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Speeches and Programs

How to tailor a talk
to fit a group

WHATEVER YOUR HOME ECONOMICS JOB, there are sure to be times in your career when you must give a speech. It may be to a small group of salesmen or to an audience of homemakers or home economists. It may be limited to five minutes or extended to 45. Whatever the subject, the occasion, and the time allowed, you want that speech to be a good one.

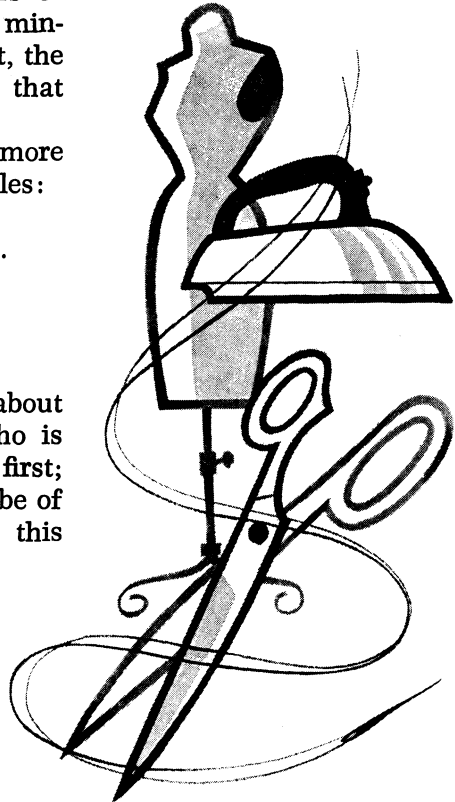
The task becomes easier, and the speech more effective, when you look at it from three angles:

1. Planning and writing the speech.
2. Figuring how to bring the speech to life.
3. Giving the speech.

How To Plan a Speech

Your first step in planning is not to think about what you will say. It is to think about who is going to hear you. Visualize that audience first; then ask yourself, "What can I say that will be of special interest to this particular group on this particular occasion?"

*Tailor your talk or program
to fit the group.
And don't be afraid
to use the scissors!*



If you are to speak to homemakers, for example, get a mental picture of those homemakers and their problems. If you are to address a gathering of dietitians or of teachers, think in terms of what such professionals would want to hear. What you have to say may be basically the same for each group, but your approach will be quite different. When you visualize an audience clearly, you not only make sure that your speech will be more flattering to your listeners, but also will be easier for you to plan. And when you actually give your speech, you will find that thinking of those listeners rather than of yourself has helped you to get rid of your own self-consciousness.

AVOID THE ABSTRACT APPROACH

When you give a speech the temptation often is to talk in the abstract. Resist that temptation. Instead, talk to persons; use personal experiences. The more lifeless the subject matter, the more necessary it is to put life into its presentation.

PICK AN APPEALING TITLE

Having visualized your audience and decided in a general way about your subject matter, stop right then and there and figure out what to call your talk. Why do it at that time? For two reasons. First, once the title is in your mind, it acts as a magnet, picking up significant facts and interesting incidents that can be woven into the speech. Second, the sooner you have a good title, the sooner publicity about your talk can get under way. The more your subject or title is mentioned in publicity, the greater the anticipation the audience builds up for what you have to say. And, of course, the *better* the title, the better the publicity and the anticipation.

That title must sound alive, not static. It must be specific, not general. It must be provocative, or at least arouse curiosity. It must make everyone who reads it say, "Now that is something I really want to hear."

For example, you are to speak to young business women on the subject of nutrition. If you choose the title, "Meals for Maximum Nutrition,"

you will stir up absolutely no excitement in the minds of those girls. That's a take-it-or-leave-it title, and too many will decide to leave it. But if you put your emphasis on the girls and their interests and call your talk something like, "Eat Right and Stay Slim," or "Eat Right and Be Beautiful," you'll have the audience with you even before you begin speaking.

Thinking up a just-right title is hard work, but it's worth doing. Remember, a good strong handle makes it possible for you to pick up your thoughts and put them down right where they belong.

MAKE AN OUTLINE YOUR AUDIENCE CAN FOLLOW

In planning any speech you will, of course, decide on the three or four or five main points you wish to get across. Those points are the outline — which is something a speech absolutely must have if it is to hang together and be effective. Now, how can you help your audience to keep that outline in mind?

Simplest way to do this is to state, at the beginning, the points you are going to cover; then go ahead and elaborate on each in that order. It's the pattern of "tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em; then tell 'em."

