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## PUBLIC SPEAKING AND SPEECH PRESENTATION: SKILLS AND STRATEGIES

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The ability to speak before a group of people is a valuable asset as well as an important talent. Like an actor or actress on stage, a public speaker carries his audience along or disappoints both himself and the audience. Public speaking and speech delivery is not an all-comers affair. The skills and strategies needed to deliver a speech are needed to be acquired by everyone irrespective of the person's field of endeavour. It is often said that there is nothing more important to one's education than knowing how to express oneself. Public speaking is easy if the public speaker allows it to be. In any case, there are few pointers that one needs to know which make public and speech presentation less difficult. Above all, the public speaker must know his audience thoroughly in terms of their needs, attitudes, background, interest, etc.*

There is no gainsaying the fact that man is not an island, and for this reason, there is a need for social interaction. Like an actor or an actress on stage, the public speaker performs excellently well and succeeds in carrying his audience along, or performs poorly and fails to get across and really capture the attention of his audience. In effect, he ends up disappointing both himself as well as his listeners who invariably needs to get something important from him.

It is, therefore, important at this juncture to point out that the ability to speak before a group of people is a valuable talent as well as an important asset which one needs to have in order to perform the task ahead of him perfectly well. As Ngwu succinctly puts it:

Speech communication or speaking is a specialized form of communication, which requires careful study. It is not necessarily an all corners affair, though every healthy person makes a thousand and one or so utterances daily. Most often, this is done without paying much attention to the standard form of organized sound production.... Speaking mirrors us and serves as a formidable tool for others to judge us. Wrong presentation of speeches may give wrong impression of what we intend or what we are(3).

Public speaking is all about sharing information, ideas or opinions on a particular issue of interest and importance to your audience. In other words, the major task of a public .speaker is to hold his audience's interest and attention on a given topic for a stipulated period

of time. Unfortunately, a brilliant person may fail in speech presentation even with his brilliant phrases. In public speaking, the speech serves as the pivot of the basic things: the speaker, the subject under discussion and the audience whom the speech is meant for. According to Ezeukwu, "Public communication or speaking is a third concentric setting face-to-face communication in which one person speaks while a considerable number of other people listen" (34). Invariably, this exchange of message is usually between a person who is referred to as the speaker or the source for he receives the stimulus and acts on it while the remaining others just play a complimentary role which is to listen to the speaker (Tubbs and Moss 3). However, in some cases, the members of the audience, in addition to playing a complementary role, make their own contributions in terms of further discussions or asking questions.

Speaking can be said to be a natural trait of human beings; just as cows are endowed with the ability to moo and dogs to bark, in the same vein the human species are endowed with the ability to talk or speak for they are regarded as the talking animal. However, there is need for skills and strategies needed in the preparation and delivery of speeches. There is no gainsaying the fact that a good speech requires careful preparation. This is because a lot of things are involved in it. Basically, the speaker should have the ability to persuade; one cannot be effective in public speaking and speech presentation without having the ability to influence or persuade or make the other people to see things the way he is seeing them. This needs a lot of convictions. Sproule therefore is of the view that persuasion is an audience-centered aspect of human communication; to convince people, one needs to know the best way to adapt his message to the needs, dispositions, values, expectations and attitudes of his audience (Sproule 39).

First of all, a public speaker needs to have self confidence--in this case, a self confidence that is based on skill in a particular subject or a given topic. There are, of course, necessary steps in preparing and delivery a speech. The essentials of public speaking, therefore, cannot be over emphasized. Whether one is a lawyer, banker, engineer, teacher, doctor or what have you, he needs to be abreast with the skills and strategies needed for public speaking. It is often said that there is nothing more important to one's education than knowing how to express oneself. One may have valuable ideas or information, but such ideas or information will remain useless if the person who has such ideas cannot express himself. As professionals in every field of human endeavour, we do not only have to have a mastery of the subject matter, but will also need to have the ability to publicly present that knowledge or ideas of ours to other people.

The success of performing this feat depends upon three important factors: discovering what to do, learning to do it and doing it properly. The greatest problem lies in the fact that

when a person (especially a non-professional) is assigned to prepare a speech for delivery, he if care is not taken usually fails. Instead of seeing the task ahead of him in terms of a series of steps to be approached step by step, he conceives the completed speech at the very beginning. The first thought that comes to most people is that the task ahead of them is a formidable one. But one thing is certain in public speaking and speech presentation: public speaking is very easy if the speaker allows it to be; once he removes the walls of inhibitions around him, public speaking is not just easy but interesting. That is why a non-professional is afraid of it but the professional wants more of it.

