



Dale Carnegie **Speak More Effectively**

Learning Guide

Effective communication is critical in any organization; the mark of a great communicator is the ability to energize a team, a boardroom, or an arena.

What does it take to be a great communicator? Being a subject matter expert alone doesn't guarantee a riveting presentation. Deep content knowledge may earn you the right to speak but conveying the excitement you have for your message is equally important – if not more so. If an audience senses your genuine passion for your topic, they will hang on every word. While they may appreciate your knowledge, it's your enthusiasm that will truly engage people.

To date, life has prepared you to make at least a dozen great speeches that no one else could deliver, because no one else has had precisely your experiences. Talking publicly about your own experiences should be no more difficult than telling a good story to a friend. We'll help you to develop the courage and self-confidence to speak clearly and concisely in any public setting. You have the knowledge, and we can show you how to share it.

In this book excerpt, you'll discover eight guiding principles – each brought to life by Mr. Carnegie's compelling, first-hand stories – designed to prepare you for powerful public speaking.

Part One

Public Speaking

A Quick and Easy Way

You may be saying to yourself: “Is there really a quick and easy way to learn to speak in public—or is that merely an intriguing title that promises more than it delivers?”

No, I am not exaggerating. I am really going to let you in on a vital secret—a secret that will make it easier for you to speak in public immediately. Where did I discover this? In some book? No. In some college course on public speaking? No. I never even heard it mentioned there. I had to discover it the hard way—gradually, slowly, painfully.

If, back in my college days, someone had given me this password to effective speaking and writing, I could have saved myself years and years of wasted, heartbreaking effort. For example, I once wrote a book about Lincoln, and while writing it, I threw into the wastebasket at least a year of wasted effort that might have been saved had I known the great secrets that I am going to divulge to you.

The same thing happened when I spent two years trying to write a novel.

It happened again while writing a book on public speaking—another year of wasted effort thrown into the wastebasket because I didn’t know the secrets of successful writing and speaking.



If Possible, Spend a Year in Preparation

What are these priceless secrets that I have been dangling before your eyes? Just this: talk about something that you have earned the right to talk about through long study or experience. Talk about something that you know and know that you know. Don't spend 10 minutes or 10 hours preparing a talk: spend 10 weeks or 10 months. Better still, spend 10 years.

Talk about something that has aroused your interest.

Talk about something that you have a deep desire to communicate to your listeners.

To illustrate what I mean, let's take the case of Gay Kellogg, a housewife from Roselle, New Jersey. Gay Kellogg had never made a speech in public before she joined one of our classes in New York. She was terrified. She feared that public speaking might be an obscure art far beyond her abilities. Yet at the fourth session of the course, as she made an impromptu talk, she held the audience spellbound. I asked her to speak on "The Biggest Regret of My Life." Gay Kellogg then gave a talk that was deeply moving. The listeners could hardly keep the tears back. I know. I could hardly keep the tears from welling up in my own eyes. Her talk went like this:

"The biggest regret of my life is that I never knew a mother's love. My mother died when I was only a year old. I was brought up by a succession of aunts and other relatives who were so absorbed in their own children that they had no time for me. I never stayed with any of them very long. They were always sorry to see me come and glad to see me go.

They never took any interest in me or gave me any affection. I knew I wasn't wanted. Even as a little child I could feel it. I often cried myself to sleep because of loneliness. The deepest desire of my heart was to have someone ask to see my report card from school. But no one ever did. No one cared. All I craved as a little child was love—and no one ever gave it to me."

Had Gay Kellogg spent ten years preparing that talk?

No. She had spent 20 years. She had been preparing herself to make that talk when she cried herself to sleep as a little child. She had been preparing herself to make that talk when her heart ached because no one asked to see her report card from school. No wonder she could talk about that subject. She could not have erased those early memories from her mind. Gay Kellogg had rediscovered a storehouse of tragic memories and feelings away deep down inside her.

She didn't have to pump them up. She didn't have to work at making that talk. All she had to do was to let her pent-up feelings and memories rush up to the surface like oil from a well.

Jesus said: "My yoke is easy, my burden is light." So is the yoke and burden of good speaking. Ineffective talks are usually the ones that are written and memorized and sweated over and made artificial. Good talks are the ones that well up within you as a fountain. Many people talk the way I swim. I struggle and fight the water and wear myself out and go one-tenth as fast as the experts. Poor speakers, like poor swimmers, get taut and tense and twist themselves up into knots—and defeat their own purpose.

