



SPEAKERS' CORNER



July 2011

What's your line?

Summer is a favourite time for weddings and we are often asked to help people who have to make a speech and don't want to start with "Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking..." Barry spoke at his step-daughter's wedding last month and in the process of preparing his speech he was reminded of the value of writing down good lines whenever and wherever you find them.

One of the lines he found was in Westminster Abbey, two days after the wedding of William and Kate. It was in a commemorative book which members of the public could write in. The message that stood out to Barry was: "May the love you have for each other today last forever". He knew he had to use it and that it would be well received - and it was.

Why not start your own 'commemorative book' of lines (and stories). As Baden Powell put it so succinctly: "Be prepared" - for any occasion!

"Too much of a good thing is wonderful". Mae West

"You get a lot more with honey than with vinegar." A proverb

The power of a smile

Research suggests that children smile some 400 times a day whereas adults smile no more than 40 times – is life that bad? What's interesting is that there is more research available today which points to the benefits of smiling. Smiling improves longevity – people who smile more, live longer. People who smile are not only seen as more likeable and courteous but also more competent.

That means it actually pays to increase your complement of daily smiles! You may get curious looks at first but in the end you'll stand out for all the right reasons. You'll also find your audiences will be more attentive – what you give out you get back!

"I always turn to the sports page first. The sports page records people's accomplishments; the front page nothing but man's failures."

Earl Warren

Power to the People

It says something when the Swiss are provoked beyond the brink of boredom into action. A public speaking coach has launched a new political party the Anti-PowerPoint Party which is campaigning to outlaw needless PowerPoint presentations. It argues that not only could it save the world 350 billion euros but also save millions of people hours of boredom. No more

having to listen to a presenter recite a sentence that the audience can read for themselves on screen in half the time. No more bullet point triteness or stock shot images that distract from a good speaker. No more presenters delivering weak arguments disguised in a mass of slick PowerPoint.

We're not sure we would go as far as prohibition but we do know that the best speakers don't need to use it.

“Power tends to corrupt. PowerPoint corrupts absolutely.”

Edward Tufte

Good storytelling helps decision making and builds trust.

Why does it sometimes seem right to “speak out” but other times to “stay quiet”? And why can we invest in a project with “no guarantee of return” one day and yet the next time look for “a fixed return”?

We humans don't employ a formula to every decision we make. So stop thinking charts, metrics and spreadsheets to prove your case every time – they are the culprits that block imagination. They prevent the audience from thinking and mean they have to either accept or reject your conclusions. Instead start using your imagination and become a storyteller. Life is ambiguous - stories are ambiguous. Stories don't squeeze out interpretation but invite the listener to participate in the “what does this mean to me?” and then draw their own conclusions.

When facts become so widely available and instantly accessible, each one becomes less valuable. But a story engages, is memorable and is valued.

You can't control people into the “right” conclusion but trust them to draw their own. This is the key to being the trusted partner in any relationship. So show you have confidence in your audience's decision making – give them the chance to imagine what's possible – tell them a story.

“Fiction reveals the truth that reality obscures.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

An Exceptional Speaker

We listened to one of America's most successful speakers, Lou Heckler the other day. Here are some of his insights and tips on being an exceptional speaker. Some you'll have heard before but together Lou offers some valuable advice.

1. Spend as much time in preparing your opening & closing as you do on the rest.
2. You're not giving a speech, you're giving your audience an experience – see it as a movie.
3. Structure keeps people listening – you need a theme (your angle), a destination statement (what they're going to hear) and main points which are relevant, memorable and repeatable.
4. Stories are content. They need to be illustrative, vivid and emotional. Show rather than tell. Let your story unfold so your listener says: “What happens next?”
5. Work on your voice so audiences will enjoy listening to it. Make sure it can deliver intimate conversation so each member of the audience feels you're talking to them.
6. Love your audience – every one of them.

“The problem in life and other people's lives is not the absence of knowing what to do, but the absence of doing it.” Peter Drucker

Read any good books recently?

Recent research has proved that the more fiction you read, the better your ability to empathise with others and understand more clearly the social world you live in. A book called "Such Stuff as Dreams: The Psychology of Fiction" (ISBN 13: 9781119970910) by Keith Oatley explores how fiction works on the brains and imagination of readers. Professor Oatley says: "I liken fiction to a simulation that runs on the software of our minds. Just as computer simulations can help us get to grips with complex problems such as flying a plane or forecasting the weather, so novels, stories and dramas can help us understand the complexities of social life."

Daniel Pink, the author of another interesting book "A Whole New Mind" (ISBN 1594481717), states: "Story represents a pathway to understanding that doesn't run through the left side of the brain." It is his belief that people who can recognize patterns and make meaning from seemingly non-related events and information will succeed while the purely logical left brain thinker will struggle. In his view, the future belongs to the big picture thinkers – the storytellers.

So the more fiction you read, the more developed your emotional intelligence and the right side of your brain will become. Reading business books may help you learn business skills, but reading novels just might do more to help you succeed.

"History tells us only what has happened, whereas fiction tells us what can happen, which can stretch our moral imaginations and give us insights into ourselves and other people." Aristotle

It's so easy a kid can understand.....

It's common knowledge that mobile phone manufacturers have used children as their product testers. We listened to Robert Craven talking recently and he suggested that all of us should be working with 13 year olds. Why? Because a sure way of knowing if you have a clear proposition is to tell a 13 year old and ask them to explain it back to you.

"Successful and unsuccessful people do not vary greatly in their abilities. They vary in their desires to reach their potential." John Maxwell

News Item: IAA PAC Seminar

We will be running the "Presentation Skills" session again at the IAA PAC Seminar in Merton College Oxford on Thursday, August 11. The seminar runs from August 10-13 and is an established and highly regarded international media training course.

For more information, call Annika at the IAA -0207 381 8777.

"Work harder on yourself than you do on your job." Jim Rohn

Why did the possum cross the road?

Whilst travelling on coaches around the south island of New Zealand, we were given some brilliant lessons on "good communication practice" by our drivers, Dave, Pete and Richard. For the record, the scenery there is stunning and vast - but after a few hours can become monotonous. And if your driver likes the sound of his own voice, you can be drowned by a sea of words - some of interest but most not. So as a passenger you learn to tune in and out

to the events around you but if you're not careful you risk missing the best bits. It struck us this is exactly what can happen to an audience when faced with a lengthy, fact-filled presentation.

So back to Dave, Pete and Richard - what made them special communicators?

Firstly, they recognised we had a lot of ground to cover. Secondly, as experts they knew when to alert us to important sights so we could take photos to refer to later. Thirdly, they understood we couldn't remember much of what they said unless they engaged with us. How did they do this? By telling us some of their personal stories - of sheep farming and shearing, of a new wood burner, of being taught to hunt and fish by a father, of a wife's family argument over land ownership and much more. Because they were personal, we can remember them. But the key difference was that each of their stories made a point to help us better understand their country of New Zealand.

The power of storytelling in business presentations works exactly the same way. The presenter needs to tell a story to help make the key point of the presentation and in so doing leave the detail in the document for later examination - rather like those photos we'd taken on our trip.

What about the possum? On our coach journey we had been told a lot about the problems they were having with possums - an unwanted import from Australia. We had mentioned we had not seen any live ones - only dead ones on the road. We were told that they loved coming out at night to warm up on the hot roads and as a result were killed by passing cars. So, why did the possum cross the road? To visit his flat mate of course!

Good luck!

Barry Graham and Sally Clare

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