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# Speak for Yourself, John

By Nancy Q. Keefe

Applause resounds through the hall. The speaker nods (humbly) and beams. From your place in the audience the Walter Mitty in you stirs briefly and wishes to be the hero of the moment on the podium.

Or imagine this situation, unfortunately the more likely one: the audience dozing, the speaker plodding along monotonously, while the exasperated fidget in you says that you know you could do better. Probably you could and, if you haven't yet been called upon to demonstrate your speaking ability, you almost certainly will be. For somebody—maybe an accountant—did some figuring and estimated that 50,000 speeches are given every day in the United States. This deafening report doesn't include sermons, college lectures or political speeches.

So the odds are that you, a specialist in a complex field, will someday be a speaker—instructing a staff training session, talking to a college accounting club or addressing a service club.

H&S people who have preceded you to the platform say it's satisfying, rewarding and fun. Standing up to speak before a group appeals to the "performer" that lurks in nearly everyone. It singles out the speaker for recognition lasting long after the applause has faded. And it lets an accountant, who traditionally toils in anonymity, shine for a moment in the spotlight. Moreover, the chance to stand alone as a speaker offers an invigorating change of pace from the group-think and action by committee that characterize most of our lives.

The recognition aspects—personal and professional—shouldn't be lightly dismissed. Charles Goldsmith of the Executive Office, responsible for management education, points out that the Firm and the profession in general are "becoming more visible to the public, and opportunities should be seized to project that visibility well." Public speaking, or—as Charlie Goldsmith prefers—effective speaking, provides an excellent opportunity to make yourself and the Firm visible.

Winston Churchill, who has a sort of patron saint status among many experienced speakers, climbed to prominence by way of the speaker's platform. He was not an unknown as a young man because his raffish war experiences and his early writing had received wide notice. Still, his first election, his subsequent preeminence and much of his livelihood resulted from his speeches, even though Churchill had a lisp and a stutter, which dogged him always. And he lacked any quality like the late Senator Dirksen's golden tones. He had instead, according to one biographer, "sincerity or vehemence [and] evident belief in his own words."

The president of a West Coast corporation, who is a well-traveled professional speaker, says, "You just can't beat the platform as a means of communicating sincerity." For Churchill, that ability made him effective and ultimately it made him prime minister. Your own ambitions, even if they are more modest, are still enhanced by effective speaking.

"Besides, it's fun," says one well-spoken H&S partner, who calls himself a frustrated actor. "Some of my most satisfying moments have come from speaking—the immediate applause, appreciative letters afterward. People remember a good talk for a long time, which is a plus for the speaker, because in this Firm or anywhere, you're always being evaluated."

Beyond personal satisfaction, effective speaking heartens listeners and makes them attentive. Then you have what Charlie Goldsmith calls the "dynamics of effective communication"—imparting your special knowledge to someone else.

In addition, certain byproducts accrue. At a community gathering, like an open meeting on the town's school budget, the audience warms to the best speaker and assumes he is the best thinker as well. Any participant who has polished his speaking skills capitalizes on this undeniably visceral reaction in people. He wins support for his views, even if they are not the most valid. You, with your professional knowledge, may have a great deal to tell the citizens about a budget. But you have to speak up. From his experience as a Dale Carnegie instructor, Charlie Goldsmith knows that one of the most frustrating experiences a person can have is to have a great idea stay locked within himself because he does not have the ability to express it.

This is true whether your platform is in front of a captive staff meeting in the Firm or before a large gathering entirely outside the profession. It was that sort of wider audience that the late Charles Rockwood urged H&S people to seek. As director of public relations for the Firm, he regretted that "accountants are still talking mostly to each other." He wanted them to talk as well to the world outside. Among the estimated

50,000 audiences a day, probably hundreds would like to hear an accountant speak about the less esoteric aspects of his work. Could you be that accountant?

One highly visible board chairman sees direct benefits to his company from his speechmaking even though he never puts a commercial into his talk. Any enterprise can likewise benefit from effective communicators. They needn't be the chief executive officer, either. General Motors offers speakers from many levels on the corporate ladder to address local organizations on topics like job safety and minority hiring. The manager of GM's field speakers' bureau observes: "It has long been our experience that the best way to convey information is on a personal basis."

