical Archaeological Review, Discover, National Geographic, Omni, Popular Science, Reader's Digest, Scientific American* and *Space Flight News*.

Clip and save articles for future study and label them according to their subject matter. After you've delivered your speech, retain the material for future use and update it as new information appears.

WHERE TO OBTAIN RESEARCH INFORMATION?

Libraries can be goldmines for information. Some even specialize in certain areas such as law, medicine or theology. Many libraries in government departments, universities and embassies are open to the public. Within each library there

> are periodical indexes and abstracts, which are useful for finding recent articles on specific topics. And don't overlook the old standby – an encyclopedia.

> The telephone is also an effective research tool. For a speech on a future manned mission to Mars, I called NASA in Washington, D.C., and they sent me a

packet of information. For a speech on Pearl Harbor, I phoned the U.S.S. Arizona memorial in Honolulu and received several 50th anniversary brochures in return.

Take advantage of the fact that letters can be sent anywhere in the world for just the cost of paper and a stamp. To obtain material on ostrich farming, I wrote to an ostrich museum in South Africa. Foreign embassies can provide addresses for archives, libraries, museums and other places of interest.

There is always something strange or unusual to be found while traveling. Visit interesting sites and collect brochures, postcards and addresses for further information. If you cannot travel to your preferred destination, talk to someone who has been there or write a letter to someone who lives there.

For example, I gave a speech called "Miami Beach's Speeches" about my experiences attending an oracle database conference and local Toastmasters club meeting in that city. And a Texas holiday on which my cousin and I walked across the Rio Grande into Mexico was retold in a speech called "I walked to Mexico."

I really enjoy researching incredible speech topics for Toastmasters. By selecting interesting subjects, I'm motivated to learn new things, develop research and journalistic skills, and entertain my audience. In turn, the listeners are inspired to improve their own speaking skills and eager to come back for more.

Joe Holmes, ATM, is Vice President Public Relations for Capital Club 2722-61 in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, and a Senior Systems Analyst for the office of the Auditor General of Canada. ■ IF YOU ARE TRYING TO DEMONSTRATE TO potential Toastmasters that your club can help them improve their speaking skills, what better way to that than to focus on issues of local or statewide interest? You're not going to recruit many new members to your club just by *telling* someone how Toastmasters has helped you become a great speaker – your best results will come from actually *showing* them what you can do, and how good they can become.

If you contract with a carpenter to remodel your home, or with an automobile

- Show by example what Toastmasters can do for one's ability to communicate
- ► Recruit new members
- ► Improve our own speaking skills
- Become better informed on issues of personal and global concern.

Please understand, I'm not advocating a change in the way your club conducts its affairs. Within the comfort zone of the club, you can



mechanic to overhaul your car, what is your main concern? It's probably whether the work can be done according to specifications, on time and within budget. You probably won't care if the carpenter uses a 12-oz or 16-oz hammer, or how adept the mechanic is in using a spark plug gauge. Instead the end result is the message; you want them to *show* you how good they are by delivering a quality product.

Potential Toastmasters are no different. They pay attention to someone who speaks with confidence, poise and conviction; someone who uses their speaking tools well. During the three years I've been involved in District 48's publicity program, this indirect way of promoting Toastmasters has served us very well.

But I can just hear you saying, "I would gladly demonstrate my speaking skills if only I had an interesting topic to talk about. People aren't interested in what I have to say."

Complaints like these are all too familiar – and simply not valid! As a matter of fact, there are more speech topics than there are people available to make the speeches. By exploring some of the following speech ideas, we have a golden opportunity to: determine what you want to say and practice the best way of saying it – all before a supportive audience that helps you make the best presentation possible. But the real test of your speaking skills comes from speaking to audiences outside the club. Most communities have agencies dealing with specific causes that need articulate spokespersons regarding issues of local or statewide interest.

This doesn't mean that you, your club or Toastmasters International are endorsing any of the causes or organizations on whose behalf you are speaking. You are simply putting your communication skills into practice and demonstrating the potential of Toastmasters training.

To show that it's virtually impossible for a Toastmaster to have "nothing to talk about," I've investigated several subject areas available to Toastmasters in my state of Alabama. The result? I've found more to talk about than can ever possibly be covered in one article, much less several speeches.

I compiled the information I found into two publications, *The District 48 Publicity Handbook* and *Speaking of Alabama*. Here is just a sample of the information I uncovered: Speaking up for a cause can bring more than just applause.

by Marty Morris, DTM

"The real test of your Toastmasters skills comes from speaking to audiences outside the club."

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

Perhaps you've read an article recently or listened to some remarks about a topic of civic, political or economic importance. The writer or speaker concludes by saying, "Call or write your local representatives and let them know how you feel." Did your interest suddenly diminish because you weren't given the addresses or phone numbers of the people to contact?

Such information isn't restricted to a few select citizens. On the contrary, your local representatives *want* to hear your views on subjects of public interest. In *Speaking of Alabama*, I collected a variety of reference material, including: a complete Alabama Legislative Listing from the January 1993 issue of *Business Alabama Monthly*, a brochure from the League of Women Voters with contact information for our state legislators, a copy of the Legislative Roll Book for the Alabama House of Representatives and Senate, and a brochure published by the Business Council of Alabama describing "How a Bill Becomes a Law." Your local library can easily access similar information. Once you've researched your topic of interest, turn that knowledge into a series of speeches for local service clubs – then recycle them into editorials for newspapers!

PRESERVING THE ENVIRONMENT

Are you an environmentalist? If so, how do you show your dedication to improving the environment? Many people do their part by recycling, picking up litter and using only environmentally friendly products. While those activities are definitely worthwhile, they just skim the surface of deeper issues such as water quality monitoring, toxic waste management, litter control, air quality management, non-ozone attainment and wetlands preservation.

