

SPEAK OUT WITH CLOUT

Charles A. Boyle

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1



**SPEECHES
SATISFY**

1



Most of us are honored when we receive an invitation to be a speaker at a convention, a banquet, or a service club. But after the first flush of self-esteem begins to fade, each of us reacts to the invitation according to our own measure of confidence, our needs, and our aims. Whether or not we accept the invitation depends on a number of personal factors. Some people really enjoy getting up before an audience and giving a speech. Others would rather face a charging hippo than an audience, but, for one reason or another, they must drag themselves away from their favorite television show, go out into a rainy night, drive 30 miles, and give a speech to the people attending the annual big bash of the Crocodile Society. Why? Because the Society wants a bank president to address them and the speaker happens to be the president of the bank that has the society's money in its vault. Others give speeches because they see a current or long-range benefit to their personal growth, their company, or their cause. In short, people give speeches for the pleasure of it, for the reward, by compulsion, or for a combination of those reasons.

Whatever the motivation, there is no reason why a speech should be an ordeal for the person giving it or for those listening. But there is an important reason, aside from personal inducements, for speeches to be given. In spite of mass communications in the modern world, speeches fill an information chasm. Although we are flooded with broadcasts and publications (radio, television, newspapers, and now even the Internet) providing data for everything under the sun and answers to questions we never asked, we

get information in bits and pieces. Most of us are informed or misinformed by ingesting fragmented, edited, and opinionated messages, especially from the nation's primary sources of televised and Internet-based news. What we need, at least some of the time, is unexpurgated information and the opportunity to question the informant. Speeches are a vital ingredient for a well-balanced diet of current and historical events.

Shortly before the turn of the century, Theodore Vail became a colossus in American industry and continued to innovate until his death in 1920. Newspapers called Vail, the man who built AT&T, the “Cincinnatus of Communications.” In his first AT&T *Annual Report to Shareholders*, Vail titled the lead-off section, “Public Relations.” He was one of the first major business leaders in America to recognize that good public relations provides the proper climate in which to build a successful business. And we all know what a success AT&T is today and has been for over a century. To Vail, “good” public relations meant honest reporting. “If we don’t tell the truth about ourselves,” he wrote, “somebody else will.” Telling the truth about oneself requires more than a 30-second commercial. Company speakers are an integral part of a total public relations effort. Newspapers, TV, films, magazines, radio, and other company publications all provide one-way communication. But only a company speaker can respond immediately to questions and provide instant feedback to the public in a much more personalized way than by responding via email or with a phone call.

Since the 1960s, the public’s confidence and trust in institutions — business, government, and labor — has declined drastically. Young people are challenging time-honored values and older people are distrustful of change. In addition to established public relations programs, today’s issues call for face-to-face contact with people in the community to answer their questions, recognize their concerns, and express positions.

Speakers are one link in an effort to “tell the truth about themselves.”

Why give speeches at all? Because without them, your message will be incomplete.

From a practical point of view, speeches are essential to meeting the demands and criticisms of today’s consumers and constituents.

From an intellectual point of view, speeches have quite often been the launching pads which have moved nations into freedom or

chains. Almost every great thought of mankind was first expressed in a speech. Aristotle, Socrates, and Cicero gave speeches which were taken down in shorthand by slaves and then, at least in the case of Cicero, transcribed and sold to the public. Shakespeare wrote plays — which were mostly full of speeches. Walter Lippman pointed out how important it was that America's founding fathers were able to draw on the classical authors and, according to Henry Fairlie, "First in importance among these were the orators."

Throughout history, the words from speeches have been the banners people have rallied round. In the twenty-first century, speeches continue as a primary source of many ideas and phrases that move people into action.* Ask yourself, can you remember the words John F. Kennedy wrote in his best-selling (Pulitzer Prize winning) book, *Profiles in Courage*? Probably not. But not many of us can forget what he said in his inauguration speech: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." This, incidentally, was first said in a speech by Frederick I of Prussia about 300 years ago. Can any of you quote phrases from the books of Winston Churchill? It's doubtful. But who can forget his phrase, "The Iron Curtain," used in a speech more than sixty years ago at Fulton, Missouri?

In more recent years, Ronald Reagan was known as the "great communicator" because of his speeches, and Barack Obama — well, the truth is, his speeches hold his followers and others spellbound. Of the many reasons he was elected president, his speeches would have to be near the top of the list. And remember, he reads from a teleprompter — he uses scripts.