Incidentally, here is a little trick or device: Plan to develop your first main point rather quickly, then take more time, as needed, on the others. Why? Because at the beginning of a lecture an audience is eager and curious and a bit restless; it wants action. When you cover your first point quickly, your audience feels pleased because your talk is evidently going to march along.

When you get into the second point you can slow down, expand ideas more fully, work in plenty of illustrations and incidents. By this time your audience is used to your voice, is into the

TITLES FOR TALKS

The good speech title usually suggests how a problem might be solved (such as "How To Manage a Budget"); or it gets in the *you* approach (such as "How To Be Your Own Decorator"); or it indicates news (such as "Trends in Home Decorating" or "New Color Schemes for Kitchens"). Other good words to use in titles are: Today; Tomorrow; Why; Where.

WARNING

Beware of such pretentious titles as these: "Helping Adolescents Obtain Social Skills," and "Techniques in Evaluating Home Economics Presentations." These are scientese words and phrases.

spirit of your speech. Also you will have felt out the audience, sensed its reactions. As you go into the remaining points you can build them up or cut them down, depending on the time available and the responsiveness of your listeners.

Make sure that the main points of your speech are parallel in construction. In that speech to the business girls, called "Eat and Stay Slim," for example, the points in your outline might be something like this:

How much food does a business girl need?
 What foods are necessary in a well-rounded diet?
 Which of these foods build bone and muscle tissues rather than fat?
 What type of daily diet will keep weight down, energy up?

Note those key words: *How, What, Which, What*. See how they hold the outline together; how they keep it parallel in construction. Remember, the sharper your outline, the easier it is for you to develop and the easier it is for the audience to follow.

ADDED INDUCEMENT

A man or woman prominent in public life often can be induced to speak before a group, provided the speech later is to be published in a professional journal.

BRING POINTS TO LIFE

Once you have the outline of what you are going to say, it's time to think about dramatizing — bringing to life — the points in that outline. Here are several ways to do so:

Point up your ideas with examples. In this way you avoid preaching. You *show* rather than tell.

Use illustrative materials whenever feasible. Exhibits such as drapery samples in a talk on home decorating, and charts to clarify facts or figures in a presentation on household finance, have helped to liven up many a talk that would otherwise have been slow.

Work in plenty of personal incidents — not cut-and-dried stories, unless you can tell them unusually well, but pertinent little anecdotes that the audience will remember.

Follow the fiction writer's tricks of foreshadowings and flashbacks to weave your points together. For example, "I'll have more to say about this when we come to our third point." Or, "You will recall that earlier I mentioned such and such."

Compliment the audience. Instead of saying, "I saw a cartoon the other day," say, "You probably saw the cartoon . . ." This is just the gracious, thoughtful way of putting others ahead of yourself in your thinking. Avoid overusing that pronoun "I." When you must use it, be careful not to over-emphasize it, as "I think," "I believe," and so on.

Questions To Ask Yourself

One way to make your audiences sit up and take notice (as well as take notes) is to test every speech in advance by asking yourself four questions. This is a test used, consciously or unconsciously, by every successful speaker.

IS THERE ANYTHING IN MY SPEECH WORTH QUOTING?

A reporter on a metropolitan newspaper was asked what, in her opinion, constituted a speech worthy of advance or follow-up publicity in her paper. "I always look for at least one quotable statement that could make a headline," she answered. "If it isn't there, I skip the story."

If you want to test the truth of that statement, study the reports of meetings as they appear in your local papers. See if most of the stories about speeches don't bring out some pertinent facts brought out by the speaker.

Then study your own speech. Are you saying anything of sufficient importance to be repeated — either in print, or orally by those who listen to you? Could you, if you were a reporter, write a story built around your pearly words of wis-

CHARTS AND POSTERS

Reduce your wordage to a minimum. Consider color and its effect. Black on yellow, for example, has a high degree of visibility. In hand-lettering, print the first letter of a word, then the last letter; then the letters in between. If you do, spacing will work out better.

USING A CHALK BOARD?

Be sure the chalk board is washed clean and that there's an eraser and plenty of chalk. Experiment in advance to see how large your writing or lettering should be. Avoid long, involved sentences; keep your blackboard copy to outline form.

LITTLE THINGS THAT COUNT

Have a table or rostrum on the platform. No, you won't lean on it, but it gives you psychological support. Pick out some one person in the audience and speak directly to her or him. Shift your weight occasionally. Pause frequently to smile.

dom? If not, something more needs to be done to that speech. Put in several quotable lines, packed with meaning, and see if you haven't stepped up your talk at least fifty per cent.

HAVE I USED PLENTY OF EXAMPLES TO GET MY POINTS ACROSS?