Become Excited About Your Subject

Even people with only mediocre speaking ability can give superb talks if they speak about something that has deeply stirred them. I saw a striking illustration of that years ago when I was conducting courses for the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce. It was an example that I shall remember for a lifetime. It happened like this:

We were having a session devoted to impromptu talks. After the class assembled, I asked them to speak on “What, If Anything, Is Wrong with Religion?”

One member (a man, by the way, who had never finished high school) did something to that audience that I have never seen any other speaker do in the years I have been training people to speak in public. His talk was so moving that when he finished, every person in the room stood up in silent tribute.

This man told about the greatest tragedy of his life: the death of his mother. He was so devastated, so grief-stricken, that he no longer wanted to live. He said that when he went out of doors, even on a sunny day, it seemed as if he were wandering in a fog. He longed to die. In desperation, he went to his church and knelt and wept and said the rosary, and a great peace came over him—a divine peace of resignation: “Not my will, but Thine be done.” As he finished his talk to the class, he said, in the voice of one who has had a revelation: “There is nothing wrong with religion! There is nothing wrong with God’s love.” I’ll never forget that talk because of its emotional impact. When I congratulated the speaker on his deeply moving talk, he replied: “Yes, and I made it without any preparation.”

Preparation? Well, if he hadn’t prepared that talk, I don’t know what preparation is. He meant, of course, that he had had no advance notice that he would have to talk on that subject. I am glad he didn’t, because if he had had advance notice, his talk might have been far less effective. He might have labored over it and tried to make a speech and been artificial. Instead, he did just what Gay Kellogg did years later—he stood up and opened his heart and talked like one human being conversing with another.

The truth of the matter is that he was preparing to make that talk when he knelt and wept and said the rosary. Living, feeling, thinking, enduring “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune”—that is the finest preparation ever yet devised for either speaking or writing.

Look Inside Yourself for Topics to Talk About

Do beginners know the necessity of looking inside themselves for topics? Know it? They never even heard of it! They are more likely to look inside a magazine for topics. For example, I remember meeting one of our students in the subway—a woman who was discouraged because she was making so little progress in this course. I asked her what she had talked about the previous week. I discovered that she had talked about whether Mussolini should be permitted to invade Ethiopia. She had gotten her information out of an article in Time Magazine. She had read the article twice. I asked her if she was interested in the subject, and she said, “No.” I then asked her why she had talked about it. “Well,” she replied. “I had to talk about something so I chose that.”

Think of it: here was a woman who had tried to speak about Mussolini’s Ethiopian war, yet she admitted she had little knowledge and no interest in the subject. She had neglected to speak on a subject she had earned the right to talk about.

After a discussion, I said to her: “I would listen with respect and interest if you spoke about something you have experienced and know about, but neither I nor anyone else would be interested in a subject which you yourself are not interested in, such as Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia. You don’t know enough about it to merit our attention or respect.”

Talk From Your Heart – Not From a Book

Many students of public speaking are like that woman. They want to get their subjects out of a book or a magazine instead of from their own knowledge and convictions. For example, a few years ago, I was one of the three judges in an intercollegiate speaking contest over the NBC network. The judges never saw the speakers. We listened to them from Studio 8G in Radio City. I wish, oh, how I wish that every student and teacher of public speaking could have witnessed what went on in that studio. The first speaker spoke on “Democracy at the Crossroads.”

The next one spoke about “How to Prevent War.” It was painfully evident that they were merely repeating carefully rehearsed and memorized words. So neither the guest in the studio nor the judges paid much attention to them. One of the judges was Willem Hendrik Van Loon. When he began drawing a cartoon of one of the contestants, everyone stood and watched him and ignored the amateurish “orations,” the memorized words, which were coming over the air.

However, the next speaker caught my attention immediately. A senior at Yale, he spoke about what was wrong with the colleges. He had earned the right to talk about that. We listened to him with respect. But the speaker who got the first prize began something like this:

“I have just come from a hospital where a friend of mine is near death because of an automobile accident. Most automobile accidents are caused by the younger generation. I am a member of that generation and I want to speak to you about the causes of these accidents.”

