



What's the Story?

November 2017

Should I tell a joke or a funny story?

We're often asked by delegates whether they should tell jokes or not. We always say: "If it's funny AND relevant, tell it!"

Audiences love a speaker who can entertain them and shows a sense of humour.

A friend, Brian Jenner, who is founder of the UK Speechwriters Guild, told us how well a speech went in Dublin when he included a couple of funnies.

The audience was a mixed business group including a number of Americans, so he told these two:

"The difference between America and England is that Americans think 100 years is a long time, while the English think 100 miles is a long way."

And... "The Victorian, George Jessel, had some excellent advice on how to become a good speaker: practise all the time. One of the best ways is to put a bunch of marbles in your mouth while you talk. Slowly but surely you take away a marble. And then, when you've lost all your marbles, you're a public speaker."

Brian has published a handbook of similar lines and stories called Trade Secrets. It's available at lulu.com for £4.99 +VAT <http://goo.gl/nYZffS>. You can also download our book of stories Free at <http://goo.gl/zLj1N2>.

Both will help you find a lighter touch.
Good luck!

Good writing

We came across a memo which had been sent out by a large international marketing company to staff and key suppliers on the need for good writing.

It pointed out that poor writing reflects badly on a business. It can be time-wasting, costly, even damaging and reflects on the sender. On the other hand, good writing is good for everybody especially the sender's image.

On a single sheet, it argued the case for good writing and included these tips:

Your 1st para should contain 80% of the story.
Your 1st page needs to carry 100% of the critical information.
Jargon, acronyms and abbreviations should be avoided.

Remember, effective communication is short and to the point.

Can somebody answer that phone?

The journalist Danny Finkelstein tells a story of the American computer businessman Ken Olsen.

Mr Olsen was furious when it took him ages to get through to his firm's British Office. He reminded the man who eventually picked up the phone that it was company policy to allow no more than three rings.

His laid-back employee muttered that he'd been busy. Olsen exploded: "Do you have any idea who this is? I'm Ken Olsen, the founder of this entire company".

There was a pause before the employee replied: "And do you know who this is"?
When Olsen said no, the man said "Good!" and hung up.

When they go low, we go high*

After a season of poor political conference speeches in the UK, it was good to read a book by a man who knows a good speech from a bad one.

The author is Philip Collins ex-speechwriter to Tony Blair and now a leading Times columnist who reviews and analyses all major UK political speeches.

He has taken 25 of the speeches that have shaped the world and analysed them and told the stories behind the creation of the speeches.

They are mainly 20th century greats but world-wide. If you're wondering where the title came from, it's the title of Michelle Obama's uplifting speech at the 2016 Democratic convention when she rallied the delegates to take the fight to the Republican candidate Donald Trump.

It's a book for people who love good speeches – and why we need them.

*(When they go low, we go high" ISBN 978-0-00-823569-7) <http://goo.gl/yPTohY>

Good luck with your stories, presentations and pitches in 2017

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