



START WITH THE END IN MIND

Most Americans speak at a rate of about 125 words per minute, which means a majority of the words you say will be forgotten. If all goes well, people will remember some key themes, or something you say that spoke directly to them—something that resonates.

However, one thing is certain when you stand and deliver a presentation: no matter how long your speech, the audience will never forget how you make them feel. One of Stephen Covey's key principles in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, is "begin with the end in mind." Consequently, be conscious as you prepare your speech to know how you want to end it.

One of biggest mistakes speakers make is that they don't harness the power of the end—they don't guide the audience to the perfect spot where they can deliver the perfect knock-out punch. Take the opportunity to lead them where you want them and then get it done—clinch the end, leave them struck with awe, inspiration, admiration, wanting more, etc.

IT'S THE FIRST COMMANDMENT ... OF GREAT COMMUNICATORS

The first commandment in my Ten Commandments of Great Communicators is focused on the importance of the Primacy and Recency Effect—or, the beginning and end of any presentation you give. You'll notice that movies start and end with a bang. Commercials begin with a hook and leave you with a price. Concerts open and close with a band's best songs. The end is just as important as the beginning. The close is your call-to-action, your chance to succinctly address the question as to why exactly it was worth everyone's time to listen to your speech.

In order for the end to be powerful, your audience must feel it. What the best way to make the audience feel in the end? Have them leave the event feeling refreshed and energized. Here are a few tactics to help the audience feel the positive energy when they leave the room:

- **Deliver the unexpected.** Use an ice-breaker exercise when the audience isn't expecting it. I like to break with an exercise called "I, Me, Mine." Ask the audience to separate into pairs. Have each couple stand and begin a conversation about their weekend plans. The first person to say "I," "me," or "mine" has to sit down. Watch the dynamic of the room and see how quickly people begin to take their seats. The prevailing theme is that when you speak to an audience, it's never about you. It's about their hopes, dreams, and aspirations. It's an effective way to model your approach to show an audience you care about them. It's also a lot of fun while challenging everyone to think differently.
- **Move to the back of the room**—or a different part of the room—and catch your audience by surprise. Sometimes that will create just enough of a spark to wake people up.
- **Remember that energy is contagious.** You don't have to ignite the entire room at once. Find a few faces that show a glimmer of life and start there. Energy spreads quickly.
- **Conclude your speech with a positive call-to-action.** Share stories and quotes that are uplifting, provocative, and thoughtful.

Energy is critical to your success. Be mindful of it throughout your presentation. You'll hopefully begin with impact that grips them from the start, fight through the middle to keep them engaged, and then you'll need to do the most important thing: motivate, inspire, and persuade them to leave with the action, mindset, etc. that was the purpose of your presentation. Here are three ways that you can deliver a "knock-out punch."

- 1) **Summarize what has come before.** Sometimes I summarize what I just said, but, occasionally, I ask audience members to condense what they think the key takeaways of my speech are. Without disclosing it to the audience, you can call on a "plant" (someone in the audience that you've prepared for this prior to the speech to provide the summary). The dialogue with him or her acts as an "icebreaker" and works effectively to bring others into the discussion. Or, you can call on an individual you don't know who has been paying close attention throughout the speech—someone who makes frequent eye contact with you, sits on the edge of his or her chair, or is taking copious notes is a good target. "Tell me, John Doe," I'll ask an engaged listener in the crowd, "from everything that you've heard today, what's just one takeaway that you've gleaned from this presentation?" John will likely say, "Here's what I'm thinking . . ." and communicate a few ideas. By calling on people in the audience, you're showing that you want to involve others in your speech. You're asking them questions. You care about what they have to say. You want their opinion. People appreciate the effort and remember that long after the speech is over.
- 2) **Use some stagecraft.** Try asking a question but not answering it right away. "I've told you that we need to exceed our normal sales quota for this month. Can we do it?" Let the statement hang in the air for a bit. See what everyone's reaction is. Look around. Who's on board and who isn't? And then let that awkward silence work in your favor by urging people to ask themselves, "Why isn't he talking?"
- 3) **Close the loop.** Consider bringing your audience full circle back to where you started in some fundamental way. If you've opened with an unusual fact or used a visual, try referencing your opening tactic in the close. It's a way to remind people of how you caught their attention earlier—which is a positive memory—so you can guide them to your next destination.

When all is said and done, the impact of your presentation will be reinforced if you're able to tie your powerful, attention-grabbing opening together with a compelling and memorable call-to-action. Your goal is not only to compel your audience to listen; your goal is to answer the question, "What do I want my audience to think, feel, or do, when this speech is over?" and achieve it.