What a perfect opportunity to practice our speaking skills and serve the community! There are many groups who would welcome having a seasoned speaker, such as a Toastmaster, spread the word about how their organization helps make the area a better place to live.

After researching many of these organizations locally, I found that significant progress

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is being made on several environmental problems facing my home state of Alabama. The book that started me on this quest is The 1991-92 Green Index by Bob Hall and Mary Lee Kerr (Island Press, 1991). It features an extensive list of environmental agencies to contact for further information. In a short time, I contacted 17 organizations devoted to improving Alabama's environmental quality. Spokespersons at the agencies were cooperative in supplying information about their goals, contact addresses and phone numbers, as well as hand-outs containing a variety of background information. Additionally, when they learned I was a Toastmaster, they even provided prepared presentation materials for lay persons.

The list of environmental organizations is long, and all of them need help in one form or another. Find out how your communication skills can help a particular organization meet its goals – and keep a speech manual nearby so you can be evaluated and get credit for a speech delivered outside the club!

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Fleeting thoughts of charitable contributions often occupy our minds during the holiday season when we're reminded of those less fortunate than ourselves. However, a couple weeks aren't enough to address problems such as poverty, homelessness, child abuse and AIDS. Social service organizations need assistance throughout the year, and this is where your Toastmasters skills can spring into action.

A listing of all the social service organizations in your area can be found in the phone book; simply call or write the agency's director to obtain more information. Tell them about yourself and offer to speak on their behalf to members of the community. Believe me, they'll welcome you with open arms!

So speak up for a cause you believe in, and you'll find that people are indeed interested in what you have to say.

Marty Morris, DTM, was the 1992-93 Public Relations Officer for District 48.

"Find out how your communication skills can help the organization meet its goals – and keep a speech manual nearby so you can be evaluated and get credit for a speech delivered outside the club!"

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Become a Temporary Expert

by Karen O'Connor

Five ways to give your speaking and writing the voice of authority. ■ "HOW DO YOU FIND SO MANY INTERESTing anecdotes and facts on such a wide range of topics?", I asked my friend Doris, a professional writer and speaker who seemed to be an expert on everything. I was new to both fields and eager for all the help I could get.

"The trick," she said, "is to become a *temporary expert*. It's not that difficult, actually. I concentrate on one subject at a time – the one I'm into at the moment. I learn everything I can. When I'm finished with that article or talk, I become a temporary expert in something else."

I left our meeting that day inspired by her simple and workable idea, and eager to put it to use in areas that interested me. In the years since, I have become a temporary expert on a wide range of subjects – working with horses, special effects in films, natural disasters, animal rights, astronauts, the writing process and others – many of them complex topics I would have avoided had I not taken my friend's sensible advice.

If you'd like to broaden your expertise, challenge yourself to tackle some unfamiliar subjects and give your speeches and articles a new voice of authority, then I encourage you to become a temporary expert in whatever subject areas you wish to pursue. Here is a fivepoint plan I have followed with good results for more than 15 years.

1. READ ABOUT IT

Choose your topic. Then go to the library and gather books, magazine articles, surveys, government documents, press releases and any other pertinent information. Don't be fooled by the obvious simplicity of this most basic step. Many – too many, in fact – new speakers and writers don't follow through on this and begin and end their research with the encyclopedia.

Did you know, for example, that back issues of popular magazines and professional journals provide a wealth of information on almost any topic you can think of? You can locate appropriate issues by checking the subject guide to periodical literature and the newspaper index. In most libraries these sources are now stored on easy-to-use electronic equipment. This is a sound and reliable first step to becoming a temporary expert.

2. CONTACT PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Ask the librarian for a list of professional organizations, clubs, service groups or government agencies that specialize in or are related to your subject. While researching the topic of animal rights, for example, I made a list of 10 or 12 animal welfare groups and began contacting them by phone. Within weeks I had leads for several more. Some highly specialized groups, like the Animal Legal Defense Fund and the Student Action Corps For Animals, became vital sources of information, yet without the referrals I would never have known they existed.

You can write to most organizations, of course. I prefer the ease of a phone call because I get answers, referrals, suggestions or leads immediately. If the person on the other end cannot provide help, he or she usually knows someone who can.

Information and sources for my book on equestrian careers came about almost exclusively in this way – one source led to another and that one to another and so on. It all began with a phone call to an appropriate professional organization – so don't overlook this vital step.

3. TALK TO THE (REAL) EXPERTS

Next, I call or write individuals whose names I found while reading, or through my initial contact with an organization. For example, while researching the topic of waste pollution, I read a magazine interview with Don Kessler of the Johnson Space Center. Mr. Kessler, I learned, is a space debris expert and I knew I had to talk with him. Within weeks of the interview and



follow-up reading, I was a walking, talking (temporary) expert on space pollution.

You can do the same thing in your field of study. The Yellow Pages are another quick and convenient way to contact experts. I located a female podiatrist this way – the only one in the entire county. Her brief interview and helpful remarks gave my article on teen careers the voice of authority the editor wanted.

4. CONDUCT ORIGINAL RESEARCH (WHENEVER POSSIBLE)

Get it "straight from the horse's mouth," as the saying goes. Original sources give your writing authenticity as well as authority. A friend of mine traveled to Stockholm, Sweden, to research her book on female Noble prize recipients. For my book on movie special effects, and a subsequent talk on this topic to a group of school children, I visited studios and movie sets and talked with the specialists.

Of course this is not always possible. Not everyone can afford the time or expense of travel and the original sources often are not available. To compensate, however, you can collect the same information from a variety of written sources, such as newspaper and magazine accounts, so you can verify facts and quotations.

