



HOW TO STAND OUT

Make your speech memorable and connect with your audience.

By Warwick John Fahy, DTM

In 1885, **Hermann Ebbinghaus**, a German psychologist, discovered a most depressing fact in education. People, including audiences, usually forget 70 percent of something they learned within a day — most within *hours* of hearing it. Sadly, this remains a problem today. But a new understanding of audience memory offers hope for improvement.

“Whenever I find something inspiring that makes me say, “wow,” I write it down as a story for a future talk.”

John Medina, a brain researcher and affiliate professor of bioengineering at the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle, Washington, has stated that memory retention can be improved by using techniques that align with how the brain acquires, stores and recalls memories. Any public speaker can connect with an audience better — and be remembered better — by understanding three related approaches: the need to express a big idea, the power of five-minute modules and the best ways to inspire your audience.

Your Big Idea

Crowns are symbols used to represent power and convey legitimacy to the person wearing them. But crowns are not only for

kings. You can wear one to represent your expertise. In a speech, your *crown of expertise* is your big idea and adds a powerful frame to everything you speak about. It provides the context for your talk and helps the audience understand the big picture before you go deeper into detailed content. Four examples illustrate this value:

▶ Professional speaker Simon Sinek has a big idea called “Start with why.” Sinek tells audiences that before they decide on a career, they should first understand what drives them by clarifying their passions in life.

▶ Yang Lan, a pioneer in open communication, created and hosted groundbreaking television shows. The popular show *Her Village* brings together China’s largest community of professional women (more than 200 million people a month).

▶ Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking finalist Rory Vaden presented a talk in China and explained his big idea as “Take the stairs.” He used it as a metaphor to denote, *literally*, stay in shape physically and also, *symbolically*, persevere on the rigorous pathway to success. It’s easy to understand, remember and pass along.

▶ Virginia “Ginni” Rometty, the first female chief executive officer in IBM’s 100-year history, pushed to expand the company’s fast-growing analytics unit, which blends data-mining software with services expertise. “It’s not about capturing markets,” she said, “it’s about making new markets.”

Express your big idea in three to five words and remember that it can be applied to your job, your experience, your background or any topic you like to speak about with passion. Creating a big idea for your next presentation will help the audience remember your point. When Vaden prepares a presentation, he always begins by asking himself, What is my message? And could I write this message in one line on a business card?

A big idea will help you focus your speech by filtering out ideas that are not relevant to your topic. Now it is time to build your content. This is where the second approach related to brain research becomes invaluable to your speech preparation.

The Power of Five-minute Modules

Imagine that the content of your speech is like a necklace strung with diamonds. Each diamond represents five minutes of content — a content *module*. Rather than delivering one long sequence of data, a string of shorter modules will help the audience digest your material and stay on track during your talk.

WHERE OH WHERE IS THE CONCLUSION?

By Milton Wood, DTM, Ph.D.

Recently, I listened to seven Toastmasters give speeches, and they all suffered from one consistent problem: lack of emphasis on the conclusion. Each of their speeches contained the traditional opening, body and conclusion; however, their conclusions were little more than a summary sentence or two. Emphasize the ending of your speech because it:

- ▶ **Closes your presentation.** The opening and body of your speech should set up the final message that you share and emphasize in your conclusion.
- ▶ **Expresses what you want your listeners to take away.** It is critical to make the most of your final shared thoughts because audiences often remember best what they heard last.
- ▶ **Provides a conceptually tight package that briefly restates your major points.** Make sure your audience understands and feels the importance of your message.

A strong conclusion can be the most powerful part of your speech. Pack power into your conclusion these two ways:

- ▶ **Plan your time wisely.** Try this rule of thumb: 15 percent of the content for your opening, 70 percent for the body of your speech and 15 percent for the conclusion. While speeches can vary, you shouldn't shortchange your conclusion — a sentence is too short!
- ▶ **Try writing your conclusion first.** Doing so focuses the rest of your presentation on the message you want to deliver. You will also quickly discover when you are cramming too many ideas into one presentation.

When you sit down to craft your next speech, remember the inherent power of a good conclusion and wow your audiences from now on!

