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Preface

Speech is one of mankind's greatest achievements. By talking, we're able to express ourselves verbally, bring across messages and communicate. By talking, we are able to connect with other people. Speech expands our thought patterns. This makes language an all-encompassing reality, a reality that exists independently from those speaking it.

Here, we discover the magic and become aware of the fascinating power of words. We influence others through speech. We don't simply want to exchange information; we also like to make our feelings and desires known.

It is incredible that people are gifted with linguistic competencies. We are undoubtedly equipped with a set of grammatical rules at birth. It would otherwise be impossible to explain why children are able to string together sentences that they have never heard before.

Over the centuries, speech has had an immeasurable influence on daily life, politics, justice and religion. Spoken language is reflected in written language and this makes language, spoken or written, the number one influence on the world.

The world would have been a very different place without authors, philosophers, scientists and speakers like Plato, Cicero, Augustinus, Marx, Freud, Darwin, Nietzsche, Caesar, Mandela, Gandhi, Kennedy, Churchill, Machiavelli, Shakespeare, Obama and thousands more.

However, loudmouths like Mussolini and Hitler abused speech. The same is often the case with leaders of obscure sects, self-proclaimed spiritual leaders and speech gurus. We won't even mention the drivel served up by power-hungry politicians or the chatter from less gifted journalists. We live in a 'linguistic' world or in 'the home of speech'. Without speech, we would miss out on countless communication opportunities. Speech is essentially important in order for us to express ourselves clearly and accurately.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) was the first to write a book about speaking. It was called 'Rhetorica'. About 450 years later in 95 AD, Quintilianus (ca 35-100 AD) wrote his famous 'Institutio Oratoria', a work which is still intensely studied in the 21st century and has been translated into numerous languages. It is a handbook containing many tips.

Studies have shown that three out of four people who are required to speak in public suffer from glossophobia, better known as fear of speaking in public or stage fright.

This fear may go hand in hand with complete black-outs (not knowing what to say and staring at the audience), fainting, quivering legs, excessive perspiration, needing to urinate, stuttering and use of multiple aaaahs, uhhhs and ummms. Some speakers have been known to look at the audience and turn around and walk off the stage without saying a word. 'Public speaking' is one of the top 5 phobias and people regard it as similar to 'dying' and 'suffering immense pain'. (Some people would rather die than speak in public!)

Everyone will, sometime during his life, be required to speak in public. This could be a final farewell at a funeral, a presentation to colleagues at work or a word of thanks following victory in a match.

For this reason, it is important to acquire the basic skills necessary so that you come across as professional as possible. It is therefore extremely advantageous that people can be trained to become familiar with the dos and don'ts of public speaking.

Speakers Academy® doesn't train speakers, but represents professional speakers in their public speaking capacities. However, we often receive requests for speaker training. In such cases, we only recommend one company and that is Schouten & Nelissen. This is due to the fact that they provide rock-solid training and make speakers believe in themselves. I give me great pleasure to highly recommend this book.

Albert de Booij
Founder and CEO of Speakers Academy®

'No victor believes in coincidence'

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)

Introduction

Most readers of this book will probably find the idea that speaking in public could be fun absolute nonsense. Giving a speech to a group of people would probably be in the same category as a visit to the dentist: it must be done, it's necessary, you can't escape it, but fun – no, absolutely not! Other readers might not regard public speaking as torture, but are perhaps not satisfied with the quality of their speaking. They are eager to improve their presentations by further developing their skills and techniques.

The first group of people mentioned will gain support and confidence from the instructions and technical tips that we provide. They will really benefit from the methods for handling anxiety dealt with in the book.

During our many years of training experience we have witnessed many a petrified stutterer transformed into a speaker who's obviously enjoying him- or herself and has to be dragged off the stage. Of course, these are the real success stories, but our experiences show that most participants learn how to deal with stage fright and the accompanying stress. Their presentations are no longer jeopardised and they're able to sleep peacefully the night before a speech.