Preparing a speech to be delivered entails three things:

- a. Gathering the materials needed for the speech,
- b. Writing out the speech,
- c. Deliver/the prepared speech.

The above-mentioned points can be followed in a situation where the speaker has been given a particular topic to prepare. If, on the other hand, he is not given any particular topic and probably he is left with an option of selecting the topic himself, then there is need to first of all, consider choosing an appropriate subject from where he will develop an appropriate topic. The appropriateness of a subject depends to a large extent on choosing a subject or a topic that the speaker finds interesting as well as the one that his audience would find interesting also. So, two things must be put into consideration in choosing an appropriate subject or topic for speech delivery: the one that will interest the speaker as well the one that will be of interest to the audience.

In a case where a speaker has been given a topic, the issue of gathering and writing his speech may be done in a library or closet while the speech delivery is meant to be done on the speaker's feet before his audience. It is worthy of note to say that speech delivery is by no means a difficult task if the speaker has worked carefully and conscientiously on the first two stages mentioned above i.e. gathering the materials and then writing the speech. Note that once you have something to say--something which you are convinced is important--making a speech is one of the simplest and most interesting things one can experience (Powers 45). What the public speaker needs most is to just be himself; to be natural, for easy speech is natural and natural speech is very efficacious. It is, also, pertinent to point out at this juncture that in preparing a speech, the speaker does not really need to start from the scratch. In other words, the experiences the speaker must have gathered in life should provide him with some basic background on the subject or topic under discussion. This can be of immense value in making a speech presentation interesting. As a matter of necessity, the speaker should also put his whole self into the preparation of the speech. And this can only be achieved when the speaker has some enthusiasm for the subject matter, which would arise from having made

enough researches on a particular topic and the belief on the speaker's part that he has something which he believes to be important to be shared with other people.

## THE AUDIENCE AND THE SPEECH

A good public speaker should have a good perception of his audience. As pointed out earlier, the speaker should bear his audience in mind as regards their needs, interest, attitudes, background, etc. Before a speaker sets off to gather the materials needed for delivering a particular speech, he needs to take into consideration some necessary preliminary steps which he must take to ensure a successful handling of his speech.

In this case, he can be likened to a man who sets off to build a house. Before the man embarks on such a project, there is need to put into consideration the items to be used; how simple or complicated will the items be in order to meet up with the target. So also it is for someone who intends to give a speech. When the speaker takes this same approach, there is the tendency that he will have a good speech preparation. It is important, too, to say that a speaker may be called upon to make a simple announcement, a vote of thanks or a short speech in a gathering or in a church or a full length speech, with reporters present. Notwithstanding the circumstances, there is need to have a good speech preparation.

Having said all this, it is necessary to reiterate the fact that a speaker should know that there are certain basic things which will affect his preparation of the speech. Such, items will be the type of audience he is going to address. A good public speaker should know more than any other thing, his audience for his major task in speech delivery is either to inform, inspire, persuade or entertain his audience (Ezekwe 59). And when he fails in achieving any of these, he has failed in his speech delivery. Therefore, a good public speaker should be able, to first of all, picture mentally the sort of audience he will face, and learn how best to have a good rapport with the audience while delivering his speech. There is need to have a mental analysis of the members of the audience regarding their general age level, previous knowledge of the subject under discussion, their needs, general opinion of life, intellectual level, background, etc. For instance, what a speaker needs in order to address a group of young school leavers will be different from what he needs, to address a group of market women who are probably illiterates.

Moreso, the speaker must consider the type of speech that is needed for a particular occasion. He must take into consideration whether the speech is to inform or educate, to persuade or to entertain his audience or whether it will be better if it is a combination of two or all the above-mentioned elements. When all these things are considered, the speaker will be able to determine the general purpose of a particular speech. In addition, the speaker should not forget that the primary purpose of delivering a speech is to command as well as hold the interest of the audience. That notwithstanding, it is important to say that all these can

only be achieved when, the speaker logically plans his subject matter, and also presents his subject matter in a way that it will be acceptable to the audience. All the same, the speaker must have something that is worthwhile to present to his audience.

## DEVELOPING THE SPEECH

As pointed out earlier, any good speech requires a careful preparation; the speaker must logically present his subject matter. The first step in developing a speech is by usually choosing a subject. In this case, it is not just choosing a subject but in doing this, two important factors must be considered.

