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3. COMMUNICATION

This, of course, is the purpose of all that went before. The best studied and organized and planned briefing will not be a success unless it gets through to the audience, unless your ideas become theirs. Several elements enter into the communication of your thoughts to your audience: your delivery, your contact with the audience, your use of visual aids, your personality (sincerity, conviction, directness, humor, as manifested in your platform manner), your reaction to and handling of questions.

Each of these is good for an article all its own. But we can give a few ideas on each right here (these are stated very sketchily, and if you don't have access to a good textbook on speech or if you plan to refer to these notes later, you will have to flesh them out yourself).

DELIVERY

a. Diction is your choice of words. These should be correct, while avoiding grammatical purism. Selection of words should be precise; your choice may depend somewhat on your audience, but there is never an occasion when you should want to appear uneducated. Slang is seldom appropriate.

b. Voice quality. Your voice should be easily audible to all, but not sustained at maximum volume; clear, not harsh or breathy; flexible, able to vary constantly in volume, pitch, rate, inflection; unaffected; pleasant, without (to damage a metaphor beyond repair) a chip on its shoulder; lively, reflecting animation and emphasis.

c. Articulation. Without clear and distinct pronunciation and enunciation of your words, your ideas will not be understood or even heard by your audience. Even mild failure in articulation subjects the audience to unwarranted effort. Most bad enunciation is caused by not opening the mouth adequately and not using the lips.

d. Speed: too fast and no one can understand you, too slow and all will go to sleep. Your aim: clear enunciation, logical grouping of words, and a fairly even rate of speed.

e. Volume. Make sure you are being heard; that's the level you want. Shouting may antagonize your audience and will certainly injure your throat.

f. Gestures should be natural and uncontrived, emphasize what you are saying, not draw attention away from it (which can happen if gestures are either inept or too flamboyant). Remember that head movements and facial expressions are also gestures. A good rule for the hands: unless you have a good natural reason for a gesture, do nothing with them.

g. Platform manner should show confidence (felt or unfelt), create a good impression, induce a positive response. This will happen if you are alert, pleasant, friendly, natural, enthusiastic. Look at the audience, at individuals in the audience, not at the ceiling or out the window or at the floor. Control body actions, avoiding up-and-down movements, swaying, pacing, juggling change in pockets. Stand erect, at ease, every movement under control.

VISUAL AIDS should be

a. easy to see (did you ever try reading half-inch letters from the rear of a large room or viewing a slide when the projector is in the way?)

b. easy to handle (examples of what not to use are a chart too heavy or awkward for you to lift, a map folded 17 times, a picture rolled so tightly it won't stay unrolled, a projector which won't project)

c. attractive, but not distracting (remember that it is an "aid," not the purpose of the briefing)

d. clear (expressing the ideas you want to get over or emphasize, and no others); simple (not cluttered with extraneous material or so elaborately lettered or designed as to confuse more than help)

e. dynamic (it's better to limit yourself to blackboard and chalk than to depend on a static display; parenthetically inside these parentheses, the use of chalk can be very creative, illustrating a talk as it develops and in accord with audience need and interest)

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f. designed, if possible, for the particular audience with which the visual aid is used.

g. thoroughly planned in advance, including an attempt to anticipate everything which can go wrong.

HANDLING QUESTIONS

Often there will be a question period following your briefing; there may be questions even if not expected. Here are some suggestions on how to handle them:

Try to anticipate what points may be raised and prepare for them.

If the questioner is asking for information, answer him, if you can, by expanding, amplifying, or rephrasing your briefing material. If you don't know the answer, say so.

If the question is argumentative, it may support your stand or take issue with you. If the former, be grateful for the support; if the latter, answer as best you can, recognize the questioner's right to differ, and turn as soon as possible to another question.

If the query is irrelevant, handle it as gently as possible, trying to avoid offending the questioner, who is sure his problem is pertinent.

Do not repeat a question unless the audience cannot hear it or you are not sure you understand it.

If you have a question period but no one asks any, try to stimulate some.

When time is up, firmly cut the questions short.

SOME COMMON PROBLEMS

1. Nervousness. Even years of experience are no guarantee that you won't feel the familiar "butterflies." One thing you should remember is that the audience is not likely to know you are nervous unless you tell them. And one of the best ways of hiding and dissipating nervousness is through controlled bodily movement; perhaps read your introductory remarks, begin by writing on the blackboard, take a moment to adjust a visual aid or begin the talk by drawing attention to it, or begin with an extra forceful voice. These and other types of physical activity release the emotional tension which is making you nervous.

2. Avoid the vocalized pause, usually a long or short "uh," sometimes one or more per sentence. There is only one solution: be conscious of the habit and practice getting along without it.

3. Avoid dropping your voice at the end of sentences.

4. The mental blackout—you can't for the moment remember a thing. First, realize it won't last long, even though it may seem long to you. You may be able to make it seem a deliberate pause. Remember too that you are the only one who knew what you were going to say and thus the only one who knows that you have forgotten. Check your notes. Forge ahead on the next topic of your briefing. If what you have forgotten comes back to you, fit it in if appropriate; otherwise, ignore it.

5. Ignore disturbances, inside or outside the room, unless they interfere with communication between you and the audience. If they do, pause until they end; if they refuse to end, do something.

6. Should you read your talk? Although there are some occasions which demand that a speech be read, this is not true of a briefing. A talk read to an audience is seldom as effective as one seemingly ad libbed or given extemporaneously. The use of a script ties you to the lectern, inhibits gestures and the use of visual aids, may distract or displease audience. And it doesn't make last minute changes or inspirations easy. If you must read, try to follow the same rules of composition given above.

7. If not gesturing, your hands should hang at your sides, relaxedly, not in your pockets.

8. How do you end your talk? Restate and stress the main points, succinctly and vividly, if you can; summarize anything else worth repeating; and *end*.

9. Do I need an introduction? It helps, but make it *short*.

10. Talking down to the audience results more from an attitude of mind than from choice of words. Remember that your hearers are intelligent men, not children. Choose a nontechnical vocabulary, though, unless you are talking to technicians.

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