
Why Is A Microphone Like A Breath Mint?

and Nine Other Riddles
To Make You A Better Public Speaker

by
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ISBN 978-0-6151-8892-8

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wife, Bonnie, and my daughter, Angela, without whose patience and encouragement, this book would not have been possible.

First edition

Cover layout and design: Dalton Hooper

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Prologue: The Art of Public Speaking

Yes. I believe that excellent public speaking is an art more than a science. Although, I also believe that nearly anyone can be trained to become a better public speaker than they are currently, there will always be those among us who seem to have an innate “gift” for persuasive oratory. These persons simply have a head start on the rest of us, but we can narrow the gap substantially through training and practice.

So, take heart. There is indeed much hope. As of this writing, I have been speaking in public for over thirty years. During that time, I have accumulated many personal “rules” for successfully speaking to groups. This book takes an in-depth look at ten of them.

I know that it can sometimes be difficult to read a dry and academic list of instructions and retain them, so I have attempted to make my ten rules memorable by associating each with a riddle. Hence, the title, “*Why Is A Microphone Like A Breath Mint?*”

Of course, if you are just dying to find out the answer to that riddle (Number ten), you can go ahead and jump to page 83. I

hope you stick around for the other nine riddles, though. I believe you will become a better public speaker because of it.

The Ten Riddles

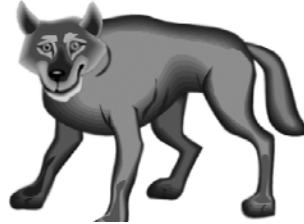
Following, are the ten riddles I will use to help you remember my ten rules for becoming an excellent public speaker. Each of the ten riddles will morph into a rule at the end of their respective chapter. They are in no particular order, with the single exception of riddle number ten, which is also the title of this book, and was purposely and devilishly placed at the end.

As you will see, the advice contained within the ten individual riddles tends to overlap at times. There will probably not be many occasions, if any, where you are able to bring all ten rules (née riddles) into play for a single presentation. They don't all apply to all venues. I hold the position, though, that the more of them you use, the better will be your chances of success.

I have divided the ten riddles into three categories: Techniques, Mindset, and Logistics.

Techniques

One: “Why is an excellent speaker like a wolf?”



Answer: *Both know how to mark their territory.*

The Eagle has landed.

Claim the room. Make it your turf. No, I am not proposing that you arrive early at the presentation site and urinate around the perimeter of the room! But, I *am* saying that you should strive to achieve similar results. When you are standing in front of an audience, delivering your message, it should be apparent to everyone in the room that YOU are the central figure at that moment. The message being delivered is YOUR message. The content is YOUR content. The agenda is YOUR agenda. The subject matter expert of your presentation is YOU. Unless the audience recognizes these premises, you will have an uphill struggle all the way.

Fortunately, except in the rarest of circumstances, the audience assigns you all of these attributes even before you begin. The audience assumes you are qualified to make the presentation, until you demonstrate otherwise to them – and by the way, whether you believe you are the most qualified person to give this particular presentation is irrelevant. It is what the audience ultimately believes that matters.

Onstage vs. backstage.

I had the good fortune to work for *Walt Disney World* for nine years. Disney has their own unique vocabulary of terms, designed to instill the “Disney Way” into each of its employees. For example, employees are called *Cast Members*, customers are called *Guests*, jobs are called *roles*, etc.

One of the concepts I found especially intriguing was that when you are on Walt Disney World property (over 46 square miles!), you can only be in one of two places: “onstage” or “backstage.” Onstage refers to any area in which the Guests are allowed. Backstage is any area in which Guests are not allowed. Consequently, the rules for Cast Member behavior differ greatly, depending on whether you were subject to meet or be seen by a Guest, versus being isolated to a Cast Members only area. As long as a Cast Member was onstage, they were considered to be

part of the overall performance and were expected to act accordingly.

I mention all of this to tell you that you should approach your presentation the same way. Part of establishing yourself as the central figure and the person in control of the room, is to either be onstage or backstage.

Thinking (and greeting) outside the box.

Greet arrivals outside the entrance to the room. When you are doing this prior to the presentation, you are onstage. You are the central figure. It is your turf. This is a maneuver I discovered several years ago. In those instances where you are giving a presentation in a room where people will be arriving ahead of time and taking their seats, stand outside the door and greet them. This achieves the following:

- It establishes you as the “lord of the manor.” By greeting them before they enter, you are saying, “Welcome to my turf.”
- It deters early arrivers from engaging you in lengthy private conversations before the presentation starts. If the person sees that keeping you engaged in conversation is causing the line to back up behind them, they will be less inclined to dawdle.
- When you step inside the room and close the door behind you, it provides a clear visual cue that the

arrival period has ended and everyone should now be seated.

I should caution here that, while closing the door behind you can be an effective psychological cue that the “arrival” phase has ended and the “direct your attention to the front of the room” phase is beginning, you should never close the door earlier than the pre-announced starting time. If for some reason, you are not able to greet arrivals up until the starting time, then by all means, leave the door open.

If, however, you have stood outside the door greeting the arrivals, and now the starting time is at hand, do a quick visual check to see if anyone is approaching that appears to belong to your audience. If so, wait for them and greet them as you did the others. If the coast is clear, step inside the room and gently close the door behind you. What you do next depends on whether you are to be introduced to the audience or not.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I present [insert name here].

If at all possible, you should be introduced, and it should be by a recognized representative of the audience or the venue host. An introduction is like an oral resume of why you are qualified to speak to this audience on the designated topic. There are pieces of information about the speaker (you) that a host is able to make known, within the context of an introduction, that would

be too self-serving if delivered by the speaker. Being introduced also provides a psychological “opening curtain” for your performance. Yes. That’s right – I called it a *performance*. More about that in Riddle #7.

During that period of time between your stepping inside the room (and possibly closing the door behind you), and the conclusion of your introduction to the audience by the host, you should be out of the general view, somewhere in the back of the room (i.e., “backstage”). When the introduction is completed, immediately walk to the front of the room and let the natural transition take place from the host to you. This transition time should be as short as possible. The longer you share the stage with the host, the more diluted is your presence.

To manage this transition, you should actually write the introduction that the host will use. Ask the host to read it verbatim. You will find that the overwhelming majority of hosts are relieved to have the introduction already written for them and will gladly read it. By writing your own introduction, you can ensure that the stage is set properly for your entrance. Few things are more disheartening than having a whiz-bang opening story prepared, only to have the host foul it up for you by giving away the punch line during the introduction. If the host insists on using his or her own words during the introduction, at least ask them to

go over it with you first, so you can be prepared to react to it. Of course, you will want the last words of the introduction to be YOUR NAME. You will walk from the back of the room to the front (backstage to onstage) as soon as your name is read, and hopefully, during applause, as well.

Sometimes, it's better not to share.

A few words here about being introduced: If you can avoid it, DO NOT be onstage while your introduction is taking place. In my opinion, it is better not to be introduced at all, than to be standing with the host while they introduce you. It is an awkward situation, where you are not in control and not at an equal stature with the host or the audience. The audience watches as you are then “promoted” from outsider to presenter. It is the equivalent of seeing an actor out of character immediately prior to their performance. It detracts from the overall effect.

So, our first riddle now becomes our first rule...

Rule #1: “Own” the room.