Everyone in the studio was quiet as he spoke. He was talking about realities, not trying to make a speech. He was speaking about something that he had earned the right to talk about. He was talking from the inside out.

Have an Eager Desire to Communicate

However, let me warn you that merely earning the right to talk about a subject will not always produce a superb talk. Another element must be added—an element that is vital in speaking. Briefly, it is this: in addition to earning the right to speak, we must have a deep and abiding desire to communicate our convictions and transfer our feelings to our listeners.

To illustrate: suppose I were asked to talk about raising corn and hogs. I spent 20 years on a corn and hog farm in Missouri, so surely I have earned the right to talk on that subject. I don't have any special desire to talk on that subject. But suppose I were asked to speak on what was wrong with the kind of education I got in college. I could hardly fail if I talked on that subject, because I would have the three basic requirements for a good talk. First, I would be talking about something that I had earned the right to talk about. Second, I would have deep feelings and convictions that I longed to convey to you. Third, I would have clear and convincing illustrations out of my own experience.

When Gay Kellogg spoke on the biggest regret of her life—never knowing a mother's love—she had not only earned the right through suffering to talk on that subject, but she also had a deep emotional desire to tell us about it. So did the class member who spoke in the Brooklyn Chamber of Commerce class about the death of his mother—"Not my will, but Thine be done."

History has repeatedly been changed by people who had the desire and the ability to transfer their convictions and emotions to their listeners. If John Wesley had not had that desire and ability, he could never have founded a religious sect that has girdled the globe. If Peter the Hermit had not had that desire and ability, he could never have stirred the imagination of the world and plunged Europe into the futile and bloody Crusades for possession of the Holy Land. If Hitler had not had the innate ability to transfer his hate and bitterness to his listeners, he could not have seized power in Germany and plunged the world into war.

Talk About Your Experiences

You are prepared right now to make at least a dozen good talks—talks that no one else on earth could make except you, because no one else has ever had precisely the same experience that you have had. What are these subjects? I don't know. But you do. So carry a sheet of paper with you for a few weeks and write down, as you think of them, all the subjects that you are prepared to talk about through experience—subjects such as "The Biggest Regret of My Life," "My Biggest Ambition," and "Why I Liked (Disliked) School." Do that and you will be surprised how quickly your list of topics will grow.

Here is good news for you: your progress as a speaker will depend far more on your choosing the right topic to talk about than upon your native ability as a speaker. You can feel at ease and make a fine talk immediately if you will only do what Gay Kellogg did: talk about some experience that has affected you deeply, some experience you have been thinking about for 20 years. But you may never feel completely at ease if you try to make speeches about "Mussolini's Invasion of Ethiopia" or "Democracy at the Crossroads."

Talk About Things You Have Studied

Talking about your own experiences is obviously the quickest way to develop courage and self-confidence. But after you have gained a bit of experience, you will want to talk about other subjects. What subjects? And where can you find them? Everywhere. For example, I once asked a class of executives of the New York Telephone Company to jot down every idea for a speech that occurred to them during the week. It was November. One person saw Thanksgiving Day printed in red on the calendar and spoke about the many things for which to be thankful. Another person saw some pigeons on the street. That inspired an idea. The person gave a talk about pigeons that I shall never forget. But the prize winner that night was a class member who had seen a bedbug crawling up a man's collar in the subway. The class member gave us a talk that I still remember after 20 years.

Carry a Scribbling Book

Why don't you do what Voltaire did? Voltaire, one of the most powerful writers of the eighteenth century, carried in his pocket what he called a "scribbling book"—a book in which he jotted down his fleeting thoughts and ideas. Why don't you carry a "scribbling book?" Then, if you are irritated by a discourteous clerk, for example, jot down the word "Discourtesy" in your scribbling book.

Then try to recall two or three other striking incidents of discourtesy. Select the best one and tell us what we ought to do about it. Presto! You have a 2-minute talk on Discourtesy.

As soon as you begin to look for topics for talks, you will find them everywhere: in the home, the office, the street.