OK, you say. How do I get to the speaker's platform? The same way you get to Carnegie Hall. Practice.

Al Cardone, partner in New York and a frequent speaker on financial management of hospitals, says, "Ample opportunities to speak exist right within the Firm. Young accountants should start as instructors with the staff training program, which will help them develop poise in handling a group. At the manager's level, there are even more opportunities. And local CPA chapters always need speakers. Once you become known, other groups want you—I find I'm constantly on my feet—then you have to become selective."

Oscar Gellein, EO partner with a reputation as a good speaker, thinks that "accountants with a specialty get the speaking invitations." Sometimes, however, a local connection may qualify you as a speaker. Don McLellan, manager in the EO Continuing Education section, once thought he was going to "say a few words" to a small accounting club at his alma mater. He arrived to find more than 100 students waiting to hear his "speech." Sometimes opportunity does seek you out.

Consider Churchill again. When he was given a lion's share of the credit for

England's success in World War II, he replied: "It was the nation and the race dwelling around the globe that had the lion's heart. I had the luck to be called upon to give the roar"

To be ready to give the roar or just say a few words takes a little education. As Charlie Goldsmith says, "We can't expect people to be successful speakers instantly any more than we can expect them to be successful accountants instantly." Much more time is necessarily spent making good accountants than is given to training good speakers, though. One executive, a self-styled fidget, wrote in *Dun's*: "The bright young MBA comes out of business school thoroughly tutored in the fine arts of management and finance, but nowhere along the line has anyone bothered to teach him to... put over a speech that does not have half his audience looking at their watches."

At one time, a required course in public speaking appeared on every college freshman's schedule. Frank Borelli, partner in New York who speaks often throughout the year to professional groups, remembers his four-semester course in public speaking: "I was really nervous in the first term, but I picked up a great deal of confidence by the second term. By the time I was in the Army and assigned to teach in artillery school, I found speaking easy and enjoyable." Experienced speakers find that teaching any subject on any level helps them develop poise and the extemporaneous manner that beguiles audiences.

Many speakers, including a professor of speech and drama, are dubious, however, about the value of an old-fashioned public speaking course. "It shouldn't be required now," the professor

says. "The students don't want it and probably don't need it. They get experience leading and participating in seminars. In fact, this generation of students has been gaining speaking experience since show-and-tell in kindergarten. They don't need formal courses as much as they need helpful criticism from us along the way."

A woman who earns her living as a professional speaker would agree. "The old concept of public speaking, lecturing—forget it," she says. "The audience must participate...the group involvement wave is coming in." This makes speaking both easier and harder. The speaker is not expected to be a classical orator but an easygoing talker. He or she should be able and willing to handle questions from the audience, without hesitation. At the same time, the group-involvement aspect means that a speaker has to be spontaneous, thoroughly informed and nimble. If this catches you clearing your throat because you haven't been exercising these attributes since show-and-tell days, you can follow the suggestions from experienced speakers: read some books, take a course, get some practice.

Books, with titles like *How To Overcome Nervous Tension and Speak Well in Public* and *How To Be the Life of the Podium*, abound in every public library. One of the best is *How To Write and Deliver a Speech* by John Ott (Trident Press, 1970). If you read one of these books and think it's like reading a book on how to swim—"I know all the theory but I'm still afraid of the water"—perhaps a speaking course would encourage you to take the plunge.

The Dale Carnegie Course is available throughout the world. Participants in the 14-week course meet once a week

for four hours under the guidance of an experienced instructor. On the assumption that "we'd all like to be shining speakers but we're afraid to fail," Charlie Goldsmith said the first goal of the course is to help students "conquer the fear element," then gradually add the ingredients to become an effective speaker. This means a performer learns to cope with fear (Helen Hayes has suffered stage fright before every performance), not to purge it (Oscar Gellein says "a little nervousness is good for a speaker. You should be nervous enough to get psyched up").

Colleges and universities with continuing education programs offer speaking courses. "These can be helpful," says one speech professor. "Just be sure of the instructor—that you're not getting elocution lessons but solid instruction in effective communication."

