

# RECORD OF SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES 1975 VOL. 1 NO. 1

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

### Teaching Session

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As the actuary for your company, you have been asked to:

- (1) present your recommendation advocating entering the property and casualty field to your company's Board of Directors.
- (2) explain a 50% increase in pension costs to the finance committee of your largest client.
- (3) prepare an address to a group of high school students describing the actuarial profession.

Today's actuary is being confronted with situations such as those above with increasing frequency. We are being called on to voice our opinions as experts on matters of national concern, to explain in lay terms the workings of complex products and systems, and to describe our profession to those who know little or nothing about us. Our training and experience provide us with the content of any presentation we might make; the method and style of the presentation itself is the subject of this teaching session.

(Two films were shown: "How to make a more effective speech" and "How to give a more persuasive presentation." Both dealt with the basic methods and style of persuasive communication--concepts, facts, and points of view.)

Some of the finer points covered in these films are enumerated below.

#### How to Make a More Effective Speech

##### 1. Upon being invited to speak, determine:

- a) What type of speech is desired (subject matter, etc.)?
- b) How long will you be expected to speak?
- c) Are you the only speaker?
- d) Time, place, facilities.

##### 2. Qualities of a Speech

A speech is a relatively formal prepared address, delivered to a specific audience on a specific occasion. A good speech makes an overall impression and persuades the audience of the truth of its main thesis.

Generally, a speech has four elements:

- a) Opening.
- b) Statement of the main thesis.
- c) Arguments and facts in support of the thesis (and perhaps rebuttal of arguments against it).
- d) Summation and conclusion.

##### 3. Constructing the Speech

- a) Analyze your audience. Next to knowing the subject of your speech, the most important thing to know is precisely whom you are addressing. Not only will the content of the speech be affected by the characteristics of the audience, but the style of the presentation and nature of arguments used may also vary.
- b) Prepare the opening. The opening establishes a relationship between speaker and audience, and paves the way for the introduction

of the main thesis ("Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I'm very happy to be here with you this evening to discuss national health insurance").

- c) Statement of your thesis. When you have finished your opening, you tell them what you are after. "I'm here because I believe certain proposals on this matter are unworkable, and I'd like to explain why."
- d) Development of the thesis. Proceed now to build the strongest possible statement and defense of your position, in the time allotted.

This is the part of your speech in which you give the various arguments--social, economic, political, or whatever arguments are appropriate for this audience--buttressing them with facts, examples, expert testimony and anecdotes if possible. Anecdotes are important, whether they are humorous or serious, because they introduce a human note. In this part of your speech you also take up those arguments against your position which you are able to rebut effectively.

In preparing your arguments, several rules are to be followed:

- (i) Research the subject carefully.
- (ii) Edit the material--do not overdo facts and figures; choose only those that will have strong appeal for this particular audience.
- (iii) Arrange the material logically--follow some simple pattern, such as:
  - a) The question-and-answer method, in which your speech is organized to answer rhetorical questions that you select in a pattern that represents your total argument.
  - b) The narrative method, in which you tell a story, usually chronologically.
  - c) The elimination method, in which you list all possible solutions to a problem, then prove yours is best.
  - d) A combination of the above.
- e) Summation and conclusion. The summation should be a brief re-statement of the main thesis and the conclusions that you (and hopefully the audience) have drawn based on your arguments.

#### 4. Delivering the Speech

Write the entire speech out; read it until it flows naturally. Decide then whether to speak from script, notes or memory (memorize the opening and conclusion in any event). Rehearse first by yourself, then before others; ask for and listen to their criticism. Rehearse again. On speech day, avoid the cocktail hour and when introduced stride to the podium, take a deep breath, smile, thank your introducer and give your speech.

### How to Give a More Persuasive Presentation

#### 1. Qualities of a Presentation

A presentation is a partisan argument, or a fact-giving performance, directed at a specific audience and intended to produce some definite decision or action or attitude. It is generally supported by visual aids, which can mean anything from writings on a chalkboard to a motion picture. It can be given or received by an individual or group; that

it is given at all depends on one important fact--that both the presenter and the audience hope to get something out of it.

## 2. Planning the Presentation

- a) There are two basic principles to be followed in the planning of any presentation.
  - (i) Analyze your audience. You must know as much as possible about your audience because the secret of persuasion is the ability to put yourself into your listener's shoes. Your knowledge of him will determine the kind of language you use, the level of literary or technical sophistication you project, the way you will overcome his biases.
  - (ii) Define your objective. Summarize for yourself, in a sentence or two, what you want the presentation to achieve. On that statement of objective build your entire presentation--your choice of arguments and the order in which you give them, your selection of supporting facts and figures, the techniques and order of your visual material. Often objectives may need to be presented in phases (First--"Our company should expand its product line."; Second--"Travel accident coverage appears to be an appropriate addition.") Occasionally, the presentation may offer several objectives, with the audience asked to choose among them.
- b) Support your objective with arguments. These can be presented in several fashions:
  - (i) Narrative--A presentation for a new product could give its history, from an idea in the marketing department, through research and development, into production, advertising and test marketing.
  - (ii) Question and answer (problem-solving formula)--Why do we need new products? Why travel accident? Support your presentation with facts and figures.
  - (iii) Alternatives--List other possible solutions to the problem and enumerate reasons for their elimination.
- c) Designing the visual aids. Visual elements emphasize, clarify, dramatize, or make concrete your words, figures, and ideas. They also provide continuity. Graphs, charts, and drawings are useful tools in a presentation of a complex proposal. Media commonly used in presenting the visuals are the chalkboard, flip chart, felt board, and slide or overhead projectors.

## 3. Delivering the Presentation

A presentation is generally more effective if it is spoken conversationally, rather than read. Naturally, rehearsal is extremely important; it is essential to duplicate as nearly as possible the conditions under which the presentation will be given. Practice sufficiently with the visual material. Rehearse before others, listening to their criticisms. Anticipate questions from your audience; announce in advance whether you'll handle them on the spot or take them at the end of the presentation.

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The following bibliography of selected works in the field of effective communications is provided for those who wish to explore this subject more fully.

Bibliography

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