



## Marketing Messages

### MARY CHARLESON

#### *Speak up: it could be your best marketing move*

It's inevitable in business. You are at a function and someone asks you to stand up and tell people about what you do. Or, you're asked to make a presentation to an influential group of investors or colleagues. Instead of sheer panic pumping through your bones, wouldn't it be nice if you rose and greeted the request as a terrific opportunity to position yourself, your business, and your knowledge? You can spend much time plotting your marketing strategy, but the shameful truth is that you, and your capacity to speak with knowledge, honesty and wit about your business, products or services is the single most powerful tool in your personal marketing arsenal. If this is beyond your comfort zone, make a commitment now to improve your public speaking abilities. You need to get those butterflies flying in formation.

I'm not talking about learning the latest presentation skills, or how to use the wizardry of Powerpoint or Keynote for audiovisuals. In fact, we've likely all sat through too many content laden presentations where someone relied heavily on technology and read to us painfully exactly what was on screen. All this frequently following a charade of fault filled test runs with unfamiliar technology. I'm talking about learning the skills of a great orator, becoming someone who can tell a compelling story, evoke emotion, and persuade with power. Someone who can use the power of words to command an audience and keep technology, as a support mechanism, in its place. That someone should be you. This learned skill could be the single most valuable tool in your personal and professional positioning strategy. This is where marketing gets personal. Whether it's a two-minute introduction or a one-hour presentation, here are some pointers.

**Accomplished leaders know the power of a well-told story. They take listeners on a journey.** They don't just discharge facts and data. To tell an authoritative story, they establish a communication objective and construct their presentation with an outcome in mind. Is your objective to persuade, inform or inspire? Craft your story with a clear objective in mind.

**Context is important.** A presentation requires context and background to be meaningful. Without it, your persuasive sales pitch or inspiration to action will fall short later in the talk. Relate your key points back to context. Leaders know the power of influence that comes with great context. And please, research your audience. Do not talk up or down to them.

**Be personable. People become engaged with those who they feel close to.** Good speakers make you feel that they are interacting with you as an individual. They make eye contact. They interact with their audience and move throughout the room. They customize their material for the audience by taking the time to research the group.

**Never, ever rush a presentation.** If you run short of time cut out material. If you know you will be speaking after several others, count on the possibility of being cut short. Plan for it. Prepare different length versions of your talk. Learn that pauses are good. They provide space around words and help drive home a well-made point. Silence can be golden if used well.

**Talk slowly, project your voice, make eye contact and use gestures.** Many novice speakers talk far too quickly at first. Experienced speakers do the reverse. They start slowly and then speed up when content demands it. Speak not only with your voice, but your body.

**Use technology as a tool not a crutch.** The higher up the corporate food chain, the less tools like Powerpoint are used. This is for a good reason. These people are usually better speakers. Audio-visuals should compliment not replicate your presentation. Make sure your talk can stand on its own and then use AV to make it even stronger. Well-chosen words, delivered in a powerful manner will eclipse a glitzy presentation. Really. Did some of history's best orators like Trudeau or Churchill have PowerPoint? Exactly.

**Always have a rehearsed two-minute pitch about your business ready.** You never know when you might be able to use it. You need to make that short period of time work for you.

There are many organizations and companies, which can help you, become a better speaker, but one of the best is **Toastmasters International**. There are 254 clubs alone in BC and 2004/05 saw 27 new clubs formed in the province. **Ann Kramer, District 21 Governor for all of BC** notes, "The majority of this 12% growth was in the corporate sector. There has been a great interest from individuals and business such as HSBC and Accpac who have chartered corporate clubs this year." District 21 was number 3 in the world, receiving Presidents Distinguished status for growth, due largely to Kramer's efforts in the business community. To find a club in your area visit: [www.toastmasters.bc.ca](http://www.toastmasters.bc.ca) and click the link to "search for a club in your vicinity." Notes Kramer, "Peter Legge, Publisher of Canada Wide Magazines, Bill Bennett, former BC Premier, Peter Coors, CEO Coors Brewing, and Harvey MacKay, business author were all Toastmasters." Make this the year you commit to improving your speaking abilities. It may be the best marketing move you make.

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