When you can conduct original research, do so. It's always worth it — and it often does not require as much effort as you may think. When I spoke with Mr. Kessler by phone after reading about him in *Space World*, I read him some of his quotes from the article. He verified and updated them. I could then proceed with my project, confident that my information was accurate. Careful research of this kind has turned many a temporary expert into a full time expert – one booking agents (and editors) fight over!

5. EXPERIENCE IT FIRST HAND

Experience is not only the best teacher, it is also, in my opinion, a speaker's and writer's best friend. Nothing gives your speech or article more authority than personal experience. Test the recipe, then speak or write about it. Ride herd with a cowboy, then speak or write about it. Visit a landfill, then speak or write about it.

All of these things and more are possible with a little patience and persistence and by following some of the steps listed in this article. When people find out that you are researching a topic for a speech, article or both, they want to help. I think you'll find most of them eager to teach you what you need to know.

So don't put off that speech or article you've been dying to create. Become involved. Get your feet wet, your hands dirty, your mind engaged, your heart beating. Look, listen, taste, touch and smell. Then take notes for your speech or article. The final product will ring true because you were there. You know. You are an expert – at least temporarily!

Karen O'Connor lives in San Diego where she writes, speaks and teaches for a variety of organizations. She is a member of the National Speakers Association and the American Society of Journalists and Authors.

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by Thomas Montalbo

Reminiscing about Winston Churchill, Adlai Stevenson – an eloquent speaker himself – said: "I asked him something I'd always wanted to know. I asked on whom or what he had based his oratorical style. Churchill replied, 'It was an American statesman who inspired me and taught me how to use every note of the human voice like an organ. He was my model – I learned from him how to hold thousands in thrall.'

Then Stevenson added, "You've never heard of him. He wasn't a great statesman, just an Irish politician with the gift of gab, but Winston called him a statesman. His name was Bourke Cockran."

greatest – of modern world leaders. Not only did Churchill give credit to his mentor during his conversation with Adlai Stevenson, but also while scribbling private correspondence, within the pages of his widely published memoirs, and to the general public in speeches delivered over the span of his long and legendary lifetime.

For example, in a letter to his mother, the celebrated American beauty Lady Randolph Churchill, young Winston admitted that "Mr. Cockran is a clever man from whose conversation much is to be learned." Some years later, just before one of Cockran's visits to England, Churchill exuberantly told his wife,



Bourke Cockran was surely much more than a politician with the gift of gab. He was one of the greatest speakers in an age when rhetoric was a polished art and oratory a popular entertainment. At the height of his career as a lawyer and a United States Congressman, his name was a household word in the courtroom, on the public platform and in Congress.

KEEPER OF THE FLAME

Not only was Cockran considered one of the great conversationalists of his era, but his fellow barristers regarded him as one of the finest representatives of their profession. Critics were quick to acclaim his oratorical skills, and some thought Cockran's speaking abilities to be even more eloquent than those of populist statesman William Jennings Bryan.

Yet Bourke Cockran's name is not included in current biographical anthologies, encyclopedias or collections of great speeches. Plenty of proof exists, however, that he was a highly valued mentor to the man who would one day wield tremendous power and influence as one of the greatest – perhaps *the* "He is a remarkable fellow – perhaps the finest orator in America, with a mind that has influenced my thought in more than one important direction." And in *Thoughts and Adventures*, a book of reminiscences published in 1932, Churchill wrote: "I must record the strong impression Bourke Cockran made upon my untutored mind. I have never seen his like, or in some respects his equal. His conversation, in point, in pith, in rotundity, in antithesis, and in comprehension, exceeded anything I have ever heard."

Still later, during his 1946 "Iron Curtain" speech at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, Churchill said: "I have often used words which I learned fifty years ago from a great Irish-American orator, a friend of mine, Mr. Bourke Cockran."

By 1954, during a last trip to the United States at the venerable age of 80, Churchill still wished to acknowledge his appreciation of Cockran while speaking at the University of Rochester, New York: "I remember when I first came over here, in 1895, I was a guest of your great lawyer and orator, Mr. Bourke Cockran. He poured out all his wealth of mind

Forgotten by most, **Bourke Cockran** inspired one of the century's greatest speakers.



and eloquence to me. Some of his sentences are deeply rooted in my mind."

Here are some of those sentences: "There is enough for all. The earth is a generous mother. She will provide in plentiful abundance food for all her children, if they will but cultivate her soil in justice and in peace."

The above passage was a favorite of Churchill's and often quoted when he campaigned for office. Another sentence

that left a lasting impression on Churchill was this one: "In a society where there is democratic tolerance and freedom under the law, many kinds of evils will crop up, but give them a little time and they usually breed their own cure."

Churchill said he modeled his speaking style on that of Cockran. In the following excerpts from their speeches, compare Cockran's techniques with Churchill's:

Cockran: "In seeking to find the freest markets for our products, we seek the welfare of the whole human race, we seek to establish a

commercial system which will make this land the fountain of civilization, these people the trustees of humanity, which will make the flag of freedom in the air above us the emblem of freedom on the land beneath us – freedom in our fields, freedom in our mines, freedom on the seas, freedom through all the world, for all the children of men."

Churchill: "We shall not flag or fail... We shall fight on the seas and oceans. We shall fight...in the air...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."

Churchill had obviously studied Cockran's style and syntax; note the similar word pictures as well as the patterns of rhythm created by alliteration, repetition and parallel structure designed to reinforce ideas and stir listeners' emotions.

UNPARALLELED LIVES

They first met in 1895. Churchill had obtained an assignment from a London newspaper to write dispatches about the Cuban-Spanish War. On his way to Cuba, however, he was expected to oblige his mother by stopping in

New York City for a week to visit an old friend by the name of Bourke Cockran.

