

# THE EXCHANGE

This issue's featured subject is "Speaking Up."

## Impromptu Speaking

Ben Cairns, M.A.

Mark Twain once said, "It took me three weeks to prepare for this impromptu speech!" The very nature of impromptu speaking is that the speaker doesn't have much, if any, preparation time. If you can anticipate that you'll have the opportunity or be asked to speak, it's not really an impromptu situation! When you're asked to "say a few words," "give us your opinion on that," or "please introduce our guest," here are some recommendations:

- Know what you are expected to say or respond to. You can paraphrase what you understand or ask a clarifying question to specify the scope of what you will address.
- Stay calm. The natural tendency is to get nervous, which leads to a faster vocal rate and higher vocal pitch. When you speak more rapidly than normal, it is harder to find the best words. Speak at a normal rate or insert pauses to slow you down and control your inflections by lowering your pitch so that you can share your emotions, opinion, and personality.
- Pause before you begin speaking and, if you need it, give yourself a few seconds to think about what you are going to say. If you need more time, you can restate the question or ask the speaker to restate it.
- Pause anyway. Even if you already know exactly what you are going to say, pausing puts emphasis on what you say and conveys the impression that you listened before speaking.
- Remember to breathe!
- Be your natural self.
- Share a story, anecdote, or word picture to illustrate your point. Images and experiences are far more persuasive, memorable, and interesting than plain facts and information. It's the difference between being at the scene where you see, hear, and feel what is happening versus just hearing someone say that something occurred.
- Use your facial expressions and body language to convey positive emotions. Please, remember to smile when it is appropriate!
  - Remember the old saying, "Be brief, be brilliant, and be seated." If you can't be brilliant, at least you can be the other two. An economy of words is better than opening the floodgates of random thought on your audience.
  - Being brief is balanced with taking enough time to think and share your thoughts before you conclude.
  - If you stumble on your words or have a tough time formulating your thoughts, please realize that most people can relate. Being human and making these mistakes can actually contribute to impressions of sincerity and help the audience identify with you, so just slow down and do the best that you can.
- Practice impromptu speaking. You can do this with a communication coach or with an organization like Toastmasters International. Theodore Roosevelt once said, "Do the best you can, with what you have, right here, right now." When you have the chance to speak in an impromptu setting, do your best and learn from the experience so that you will be even better next time!



## What Our Clients Are Saying

"[The] presentation hit home on so many aspects of day-to-day communication at work and at home. [The] positive focus on the situation and how we communicate with others inspired me to change some of my feedback techniques that afternoon, and I am happy to report that I have successfully used them each day since. I am staying much more focused on those speaking to me while providing better feedback and I will strive to make these new techniques habits.

Regardless of your position and who you may communicate with, [TLC's] knowledge, tips, and coaching can make you a better communicator if you listen and act on what you learn."

Scott Ward, Seminar Attendee, Knoxville, TN



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### LOOKING AHEAD:

♦ **The August issue of The Exchange will focus on Giving Correction & Guidance.**

### LOOKING BACK:

♦ **For previous editions of The Exchange, go to our [back issues](#).**

♦ **Re-read the [10/2002](#) edition: [Public Speaking](#).**

**Speech is power: speech is to persuade, to convert, to compel.**

Ralph Waldo Emerson

**The best way to sound like you know what you're talking about is to know what you're talking about.**



## MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

By Don Wheeler

Several years ago I was invited to serve as an expert panelist during a symposium on Property Management in Atlanta, Georgia. I was told that the facilitator had asked for me personally because I was a leader within my company and the community.

After the facilitator had welcomed everyone and outlined the subject order, she opened up the room for questions. Each time a question was asked, she either answered it herself or chose one of us to answer the question. I knew the answer to every question that was asked but only answered a couple of them. When the subject came to customer satisfaction/service, an area that I excelled in, I thought that this would be my opportunity to speak up. Unfortunately, the facilitator was a microphone hog during this segment. In looking back, there were a couple of times that I had a chance to offer new, practical information but, I held back! I only shared a few of my thoughts on the subject.

After the event was over, my boss, who I didn't know would be in attendance, came up to me and asked me why I didn't respond to several of the questions. He said he was disappointed because he knew my knowledge would have been beneficial to those attending the symposium. I vowed not to let this kind of opportunity pass me by again. I turned it over and over again in my mind, trying to figure out how I could have shared my opinions without stepping on the facilitators' toes.

Recently, I was asked to testify at a hearing on Predatory Lending practices in Chattanooga, Tennessee. The State of Tennessee has appointed a commission made up of State Senators and Congress people to look into these unfair practices. They have been traveling the state holding public hearings on the matter. My father was the victim of this practice and I have been involved in trying to get the state of Tennessee to pass a law against it. My father's attorney told me that they needed someone articulate to answer the questions asked by the commission.

I was very nervous when I arrived, remembering my failed public performance from years ago. There were only four panelists and I was told that I would be first. We were asked to wait in a room off to one side of the courtroom. When we were herded into the courtroom, I was amazed at the number of people in the audience and I was totally unprepared for the crowd of reporters, photographers, and journalists present.