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Working your ideas into strong five-minute modules is a good way to start a great presentation. Looking for content? Why not begin with the Toastmasters manuals? I recently delivered five manual talks and identified five minutes of good content from each that I later used as part of a 40-minute presentation.

Trying out bits and pieces of a performance is nothing new. Stand-up comedians use this process to refine their acts all the time. In the documentary *Comedian*, Jerry Seinfeld routinely visits comedy clubs to try out new material and then selects the best parts to include in his larger, final presentation. You can use a similar process to create a speech that sparkles like a string of diamonds.

Refine your content with these three steps: test-edit-test. Don't just deliver a speech once. Instead, record every speech you deliver and listen to it. Observe when people react, perhaps by laughing. Extract those parts and try them again with a different audience. When different audiences react positively, you know you have good content.

But what if your material flops? Joe Rogan, an American stand-up comedian, explains how to omit content that doesn't work. "Try it on another audience. If it still doesn't go over well, refine it and try it on a third audience," Rogan said on an episode of his podcast, *The Joe Rogan Experience*. "If after three times of re-working a story, it flops every time, drop it!"

It is important to remember that flexibility is the hallmark of all great presenters. You can change the colors of your string of precious content stones depending on your message or audience. Also, each module could be delivered independently, if needed, or as part of a longer presentation. Take your time and select the right stones for the audience you will address. After you have settled on your content, all you need is a great delivery.

Sparkle and Inspire

Most often, a speaker is asked to deliver a speech as a result of being a subject-matter expert. However, great knowledge and content is not enough. You need the ability to *inspire* and *entertain* your audience while delivering

great information. This requires that you deliver a plentiful supply of inspirational stories and anecdotes — and that they all relate to your big idea.

One way to find inspiring examples is through other people. While visiting Holland, I was inspired by Richard Bottram. To raise awareness for cancer charities after he lost his wife to cancer, Bottram conceived the idea of the Wheel of Energy situated next to Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam. Powered by people running in it at all times, this huge wheel turned 24 hours a day for one year. Bottram committed to run a marathon every single day for a year; that's 365 marathons! This amazing effort kept his worthy cause in the public's mind and also engaged people around the world to come and run in the Wheel of Energy with him. As I listened to Bottram's story I thought, Wow. This is amazing. I now call this the *wow* test. Whenever I find something inspiring that makes me say "wow," I write it down as a story for a future talk.

To make an even deeper connection with your audience and to be viewed as a more authentic speaker, share inspirational stories from your own personal experience. For instance, in 2010, I completed an Ironman triathlon in 36 C (97 F) heat, which included

a 3.8-km swim (2.4 mi), 180-km bike ride (112 mi) and a marathon at the end. It was by far the hardest physical challenge I ever faced. When I told a friend about the race, he said, "So what does triathlon mean? Tri ... *not-to-die*?" The Ironman is indeed a tough race, but I learned about my own inner strength from the experience of training consistently for over a year and pushing through the heat and physical discomfort during the race.

Such an experience could reinforce a point in one of my talks. I could use my 12-month training regime to illustrate the message that small, consistent steps can overcome seemingly huge obstacles. Or I could use the heat as a metaphor for the challenges we all face along the way to achieving something worthwhile. In your own speeches, look for ways to connect your inspirational story to your big idea. Practice delivering your story briefly, and be sure to show how it links to your big idea.

Find your "wows." What are you doing that you take for granted but other people think is amazing? A single mother bringing up four children has a wealth of insights, experiences and wisdom that could benefit many people. Your work, family, hobbies, achievements, failures, where you spend most of your time — even where you *would*

like to spend most of your time — are all sources for inspirational insights.

Be open to finding your stories. Save newspaper clippings (or online links to them) that depict inspirational scenes from your life that you can use in your next presentation. Use any handy recording device to capture ideas and re-listen to them so that you remember to work them into a talk or develop them into five-minute modules.

You can engage with your audience by sharing a big idea, polishing your content into five-minute modules and becoming a collector of inspirational stories that connect to your big idea. Try these out with, "Project 10: Inspire Your Audience" from the *Competent Communication* manual. While you're at it, take a look at the skills you can develop with *The Entertaining Speaker* manual from the *Advanced Communication Series*. Put it all together, and your audiences will remember what you teach them. Isn't that the point? T

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