Cockran was 41 and Churchill only 21. Considerable age differences are often common between mentor and protégé. But even more striking in this case were the differences in their background and appearance.

 ${}^{\prime\prime}M$ r. Cockran is a

clever man from whose

conversation much is

to be learned.

A highly successful and prosperous professional man of the world, Cockran was born in Ireland and educated in France. He spoke French and Latin fluently, and in college had won highest honors in Latin and Greek. On the other hand, young Churchill had never attended college, graduating instead from a military academy. The assignment from the London newspaper was providing him with his first earned income.

Cockran had all the physical advantages of a great orator. Standing 6 feet tall, with burly chest and shoulders, he gave an impression of dignity and authority. That strong effect was made even greater by a bold, leonine countenance and a steely-eyed gaze. But most remarkable was the range of Cockran's powerful voice, which could at one moment sound as sweet as a flute and the next moment rumble forth like a voluminous clap of thunder.

In sharp contrast, young Churchill seemed physically frail.

Only 5 feet 6 inches tall, with a chest measuring but 31 inches, his small frame tended to hunch forward as he walked. Moreover, Churchill's voice was raspy and burdened with a speech impediment – an unfortunate combination of a lisp and stammer. All in all, a thoroughly unpreposing young man who showed no promise whatsoever of emerging as one of the most outstanding leaders and orators in world history.

LESSONS IN ORATORY

By the end of this initial visit, however, the seemingly futureless young man was writing back to Lady Churchill in England that "Mr. Cockran is one of the most charming hosts and interesting men I have met. I have great discussions with him on every conceivable subject."

Mostly they talked about public speaking. And, at the young man's request, Cockran read aloud some of his own speeches.

Listening to Cockran's fine phrases and eloquent delivery, Churchill was beside himself with enthusiasm. Before he had met Cockran, whatever Churchill knew about public speaking he had obtained from his own observations, reading and study. But now, for

the first time, he was getting private instruction from renowned orator.

Cockran's advice inspired Churchill's early ideas about oratory. In his article, *The Scaffolding of Rhetoric*, written a couple of years after meeting Cockran, Churchill described one plank of the rhetorical structure as the "accumulation of

Advice to a **Young Turk**

When Winston Churchill asked for Cockran's advice on how to mesmerize an audience of thousands, Cockran gave these pointers:

- 1 Learn everything you can about your subject.
- 2 Store in your mind the material you gather from your research.
- **3** Simplify the most difficult issues with ordinary examples.
- **4** Concentrate on the strongest point or argument and build it up to an irrefutable conclusion.
- 5 Speak as though you were an organ and make your words sound like rhythm.
- 6 Speak the truth because only a speaker who is sincere can be eloquent.

A Study in CONTRASTS

■ As a young man Winston had few friends among his contemporaries and elders. Considered something of a ne'er-do-well, his poor scholastic record could not qualify him for a university education. Then, while still trying to determine what course his life would take, his father, a brilliant and respected former member of Parliament, died in January 1895 at the age of 46. In November of that same year, Churchill met Cocckran, the man who would become his mentor. Cockran believed in Winston's abilities to get ahead and provided encouragement and support. Perhaps his great interest in promoting Churchill's future was motivated by the memory of the beginnings of his own career.

After teaching school for several years, Cockran had become restless and began looking for a wider and more promising field. He decided to try his hand at delivering lectures before local church societies and civic groups. One evening, after having just

argument," requiring a series of facts to be brought forward which all point in a common direction. "The end appears in view before it is reached," wrote Churchill. "The crowd anticipates the conclusion and the last words fall amid a thunder of assent." All of which echoed Cockran's advice to "Concentrate on the strongest point or argument and build it up to an irrefutable conclusion."

Before ending his visit, Churchill asked Cockran if he might send copies

of his speeches for further study. Cockran promised that he would, and so began a kind of correspondence course in public speaking.

When Churchill returned to England from Cuba, his newfound mentor urged him to study sociology and economics. "With your remarkable talent for lucid and attractive expression," wrote Cockran, "You would be able to make great use of the information to be acquired by study of these branches. Indeed I firmly believe you would take a commanding position in public life at the first opportunity which arose, and I have always felt that true capacity either makes or finds its opportunity."

These and other letters from Cockran to Churchill demonstrate the older man's profound powers of perception. Cockran was, in fact, the first person to really recognize and understand the young Englishman's potential which, until their acquaintance, had been dormant.

PREDICTION OF A MENTOR

For more than a quarter of a century, Churchill and Cockran continued to develop their friendship. During the course of their correspondence, Churchill would evaluate Cockran's

Cockran was the first person to recognize and understand the young Englishman's potential.

delivered a lecture, a distinguished-looking man introduced himself. He turned out to be a Justice of the New York Supreme Court and, much impressed by Cockran's speaking style, advised him to study for the bar. The Justice even offered him the use of his private law library.

Gratefully accepting the offer, young Cockran devoted all his spare time to the study of law. Three years later he was admitted to the bar and opened a modest office. Soon he was busy with a substantial volume of clients. By the time he welcomed young Churchill to New York in 1895, Cockran was earning more than \$100,000 a year as a lawyer – a tremendous sum in those days of low prices and no income tax. His financial success, however, was only half the story. Cockran had also risen to political prominence, and as a frequent speaker during the Democratic presidential campaign, he attracted widespread attention.

> speeches and Cockran would then respond to the comments. Often they agreed to disagree. For example, after reviewing one of Cockran's speeches, Churchill wrote that "It is one of the finest speeches I have read. Of course, my dear Cockran, you will understand that we approach the subject from different points of view." Cockran's reply? "I was so profoundly impressed with the vigor of your language and the breadth of your views as I read your

criticisms of my speech that I conceived a very high opinion of your future career."

