

What the Mayor's Speech Writer Says Is Necessary for Creating Winning Content

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For those of you who speak at conferences and conventions, pay attention! Wade Nelson, chief speech writer for the Mayor of Chicago, Mayor Richard J. Daley, offers his insights for creating winning content from his more than thirty years of experience. Before joining the Mayor's office, Wade was a media consultant and policy writer for numerous public officials and Washington politicians, as well as State and Federal Agencies.

First and foremost, Wade stresses knowing the audience. "It is essential that you are clear about what they know, what they are expecting and what conclusions they have already reached about your topic. If you know this information, writing the speech is easy because all you have to do is tie your talking points back to your intended audience. You can't go wrong."

Next, develop a message around two or three key points— never more than that. Too many points confuse people and make retention doubtful. The last thing you want is people walking away from your speech not sure what your message was. When speakers get in trouble, it's usually because the audience was not able to understand the person's position. "Once you determine what your message is, don't stray from it. It is your position statement. If you are comfortable with those two-three key points, no one can pull you off your stride."

Too much content is never a good idea. "Reduce your universe before you sit down to the keyboard to write your speech." In fact Wade remembers when he was an inexperienced reporter, his editor would write at the top of his copy, time after time: 1/2 /Eng! What his wise editor meant was condense the content to half and write in plain English—no jargon, no techno-speak. In fact, Wade believes shorter speeches insure that im-

portant ideas remain in focus. "Speaking for twenty minutes is a very long time, let alone speaking for an hour or two. Mayor Daley prefers to speak for 10-15 minutes. The longer you speak, the more things can go terribly wrong. The more the audience gets restless."

With regards to your content, there has to be a logical flow to what you are saying. An audience won't be convinced if they struggle to follow your points. Transitions from one point to another have to be absolutely clear. Talking points have to be proven with accurate facts and relevant examples.

Wade also said the way you begin a speech sets the stage; the way you end it reminds the audience why the topic was important in the first place. Most speeches Wade writes begin by acknowledging what he understands about the audience—their concerns or issues, the reason they are here. Then, he gets right to the point about how the Mayor or a particular policy will address those concerns, again tying everything to the particular audience. He ends with a strong summarization statement that may define next steps or, perhaps, a commitment on the mayor or City of Chicago's part.

Lastly, Wade stresses that speeches have to be delivered conversationally and with conviction. Without it, even the best speech falls flat. The speaker needs to have interesting vocal inflection, strong eye contact and meaningful gestures. Whether speaking to an audience of 10, 100, or 1000, a speaker must give the impression he or she is enjoying talking about his topic with a group of people he/she knows well.

The written word or speech is the real currency in communication. If you take the time to write a good speech, people will remember it. It will get disseminated to others, whether orally or in print.

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