From Washington's Farewell to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's " ... we have nothing to fear ... ," and Churchill's " ... blood, sweat, and tears," the list of memorable speeches is endless. Good speeches are printed and quoted and remembered.

Why give speeches? Emerson said, "Speech is power; speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel." The American statesman Chauncey DePew stated, "There is no other accomplishment that any man can have that will so quickly make for him a career and secure recognition." In the 1970s, an executive of General Motors, commenting on why they had employees at nearly 100 locations

*Books may have given birth to Ralph Nader and Rachel Carson, but speeches kept their causes alive.

available to give speeches to local organizations, said, “It has long been our experience that the best way to convey information is on a personal basis.”

Why give speeches? Because they satisfy a crucial need for more complete communication.

Who Will Listen?

Dr. Edward R. Annis, a former president of the American Medical Association, began a speech some years ago by saying: “When you talk about some of the crowds I have spoken to, it reminds me of a lady who called me and said, ‘Dr. Annis, now that you have made the big time on television and all that, how many people do you have to have before you make a speech?’ I said, ‘Well, I still insist on two — but I will be one of them.’ I will talk to anybody who will listen, because I think it is important.”

Before quitting the news business and getting into speeches, it occurred to me that it might help to know if there was a market for my services. Being unable to afford a market research expert, I took my own survey in about 20 minutes. The formula was easy. Knowing there were 20 Rotary Clubs in the immediate vicinity of my city in the 1970s and that Rotary Clubs meet every week, simple arithmetic added up to about 1,000 speeches a year being given at Rotary Clubs alone. Armed with that knowledge, my guess was at least 4,000 or 5,000 speeches were being given each year in any metropolitan area. I was wrong. There were 1,000 or 2,000 speeches being given *every day* in my metropolitan area. In metropolitan New York in the 1970s, an estimated 10,000 speeches were being delivered every day.

Service clubs are not the only groups looking for programs. There are also Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), retiree clubs, garden clubs, conventions, school assemblies, and scores of other organizations ranging from monthly labor union luncheons to weekly “establishment” meetings. The audiences for speeches are there — always have been there and always will be there.

The question, then, is not who will listen — everybody listens to speeches — but rather, who will listen to *you* give a speech?

The answer is that almost everyone has something interesting to say regardless of their profession. The doctor, lawyer, engineer, and company president — all are experts in their field as far as everybody who is not in their field is concerned. But even the

nonprofessional has something of interest to speak about. A used-car salesperson undoubtedly has some amusing and fascinating stories to tell about his or her business as well as some useful, practical advice to share with all of us who buy a car. Or as an avocation the speaker might be a general in the National Guard or a member of the Propeller Club. Maybe he or she is an expert scuba diver or parachutist.

Everybody has a little more knowledge in a particular field than the rest of us, and there's an audience out there waiting to hear about it. But whether a person is a used-car salesman or the president of the biggest bank in town, an audience expects and deserves more than a mental grasping for words and information from the speaker. If a company executive is invited to speak to 500 people at a convention, he or she would be a fool to start thinking about what to say to them while en route to the site and then jotting down a few notes while munching on salad prior to the speech. The speaker would be smart to go to that convention well-prepared.

Mark Twain said it takes about three weeks to prepare a good, impromptu speech. And yet, the businessperson, invited to a small club with an audience numbering 20 or 25 people, might slough off its importance and do to them what he or she wouldn't do to a large audience — think about what to say on the way out of his or her office an hour before the speech. Such a lack of preparation too often results in a disgruntled audience, a dissatisfied speaker, and a lost opportunity to present an effective message for a cause or a company.

You have no reason to lose those opportunities — people will listen to you if they are not put under a strain brought on by your unpreparedness and fumbling. They will listen if they hear new information, something they haven't heard before: a message.

What Speeches Do for You, Your Cause, or Your Company

Marshall McLuhan said, "The medium is the message." Meaning, I suppose, that television was where it was at when he said it. A lot of people believed this, and some companies even went so far as to put their entire advertising budget into television. These experiments sometimes failed, and the advertising budget for the next year was spread out disproportionately among other media. Times have

progressed now, and companies' marketing and advertising budgets are skewed more toward online advertising.