In 1923, Cockran died suddenly at the age of 69, the day after he had delivered a 45-minute speech in Congress with his usual vigor and eloquence, drawing prolonged applause when finished. His motto, "Live intensely and die suddenly," had been fulfilled.

Today it is possible to check the files of the Manuscript Room of the New York Public Library and find the most complete collection of papers, letters, clippings of interviews and newspaper reports of national conventions where Bourke Cockran shone as star performer.

But for the average person, this once famous politician and public speaker remains a forgotten man. Those who admire and study the oratory of Winston Churchill, however, eventually discover the reoccuring tributes to a man who rightfully deserves to take his place in history as mentor to one of the greatest orators of all time.

Thomas Montalbo, **DTM** is a member of Sparkling Toastmasters Club 3602-47 in St. Petersburg, Florida. He is a frequent contributor to this magazine.



In Memory of a Past International President

"Alex Smekta was one of the greatest leaders in the Toastmasters organization."

LOU NOVAK

■ ALEX P. SMEKTA, TOASTmasters' 1963-64 International President, died June 10 at the Madonna Towers Health Care Unit in Rochester, Minnesota. He was 87 years old.

A Polish immigrant who came to the United States as a young child, Smekta used his Toastmasters training to acquire and hold a position as Rochester's mayor for 17 years – the longest tenure for that office in the city's history.

Smekta's success in politics and city government can be traced to his Toastmasters experience, specifically the leadership skills he learned while serving on Toastmasters International's Board of Directors starting in 1958.

"Toastmasters gave me confidence," Smekta told *The Toastmaster* in 1978. "It made me more alert of the manner in which I spoke. As a result, I was able to communicate my thoughts with greater precision and forcefulness.

"I attribute all the success in my business, community and political life to the improvement of my communication with my fellow man – and to Toastmasters."

Early on, Smekta collaborated with his brother to start a company specializing in rug, furniture and upholstery cleaning. He also was involved with a number of community and social organi-

zations, including a 42-year membership in the Rochester Toastmasters Club 271-6.

In 1961, Smekta was one of 24 mayors invited by the State Department to visit West Berlin as part of a goodwill mission aimed at expressing American support a united Germany. On that trip, he was given the opportunity to speak in his native Polish during a 20-minute broadcast over Radio Free Europe.

Back home Smekta played host to thousands of visitors seeking treatment and care from Rochester's famous Mayo Clinic, the world's largest private medical facility at that time. As mayor and official greeter at the Mayo Clinic, he met many famous individuals, including Ed Sullivan, Jack Benny, Eleanor Roosevelt, and U.S. presidents John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter.



Alex P. Smekta

Though his accomplishments were impressive, Smekta remained a compassionate, humble man with a quick sense of humor whose motto was "Never take yourself too seriously." He brought these

qualities to his leadership roles within the organization, as many of his fellow Toastmasters recall.

"Alex Smekta was one of the greatest leaders of the Toastmasters organization," said Past International Director Lou Novak,

who regards Smekta as a close friend and mentor. "I looked up to Alex. He was my role model, and he greatly inspired other Toastmasters in our district."

Not only did Smekta recruit hundreds of new members, he also encouraged them to seek leadership positions within the organization.

"He was an active Toastmaster who took part in the organization from the club to the international level," said Past International President John Miller. "He was always interested in promoting young leaders."

Looking back on Smekta's many contributions to our organization, Past International President and Legal Counsel Joseph Rinnert, said he was a doer as well as a dreamer..."Alex was a skillful politico, in the best sense of the word, with an undying love for Toastmasters International."





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by Mard Naman

Backstage advice on avoiding audio-visual snafus.

Staged

The situation had all the makings of a speaker's worst nightmare come true. It was the 1988 Macworld Expo in San Francisco, and Apple Computer's Chairman John Sculley was in the middle of making the conference's keynote address. Sculley was presenting a sneak preview of an unreleased, prototype Macintosh; his keystrokes and mouse movements were displayed to the audience on a large overhead screen. All went well until suddenly – in front of the full house – the computer froze.

Realizing what had happened, an audio/visual technician working behind the scenes immediately hit a button to switch the screen projection from Sculley's computer to an identical Mac backstage; a cable and a scanner installed before the show made it possible for Sculley's keyboard and mouse commands to control the backstage Mac. For the rest of Sculley's presentation, the backup computer projected what was seen on the large auditorium screen; the audience never realized there had been a technical glitch, and the technician with the backup Mac saved Sculley from embarrassment in front of thousands of people.

It doesn't matter whether you're the chairman of a large corporation, like Sculley, or a marketing manager introducing a new product, or a district sales manager rallying your sales teams together – the fact is, you can't always foresee technical snafus. But with the proper planning and technical support, you can at least minimize your chances of encountering an embarrassing glitch or of not being equipped to handle one. After all, presenting ideas to an audience is scary enough; who wants to worry about "technical difficulties," too?

So, to help those who must stand up in front of a group and run an a/v show, either for the first or 50th time, we asked some of the best a/v technicians in the country for advice on how to run a smooth show. These experts stage dozens of large shows each year, ranging from Comdex to the Academy Awards; they've seen all the mistakes a presenter can make, and they know how they can be avoided. Most a/v experts work on large-scale productions, but their advice is applicable to even one-person presentations.

"The most common technical gaffes are microphones that are improperly handled or wired, incorrect lighting and computer programs that freeze," says Richard Heller, vice president of operations for the Interface Group in Boston (which produces the annual Comdex trade show). Here are the masters' tips on how to prepare for and deliver a compelling a/v presentation that won't degenerate into a comedy of technical errors.

1. KNOW HOW TO HANDLE A MICROPHONE

Your microphone is your primary communication vehicle. Remembering some simple pointers will make your presentations clearer and more professional.

