



## Marketing Matters

# Speak Out

At some time in your business career, you will have to give a speech. It may be nothing more than a few brief remarks at your weekly department meeting, or perhaps it's a formal report to a professional committee. It could even be a full-hour presentation to your customers.

Whatever the occasion, you may feel a bit nervous. Even thinking about writing a speech may make your palms sweat.

Relax! Tens of thousands of people just like you have delivered successful speeches to a wide variety of audiences. Here are a few tips to help you join them. These tips won't necessarily keep your palms from sweating, but they will help you turn that dreaded chore into a concise, well-organized, even memorable, speech.

**Keep your listeners in mind.** Are your listeners engineers? Company presidents? Do they have certain interests and skills? The content, vocabulary and diction you use should be appropriate to your listeners.

**Stick to a structure.** The "structure" of a talk is something like a skeleton. If you're trying to compare positive qualities of your department with the positive qualities of other departments, for instance, you might use a *comparative structure*, moving through the qualities you're describing point by point. If you're trying to show why certain economic trends are causing a downturn in your business, you might use a *cause-and-effect*

structure. If you're explaining how a piece of machinery works, you might use a *step-by-step* process structure. Identify the structural pattern you would like to follow in your speech, base your outline on that structure, and stick to it. You'll feel much more confident presenting your material and your listeners will have an easy time following you.

**Use illustrations.** Nothing beats anecdotes and real-life examples. Steer clear of theory and use one or two examples to illustrate each of the major points in your structural outline. You'll add that all-important human interest element to your talk.

**Be conversational in tone.** This means you will avoid long sentences, stress the active voice and use contractions. Your speech may be peppered with a variety of common phrases. Some veteran speakers never write their speeches out word for word in an attempt to maintain a light, conversational tone. Don't try this until and unless you become comfortable making verbal presentations; but be aware that long, complex sentences and "textbook-style" diction can deaden an otherwise good speech.

**Position your body and your hands.** Nothing is more distracting during a speech than excessive movements of a speaker's head, torso, feet, and especially, hands. Before giving your speech, visualize where you'll place your hands and resolve to keep them there, except to move them in gestures you deliberately plan. If you have a tendency to shift your body during verbal presentations, plan your overall posture as well.

**Use simple relaxation exercises.** If you get the jitters five or ten minutes before your talk, simple physical activity may help you relax. For starters, deliberately tense your whole body. Then slowly relax your body and mind, muscle by muscle, joint by joint, thought by thought. Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Try to imagine the worst thing that can happen during your speech. You'll quickly realize that the "worst thing" won't happen; things should get better from that point on.

**Gaze toward specific individuals.** Before you begin your talk, pick out several members of the audience and imagine that you're speaking to them individually. As you speak, shift your gaze among each of these individuals and you'll soon forget that you're speaking to a much larger group.

**Go slow.** Your listeners may be unable to grasp your meaning if you speak fast. In fact, they'll even become distracted by a fast tempo. If you have a tendency to use high-speed speech, place symbols in your outline or written text to remind you where you should slow down, pause or stop.

Effective speeches are nothing more than an extension of effective conversation. If you enjoy sharing your ideas with other people, a little advance planning will help you join the ranks of memorable, persuasive speakers. Even if your palms sweat.

