

THREE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

every time you speak

Why doesn't everyone commit to communication self-development? For years, I've coached executives who all needed to persuade and provoke change in order to succeed. Many of these executives sensed they weren't up to the task or simply didn't know how to communicate effectively. Becoming a masterful communicator requires several concurrent skills, but ultimately those skills culminate in being able to persuade the result of three key questions regarding your audience, large or small:

1. **What do you want them to think?**
2. **What do you want them to feel?**
3. **What do you want them to do?**

WHAT DO YOU WANT THEM TO THINK?

My own research suggests that people make decisions about you in the first seven seconds they see you. And it's these early judgments that often prove to be one of the key predictors as to whether your speech will be perceived positively or negatively. This is a hurdle every one of us must leap over to get to the meat of our message. What is it that you want your audience—large or small—to think? You likely have a message or agenda that you want believed. You want to be trusted and thought of as a viable source of information. From your appearance to the beginning and end of your speech, those listening to you will walk away thinking something—the question is: what?

It's important to understand who your audience is. Are they a room full of professionals attending a conference? Or perhaps your department team? No

matter who it is, you have the power, through the delivery of your narrative, to influence how they think about the topic you're presenting.

Consider President John F. Kennedy's speech regarding space exploration. It was a fascinating topic of the time—one that many were curious and passionate about. However, it was his famous speech, given on September 12, 1962, that convinced the public that we would in fact go to the moon. It was a speech meant to persuade the American people to accept and endorse the Apollo program. And it did. Here are a few excerpts of that speech:

There is no strife, no prejudice, no national conflict in outer space as yet. Its hazards are hostile to us all. Its conquest deserves the best of all mankind, and its opportunity for peaceful cooperation may never come again. But why, some say, the Moon? Why choose this as our goal? And they may well ask, why climb the highest mountain? Why, thirty-five years ago, fly the Atlantic? Why does Rice play Texas?

We choose to go to the Moon! We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard; because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one we intend to win ...

The way the American people thought about space exploration changed after that speech.

WHAT DO YOU WANT THEM TO FEEL?

I am often reminded of a great quote by the poet Maya Angelou, who said, “People will forget what you say, people will forget what you do, but they will never forget how you make them feel.” When you’re in front of any number of people, remember the essence of Angelou’s statement. Remember that people won’t be able to recall the exact words you deliver or the exact way you present your ideas, but they will remember the way you make them feel.

In January, we celebrate the life of one of the greatest visionaries and ambassadors for peace and progress, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. An American Baptist minister, activist, and leader in the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. King was a gift orator. His speeches inspired, motivated and made people feel—culminating in one of the greatest speeches ever given, his “I Have a Dream” speech delivered from the Lincoln memorial on August 28, 1963.

I say to you today, my friends, though, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...

...I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation Where they will not

be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream ... I have a dream that one day in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification, one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

Dr. King’s ability to convey these impactful words—amongst so many others—gave individuals the confidence to *feel* that hope and change were possible.

WHAT DO YOU WANT THEM TO DO?

When you’re able to persuade your audience to think and feel a certain way, what will inevitably occur? The desire and motivation to act. What is it you want your audience to actually do as a result of your presentation or conversation? From votes and civic involvement as inspired by Kennedy and King, to achievement of tasks and goals as a team at work, you have the opportunity to inspire action through your communication.

When you consider these three driving factors of behavior for your audience, combined with your topic at hand, the purpose and goal of your presentation/conversation/speech becomes more clear—that is, if you *know* the answers to those questions! Which, if you don’t, it’s time to reflect on them before you do anything else!



CHUCK GARCIA is the founder of Climb Leadership International and coaches executives on leadership development, public speaking, and emotional intelligence. He is also an Adjunct Professor at Columbia University where he teaches Leadership Communication in the Graduate School of Engineering.

A 25-year veteran of Wall Street, he spent 14 years in sales and marketing at Bloomberg in a variety of leadership positions. He was Director of Business Development at BlackRock Solutions, an arm of the world’s largest investment manager, and was a Managing Director at Citadel, a prestigious alternative investment manager.

He is also a mountaineer and has climbed some of the world’s tallest peaks, including Mount Kilimanjaro, Mount Elbrus, the Matterhorn, as well as mountains in Alaska and the Andes.