Speak clearly into the microphone. When using a mike, presenters need to keep the proper distance. "With a standard podium mike, talk about six inches from the microphone, or a little closer," suggests Wayne Vincent of Presentation Video Services. But don't get too close, he warns; if you do, you'll start "popping your p's," meaning that the p's become overemphasized in your speech – an annoying sound for audiences.

If you're planning to move around as you speak – to gesture dramatically or to take questions and answers – tell the a/v suppliers in advance, so they'll be sure to have a clipon Lavalier mike available. The Lavalier should be attached to a jacket, lapel, collar, neckline or tie above the midchest level, but not against the larynx; or else your voice becomes muffled.

`visual contrast' between the speaker (in the spotlight) and his or her audience (in the dark). Of course, you don't want too much room light, because the screen will be washed out."

In addition, turning off the lights for a prolonged period has been known to induce drowsiness among audience members, particularly after a meal. For that reason alone, it's a good idea to soften the contrast between the house lights and the light shining on the speaker.

Another consideration is the podium lighting, which can't

ith the proper planning and technical support, you can minimize your chances of encountering an embarrassing glitch."

Repeat questions from the audience into the mike. This helps everyone hear the questions, and it's essential if your session is being recorded on audio or videotape. Sometimes a/v technicians place a standing microphone in the audience for questions, but that can be unsatisfactory. "We've found a lot of people are intimidated by having to get out of their seats and walk to a microphone," says Heller. "They'll readily yell

their questions from their seats, but a lot of people won't get up and speak in public."

2. PUT SOME LIGHT ON THE SUBJECT

Lighting is particularly essential to the success of a presentation, Heller says. One thing to ascertain in advance is the heat generated by spotlights or other lighting; the lighting used in an auditorium can sometimes broil a speaker.

To avoid third-degree burns, try a dress rehearsal of your presentation from the podium; you'll experience how the lights will feel shining on you while there's still time for adjustments. If that's impossible, ask one of the technicians on stage to stand in for you, Heller advises.

Some a/v experts believe that a speaker doesn't need a spotlight (and the problems such lighting can create). Adds Walter Silverberg, President of Silver Mountain Productions in Dalls, Texas, "My solution is to not turn the room lights all the way off during a presentation. The main thing that bothers speakers is not the spotlights shining in their eyes, but the always be relied upon. If you're making a slide or video presentation and you need to read your notes during the presentation, it's a good idea to take a pen light with you, several a/v experts suggest. If the podium lighting proves inadequate, a pen light will enable you to read your notes without having to turn up the house lights.

3. HAVE BACKUP PROCEDURES IN PLACE FOR COMPUTERS, SLIDE MACHINES AND VIDEO EQUIPMENT

Computers are notorious for freezing up during a presentation – it's a matter of Murphy's Law – so be prepared. "For every piece of equipment we use in a presentation, we have a backup machine or a backup procedure in place," says Doug Hunt, executive vice president of Audio/Visual Headquarters (A.V.H.Q.) in Inglewood, California, which produces shows for Apple, IBM and Sun, as well as the Emmy and Oscar awards presentations. When John Sculley's demo crashed at Macworld, for example, the technicians at A.V.H.Q. had a backup plan ready.

Contingency plans for computer equipment can be expensive, though. In addition to the duplicated equipment, the A.V.H.Q. technicians used a \$50,000 routing box to save Sculley's Macworld demo. The routing box redirected computer projection signals so that the backup Macintosh offstage could replace the Macintosh that Sculley used onstage.

In the case of a presentation using rear-projection slides or video, an equipment backup plan isn't always practical. That's because rear-projection equipment must be precisely aligned, a task that no one would want to handle in a hurry in front of an impatient audience. As an alternative, plan to have a projector on hand with a 35mm slide of your company's logo; if the rear-projection system should fail, have the slide projector turned on to shine the logo onto the screen, suggests Heller. "That way, at least you're not standing up there beside a blank screen."

In fact, slides can often play the role of stand-in for computers *and* rear-projection devices. For example, if you don't have backup computers for your presentation, it's a good idea to have 35mm slides made of the highlights from your computer presentation; that way, you've still got a visual aid, and your audience will at least get a flavor for the subject of your talk. This is a good alternative if

ith a reliable a/v team in your corner, you'll be able to carry on without missing a beat - and the audience will enjoy your show with little

or no distraction.

your budget prohibits use of a sophisticated computer or rear-projection display.

4. DON'T RELY TOO HEAVILY ON EQUIPMENT

The key to strong presentations isn't the equipment you use. Knowing the message you want to get across and understanding that the message itself is what's important, says David Elliott, A.V.H.Q.'s senior engineer. "You should be able to do your presentation on a blank stage, with no props, and have it work on its own," he adds. "The equipment is only there to support you; if the computer crashes, it shouldn't stop your presentation."

According to Elliott, the worst presenters are "those who get on and just read the slide." The whole idea of slides and other visuals is to *enhance* your presentation, Elliott says, not to be the *purpose* of it.

5. PLAN AHEAD AND COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR CREW

The most common headaches in an a/v show could be avoided with proper planning and communication. To prevent lastminute worries, rehearse your presentation and communicate with the a/v providers as much in advance as possible, advises Wayne Vincent, technical coordinator for Presentation Video Services in Boston.

"Give the a/v technicians more information than you think they'll need," Vincent says. "If there's anything the least bit peculiar about what you're doing, such as using multiple screens or specially-synchronized sounds, make sure they realize that and understand how to deal with it. Too often, presenters assume you'll be able to do what they want you to do on site, and it's not always the case." Says Lee Sterbens, sales manager of Greyhound Exposition Services in Las Vegas, "The biggest problem I have is speakers walking in 15 minutes before their presentation and wanting to rehearse their speech or run through their videotape. Or if we're providing teleprompter service, they'll walk up minutes before the speech with pages of changes they want to make. They don't understand that, in most cases, somebody else is in the process of making a presentation, and we're using the stage and the system for them. You can't just stop someone else's speech to make changes."