Those of you who have listened to anyone talk at length on some general or abstract subject know what a relief it is when the speaker breaks the pattern with a story or incident or other illustration that lights up some important fact.

Think back to some of the talks you remember most vividly. What was there about them that impressed you? In many instances, didn't the speaker depend largely on some such device to bring his words to life, which in turn made you remember them?

SPEECH-MAKING

Learn to make speeches. Accept invitations to give talks, so you will develop ability and poise. Making occasional speeches — good ones, that is — helps to build you professionally by making you more widely known, hence more likely to be thought of when a good position is open.

Smile at the audience... Don't start out with an apology... Tell what you are going to say... Say it... Tell what you have said... Sit down... Don't thank the audience.

Let's say you're to take part in a panel discussion on some phase of family relations. If you merely talk about family relations problems in general, your contribution to the panel is all too likely to parrot what others are saying. If, however, you talk about a few specific families and how they solved their specific but typical problems, your part of the panel discussion will have strength and importance.

One business home economist who is frequently invited to take part in convention meetings rarely builds a talk on her own personal experiences or convictions. Instead, she visits with homemakers, grocers, business executives — anyone and everyone — asking questions, seeking new slants on problems and their solutions. By doing this, she is not only able to give a different twist to her subject matter, but she puts breadth and depth into what she has to say. What's more, her platform manner is pleasing, because in quoting others, she loses all self-consciousness.

Study the points you hope to get across in that speech of yours. Are they going to come through clearly? Probably not, unless you clinch them with incidents, case histories, or other illustrations that catch and hold the interest of the audience.

IS MY SPEECH DOWN-TO-EARTH?

One weakness common to many of us is liking to show off a bit. When we give a speech there is sometimes the temptation to impress people with our knowledge of this or that.

We are not likely to yield to that temptation, however, when we keep the audience foremost in our thinking.

To be sure, it's a good idea to let a presentation of any kind fly high at a few points, but it's usually safest not to let it fly too long and too high before bringing it down to earth. At least that is the point of view taken by some of the most successful speakers.

IS MY TALK TOO HEAVY-HANDED?

Regardless of how much we want to get across our "message," we dare not overdo it. For the more we bear down on a subject, the less likely the audience is to bear up under it.

Once when leaving a talk about a certain food product, one homemaker said, "I really like (name of product) very much. I came today thinking I would get some new ideas for using it. But the way I feel right now, I don't care if I never see it again. . . ."

Here is an example of an earnest home economist who wanted to tell all she knew — and it was just too much.

Injecting a light touch into what you have to say isn't easy — but it must be done. Just as

ON THE OTHER SIDE

When you are in the audience rather than on the platform, be a good listener. Listen with your eyes as well as with your ears. Help the speaker do a better than ever job by showing your interest and approval in your face.

hard writing makes for easy reading, so does intelligent kneading of heavy facts bring out a yeasty lightness that is relished by everyone. There are no dull subjects, you know — only dull presentations of them.

“But how can one inject that lightness?” you ask. According to one professional, there are three good ways: (1) Don’t tell everything there is to say about a subject. Instead, select some one segment and explore it with enthusiasm. (2) Figure out fresh ways of stating heavy facts. (3) Surprise the audience with an amusing or hilarious incident when it is least expected.

When You Give That Speech

Don’t memorize your talk, word for word, unless you can make it sound as if you were talking naturally to a neighbor! Use notes if you need them; it’s better than to flounder and grope for the next thought. If you must read your talk, make sure you read with life and expression, as if you were speaking freely and naturally. Important thing is to follow whichever system of delivery is right for *you*.

Make your talk march along. Use short sentences but not choppy ones. Change your pace from time to time. Pause occasionally to let a thought sink into the minds of the audience. Use live, pictorial words that mean something to the listeners. Avoid glittering generalities. Be careful not to overuse some pet phrase; for example, don’t end every sentence with “and so forth.”

Keep your voice natural. There is no surer way to kill your message than to use old-fashioned high-flown oratory.

Avoid rapid speaking. (Don’t talk faster than 150 words a minute.) Forget about gestures. They’ll come naturally when needed.

Look *at*, not through or over the heads of your audience. Make a point of looking at various individuals and try to catch their eyes. Communications on this personal level can win their response; their approval will spread quickly.

