

Adding some pizzazz and power

By Bob 'Idea Man' Hooey, AS

Looking to add a bit of pizzazz and power to your platform performance? Here are a few thoughts and tips that will help you grow on stage and in your skill as a speaker.

Last October (1999) I attended a special NSA Platform Skills Lab in Tempe, AZ with 100 other professional speakers, with some of the best NSA speakers offering coaching tips. One of our coaches, John Alston, CSP shared some thoughts on effective openings with us that I'd like to pass on to you. John shared his three rules on creative, impactful openings:

1. **Get their attention and keep it!** (By any means possible) This sometimes means getting outside of your comfort zone to capture and keep their attention - but if your message is worth sharing it's worth being dramatic to give them a chance to hear it.
2. **Remain current with your content and context** - know your audience. (Use surveys and reviews) If you are to effectively reach your audiences you need to go where they are - and that requires getting to know them. John shared the differences for example of speaking to young people vs. CEO's and how you would structure your opening to target either group.
3. **Find your common ground** - look for the universals. (What do we have in common?) Ask yourself what you have in common with your potential audience. Is there a universal principle that underlies that commonality? If so, can you build on that principle or idea?

In addition to the above, Mark Sanborn, CSP, CPAE shared some thoughts on Grand Slam closings with us in Tempe.

Mark talked about ensuring that our closings were changed in focus from **Event to Experience**. He challenged us to not simply close, but to help our audience's experience the completion of our speeches. He also challenged us to make sure our closings were an integral part of our presentation and not just added on as we ran out of time. They needed to be part of the flow of our presentation and not just a fancy closing 'tacked' on for effect.

He shared some thoughts on retention too. He said that 'raw is real' in that we shouldn't sanitize our material or try to make it too perfect. Makes sense to reach an audience by being ourselves. He mentioned that 'less is more' in that we tend to put too much into our presentations. I've found myself doing that on occasion. But it is an area that I am aware of and am working to make sure I allow the 'real' Bob out, so my audiences can see and experience what I really believe.

Mark talked about timing too. **F.E.A.R. - false endings appearing real**. Have you ever been listening to a speaker and thought they were closing, only to find they still had lots to say? How did you feel? Don't do that too your audiences. When it's time to close, do so and do it with impact. Don't fool your audiences - go for the close and finish on time.

One of the most effective things Mark did was share what he called the **Lincoln insight**. Seems President Lincoln had a political adversary who was a 'church' man. To avoid controversy, he would sneak into services after they started, and leave just before they finished.

One Sunday as President Lincoln was leaving, he was approached by an aide who asked him if he enjoyed the sermon? His reply was, "it was well crafted and delivered." His aide pursued the matter and asked again, "so you liked the sermon?"

Irritated, Lincoln replied, "No son, I did not!" Confused the aide stammered, "Buuuut, you said it was well crafted and delivered?" Lincoln went on to explain, "It was well crafted and delivered, but the preacher failed in one thing." "What was that" the aide asked?

Lincoln replied, "**He didn't challenge us to do anything GREAT with what he shared - in that he failed.**"

Caught my attention, and I'm committed to making sure I don't make the same mistake when I speak. And it has made a profound difference in my audience reactions.

Mark asked us some questions that are worth asking you to think about as well.

- Are your closings a culmination or a stopping point?
- What one thing could you do to make your presentation more of an experience? What impression are you trying to leave after your speech? Why?
- What are the 2-3 most important values that drive your life? Do they show up in your presentations? How?
- **What great thing are you asking listeners to do when you close?**

I am grateful that as a professional member of CAPS and the IFPS I have the opportunity to learn from platform masters such as these two. It was an awesome 3 days, and I will be sharing a few thoughts on it as I continue to teach my, 'Speaking for Success' program. I'd be happy to share more tips if you're interested.

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