### a. Choosing a subject which is of interest to the speaker

When a speaker chooses a topic that interests him, he will most likely have a better presentation if he has planned well what he intends to say. When a speaker is to discuss a subject he is well at home with, a subject he knows a great deal about or he has a lot of experiences it, he will definitely be expressing himself with some joy, enthusiasm and convictions.

### b. Choosing a subject that is of great interest to the audience

Remember that the primary aim of any speech is to carry the audience along. The audience must be interested in whatever the speaker is presenting. In this case, the needs, age level, background, etc of the audience should be of paramount importance. For when the speaker fails to carry the audience along, he has failed in his speech delivery.

Having selected a subject that is of interest to both the speaker and the audience, the speaker should go ahead to enrich himself through first hand information, in addition to reading textbooks, handbooks, journals and receiving lectures. He can start with scanning the materials available to him. As he finds what he feels is necessary for his speech, he may probably take note on note cards. This can be followed by preparing an outline for the speech, which is the logical sequence the speech will take. He should make sure that his speech has a good introduction and an interesting conclusion. The introduction must be able to arouse the interest of the audience, and in concluding, there is always need to summarize what he has said and try to leave dominant impression of his speech on the audience. He should not leave his speech as a vehicle that has run out of gas.

Always take note of the structure of the speech, which includes:

- a. Title which should include type of speech (a funeral oration, farewell speech, welcome address, etc.), at what occasion the speech is to be delivered, for whom, **by whom**, venue and date of delivery.
- b. Salutation **which entails recognizing the dignitaries** who are present at the occasion. **The speaker should try as much as possible to** take into consideration the line of the protocol--from the highest **in rank to the lowest person**.

- c. Body which must be well written and logically presented with appropriate language and appropriate interpretations. • \$,
- d. Conclusion which should be done with an echo of the introduction.
- e. Signature with which most written and read speeches are usually signed.

## DELIVERING THE SPEECH

With the speech written down, the next step is the delivering of the speech. In the delivery of the speech, the importance of the speaker knowing his audience thoroughly cannot be over-emphasized. This entails understanding the needs, interest, attitudes and background of the audience. Then, always remember to talk naturally and with some conviction. In order to deliver a speech perfectly well, there are few pointers that will definitely make your presentation less difficult. These pointers are:

**Rehearse alone:** With your speech fully prepared, there is need to rehearse alone; practice alone probably behind locked doors and possibly before a full-length mirror. This will help to disclose some mannerism, which you may need to eliminate. Always swing your gaze from left, to the center and to the right rather than gazing at the ceiling or the floor; imagine your audience to be before you.

**Practice before a friend:** After practicing alone, there is need to practice before a friend who will help you to correct some mannerism which you may need to eliminate. As you practice before a friend, try and watch your tempo in order not to be unnecessarily too fast or too slow. Your friend can help in timing you.

**Record your speech:** There may also be need to record and play the speech you intend to present to your audience. This will help you to make final corrections in your speech delivery. However, the above-mentioned steps may not be too necessary for someone who is not a beginner in speech delivery.

**Consider your dressing:** Your dressing on the day you present your speech can make or mar your speech. Your clothes may not be necessarily expensive or new; they just need to be clean and well ironed.

**Acknowledge your introduction;** When you are called to deliver your speech, there is need to recognize the importance of the audience. You may bow slightly to the members of the high table (if any) and to the audience. There is more than courtesy involved here. When you do not acknowledge your introduction, it makes the audience feel that you are arrogant, and when this happens, you are in for trouble with your audience.

**Manage your anxiety:** Once you are called upon to deliver a speech, there is the tendency that you will experience some anxiety in you. The ability to manage this anxiety is of paramount importance to a public speaker. Feeling slightly nervous when you are called upon to deliver a speech is natural. **But** you just need to relax yourself. This entails taking a deep breath: breathe out for ten counts.

**Always face your audience:** In delivering your speech, always look at, and speak to your audience. However, as a beginner, you are advised not to look directly and steadily into the eyes of your audience. Establish eye contacts with your audience and try to discover sympathetic listeners who will help you to get a feedback from your audience.

**Speak distinctly:** In your speech delivery, there is no reason to be unduly slow or nervously fast. Always remember that your primary aim is to communicate to your audience. If the audience fails to understand you, you have failed.

**Keep your purposes in mind:** Show an interest in what you are saying and say it with some conviction. Always remember that you have something important you want to share with others and do it with some enthusiasm.

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