Toastmasters International and the International Toastmistress Club have local chapters in most cities. They assign a list of topics to members, several of whom speak at each meeting. An evaluator, also one of the members, gives each speaker a critique at the end of his talk. Irwin Rust, partner in New York, belonged to Toastmasters for several years and rates it excellent training ground even for a beginner.

A growing group of speech consultants has emerged now that executives everywhere have decided to become available as speakers. Some consultants coach individuals or a group, book engagements and evaluate performances. Others run intensive training programs, like one consultant's four-day seminars. "You don't make a professional speaker in four days," the consultant acknowledged in a *Business*

*Week* article, "but everyone... will at least know how to go about preparing himself and he will never fall on his face."

Even with the best preparation, speakers say that Murphy's law often rules the podium. Someone in the audience will trip on the microphone wiring and break it. Or the founder's portrait hanging behind you will fall. Or you will suffer amnesia. If you've had some instruction in speaking, you'll learn how to handle situations in which everything that can go wrong does go wrong.

Still, preparation turns out to be the operative word. All the experienced speakers and teachers stress it continually. Being prepared, they say, includes everything from knowing your audience even before you start your research for material to checking the layout and equipment of the room before you start to speak. But this preparation should not be evident when you speak. What your audience should see is an apparently effortless performance, the way a spectator sees only the easy grace of Sam Snead's swing, not the years of practice that have perfected it.

"It's hard work," says Oscar Gellein. "You have to decide you're going to work at it or you won't do it right." Preparation also means careful research, he adds, "being full of your subject. You have to know much more than you'll ever say."

If a speaker sounds like the novice teacher who keeps only one lesson ahead of his students, the audience will not have much confidence in his message. Your wealth of information should not become an embarrassment of riches, however. You need to impose order on it in whatever way you decide is most comfortable for you. Irwin Rust writes out his speeches completely,

then makes notes of the highlights as a jog to his memory. He uses the notes and keeps the text in his pocket.

Oscar Gellein writes a fairly complete paper, reorders that into a detailed outline, then reduces that to a bare outline from which he works.

The professor of speech and drama, who practices what she teaches on many platforms, says she composes orally. She talks out loud to herself, jotting down her ideas but never writing a complete text. "Have the ideas down and the words will come," she says. "The transitions will be smoother, too, if you compose orally."

A few words about words. *H&S Reports* for Summer 1972 offered a guide to clear, effective writing. In his how-to book, John Ott says: "A speech is a literary composition designed to be heard rather than read... [It] uses simple, graphic and concrete language." Oscar Gellein says a speaker should have a sense of the "taste of words." He suggests doing crossword puzzles to learn the good short words that add variety to a speech but avoid obscurity and retain precision. "Broadly speaking," Churchill once wrote, "the short words are the best, and the old words, when short, are best of all." If a certain sound gives you trouble, look for a synonym.

How ever speakers differ in their preparations and style, they agree on several things. Among them: rehearse well, simulating as much as you can the actual conditions. If you are to speak standing up, rehearse standing up. Corral an audience—your husband, wife or best friend—and practice looking your audience straight in the eye.

As the day approaches, the professionals

say you should recheck the time and place, and then arrive on time or earlier. This will give you a chance to see the setting, provide yourself with a glass of water and check the microphone, if you're to use one.

In addition, they all agree: don't tell a joke that doesn't become you and don't tell a joke at all if you don't tell jokes well. There are other ways to lighten your speech. A learned economist whose native language was German told an American audience: "I didn't have time to learn a joke so I give you permission to laugh at my accent!"

Successful speakers as well as long-suffering listeners plead with one accord: don't talk too long. Some professional speakers say 20 minutes is the limit of audience endurance. Others say the occasion or topic could warrant a longer talk, but they all say that you should never exceed your allotted time and you should always leave the audience wanting more. One weary business executive urges speakers to learn to assess audience enthusiasm. "Don't assume your listeners are spellbound," he warns. "They may be merely asleep."

An articulate and considerate woman, who knew about assessing enthusiasm, was introduced after a parade of speakers at a lengthy testimonial. She delighted the audience with her ability to suit her actions to her words when she said, "To be seen, one must stand up. To be heard, one must speak up. To be appreciated, one must shut up." □

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