I was asked to tell my father's story, which

I did according to my notes I had brought with me. As much as the Legislators knew about Predatory Lending, they still had a lot of questions. The lawyer and I sat next to each other fielding their questions. When they were done with me and were ready for the next person, I stepped down and looked at my watch for the first time and realized I had been on the stand for over 1-1/2 hours. I was shocked that much time had elapsed.

Afterwards, when a reporter approached me and inquired about an interview, I was taken aback. I had no idea that any reporters would want to talk with me. When I asked her why she wanted to interview me, she responded that I had done such a complete job answering questions that I would be good on camera.

So what happened between the time five years ago when I couldn't get up enough nerve to speak out at a symposium with about 100 people in attendance and the more recent testimony I gave where there were about 350 people?

I think it was a learned process that occurred over time. Certainly, my training from TLC was most helpful. I listened to each person as they spoke. I was able to "read" the panelists' vocal tones and body language, etc. This helped me to answer their questions. I stayed away from trouble words like "always," "never," "maybe," and "but," etc. I did my research and had detailed notes about my father's situation. I felt as prepared as I could be. There is still room for improvement, but, (and I say, "but," on purpose), this speech went a whole lot better than five years ago.

What could you do to share your opinions more? Each one of us has information/opinions that could make a difference. Practice speaking up. The more you do the more you can do. I know that I don't want to say to myself, "Oh, why didn't I say this?" or, "Why didn't I voice that?" Nor do I want to experience another "missed opportunity." How about you?

### FEATURED SERVICE: Spring Creek Retreat- Beautiful Just Got Better!

Mother Nature's May flood that engulfed the Creek House at Spring Creek Retreat has allowed us to make it even better. Call **800-488-7218** to reserve this mountain home for your family's retreat or to reserve the entire property for your work family's retreat. We promise that you'll get carried away...just not with water.

#### Helpful Hints:

- Don't assume that silence signals agreement. Call upon others to speak up.
- Avoid confrontational words when you speak up such as, "should," "must," "never"...

Speak as though it were the last sentence allowed you.

Elias Canetti



To learn more about it, click here!

## CEO CORNER

By Beverly Inman-Ebel, MA CCC-SLP

As an extrovert, I have seldom been challenged to speak up in the general sense of the term. I challenge you to think about this concept in a very specific light. Speaking up does not mean just talking to hear your own voice. Look at the preposition "up" and consider that it is beckoning us to raise our level of awareness and involvement and speak at that higher level.

To accomplish this, extroverts may need to listen first and respond only after they have heard from everyone else without blocking others' ideas internally. When the topic is emotional, these talkative people can speak up by limiting the number of responses per topic to two.

Introverts may need to realize that they have information, or yes, even an opinion, that needs to be expressed because no one else has said it or because no one else can say it. These quiet people can speak up by reducing the amount of editing inside their heads and just get it said.

Speaking up for all people can mean that we need to understand the issues thoroughly. Instead of being stuck in our own opinion or experience, we need to raise the bar by asking open questions that will bring us new information and new questions.

I am usually amused when I attend a wedding and the vows are spoken so softly that only the bride, groom, and religious leader can hear them. Loudness is closely connected with confidence. Speaking up is so much more than being loud. To me, it means you care enough to listen first, ask questions on anything you do not understand, and keep your mind open to new and confusing information when you might be more comfortable making an internal judgement and shutting out everyone else. Speaking loudly is speaking out. Raise the level of your participation and stretch to speak up.

Someone in my life was bragging on the intelligence of their two-year-old child, who ran into the kitchen



claiming that he knew how to spell up. "U-P," he said proudly. The parent then asked the child how "down" was spelled. The child wrinkled his brow, bit his lip, and then with a twinkle in his eye, responded, "P-U!" Phew! I agree. I think the opposite of speaking up really stinks. Look for opportunities to listen and to share. Speak Up! Live your dreams!

## STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH!

By Vincent Ivan Phipps, B.S.

Ever receive the wrong information? Ever been told a meeting was at a specific time only to find out you arrived late? Or maybe you were told that a change was coming which caused you great worry only to discover that the information was inaccurate and the change never occurred.



Chances are that if you had moments of wasted worry, the information you received did not come "straight from the horses mouth." In other words, you did not get the information directly from the source most closely related to the situation or the person with the most knowledge of the situation.

But what does the mouth of a horse have to do with accuracy? This expression dates back to the 1920's. Horse traders were notorious for representing older horses as newer, high-priced horses to unsuspecting buyers. They would use tricks such as careful washing of the horse's coat, grooming the mane, filing down or polishing the hooves, and even removing brands that could be used to trace the horse's previous owners.

Those who regularly bought horses knew that the only way to determine the actual age of the horse was to disregard what the horse looked like on the outside and to look inside it's mouth. An expert can tell the age of a horse by looking at the condition, shape and size of the horse's teeth.

The next time you speak up, make sure your information is accurate and reliable by getting it "straight from the horse's mouth!"



Remember to:

- Preface your opinions with, "I think," or, "In my opinion," or similar claim.
- Relax your body as you share sensitive information with others. If you look comfortable, that feeling will spread.

**Listening is as important as talking. If you're a good listener, people often compliment you for being a good conversationalist.**

Governor Jesse Ventura

**A careless word may kindle strife; a cruel word may wreck a life; a timely word may level stress; a loving word may heal and bless.**

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