Say Something Simple

Don't attempt to speak on some worldshaking problem such as "The Atomic Bomb." Take something simple—almost anything will do, provided the idea gets you, instead of your getting the idea. For example, I recently heard a student of this course, Mary A. Leer, of Chicago, talk on "Back Doors." You may find her talk dull as you read it; but if you had only listened to it, as I did, you would have loved it because she herself was positively excited about her back door. In fact, I never before heard anyone speak with such glowing enthusiasm about painting the back door! The point I am trying to make is this: almost any subject will do for a talk provided you yourself have earned the right to talk about it through study or experience, and are excited about it and eager to tell us about it.

This Is the Famous Talk About Back Doors!

“Four years ago, when I moved into my present apartment, the back door was painted a drab shade of gray. It was terrible. Every time I opened the back door it gave me a depressed feeling. So I bought a can of beautiful blue paint and painted the outside of the back door, the jambs and the inside of the screen door. That paint was the most exquisite shade of blue that I had ever seen; and every time I opened the back door after that, it seemed as though I was looking upon a bit of heaven.

“I was never more angry in my life than when I came home one evening not long ago and found that the house painter had pried open my screen door and painted my beautiful blue door a most hideous shade of putty gray. I could have cheerfully choked that painter.

“You can tell a lot more about people from their back doors than you can from their front doors. Front doors are often prettied up just to impress you. But back doors tell tales. A slovenly back door rattles on slovenly housekeeping. But a back door that is painted a cheerful color and has pots of blooming plants sitting around and garbage cans that are painted and orderly, that kind of back door tells you that there is an interesting person with a lively imagination living behind it. I have already bought a can of beautiful blue paint; and next Saturday, I am going to have a gorgeous time. I am again going to make my back door cheerful and inspiring.”

And so it goes. A volume could be filled with examples to show the power of speakers who:

- (a) Have earned the right, by study and experience, to talk about their subject;
- (b) Are excited about it themselves; and
- (c) Are eager to communicate their ideas and feelings to their listeners.



How to Prepare and Deliver Your Talks

Here are 8 principles that will help immensely in preparing your talks:

I. Make brief notes of the interesting things you want to mention.

II. Don't write out your talks.

Why? Because if you do, you will use written language instead of easy, conversational language; and when you stand up to talk, you will probably find yourself trying to remember what you wrote. That will keep you from speaking naturally and with sparkle.

III. Never, never, never memorize a talk word for word.

If you memorize your talk, you are almost sure to forget it; and the audience will probably be glad, for nobody wants to listen to a canned speech. Even if you don't forget it, it will sound memorized. You will have a faraway look in your eyes and a faraway ring in your voice. You won't sound like a human being trying to tell us something.

If, in a longer talk, you are afraid you will forget what you want to say, then make some brief notes and hold them in your hand and glance at them occasionally. That is what I usually do.

IV. Fill your talk with illustrations and examples.

By far the easiest way to make a talk interesting is to fill it with examples. To illustrate what I mean, let's take this booklet you are reading now. Approximately half of those pages are devoted to illustration. First, there is the illustration of Gay Kellogg's talk about the suffering she endured as a child. Next, the illustration of the speaker on "What, If Anything, Is Wrong with Religion?" Next, the example of the woman who tried to talk on Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. That is followed by the story of the four college students in a speaking contest over the radio—and so on. My biggest problem in writing a book or preparing a speech is not to get ideas, but to get illustrations to make those ideas clear, vivid, and unforgettable. The old Roman philosophers used to say, "Exemplum docet" (the example teaches). And how right they were!

For example, let me show you the value of an illustration. Years ago, a congressman made a stormy speech accusing the government of wasting our money by printing useless pamphlets. He illustrated what he meant by saying the government had printed a pamphlet on "The Love Life of the Bullfrog." I would have forgotten that speech years ago if it hadn't been for that one specific illustration, "The Love Life of the Bullfrog." I may forget a million other facts as the decades pass, but I'll never forget his charge that the government wastes our money by printing and giving away pamphlets such as "The Love Life of the Bullfrog!"

Exemplum docet. Not only does the example teach, but it is about the only thing that does teach. I have heard brilliant speeches which I promptly forgot because there were no examples to make them stick in my memory.