Suppose, however, that whenever you wanted to reach the public, you would be in a position to command not only television, but every radio, newspaper, wire service, news magazine, and news website to record and report everything you say. Wouldn't that be the supreme communication network? No need to go out and talk to audiences of 50, 100, or 1,000 people. With the flick of a wrist, the entire news media would come to you, and your words would be heard instantaneously by millions worldwide on radio and television, read in newspaper and news magazines, and read by millions more on the Internet. Who would need to make speeches if they had that ultimate communication power? There are, of course, some people who have that power — for instance, the President of the United States.

In order to summon the combined resources of all the networks to the Oval Office (or wherever they are going to set up the cameras) the President must first have something to say — and must say it in a speech. Furthermore, the President theoretically cannot command any interest in his or her speech unless it is a nonpartisan address of national concern. If the goal is to help raise money or support for a congressional candidate in an off-year election, he or she usually speaks at a \$100-a-plate fundraiser in the ballroom of the biggest hotel in the congressman or congresswoman's city. And, if he or she wants to raise some dough and drum up support for his or her own candidacy for re-election, even though he or she is the President, preparation must be made to make hundreds of speeches in hundreds of places. Obviously, the medium is not the whole message. It's only one part.

Years ago I worked for the president of a large television and radio broadcasting company. For years, this man sat down every day and recorded an editorial which was played back the following day on television and radio. His face was the most recognized face in his city. He could say almost anything he wanted to say, as long as he could say it in a minute or so. One day he was asked to speak to a small convention and he asked me to write a speech. We sat down together, and while he told me what he wanted to say in his speech, I took notes. With the help of research to support his arguments and pleas, I drafted a script and my boss was ready to make a live appearance before the convention.

An amazing chain of events resulted from that invitation. To begin with, he was very happy to receive the applause and cheers of the 100 or so people who heard him give his speech. He was also happy to receive some immediate invitations to give his speech to other organizations to which those attending the convention at hand belonged. As the months wore on, he was happy to see his speech published — sometimes *in toto* in regional or specialized magazines, or in part as the thrust of a story in the local newspapers. He was particularly happy when his speech won a national Freedoms Foundation Award.

As the months stretched into years, the original speech kept changing — a paragraph would be taken out and replaced with updated material. A new thought would be developed and added in place of an older thought. The speech grew and lived, and my boss' fame also spread from one city into adjacent states. Occasionally he gave speeches on other subjects, but mostly he stuck to that one theme about advocacy journalism. When he first started to give his speech, he accepted invitations from almost any group. But, as time went by, he would only speak to large or prestigious audiences, turning the smaller or less prestigious audiences over to a vice-president or the TV anchors at his station. Once in a while he would ask me to deliver his speech. When I left his employ three years later, he was still giving that same speech, although there was hardly a word left in it from the original script.

During all of this time, he had a television and radio station at his command, and he continued to editorialize every day, expressing his opinions on every subject conceivable. In some of his editorials, if the subject was appropriate, he would lift out sentences or paragraphs from his speech and use them to make a point. But he never gave the exact speech itself on television or radio. Why? For the same reason a president of the United States will give one kind of message to a national television audience and another kind to a gathering of the party faithful. To the television audience encompassing philosophies stretching from the far left to the far right and everything in between, punches have to be pulled, qualifications made, and feelings taken into consideration if there is to be any hope of general receptivity from a mass-media audience. Speeches are aimed at specific audiences.

The more closely a message is geared to specific audiences, the more likely it is to be accepted. Without ever saying it, my boss and I

knew that his speech — in spite of the standing ovations he received whenever he gave it, in spite of its national award, in spite of its being printed in certain publications — would never be delivered on the air for the consumption of a television and radio audience. We never said so, but we knew empirically that his speech was meant for specific audiences and not for the vast spectrum of thoughts, prejudices, and intelligences that make up the mass, diversified TV audience. If a speech is to gain the maximum benefit for a speaker, his or her company, or his or her cause, it must be geared to specific audiences.

This doesn't mean a conservative must only speak to conservative audiences, a liberal to liberal audiences, an environmentalist to conservationists, or a businessperson to businesspeople. On the contrary, by omitting inflammatory words and phrases and stressing points of agreement, a speech is the best way for a labor leader to reach businessmen or a Republican to reach Democrats without alienating base support and without compromising his or her principles. I can't say there is no other way, but a speech is the most effective way to reach those with different opinions, convince those with no opinions, and reinforce those who subscribe to your opinion.