The a/v staff is almost always under tight time constraints, so the more time you give them to prepare for your presenta-

tion, the better you'll look in front of the audience. "The one key to success or failure on a big presentation is time, and often we aren't given enough to prepare the show properly," says A.V.H.Q.'s Hunt.

For example, if the show's budget doesn't pay the \$4,000 to rent the auditorium an extra day, we have only one day to put the equipment in and rehearse the presentation, instead of two," Hunt says. As a result, "mistakes get made, because you don't have the proper amount of time to tune up the system."

6. FIND A GOOD TEAM AND STICK WITH IT

If you plan to make a/v presentations on a regular basis to sizeable audiences, you'll need to have a consistent group of technical people to support you, just as a concert singer travels with the same band. With a reliable a/v team in your corner, you'll be able to carry on without missing a beat – a la John Sculley – and the audience will enjoy your show with little or no distraction.

"There are many variables at work in a typical audio-visual presentation," concludes Hunt. "The key to pulling it off is having a team that works together on a consistent basis and has been through enough shows to know what to do, and when to do it."

Even if you don't have a regular a/v team, you can still plan ahead, communicate in advance with the a/v suppliers, and, most important of all, rehearse. Richard Heller's philosophy for averting disaster is a simple one: "Check it, check it and re-check it. And when you think you've checked it enough, check it one more time."

You don't have to do any of these things, of course, but wouldn't it be better to have the audience remember your presentation for its relevant points and not for its embarrassing glitches? The more technical your presentation, the more likely something will go wrong.

Whether you're making a presentation in a large auditorium with extensive high-tech equipment or in the conference room of your office with a few basice audio/visual aids, the experts agree: plan ahead.

Mard Naman is a freelance writer in Santa Cruz, California.

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THE OVERHEAD PROJECTOR IS PROBABLY the most used and abused piece of audiovisual equipment. Everyone in business has seen one, even if they don't recognize the name. It's boxy shape and long neck with a head-like apparatus protruding from the end make it look like an ominous but gentle prehistoric

beast. It is relatively easy to use – at least as far as projecting an image on the screen is concerned. There are few moving parts and nothing to thread. Turn it on, lay your transparency on the plate, and after some slight focusing, you are ready to go.

Inexpensive – Another bonus is that an overhead projector usually is easy to find. They are not terribly expensive, as is the case with movie projectors, so most organizations have several of them around. They are a common fixture in most conference rooms and usually can be found without having to fill out a lot of requisition forms. It is always a bonus not to have to go on a major treasure hunt to find equipment for your presentation.

Easy to Use – Little training is required to operate an overhead projector, which is probably its most valuable characteristic. Most people following the few simple tips in this article will be able to successfully use one.

Overheads are easy to adjust and focus; it requires only a few simple adjustments. Nothing frustrates an audience more than waiting while a speaker attempts to focus the audiovisual equipment.

No Need for Screen – The ability to project an overhead almost anywhere in a room is another definite advantage. Since images don't have to be projected onto a "silver screen," just about any light-colored wall or flat surface will work fine. For this reason many people use an overhead projector instead of a screen, even when a screen is available.

It's Portable – Even the older models, though cumbersome, are fairly easy to move about, and aren't near as heavy as a movie

projector. The newer portable models even collapse into a briefcase-size container. However, it is wise to practice assembling one before your presentation – these models can be a bit complex to set up.

Using th

Flexible Image Area – Overheads are versatile in that they accommodate large or small audiences. The image can be controlled to a couple of feet in diameter in a small office, or expanded in an auditorium to several yards in diameter.

TIPS ON USE

Never stand between the overhead and the surface onto which the image is being projected. This is a common problem, since speakers seem to be attracted to the spotlight area like moths to a bulb. If there is a slide on the overhead, the speaker's image blocks it out. If there is no slide, the audience will still be distracted by the light shining on the speaker and the speaker's image or shadow on the screen. The basic rule is to always stay away from the front of the projector. When you are finished showing slides or transparencies, turn the machine off. Even if you're not through, but want to talk for a few minutes, also turn the machine off. This precludes the possibility that you will become mesmerized by the light.

by Kathy A. Rogers

Often viewed as the prehistoric beast of audiovisual equipment, an overhead projector is actually quite easy to tame. "Nothing frustrates an audience more than waiting while a speaker attempts to focus the audiovisual equipment." If you are comfortable working to the right of the overhead, position yourself there. The important thing is that you pick a side and stay with it during your entire presentation.

When setting up the room before a presentation, ask yourself the following questions: Is there enough room to set my transparencies down? Where to lay the stack of used transparencies? Always keep the two stacks separate to avoid confusion. In other words, you are going to need several feet of working space on the side you have selected.

While this may sound like a simple issue, it is critical to a speaker. Often an overhead projector will be set up by the maintenance crews of a hotel or office and no working space will be left. This leaves the speaker two choices – trying to juggle all the transparencies in her hands or putting them on the floor where they usually get stepped on.

Also, when you have chosen a side to work from, make certain other audiovisual equipment is positioned on that side as well. Remember, the object is to avoid having to walk in front of the projector light, thereby distracting the audience. If you are working from the left side of the overhead, all flipcharts, chalkboards, etc., should be on that side. This of course, assumes that you plan on using them simultaneously with the overhead. If they will not be used while the overhead projector is on, then they may be placed anywhere that is convenient.

