

How Great Leaders Communicate:

The Five Fundamentals That Move Audiences

The libraries are filled with dozens of books about what business leaders must do. But in the public speaking context, leaders must consistently do only one thing: influence people. Leaders must use their words and their personal presence to make people act or think a certain way.

And there is no one thing that moves listeners. Rather, there are five fundamentals that, when executed effectively, allow leaders to move audiences: delivering a point of view, delivering a focused message with stories, speaking with energy, making the program interactive, and rehearsal.

Fundamental #1: Deliver a Point of View.

Leadership communication isn't, "You decide." It's, "Follow me." Leaders tell what they think. Then they support their position and defend it. Give your plan for improving the way that merchants in your stores display their goods. Lay out a plan for improving the way that environmental lawsuits are investigated



and resolved. Show how the company can get a larger market share in Asia. Give a plan for improving "green" building standards.

But whatever you do, don't just give your audience all the facts and hope that they'll figure it all out on their own. We worked with a consultant who wanted to persuade a tradeshow audience that a certain logistical process was outdated. He planned to carefully lay out all the evidence of the problems with the process and only hint at his feelings at the end. He was hoping that the conclusion would be obvious based on the evidence.

We feel that leaders should be more forceful. Of course, this consultant had to have a logical argument. But we recommended that he begin by saying, "This process is antiquated and needs to be replaced."

Leadership takes courage. The language of leadership points the way and asks people to follow.

Fundamental #2: **Speak Simply and Use Stories.**

No one will follow you if they don't understand you. The best leadership communicators make their presentations accessible by keeping their messages to a few key points and bringing those points to life with stories.

To keep messages simple, come up with three "bumper stickers" that represent the core of your message.

Example:

- *Sales are down 25 percent this quarter.*
- *The cause of the problem is product quality.*
- *We need a renewed commitment to quality control.*

Once you lay out the core of the message in three clear points, bring the points to life with stories that help people see and feel the problem.

Example:

"I sat down at my computer the other day to read my email and the first message was from a client who told me that she opened a package of our socks only to find a thumbtack in the toe of a sock. Now I don't know how a thumbtack got into that toe. But clearly it had somehow gotten there during the manufacturing process. That level of poor quality control simply isn't acceptable."

Stories help audiences feel and see the problem. That feeling can move people to act.



Fundamental #3: **Show Conviction in Your Voice and Face.**

Anyone who has spent any time watching The Home Shopping Network can understand the powerful persuasive force of intensity and passion. Thousands of "George Foreman Grills" and "Abdominal Exercisers" have been sold by virtue of the pitchman's enthusiasm.

The same goes for leaders. You can't expect people to buy into your ideas based on logic alone. You need to show passion and conviction. And it needs to come through in your voice and face.

We work with Presidents and Vice Presidents of some of the largest companies in the world. And we tell them all the same thing: you need to speak to your audiences with the same passion that you speak to close friends during animated dinner conversations.

We often will ask our clients to speak off-the-cuff about a hobby or an avocation. We often see much more passion for cooking, fly fishing, or University of Georgia football than we do about business issues. But leaders need to speak with just as much passion about business as they do about their private passions. That passion can move an audience.



Fundamental #4: ***Make Programs Interactive.***

Leaders need to be accountable to the people they lead. And in the context of a presentation, they should be willing and eager to defend their ideas. That means taking questions during the presentation.

Many audiences assume that they're not supposed to ask questions and will only do so when prompted. On the other hand, you can create an environment where questions flow easily. Tell the audience that you're happy to be interrupted at any time.

We also think it's a good idea to ask for questions several times during the course of the presentation. And, for goodness sake, as soon as anyone does ask a question, stop everything and act like you're delighted to get the opportunity to respond.

Leaders understand that questions are opportunities to sell ideas. They jump at the chance.

Fundamental #5: ***Rehearse like Crazy.***

Communicating and influencing are among leaders' most important jobs. So when you have a chance to present, you need to inspire confidence and come across with polish. The best way to ensure that you nail your opportunity is to practice your presentation like crazy.

Most speakers don't rehearse much. At best, they look over their slides and think, "I know what I'm going to say here. I know what I'm going to say here."

The most inspiring speakers rehearse their presentations out loud multiple times. They work out exactly how they plan to say certain key phrases.

We worked with a woman who had to give a huge presentation at a large trade show in California. She was going to be rolling out a new financial product to Wall Street, the media, and her industry. It was crucial that she do well and she was quite nervous. We had her practice the presentation 25 times. She nailed it and the roll-out was a huge success.

Leaders have no excuses for failing to rehearse their presentations. It makes a huge difference and is easy.



Conclusion

Great leaders speak in a way that influences and gets results. They don't just stand up and deliver data. Rather they deliver a point of view and seek to persuade.

They accomplish that goal by keeping their messages simple and telling stories. They make their programs interactive and speak with passion.

Finally, great business leaders know that they cannot squander their chances to lead. With that in mind they rehearse their presentations.

By executing all of these fundamentals, the top business leaders influence their audiences and get results.



About Us

Over the last 20 years, Speechworks has been working with leaders across the country, helping them learn how to connect with audiences and get results. Our two-day workshops are mandatory training for many of our clients' managers and executive teams. We also conduct special custom programs aimed specifically at coaching business leaders in how to speak in a way that impacts audiences and get results. If you're interested in learning more, call us at 404-266-0888 or check out our website at www.speechworks.net.

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