

WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY KEYNOTE ADDRESS

What we are doing here today is as revolutionary as it is remarkable. In combining the best attributes of Web-based media with the compelling nature of broadcast media, we are entering an era where any one of you could be sitting where I am right now -- on the other side of the glass. But with one dramatic difference -- an audience reach of unimaginable proportion.

With advances in technology intensifying at record speeds, people and places around the world are now intimately linked in ways undreamed of in past centuries. Through two of the most powerful mediums of our time, television and the Internet, we are sharing experiences as one, making our world even that much smaller..

Who among us could have envisioned state-of-the-art equipment so sophisticated that companies could literally bring employees from opposite sides of the globe -- face to face -- simultaneously? If your audience can't come to you -- why not bring the meeting to them?

Suddenly the camera is everywhere -- at annual meetings, conventions, seminars, even caves in Afghanistan. Through the power of the projected image, everyone has instant celebrity. There is no escaping the lens.

It would appear that Shakespeare's oft quoted adage -- "**All the world's a stage.**" --- is now the new reality.

And like the stage, performers in today's highly televised New World Entertainment Order-- like politicians, executives, managers, meteorologists, and others -- find themselves repackaging their image, redefining their message, and most importantly, reconnecting to their audience. Celebrities are no longer products of Hollywood, but media savvy superstars from all walks of life: Jack Welch from Industry. Oprah Winfrey from Media. Meg Whitman from Technology.

If work is theatre and every business a stage, then it follows that every employee is a performer; and every performer an actor.

Am I suggesting that the next time you're called upon to give a speech, or render a performance, that you, too, should act? Absolutely. For only in the act of acting do you carefully develop your craft, massage your message, and take deliberate steps to engage your audience.

Keep in mind that acting, does not mean pretending to be someone or something other than who you are. Rather, it entails making discoveries from within, drawing from a personal reservoir of life experiences, and using those experiences to create a new and believable character or role, whether in the performing arts or in the business theatre.

Let me illustrate by showcasing two dramatically different performance styles of two very famous and highly visible men – Presidents George W. Bush and Ronald Reagan.

What George Bush failed to realize early on was what his party predecessor, Ronald Reagan, knew instinctively . Politics was performance and he was Entertainer-In-Chief. As one critic noted, George W. Bush is not a master of the weapon most immediately available to him – the spoken word. Whereas Reagan was the consummate performer, whose presidency raised the bar for every political performer that followed.

From the earliest days of his campaign, Bush believed that his homespun delivery – complete with stumbles and gaffes -- demonstrated a sign of sincerity..

Moreover, he had a primal revulsion for all things “packaged” and a resistance to being quote-unquote “handled.” He was simply not comfortable with the contrivances of modern campaigns—like TelePrompTers or Speech Coaching—fearing they would take away from his ability to communicate with people in a straightforward way.

By the time the Bush buzz was sweeping the nation during the presidential primaries, thousands of Republicans around the country had never actually *heard* George W. Bush speak. What they did hear was that his amazing ability to connect with people, made him positively Reaganesque.

I think we all know too well the reality of what followed. When the Republicans and the nation finally did get a look and a listen at Bush from television sound bites and candidate debates, he seemed to have more in common with his famously fumble-tongued father than with the Great Communicator.

Bush’s disdain for the very tools that could enhance his performance were seriously undermining his credibility and his chances. One aide recalled, “If everyone in America could just get in a room with the guy along with 25 other people, they would see what we see.”

Yet that was clearly impossible in a presidential election. And Reagan knew only too well, that the key to connecting with a much wider audience was in mastering the tools of the media trade. Reagan was so adept at using a TelePrompTer, in fact, he could lock the audience and the cameras in his gaze, making everyone who heard him feel like he was in their living room.

“What he wanted to be, and what he became, was an accomplished presidential performer.” Reagan himself compared his daily routine at the White House with the routine of an actor: preparing at night for the next day’s scenes, ‘running lines’ during briefings, rehearsing dialogue, and going before the cameras the next morning. He honestly believed that just as his staff had a job to do, his job was to deliver a perfectly staged presidential performance.

Without exception, Reagan understood the affinity between politics and acting so well he once told the television journalist, David Brinkley, “There have been times in this office when I’ve wondered how you could do the job if you hadn’t been an actor.”

It is an observation that our 43rd president has visibly taken to heart, particularly under the hot glare of large media events. Perhaps his finest hour came on September 20, 2001. On one momentous occasion in just under 60 telegenic minutes, George Bush addressed the Congress and the nation in what television anchors, pundits and editorialists were calling one of the “greatest” presidential speeches ever given. Noted historian Stephen Ambrose agreed, saying it “will be long remembered by Americans for its Churchillian air of defiance.”

High praise, indeed, for a man who just months before, could not manage simple subject-verb agreement. What transformed a Lost on Phonics President to an eloquent and forceful statesman? Simple. Professional expertise in the art of mastering the media through coaching, practicing, delivering, and rehearsing. It’s the same arsenal of tools available to everyone. Tools that develop your craft, respect your audience, and sell or convey what you have to offer. It’s the critical difference between a mediocre presenter and a powerful performer.

Since Aristotle, philosophers, scholars, and artists alike have acknowledged the transformational power of performance. It’s been said, Napoleon took instruction from the actor, Talma, in the art of small talk, and carefully calculated everything from his rages to his poses.

Things are not very different today as we move into the 21st century. We are a culture of experienced watchers, programmed by remote control, propositioned by 30 second increments, plagued by attention deficit disorders.

Competing for center stage has never been more important or more hazardous. Despite the fact that many of us would rather face a firing squad than give a speech, chances are that, sooner or later, you're going to be asked to do so -- say a few words, for example, at the annual meeting, the seminar, the banquet, or the parent teacher gathering. From the business conference to the teleconference, it seems that everyone is getting in on the act.

Executives, managers, teachers, authors, housewives, athletes, even criminals. Sooner or later we're all going to be on C-Span.

People seem to be speechifying more than ever. What it comes down to is this : a new premium has been put on the oldest form of communication. 'The power to stand up and say what you think in front of others.'

Nothing has more impact, or is quite as impressive, as a well-delivered oral presentation. Properly executed and in the right context, it can inform, motivate and convince more effectively than any other single form of communication. As a result, employers place great value on presentation skills. So much so that your abilities, or lack of them, can literally make or break your career.

Studies consistently show that your professional success and upward mobility depend on how competent you are at giving a presentation. How many of you have observed a less capable person getting promoted simply because they were good talkers?

It never ceases to amaze me that intelligent, well educated, and ambitious individuals frequently overlook the #1 skill that is guaranteed to position them ahead of the crowd – **the power of the spoken word.**

And yet many people suffer from the misguided notion that speeches are somehow magic, a combination of sorcery and shamanism that cannot, by a normal human, be achieved. But speeches are not magic. Reduced to its essentials, a speech is nothing more than a combination of information and opinion written on paper and spoken with the mouth. If you can have a thoughtful conversation, you can, probably, write and give a thoughtful speech.

Every person who steps on a platform or sits on the other side of the lens, whether they want to admit it or not, is a performer. And for performers, showmanship is paramount. As someone once observed of one of the greatest showman of our generation, "I've seen Bob Hope revitalize weary soldiers with some snappy jokes. I've seen him bring surges of pride and patriotism to them with a few words of praise, and I've seen him bring tears to the eyes of battle worn warriors with a tender song." (end quote)

That is the sheer power of performance. To enhance, to enrich, to enlighten. To make a difference. For when you don't say what you know and feel, when you stand back and withhold yourself, the world is poorer for it.