Let's break down the title of this section into specific examples of how speeches satisfy according to what they can do for you, your cause, or your company.

For the Individual

Thousands of people make money by giving speeches. In addition to the professional speakers who travel the convention trails, there are the nonprofessionals such as political leaders, sports personalities, and others who actually make a heck of a lot of money by getting paid for giving speeches. In some cases the activities of the political leaders and the company* with a cause use speeches for a mutual benefit. For example, a company may want to gain or cement a relationship with a congressman or congresswoman, and one way of rewarding him or her is to extend an invitation to speak to a dinner or meeting with a fat fee for his or her services. It's easy to see that giving speeches can be very lucrative for many people. But, most of us are not political, sports, or show-business personalities in a position to command large fees for giving a speech. Nevertheless, the

*The term "company" in this case can apply just as well to special interest groups, foundations, labor unions, and organizations.

rewards of public speaking can be longer lasting and more beneficial to those who don't speak as mercenaries.

The greatest reward, of course, is personal satisfaction. Aside from financial gain, either as a fee or as part of your job, public speaking offers you an opportunity to express your views and opinions. If you are not a public figure, or if you don't own a broadcasting company or publication, speeches are an effective way to reach large numbers of people. Finally, for those of you with a little bit of "ham" in your nature (and to some degree that's almost everyone!), speeches allow you to perform. When you rise to the platform, the spotlight is on you and all attention is focused your way. There are very few satisfactions that can match a good performance at the podium.

For the Companies and Causes

Speeches can be, and quite often are, the catalysts for immediate or long-range success. Advertising can sell a product and even an idea, such as conservation, if continued over a long period. News coverage, depending on the magnitude and degree of public participation needed, is also necessary for success in promoting causes. Speeches are the vehicles used to get the media coverage necessary to express the company's side of an issue.

A specific example of a company using a speech for a cause is the battle between the phone companies and the private carriers that was rampant in the 1970s. Actually, this controversy involved the entire phone industry and its unions on one side arrayed against private companies getting into specialized phone service on the other side, with the FCC and Congress in the middle. There were many phone companies in America. The private companies saw long-distance telephone service as a moneymaking enterprise, which it was. They wanted a piece of the action. By setting up service between low-cost, high-volume routes such as Chicago to New York, they could keep their rates low and still make a lot of dough. The Federal Communications Commission thought this competition to lower rates was a good idea. The phone companies argued that the whole thing was unfair because they had to provide long-distance service for low-volume, high-cost routes between all the small towns, as well as between the profitable big cities. Furthermore, phone companies argued that the profits they made on the lucrative long-distance rates helped to hold down the cost of home telephone service, which was provided, according to the phone companies, below cost.

Now, if the whole argument between the regulated phone companies and the private Specialized Common Carriers (SCC) was as simple as the explanation I just used, AT&T and the other phone companies could have saturated television and radio with commercials explaining the problem, in so doing gain the public support needed to get Congress to overrule the FCC. But it wasn't that simple. First of all, most people thought phone rates were too high and the phone companies were too big and rich. It was unlikely that public support for the monolithic industry would have come from an announcement saying competition from non-telephone companies was unfair.

Companies had to show, by comparison and by providing a brief history, how they provided the best telephone service at the lowest cost in the world. This approach required more time than a brief commercial. It required a tightly written speech giving a brief history of the system, how and why it became what it was, and how the service and cost to the consumer compared with other countries. The speech could take as little as 15 or 20 minutes to give with time left at the end for questions from the audience.

The speakers who gave talks like these used to be telephone company employees volunteering their time to tell the story of their industry. Hundreds of these employees gave similar speeches throughout the country to thousands of people and urged their audiences to write to their congressman or congresswoman about this issue. Furthermore, newspapers occasionally printed excerpts of these speeches, thereby reaching additional thousands of people. The speakers bureaus for the phone companies also had speeches on other subjects concerning the phone industry and a few speeches that were completely unrelated to the telephone.

The purpose of giving these speeches was to perform a public service while at the same time affording the public an opportunity to question representatives of what appeared to be a giant, faceless institution. It's easy to get angry with a large company, particularly monopolized utilities; it's a lot harder to get angry with a human being who works for one of those companies when he or she is making an effort to answer your questions and solve your problems. And that's where speeches come in: face-to-face communications, time to present more information, and the opportunity to receive and answer questions.