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INTRODUCING A SPEAKER AT A CHAPTER MEETING

By Manuel C. Antonio

Introductions may be brief, but they are still mini speeches and are organized in the classic manner—with an opening, a body, and a conclusion. This paper highlights the elements of a good introduction. The reader is taught how to properly introduce a speaker, be it at a chapter meeting, at an International Technical Communication Conference, or at any other occasion.

INTRODUCTION

Introducing a speaker is a skill anyone can learn according to Toastmasters International, Inc. Every speaker deserves a thoughtful and helpful introduction.(1) After all, you invite the speaker to share some thoughts with your audience; so, it is only proper that you accord the speaker some respect and courtesy. Even more important, a good introduction establishes a mutual relationship between the speaker and the audience, a basis of mutual views and interests, which serves as a foundation on which the speech can rest. This common bond should be an objective of most, if not all, introductions. Introduce the speaker and the audience to each other the same way you would introduce two friends to each other. Tell both something about each other.

At the 37th International Technical Communication Conference in Santa Clara, California, I had the opportunity to observe the introduction of many presenters, including the three keynote speakers. While most of these introductions were reasonably good, and a few were excellent, I felt there were some that, had they been better, could have enhanced my appreciation of the speech. This led me to do some study on how to introduce a speaker properly.

ELEMENTS OF A GOOD INTRODUCTION

Content

A good introduction tells the audience about the speaker and about the speech he or she is about to make. You, as the person making the introduction, should give pertinent background information about the speaker, such as his (or her) present position, employer, previous positions and employments, education, affiliations, interests, and so forth. You should tell the speaker something about the audience. Why this gathering? What do they all have in common? Why are they looking forward to hearing the speech? You should prepare the audience for the speech. Tell them what the speech is about and its relevance to the audience. You should also set the proper mood for the speech, an especially challenging task if there is a marked change from the mood of the preceding talk.(1) Be careful not to reveal too much about the speaker's speech.

Format

An introduction is a short speech in itself. Normally 1 to 1-1/2 minutes long, an introduction should not be more than two minutes long. Yet, it still has all the elements of a full-sized speech. A good introduction must have an opening, a body, and a conclusion.

Opening

The opening should focus on the importance of the subject of the speech. A good opening gets the audience's attention, sets the mood, and tells them what to expect from the speech.

Body

The body of the introduction explains:

- Why this subject?
- Why this speaker?
- Why this audience?
- Why at this time?

Conclusion

The conclusion of the introduction is the lead-in to the actual presentation of the speaker. Some examples are:

- Will you please give Mr./Ms. _____ a big hand.
- Will you please help me welcome Ms./Mr. _____.
- Let us give Mr./Ms. _____ a warm welcome.
- Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Ms./Mr. _____.

TECHNIQUE

Opening

If you have not been introduced to the audience or if not everybody in the audience know you, introduce yourself first. Then introduce the speaker. You may want to begin with an interesting story about the speaker that you could tie to the theme of this gathering or to the reason why this speech is important to this audience. Skirting around the speaker's topic is often sufficient to arouse interest about his or her speech without actually revealing the speech itself and without taking away from the speaker's impact.(1)

Body

Why this subject, why this speaker, why this audience, why at this time? Build expectation and end the introduction when the audience's interest peaks. Weave the speaker's name into the introduction as much as possible (unless it's a surprise name the audience will recognize), so the audience will clearly relate the speaker with the subject of the speech. But don't overdo it. Say only what needs to be said. (See Figure 1.)

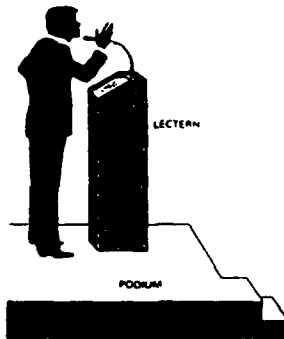


Figure 1. Introduce the speaker. Length of minispeech: 1 minute, but no more than 2 minutes.

Conclusion

This is the cue for the speaker to stand up and start heading for the lectern on the podium. Extend an outstretched arm in the direction of the speaker while still looking at the audience. Now look the speaker in the eyes as he or she steps up to the podium and approaches the lectern. Step back, lead the applause, shake the speaker's hand, and then sit down. (See Figures 2 and 3.) Never leave the lectern unattended.



Figure 2. Finished with the introduction, step back from the lectern. Lead the applause as the speaker steps up to the podium and heads toward the lectern.

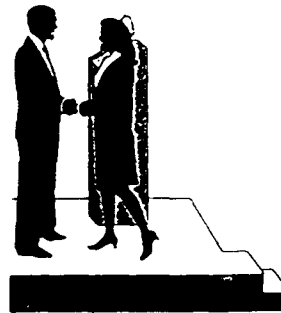


Figure 3. When the speaker reaches the lectern, shake hands. Then, you sit down.

Remember, your responsibilities for introducing the speaker continue even as the speech is being delivered. The Greek philosopher Plutarch once said, "Know how to listen, and you will profit even from those who speak poorly." (2) You should continue to set the standards of courtesy and respect by listening attentively to the speech, even when your speaker is speaking poorly. The audience will take your behavior as a role model, so don't say or do anything that will distract their attention from the speaker. (3) When the speaker has concluded his or her speech, stand up quickly and lead the applause. Return to the lectern, shake the speaker's hand, and continue applauding as he or she leaves the podium. If there is a question and answer (Q&A) period, initiate the first question and then repeat succeeding questions so that everybody in the audience can hear them. After the Q&A, lead the audience and give the speaker another round of applause. Thank the speaker on behalf of the audience and compliment the speech before turning control of the meeting to another person or before introducing next speaker. (See Figures 4 and 5.)

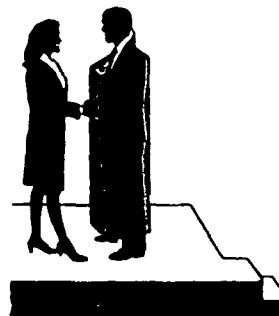


Figure 4. After the speaker has delivered the speech, get up quickly. Shake the speaker's hand and lead the applause.

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Figure 5. Go the lectern. After the applause has ceased, thank the speaker and compliment the speech.

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PREPARATION

An introduction requires almost as many steps of preparation as a formal speech. You may want to get a copy of the speaker's biography or to talk to the speaker beforehand and discuss the relevant information about him or her and about the speech. Be sure you divulge only the information authorized by the speaker. Make an outline of your introduction and then rehearse it, in front of a mirror, if possible. Time your delivery to see how long it takes you to do the introduction. Revise it if it is too long, then rehearse it repeatedly. You should give the audience the impression that you know enough about the speaker, so you want to deliver your introduction without referring to your notes. Both the speaker and the audience will appreciate your preparation.

SUMMARY

Your introduction is important to both the speaker and the audience. It should tell something about the speaker and his or her background while also giving the speaker some background about the audience. Your introduction should prepare the audience for what they are about to hear. Take time to prepare your introduction: the opening, body, and conclusion. Make an outline, rehearse, and revise. Then, rehearse it again and again until you know you are ready. When you hear the hearty reception of the audience, you will know you have done your introduction well.

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