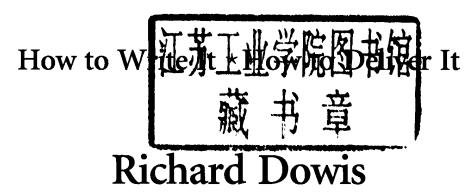


Lost Art

## Great Speech



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# Lost Art of the Great Speech

## Also by Richard Dowis (with Richard Lederer)

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Speeches have their origins in antiquity. . . . As man's progress developed, the need for speech-making increased. The more gifted speakers became the law-makers and leaders. By the time civilization flowered in Athens, oratory became the fine art of government and culture. And so it has continued to our own stormy times.

Lewis Copeland From the Introduction to *The World's Great Speeches* 

This book is dedicated to George Goodwin my friend and mentor for three decades

Some men look out into the night and see only the dark; others see moonlight and stars and fireflies, and they hail the promise of the dawn.

## **Foreword**

Many years ago, when I was laboring in obscurity as employee-news-letter editor for a small textile company, my boss asked me to prepare brief remarks for the president of the company to deliver at a gathering of longtime employees. I accepted the challenge with considerable trepidation. The situation was not ideal even for an experienced speech writer, certainly not for me, whose experience was absolute zero. The deadline was tight and I would not be given the opportunity to talk with the president to find out what he wanted to say. Guidance from my boss was minimal. It was left to me to decide what the president would say as well as how he would say it. Nevertheless, I somehow muddled through.

To my amazement, the president delivered the speech exactly as I had written it. Even more to my amazement, he sounded good. As I listened to him speak, I was conscious of every pause, every emphasis, every nuance that I had tried so hard to put into the remarks. I had made no effort to "sound" like the man. In truth, I couldn't have done so if I had tried, for I had met him only briefly and had never heard him make a speech. What I wrote for him was what I thought he ought to say and how I thought he ought to say it. That, I learned much, much later, is the speech writer's first duty.

The whole exercise was enormously satisfying. In later years, I was to experience the same satisfaction, the feeling that I had at least some influence on the direction of the company for which I was writing. I enjoyed hearing my words delivered by a good speaker.

After a brief stint as publications manager for The Coca-Cola Company, I joined the international public relations agency of Manning, Selvage & Lee, and over a quarter of a century with that firm I honed my skill as a speech writer. This book is a compilation of what I learned about writing speeches and, in the process, about delivering them, because writing and delivery are inseparable. So the book is intended both for people who write speeches for others and for

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people who write and deliver their own. It is also a defense of the written speech. I am not of the school that believes all good speeches are extemporaneous.

Because the book is to a large extent a memoir, I have written in the first person throughout. In addition to using examples from actual speeches to illustrate points, I have included at the end of each chapter at least one full speech or substantial excerpt from a speech by a well-known person. These speeches are selected both for their historical significance and to illustrate points made in the book. I believe reading and listening to speeches is one of the keys to learning how to write and deliver them.

Richard Dowis Waleska, Georgia

# Lost Art of the Great Speech

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## — CHAPTER ONE —

## **Opportunity Knocks**

Winston Churchill was arguably the most eloquent and dynamic speaker of the twentieth century. During the bleakest days of World War II, the great man used his eloquence and the medium of radio to inspire his countrymen and bolster their resolve to fight on to defeat the seemingly unstoppable Nazi war machine. His words brought hope and courage to millions of Britons who, in those terrible times, had little else to cling to, knowing that the survival of their empire and their way of life was at stake.

Who can forget those ringing Churchillian phrases—"the iron curtain," "their finest hour," and his most famous one, "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat"? That simple but powerful phrase is from a speech Churchill made to Parliament on May 13, 1940, shortly after he became Prime Minister. With that speech, the people of Great Britain and the rest of the world were first made aware of the bulldog determination that was to become Churchill's trademark. Listen:

You ask, what is our policy? I say it is to wage war by land, sea, and air. War with all our might and with all the strength God has given us, and to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark and lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy.

You ask, what is our aim? It is victory at all costs—victory in spite of all terrors—victory however long and hard the road may be, for without victory there is no survival.

And later, after the Nazis threatened to invade England:

We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields and streets. We shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender. Powerful, powerful words. Words that literally might have changed the course of history.

Many years after the war, President John F. Kennedy, no mean phrasemaker himself, said of Churchill, "He mobilized the English language and sent it into battle." High praise, indeed, from the man who inspired his own people with "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country."

You may not aspire to the eloquence of a Churchill or a Kennedy. And it's extremely unlikely that you will ever have the opportunity to "mobilize the English language and send it into battle." It is quite likely, however, that you will have the opportunity to make a speech or perhaps to write a speech for someone else to deliver. And you just might be able to use such an opportunity to mobilize the language in the service of your company, church, civic club, political party, or other organization—or perhaps some special cause to which you are committed.