Yes, there are any number of rules and yardsticks that apply to speech-making. Enough of them to fill several books — which they do. But, after all, doesn't it all sift down to this:

If you really work to think out something that your particular audience would like to hear. . . . If you fill your talk with personality, without talking too much about yourself. . . . If you speak with enthusiasm in a voice that all can understand. . . . If you are sincere, and, at the same time, sensitive to the reactions of your audience. . . . If you know when to stop. . . . Then chances are strong that everyone will leave the room saying, "I wouldn't have missed that for anything."

When that happens, you can really take a bow. For you have made a good speech!

How To Plan a Program

Unlike the planning of a speech, which is pretty much a one-person affair, the planning of a program is almost certain to be a joint undertaking. Ordinarily a committee of at least three, often many more, persons must work together. The problem is not only to produce good ideas for the program, but to blend the best ideas of all concerned into an interesting, unified presentation.

Actual planning of the program, of course, begins as always with the audience and the occasion.

It's good sense to devote most of the first com-

PROGRAM STUNTS

One way to dramatize a long, rather heavy program is to stage stunts that do not steal time away from the show itself. For example, make it a "Red Hat Luncheon" or a "Wear - Your - Favorite - Flower" affair. Or tell everyone to bring along her favorite gadget to serve as a conversation piece during the meal.

To relieve monotony in the year's program for a group, make one meeting a workshop. For example: Your topic is modern housing. Suggest that the speaker work out his talk so that the audience actually draws plans and works out room arrangements.

mittee meeting to (1) a quick analysis of the types of persons who will make up the group; (2) a discussion of the general aim or objective of the meeting in question; (3) a listing of all the various subjects along that line which would be interesting and helpful to the group. After such discussion and pooling of miscellaneous ideas, the committee then can proceed much more rapidly and effectively to put together a really good program. The first big step is to decide on the *theme*.

BUILD YOUR PROGRAM AROUND A THEME

PROGRAM THEME THOUGHTS

Mrs. America Today. Possible subjects to be fitted into such a theme might include: "How and Where She Lives"; "How She Spends Her Money"; "How She Cooks and Keeps House"; "How She Dresses Her Family"; "What She Hopes."

Kitchen Planning Forum. Possible subjects might include: "How the Engineer Looks at the Job"; "How the Artist Sees It"; "What the Home Economist Expects"; "What the Homemaker Wants."

All-Family Style Show. Subjects might include: "Breakfast in the Patio"; "All Ready for Church"; "Now for an Afternoon in the Garden"; "And a Quiet Evening at Home." These are, of course, given merely as examples of how such subjects might be approached.

Planning a program around a central theme makes it easier for the committee to select speakers and to assign topics to them. It makes it easier for the speakers to slant their talks in the same general direction. It provides a peg on which to swing the publicity. It makes the printed or mimeographed program more forceful. It suggests a key for table decorations. It keeps the committees and the speakers from going off on tangents. And it holds the audience together.

"But what kind of theme?" you may ask. There are as many answers to that question as there are programs to be given.

Let's imagine that you are planning a joint home economics meeting of teachers, extension workers, and business home economists. You know that while all phases of home economics are of real concern to the entire audience, many special interests are represented. You reason, therefore, that it might be well to present discussions on each of three important special-interest subjects such as textiles, foods, and home equipment. You realize that it is impossible to discuss any of these subjects completely in the 15 to 20 minutes that can be allowed each speaker.

You therefore figure out a theme. It might be

that old favorite, "What's New" in each of the three fields represented. "What's the News" in the textile field — all about the new fabrics and how to use them; in food products — examples and samples of new items; in home equipment — descriptions of the new ranges and refrigerators, or new ideas in kitchen planning. Your theme may be any one of a number of things. But it is necessary. Once you have it, the program begins to take shape.

For example, in that "What's the News" theme, the announcements that go out might suggest the newspaper idea. The moderator might be called "Editor of the Day." The programs might be set in newspaper style. The table decorations might feature flowers in baskets made of newspapers. So on through the entire presentation.

But you and your committee can come up with a much better theme than that!

BALANCE YOUR SPEAKERS

Just a word about balancing your speakers. If you ask three or four persons to participate in a program, as in the symposium just described, be sure they are about on a par professionally and about equal in audience appeal. Allot equal time for each talk. Give all the speakers equal amounts of publicity and build-up.

Two speakers on a program are more likely to offer complications than three or four. If you are to have two speakers for a luncheon or evening meeting, you might well make the second feature a demonstration or a brisk report, rather than a conventional speech. An element of this sort makes for variety, yet does not offer competition with the first speaker. Nothing takes the edge off a really good talk more than a second talk which is either a duplication of subject matter or a discussion of something completely extrane-

IF YOU'RE MISTRESS OF CEREMONIES

Know exactly what the program is all about and figure in advance how one event can best be tied into the following one. Put all your emphasis on the audience and on the program personnel. You are not there to make an impression for yourself. Look enthusiastic; be enthusiastic. Be complimentary. Your job is to sell the program as it is being presented.

