CREATIVE STORYTELLING

Can you think of a time when you were deeply touched by a speech or a presentation? It was probably because the message was woven in the speech through the powerful art of storytelling.

Storytelling is the most powerful speaking tool you have in your public speaking skills toolbox.

You might ask, "*Why is storytelling key to becoming a great speaker*?"

It is because people are hungry for stories. It is part of our very being. The storyteller brings a story to life and transports the listener to another time, location, or situation. When a story reaches our hearts with deep meaning, it takes hold of us. We remember the experience long after the story has been told. A story provides the "hook to hang on" that a good speech must have to be remembered.

*So, how can you develop the key public speaking skill of storytelling?*

Effective storytelling is a fine and beautiful art. A well-developed and presented story can cut across age barriers and will hold the interest and reach its listeners. Stories will be remembered long after other orations. Knowing and applying the basics of storytelling will strengthen your stories.

**Characteristics of a Good Story**

* A single theme, clearly defined
* A well developed plot
* Style: vivid word pictures, pleasing sounds and rhythm
* Characterization
* Dramatic appeal
* Appropriateness to listeners

**Points to Remember**

* **Adapting to the audience**
* Take the story as close to them as you can.
* Keep it brief and simple
* Stimulate their senses so they feel, smell, touch and listen and see vivid pictures.
* Describe the characters and settings, and help them sympathize with the character's feelings.
* Aim your story at the targeted audience

*Storytelling is a task shared by storyteller and story listeners,-*

*it is the interaction of the two that makes a story come to life!*

* **Preparation**
* Review the story several times, first for pleasure, then with concentration.
* Analyze its appeal, the word pictures you want your listeners to see, and the mood you wish to create.
* Research its background and cultural meanings.
* Live with your story until the characters and setting become as real to you as people and places you know.
* Visualize it! Imagine sounds, tastes, scents, colors. Only when you see the story vividly yourself can you make your audience see it!

*Stories paint word pictures and use the sound and rhythm and repetition of words.  
In developing and learning a story concentrate on its visual and audio aspects:   
either assemble it into a series of visual pictures like a filmstrip,   
or consciously absorb the rhythm and arrangement of the sounds of the words.*

* **Learn the story as a whole rather than in fragments.**
* Map out the story line: The **Beginning**, which sets the stage and introduces the characters and conflict; the **Body**, in which the conflict builds up to the **Climax**; and the **Resolution** of the conflict. Observe how the action starts, how it accelerates, repetitions in actions and how and where the transitions occur. If simplifying or adapting a story, do not alter the essential story line.
* Absorb the style of the story: To retain the original flavor and vigor, learn the characteristic phrases which recur throughout the story. Observe the sentence structure, phrases, unusual words and expressions.

*Give your characters personalities...live the story with them...*

*know and feel their emotions... breathe the breathe of life into them,*

*until they become so real to you that you feel like they are people you know.  
If you are convinced - your listeners will be too.*

* **Delivery elements:**
* Sincerity and whole heartedness (Be earnest!),
* Enthusiasm (This does not mean artificial or noisy excitement),
* Animation (in your gestures, voice, facial expressions)
* **Particular Oral Storytelling Skills**

A Storyteller’s skills include:*emphasis, repetition, transition, pause* and *proportion*.

* Dialog should make use of different voices for different characters and using the Storytelling "V" - where you will shift your facing (or posture) as the dialog switches from character to character.
* Use your voice to create the atmosphere or tension as the story progresses.
* Use gestures and facial expressions add much to the visualization of the story. Be sure they are appropriate and natural. Practice them!
* Pacing involves both the volume and rate at which you speak, and the progression of the action in the story. Dialog slows a story's pace down, while narrating action speeds it up.
* Repetition and Exaggeration have always been basic elements of storytelling.

*Most importantly --- relax and be yourself.*

*Develop your own style - one you are comfortable with.*

* **Some attention keepers:**
* Involvement or participation. Use volunteer(s) from the audience in your story. Or have the audience participate in hand motions or making sound effects. Or responding with "chants" or refrains
* A distinct change in your pace, voice, or mood.
* An unusual or unexpected twist in the narration.
* *Throw-away lines or asides* work well as does *comic relief*.
* **Concluding:**  
  Once you finish the story - stop! Don't ramble on. Leave their thoughts lingering over it. Don't feel you have to explain everything, or tie together all loose ends. Let them go away thinking about what has been said, and drawing their own meaning from it!

Applause is no measure of the effectiveness of a story presentation. Sometimes it will be exuberant, but other times the audience is quietly savoring and treasuring the story. An attentive audience and the feeling you "told it well" are the best reward you can have.

**Finally...and most importantly:**The more you practice- the more skilled you will become. Don't be afraid to try different methods. Be creative; as you do learn from your experiences. Expect to flop, the best of us do. Don't be overly self- conscious. Have fun and share the joy of story.

**Effective Storytelling Performance Skills**

When telling a story, an effective storyteller demonstrates the following traits observable by others:

**Voice Mechanics** Speaks with an appropriate volume for the audience to hear. Employs clear enunciation. Uses non-monotonous, vocal expression to clarify the meaning of the text.

**Face/Body/Gesture** Expressively uses non-verbal communication to clarify the meaning of the text.

**Focus** Concentration is clear. Eye contact with audience is engaging. Maintains a charismatic presence in space (stage presence).

**Characterization** If dialogue is employed, characters are believable to listener. Storyteller's natural voice is differentiated from character voices.

**Use of Space** Storyteller seems comfortable, relaxed and confident in front of listeners. Storyteller maintains clear spatial relationships for characters and narrator.

**Pacing** The story is presented efficiently and keeps listeners' interest throughout.

**Performance Skills Rubric**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Beginner** | **Intermediate** | **Proficient** | **Accomplished** |
| **Voice Mechanics** |  |  |  |  |
| **Facial Expression** |  |  |  |  |
| **Body Language & Gesture** |  |  |  |  |
| **Focus** |  |  |  |  |
| **Characterization** |  |  |  |  |
| **Use of Space** |  |  |  |  |
| **Timing/Pacing** |  |  |  |  |

**Other Mechanics:**

* The storytelling performance should not be less than 5 minutes but not more than 15 minutes.
* A three-minute preparation will be given for each performance.
* The performers are encouraged to use background music and props necessary to give life to the presentation.