V. Know far more about your subject that you can use.

Ida Tarbell, one of America's most distinguished writers, told me that years ago, while in London, she received a cable from S.S. McClure, the founder of McClure's Magazine, asking her to write a two-page article on the Atlantic Cable. Miss Tarbell interviewed the London manager of the Atlantic Cable and got all the information necessary to write her five-hundred word article. But she didn't stop there. She went to the British Museum library and read magazine articles and books about the Atlantic Cable, and the biography of Cyrus West Field, the man who laid the Atlantic Cable. She studied cross sections of cables on display in the British Museum, and then visited a factory on the outskirts of London and saw cables being manufactured. "When I finally wrote those two typewritten pages on the Atlantic Cable," Miss Tarbell said, as she told me the story, "I had enough material to write a small book about it. But that vast amount of material which I had and did not use enabled me to write what I did write with confidence and clarity and interest. It gave me reserve power."

Ida Tarbell had learned through years of experience that she had to earn the right to write over five hundred words about the Atlantic Cable. The same principle goes for speaking. Make yourself something of an authority on your subject. Develop that priceless asset known as reserve power.

VI. Rehearse your talk by conversing with your friends.

Will Rogers prepared his famous Sunday night radio talks by trying them out as conversation on the people he met during the week. If, for example, he wanted to speak on the gold standard, he would wisecrack about it in conversation during the week. He would then discover which of his jokes went over, which remarks elicited people's interest. That is an infinitely better way to rehearse a talk than to try it out with gestures in front of a mirror.

VII. Instead of worrying about your delivery, find ways of improving it.

Much harmful, misleading nonsense has been written about delivery of a speech. The truth is that when you face an audience, you should forget all about voice, breathing, gestures, posture, emphasis. Forget everything except what you are saying. What listeners want, as Hamlet's mother said, is "more matter, with less art." Do what a cat does when trying to catch a mouse. It doesn't look around and say: "I wonder how my tail looks, and I wonder if I am standing right, and how is my facial expression?" Oh, no. That cat is so intent on catching a mouse for dinner that it couldn't stand wrong or look wrong if it tried— and neither can you if you are so vitally interested in your audience and in what you are saying that you forget yourself.

Don't imagine that expressing your ideas and emotions before an audience is something that requires years of technical training like you have to devote to mastering music or painting. Anybody can make a splendid talk at home when angry. For example, if somebody hauled off and knocked you down this instant, you would get up and make a superb talk. Your gestures, your posture, your facial expression would be perfect because they would be the expressions of genuine anger. And remember, you don't have to learn to express your emotions. You could express your emotions superbly when you were six months old. Ask any mother.

Watch a group of children at play. What fine expression! What perfect emphasis, gestures, posture, communication! Jesus said: "Except ye become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." Yes, and unless you become as natural and spontaneous and free as little children at play, you cannot enter the realm of good expression.

VIII. Don't imitate others; be yourself.

I first came to New York to study at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. I aspired to be an actor. I had what I thought was a brilliant idea, a shortcut to success. My campaign to achieve excellence was so simple, so foolproof, that I was unable to comprehend why thousands of ambitious people hadn't already discovered it. It was this: I would study the famous actors of that day—John Drew, E. H. Sothorn, Walter Hampden and Otis Skinner. Then I would imitate the best points of each one of them and make myself into a shining, triumphant combination of all of them. How silly! How tragic! I had to waste years of my life imitating other people before it penetrated my thick Missouri skull that I had to be myself, and that I couldn't possibly be anyone else.

To illustrate what I mean: A number of years ago, I set out to write the best book on public speaking for business people that had ever been written. I had the same foolish idea about writing this book that I had formerly had about acting: I was going to borrow the ideas of many other writers and put them all in one book—a book that would have everything. So I got scores of books on public speaking and spent a year incorporating their ideas in my manuscript. But it finally dawned on me once again that I was playing the fool.

This hodgepodge of other people's ideas that I had written was so synthetic, so dull that no business people would ever stumble through it. So I tossed a year's work into the wastebasket, and started all over again. This time I said to myself: "You've got to be Dale Carnegie, with all his faults and limitations. You can't possibly be anybody else." So I quit trying to be a combination of other people, and rolled up my sleeves and did what I should have done in the first place: I wrote a textbook on public speaking out of my own experiences, observations and convictions.

Why don't you profit from my stupid waste of time? Don't try to imitate others.

How are you preparing for that big talk or presentation you have coming up? Understand more about how to engage, persuade and inspire audiences in Dale Carnegie's High Impact Presentations program.

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