SCHOOL STYLE SHOWS

Spring brings school style shows in which students proudly display what they have done in sewing. If you are an inexperienced teacher, these themes may suggest something new to do.

Dollar-Sign Show. After a girl has modeled her dress or coat, she picks up a card that tells what the garment cost to make, then, holding card in front of her, models again.

Clothesline Show. All types of clothing made in sewing class are strung on clotheslines at back of stage. Against this gay background, the show goes on.

Suitcase Show. Three or four members of the class unpack suitcases showing clothing made in class. Song and dance numbers are worked in. In one way or another every member of the class gets into the act.

Publicity. All such shows are entitled to publicity. Television is wonderful if it can be arranged to have the show — or at least a part of it — taped.

ous. (If you know that the second speaker might suffer by comparison with the first one, reverse their order of appearance.)

When two speakers of equal importance are to appear, as in a session of a convention, it's a good idea to declare a brief recess between the two talks. At least suggest that the audience stand and stretch before going on with the next phase of the program. Or have the master of ceremonies bridge the gap with a few statements. Each speaker then is queen for her hour. There is no feeling of comparison between the two; no possibility of one's being considered an "A" picture and the other a "B."

It may be your responsibility as a member of a program committee to find the speakers and arrange with them to appear on your program. Your task involves far more than merely extending the invitation. You need to give each prospective speaker a clear word-picture of your group and their interests; explain the theme; state specifically what phase of the discussion you would like her to cover; discuss possible titles that would tie in with the theme. Of course, you must do it all in such a way that she feels complimented.

In many instances it is easier to get one main speaker than it is to get three or four, as for a symposium. Many speakers feel that a 15-minute appearance is scarcely worth the effort of preparation. In such a case you might preface your request with something to the effect that "it takes a really good speaker to do justice to a subject in 15 minutes; that is why our program committee is asking *you* to give one of the three 15-minute talks at our . . ."

In short, when you are involved in the planning of a program, think of it as the editor of a magazine thinks of a forthcoming issue. First he dreams up — i.e., visualizes — what he feels his readers would like to find in the issue. Then he

calls on the best talent possible to bring his dreams to reality. He gives those contributors specific assignments to keep the various features from overlapping. Then he works their contributions together — expanding, cutting, balancing, dramatizing — to produce a unified, streamlined package that will be of interest to every member of his audience. That's exactly what you need to do in putting together a program.

There is, however, one other thing that must be considered. Publicity! Unless the publicity committee can find something on that program which will spark good news stories, there is something wrong with the plan!

Work with your publicity committee from the very start. Try to understand its problems. Perhaps those problems will seem more real to you after you've read the next chapter. It deals with writing publicity for an organization activity, as it relates particularly to promoting a program or a project.

HOME ECONOMICS BLENDING
(An Editorial by G.A.C.)

AS ALL OF US REALIZE, home economics was originally a closely-knit subject, centering around all of the activities of the home. Now it is becoming a profession of specialists. Some of us specialize in foods, some in textiles, in equipment, in child development, or in nutrition, and so on and on.

Question is, even while specializing, is it not possible (and important) for all of us to keep clearly in mind the original over-all concept of our profession? You who are in the teaching field, of course, do that. But some of us who are in business could well give more attention to phases of homemaking outside our own special interest. In other words, emphasize some of the intangibles of good homemaking along with our promotion of tangible products and processes.

Is the program to be printed? Then make it attractive typographically with clean-cut sentences, neat type arrangement. Make it a program that will be kept — not a difficult problem, provided you think of the job as you would a booklet or a piece of advertising copy.

Home economists in the fields of clothing, textiles, and laundering deserve credit for their subtle promotion of personality development, good grooming, and wise money management along with better methods of making and caring for clothing. Perhaps an even better job can be done along that line.

Certainly those of us who work with food products or cooking equipment can punctuate more of our recipes and menus with bits of good information on nutrition or meal management. (Not just for the sake of the product involved, but for the sake of better health and happier cooking!)

Those of us who give demonstrations or prepare educational filmstrips on any subject can work in points that might help build better family relationships. And all of us — teachers and business home economists alike — can do more to educate our particular audiences in the *economics* phase of home economics.

With or without benefit of coordinating committees, each of us can do much to strengthen and vitalize the over-all concept of home economics — and strengthen our individual specialties at the same time.