### A holistic approach

If you're like most people, you've probably taken a course in public speaking at one time or another. Most courses I'm familiar with concentrate on the techniques of speaking. They're strong on such topics as posture, voice control, and overcoming fear. These are important topics, and as we continue there'll be plenty of suggestions for improving your speaking techniques.

This book, however, takes what might be called a holistic approach. By that I mean we consider the whole area of public speaking—from researching and writing your speech and preparing your manuscript to delivering the speech and handling questions from the audience. In addition, we'll be discussing some things you're not likely to find in any speech course.

You cannot separate the speech from the speaker or the delivery from the message. No matter how skillful you are at speaking, you will not be a good speaker if you have nothing important to say or if the words and phrases you choose are inappropriate for the occasion. Nor can you be an effective speaker if you do not master the fundamentals of good delivery. Even the unforgettable words of Churchill would have fallen flat if they had come from an orator of less skill.

#### A logical sequence

In writing this book, I tried to provide instruction in all the various aspects of public speaking. I began the way most speeches begin—with someone being given an opportunity to make a speech.

I know that many people reading this book are especially concerned about the mechanics of delivery, so from time to time, I have included a brief discussion of a way in which you can improve your technique and be more poised and confident when you mount the podium. I call these practical suggestions "Podium Presence" tips.

#### Make a speech? Me?

Most speeches begin with someone being given the opportunity to make a speech. I like to use the word *opportunity* when I talk about speaking. An invitation to speak is an opportunity—not something to be avoided like a root canal or an IRS audit. Let's assume for a moment that you're the one who has been given the opportunity. I can almost hear you saying, "Yes, but I don't have anything worthwhile to talk about."

Nonsense. If somebody didn't think you had something worthwhile to offer, you would never have been invited to speak. Besides, a subject doesn't have to be a world-shaker to be interesting. If the subject is appropriate for the audience, and if the speech is well crafted and well delivered, it will be worthwhile.

"Yes, but there are others, experienced speakers, who could do a better job of representing my organization."

Don't bet on it. Most of your colleagues probably have the same misgivings that you have about making a speech. In any case, experience isn't always the best teacher. I know experienced speakers who ought to spend some time looking for ways to improve their speaking techniques. Such people may be asked to speak often because of the positions they hold, not because they're especially good speakers. One of the most boring speakers I ever heard was the president of a large company. Yet, despite his ineptitude, his name appeared often on programs. An experienced speaker can bore an audience just as easily as a novice can.

"Yes, but I'm scared out of my skull when I have to stand up before a group. I even get nervous when I'm asked to lead my Sunday School class in silent prayer."

Good line. That kind of humor will help you win your audience over. We'll talk about the use of humor in public speaking later, and we'll also give you some practical tips for overcoming fear and nervousness.

#### You're not alone

If you shake in your proverbial boots when you have to speak before a group, you're not alone. Even such great speakers as Lincoln, Churchill, Adlai Stevenson, and the esteemed editor Henry W. Grady suffered from stage fright. Fear of speaking in public shows up in *The Book of Lists* as one of the fourteen things Americans fear most, along with the fear of high places, the fear of sickness and death, and the fear of insects. Can you guess how the fear of public speaking ranks on that list? Number *one*.

Sickness and death? That's way down in sixth place. So, when someone says, I'd rather *die* than make a speech, he just might be speaking the literal truth.

Although increasing your ability to serve your organization or your special cause is reason enough to improve your ability to write and deliver a speech, there are other substantial benefits.

#### You gotta believe

Self-confidence is essential. Never doubt for a moment that you have it within yourself to make a great speech. You can move your audience. You can sell them on your point of view. You can even make them laugh, if that's your goal. Lack of confidence is a common problem with beginning speakers. Even Moses lacked confidence in his speaking ability. The Old Testament relates that when God ordered Moses to lead the Children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt, Moses tried to beg off, saying, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either heretofore or since thou hast last spoken to thy servant; but I am slow of speech and of tongue. . . . Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person."

And so the Lord sent Charlton Heston.

## Carpe diem

Let's say you're a junior executive in a large company. One day your boss comes to you and tells you she has to make a twenty-minute talk to a group of customers and wants you to write it for her. Or maybe she has a conflict that day and wants you to pinch-hit and deliver the speech. What do you do? Well, you can arrange to break your arm so you can't write. Or tell her that your grandmother is planning to die soon and the funeral will be on the date of the speech. But broken arms are painful, and grandmothers can die only so many times.

Or, you can accept the opportunity gratefully to pinch-hit for the boss as a writer or speaker or both. If you do a good job, you'll