AVOIDING FLICKER

Any motion that the speaker makes on the screen plate of the projector will be magnified on the screen. For the purposes of this article, I'll use the term "flicker" to mean any unintentional movement on the screen, such as a pencil unintentionally rolling across the plate, fingers on the edge of the screen, or an object that has inadvertently been placed on the screen.

Another frequent cause of flicker originates in the way a transparency is put on the screen. Many speakers are talking as they place a transparency – and don't finish placing it. They leave it half on the screen and half in hand and are wrapped up in their speech. This is a very annoying phenomenon for the audience, since their attention is focused on the screen.

USE OF A PENCIL AS A POINTER

You don't have to point directly at the projected image when using an overhead. A pencil can be used effectively as a pointer right on the projector's screen plate. The easiest method is to lay the pencil on the overhead and slide it forward to the next point you want to make. Keep in mind that if your hands are shaky due to tension, this will be magnified when holding either a pencil or a transparency. Thus, it is best to lay the pen on the overhead, and periodically slide it to the desired position. This keeps the audience from seeing the magnified nervousness. A mechanical pencil is usually better than a wooden one, since it has a pocket clip to keep it from rolling.

The image of the pencil is so clear on the screen that often the manufacturer can be identified. For this reason, some speakers who want to impress their audience will only use a pencil known by its distinctive shape to be very expensive. Many people scoff at this practice, but it does give the speaker a certain affluent image. After all, there is an old adage that states, "An ounce of image is worth a pound of performance."

Regardless of which pencil you decide to use as a pointer, make certain you have one before you start your presentation. Too often a speaker will get up, start the presentation, then have to ask someone in the audience to borrow a pencil. Always be prepared for your presentations, even if you have to make a checklist and go through it like a pilot before flying an aircraft.

NUMBER OF LINES

The amount of information on a transparency is significant – use no more than five to seven lines of text. If you have twelve lines of data relating to the same study, divide them on two separate transparencies.

In some cases you may have to show an entire document, consisting of more text than is recommended for the overhead. One way to handle this is to put the title of the document on a transparency and distribute copies of the actual document to the audience.

A related problem occurs when showing a detailed schematic or diagram. The only thing you can do is to distribute copies as just mentioned, or show the entire diagram on a transparency and assume a certain amount will be missed by the audience.

PREPARATION OF TRANSPARENCIES

Just as pertinent as how to use transparencies is the topic of how to prepare the slides themselves. There are certain tricks in this process that will make your presentation more effective. An important consideration is the choice of color: slides come in a wide range – clear, yellow, blue, red, green, etc. Clear is most commonly used, but it tends to give off more of a glare than the other colors. Many professionals use a soft yellow that does not create a glare. You might want to interject a red or green transparency to emphasize a point. For example, the introduction could be in green, the main body of the presentation in yellow and the conclusion in red. These are choices best left to the individual presenter's creativity.

Another popular visual element that can enhance the look of your projected image is cardboard frames. These are usually available in any stationary store where the transparencies themselves are sold. The transparency is affixed to the frame with tape.

Framed transparencies, as opposed to loose, have the following advantages: Unframed transparencies tend to stick together, making them hard to handle. Since they are just thin sheets of plastic, they will start to melt if left too long on the heated face of the overhead projector. Nothing is more embarrassing than getting caught in a lengthy discussion as your melting transparency is illuminated for everyone to see! Framing reduces the chance of this happening.

Another benefit is that the cardboard edge of the frame provides an ideal place to number the slides and even jot down reminder notes. These can be helpful when giving a presentation. The slide stay in order and you may not even need notes other than the ones on the frame.

Special marking pens with which you can write directly on the transparencies while talking is also available. Some instructors use this technique in the classroom in lieu of writing on a chalkboard. One of the problems is that this technique creates flicker and is very annoying to an audience.

Professional speakers usually have their slides typed in large block letters, or hand lettered by a professional. It is wise to have all transparencies prepared ahead of time and to avoid writing on them during the presentation. This creates the professional image all presenters seek.

Kathy A. Rogers is a freelance writer and former Toastmaster living in Marion, Indiana.

"Nothing is more embarrassing than getting caught in a lengthy discussion as your melting transparency is illuminated for everyone to see!"

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55 vears

Mt. Helix, 126-5

45 years

Will Rogers, 645-16

40 years

Waseca, 1336-6 Christophers, 157-33 Point Mugu Toastmasters, 1075-33

35 years

Tinker, 1362-16 Twin Village, 2786-28 Windjammers, 2628-33 Dothan, 2804-48 Durban, 1406-74

30 years

Highwaymen, 1692-16 Early Bird, 3651-47 Water and Power, 3629-52

25 years

Gaveliers, 2323-69

20 years

Peachtree 25th, 358-14 Beechmasters, 1279-22 Miramichi Toastmasters, 688-45 Merck, 260-46 Woden Valley, 494-70 Mosman TM Club, 3687-70 Cis-Johannesburg TMC, 1150-74 Pietermaritzburg, 1590-74

15 years

Garden Grove Toasters, 550-F Redmond, 2828-2 NPPD, 1029-24 HDR Toastmasters, 1454-24 Trapelo Noon Talkers, 3136-31 Daytona Beach, 1134-47 West Volusia, 2138-47 S F Vly Board/Realtors, 342-52 Arco, 616-52 Nedcor, 2902-74 Fil-Am, 1639-75

10 years

Chevron, 5270-F Liberty Singles, 5275-F Toast of the Coast, 5288-5 Rockwell International, 5272-14 The Capitol Club, 5279-15 White Rose, 5287-38 Warner Mountain, 5273-39 Classi Toasters, 5282-52 Pitney Bowes, 5277-53 Panhandle Eastern, 5268-56 Union City, 5269-57 Grand Strand, 5289-58 Tablelands, 5284-69 Mount Isa, 5285-69

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