If you belong to the second group of speakers, this book will provide you with countless instructions and exercises aimed at improving presentations. Some of the suggestions may be familiar to you, while others will give you an entirely new perspective. Every reader must be aware that this material will only be beneficial if it is practised. You don't learn how to swim from a book – you have to get into the water. For this reason we've provided, along with all the information and suggestions, ample space for you to complete practical exercises. Sometimes these exercises are in the form of self-observation tasks and sometimes you are invited to experiment with new behaviour. In the end, the most important thing is to speak in public as much as possible and use a number of specific strategies to improve your speaking. We are sure that this book contains sufficient suggestions which anyone can convert into concrete strategies to enhance their public speaking.

In the first chapter, we invite the reader to decide on his or her strengths and weaknesses relating to public speaking. The next six chapters deal predominantly with the intrinsic and technical aspects of public speaking, such as the prior analysis, the classification and the advantages and disadvantages of various presentation aids. We also focus on non-verbal expression, including gestures and the use of one's voice.

In chapters 8 to 10, we explore anxiety and stage fright. We discuss a number of ways which can be used to physically control anxiety and we examine the use of effective mental training that will help to deal with the illusions that frighten speakers. Once the reader is more calm and composed when presenting a speech, we move on to the more advanced aspects like speaking off the cuff and dealing with unexpected situations. In addition, we provide advice on how to handle awkward questions. *The floor is yours!* is a book that begs action. So we conclude in style by explaining how to sustain a continuous self-training regime. You also learn (with the help of others) how to systematically examine your presentations and make effective changes. We wish you hours of reading pleasure and we hope that you will succeed and also start enjoying (albeit slightly) public speaking.

For ease of reading's sake, from here onwards we will refer to 'he' and 'him'. This may, of course, also be regarded as 'she' and 'her'.

1

Speaking at various occasions

Which of you have had to take part in giving a presentation to top management? Who has had to give the speech at Auntie Ann and Uncle Bert's silver wedding anniversary dinner? All of us have found ourselves in situations where we've been faced with addressing a group of people. These situations can vary immensely, so they require different approaches. At the silver wedding anniversary, the speaker is perhaps someone who knows the couple well and can deliver a fluent, humorous speech. At the presentation to top management, the likely candidate is an expert on content and is capable of answering important questions. When looking for someone to speak at a congress, it will likely be a well-known authority who has earned his right to speak about the topic, is a fascinating storyteller and is able to draw crowds. Every event requires a specific type of speaker and, at some point in time, every one of us will have to face being that specific speaker.

However different they may be, the speakers at all of the above occasions must possess a number of basic skills in order to gain satisfactory results, such as:

- The speaker must be intelligible.
- The speaker must be able to compose his thoughts so that his speech can be clearly followed and understood by the audience.
- The speaker must control his anxiety levels to be able to continue functioning properly.
- The speaker must be capable of holding the audience captive, so as not to lose their attention.
- The speaker must be capable of making contact with the audience.

There is a significant difference between speeches made at social occasions and the verbal presentation of information at business level. Not only do the objectives differ, so do the technical aids and the interaction with the audience. We'll expand on this in Chapter 2. During more technical, content-based business presentations, use will be made of aids, such as a beamer during PowerPoint presentations. There will be more interaction and discussion with the audience than during, say, an anniversary speech or where the speaker addressing a packed congress hall will be required to move around with the microphone and hold the attention of a silent audience in an entertaining way.

However diverse these forms of verbal presentation may be, the one thing they have in common is that we refer to them collectively as ‘public speaking’ or ‘presentations’ in this book. Specific relevant issues, like the use of technical aids and dealing with questions, will be handled separately. The one binding factor that remains is the skill required in order to be effective and relaxed when addressing a group of people.

People spend their entire lives learning various skills. Cycling is an example of something that can be learnt through lots of practice. It can be mastered even if you don’t have a talent for doing it. However, when it comes to public speaking, it seems as though learning and practicing aren’t even mentioned as options. Who doesn’t know the following expression: *either you have it or you don’t and he is a born presenter and I’m not!*

The point that we are trying to make is that public speaking is a skill that can be learnt. It can be learnt in the same way as all other skills – by obtaining knowledge and practicing those skills. Obviously, not everyone who learns to cycle is going to become a Lance Armstrong. Similarly, not everyone who learns how to speak in public will become a charismatic orator. There is no such thing as a born speaker; there are only speakers who learn more easily than others.

