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Special Language Issue

Using
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Meaning

A speaker should handle words with the same care a carpenter handles tools.

**Rx for a
Good Speech
Introduction**

The 3 Cs of a quality introduction: Content, context and credibility.

Rx for a Good Speech Introduction

This guy who's coming to the podium – you gotta keep your eye on him. He'll make your wallet disappear. Please welcome Michael Varma."

Yes, this is a true Hall of Shame introduction I received years ago. It was horrendous on so many levels. It made me sound like a pick-pocket – but it gets worse. I was speaking before local businessmen asking for *donations*, to fund *Friends of the Garden* – a nonprofit project to teach elementary school children how to grow a vegetable garden.

My introducer had neglected to explain that I was a professional magician. Before my presentation, he had told me a story backstage of how another magician, about 10 years ago, magically stole his wallet as part of a comedy routine. His incomplete reminiscence at the lectern effectively killed my credibility. I had to take valuable time away from my original purpose to clarify his comments, then suitably re-introduce myself.

A fitting introduction, tailored to the topic of this article, would be, *"Ladies and gentlemen, our next guest is a professional entertainer and keynote speaker who over the last 25 years has performed and witnessed introductions ranging from spectacular to shocking. He will tell us how to avoid the Hall of Shame and provide an exclusive look into the secrets of giving an inspiring*

and dynamic introduction. Please welcome to the stage..."

Interested to know the speaker's name? Curious about what secrets will be revealed? Then my 30-second intro did a good job. It was successful because it contained the three Cs of a quality introduction: content, context and credibility.

Content: A brief, succinct sentence describing what you plan to talk about establishes a connection with the audience. Have your introducer include an interesting and attention-grabbing fact to pique your audience's interest for the next C: context.

Context: Explaining *why* the topic is timely or important to the listeners will help solidify the bond between the speaker and the audience. This persuasive sentence grants the presenter full access to engage each participant, putting you – the speaker – exactly where you want to be.

Credibility: People want to learn from experts. A medical student wants to learn from an experienced, successful doctor, not the appliance repairman. A concise sentence stating your credentials is sufficient.

Occasionally I'm asked, "But what if the speaker has several degrees and awards?" Best recommendation: Pick only two or three to be mentioned. Select the pertinent accolades for the subject mat-

ter and match it to the audience, because in most cases less is more.

Limiting each component (content, context and credibility) to one sentence provides the perfect intro length of 30 to 60 seconds.

Format

For basic introductions, keeping the Cs in order (1-2-3) creates a crescendo before announcing the performer's name, which is the natural cue to step up to the microphone. Ultimately, the type of event and the emcee's level of experience will dictate the order of the three Cs.

I like the 3-2-1 format for wedding and anniversary parties. You may ask, "If it's obvious you're at a wedding reception, is it still necessary to cover the content, context and credibility?"

Yes, for several reasons. It notifies the audience and speaker what's next on the agenda, provides a natural segue, and best of all, takes less than 10 seconds to say. For example: "The best man, Stephen Varma, the groom's brother, will say a few words and lead the guests in a toast to the newlyweds." Non-family members and their guests will know the who, what, where, when and why.

Reality check

Books on party protocol preach that the master of ceremonies will contact the performer and find out the following information: the speaker's



◀ Learning from the experts: 2007-2008 International President Chris Ford introduces Golden Gavel recipient Pamela Wallin at the International Convention in Calgary in August.

existent phone call from the person who might introduce me, I actively do the following:

- Create a well-crafted introduction printed in a large 24-point font (so it can be easily read).
- E-mail or fax copies in advance to the contact person for the event.
- Arrive early and locate the person making the introductions.
- Provide another copy of the intro and have it read out loud until we're both satisfied.

If you follow the three Cs of a quality introduction – content, context and credibility – and learn from my experience, you'll avoid the Hall of Shame and guarantee yourself a warm welcome from your audience. ■

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name and correct pronunciation (spelled phonetically if necessary), the speaker's title (CEO, CFO, President, etc.), the speaker's bona fides (Dr., Ph.D., etc.) and the title of the speech. In truth, I've rarely received any such call. Waiting for the phone to ring can lead to disaster. I submit into evidence another one of my Hall of Shame introductions:

"H-e-e-r-e's Michael!"

While I appreciate being raised to the legendary ranks of Letterman, Leno, Carson and other one-name icons, it was an inappropriate intro-

duction to a group of elementary school children waiting to learn about earthquake safety. If kids know these late-night talk show hosts, then we have an explanation for the country's dismal test scores.

Essentials

Most professional presenters, myself included, know the power of a proper introduction. A careless, haphazard, off-the-cuff intro can destroy the immediate connection needed to engage your audience. So instead of waiting for a non-

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