

Audience Participation - Critical to a Great Speech

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When most people think of giving a speech, they don't think of audience participation. Audience participation should be part of every speech.

Understanding audience participation

As a speaker the key to understanding audience participation comes in one word- attitude. Speakers must understand that the audience is important, not them. Once this is understood, the concept of audience participation begins. Simply put, a speech should not be one person (the speaker) speaking in front of listeners (the audience). Good speeches involve a speaker engaging an audience who then participates through listening and other activities.

What it does

When an audience is asked to participate in a speech they become an important part of the speech. Most speakers simply talk "at" their audiences. When a speaker engages an audience through their active participation, the audience becomes more involved and they ultimately get more out of the speech. The speaker who uses audience participation will be more effective in getting their message to audience.

Variety of participation

Audience participation can be range from asking audience members to stop and think about something to having them go up on stage and say or do something.

Questions work well

One of my favorite forms of participation is asking a question and having them respond by raising their hand. I might ask, "How many of you have teenagers at home?" By asking this type of question the speaker accomplishes four things. First, they grab the attention of the audience. By asking questions every 3-5 minutes in a speech that bring a response, audience attention is less likely to drift. Second, by asking for a response the audience must think and be mentally engaged in the speech. Third, the audience makes some movement by raising their hand and this gets the blood flowing a little. Fourth, the speaker gets to read and react to audience responses.

Try some humor

Adding humor to audience participation is fun. For example, if I ask, "How many of you have teenagers at home?" the tone of my voice and look on my face help to convey my question to them. I might then ask, "How many of you don't have teenagers at home?" Then I might finish with "How many of you just don't want to think about it?" This technique involves everyone and brings out some smiles. When asking a question that requires a raised hand, raise your hand first.

Maintain control

While having an audience participate, make sure that you maintain control. If your first attempts work the audience into frenzy, then re-gain control and limit the participation a bit. Asking audience members to raise their hand in response is easier to control than having them verbally respond. Once they begin shouting out responses, it is harder to maintain control. Any benefits of audience participation are lost if the speaker loses control of the group.

Practice

The key to mastering audience participation exercises is to practice over and over until you have them down. Start with one type of participation and once you've mastered that, then select another and repeat the process.

A good speaker uses techniques to engage an audience and give a memorable speech.