Strength / weakness analysis

In order to focus your attention as you go through this book, please make an estimate of your level of experience. What strengths and weaknesses do you notice in your verbal presentation skills in various situations? Make a list of points of interest which will be important while you’re reading this book. Use the questionnaire below to help you:

Experience

- 1 How often during my life have I spoken in public during the following situations?
 - Speech to relatives or acquaintances _____ times
 - Business presentation at work _____ times
 - Business presentation to outsiders _____ times
 - Anniversary or farewell speech outside my circle of family and friends _____ times
 - Other situations _____ times

- 2 According to the details above, do I see myself as an experienced, novice or inexperienced speaker?

- 3 How satisfied am I with my presentation performance? Indicate level of satisfaction using numbers 1 to 5. 1 is most dissatisfied and 5 is most satisfied.

	<i>Satisfaction score</i>
Preparation	_____
Content	_____
Structure of the presentation	_____
Audience captivation	_____
Correct use of language	_____
Use of voice	_____
Use of aids	_____
Anxiety / apprehension	_____
Dealing with questions	_____
Other aspects	_____

4 Once I have read this book and completed the exercises, I would like to concentrate on acquiring the following skills:

2

How should I prepare my speech?

If you're required to make a speech, begin by preparing its contents. What do I know about the specified topic? What would I like to tell the audience about this topic? It's often obvious in hindsight, that the presentation was unsuitable for the audience or the occasion, or that the speaker spent too much time on preparation. Before preparing the content, we advise that you ask yourself the following questions:

- What would I like to achieve through my presentation or speech?
- Who is my audience?
- What exactly are the circumstances?

Let's deal with these three questions before we move on to the efficient preparation of content.

What would I like to achieve through my presentation or speech?

When you are doing your preparation, it is absolutely vital that you clearly define the goal of your presentation and the effect you would like it to have on the audience. This will, to a large extent, determine the content of the presentation, the strategy to follow and the aids that you will use. Once you have determined your goal you can, according to the content, distinguish between the main- and secondary points and make an informed decision about which aids to use. In most cases, one of the following goals, or a combination of them, are set:

1 Transfer of information

For example, think about this in the context of a group of students meeting before the start of a course. After your presentation, the students should know where to collect their timetables and where their first class will be held.

2 *Influencing opinions*

For example, public opinion on one of your company's products is negative. You would like to use your presentation to reverse this.

3 *Influencing behaviour*

For example, you are an accident prevention officer for the regional police force. You are addressing young pupils at primary schools and your aim is to encourage them to use adequate lighting on their bicycles when cycling home that very night.

It's clear that these goals are interconnected and overlap one another. Take a sales presentation as an example:

Specific *information* is provided ('this is what this machine can do') to influence *opinion* (the buyer must think to himself: 'Hey, this is handy, I need it') which subsequently influences *behaviour* (purchasing it).

Despite this overlapping, it's important that you clearly determine your goals from the outset. If your aim is the *transfer of information*, you will need to choose which information should feature most prominently. This choice is essential, because the human memory and attention span is limited. The most important information can be emphasised on a slide or displayed in a brochure. To influence or sway people's opinions, you will have to work out the arguments that will convince a critical audience. This will affect the order of your presentation – it's a known fact that points made at the beginning and the end leave the greatest impression. If your goal is to influence behaviour, it's important that the desired behaviour is highlighted as much as possible during your presentation, and that the audience is made aware of the benefits of this behaviour.

In the previous chapter, we mentioned a fourth, slightly different type of goal: the atmosphere that you would like to create. A speech presented at an anniversary celebration is meant to really affect the atmosphere. You obviously want to add to the festive atmosphere at a wedding reception or a tribute ceremony with your speech. It goes without saying that this determines what kind of material you will gather for your speech – no graphs and figures, but certainly some funny personal anecdotes.

Who is my audience?

A CEO to an audience of employees: 'The most important goal for our company during the upcoming year is to increase profit!' A psychologist to parents at a suburban school PTA meeting: 'During the learning process, the stimulation-response ratio and the reinforcements must be closely monitored.'

Obviously, both these speakers have not determined the nature of their audiences. The employees aren't informed about anything which relates to them, like retaining their jobs, and the parents don't understand any of the jargon offered to them regarding their