

## Better Oral Communications For Range Managers Series—No. 5



# The Audible You

Charles L. Spencer, Jr.

An inflexible rule of public speaking is that one must be engaging in order to be effective. That is, a large part of the good impression you hope to create will derive from *how* you say your words. And you will seldom get a second chance to create a good *first* impression. Hence the mechanics of a talk—its delivery—are extremely important in being an effective public speaker.

Let's review some of the things that will help you become the kind of speaker you like to hear: warm, friendly, sincere. . .and convincing. These things can be found in nearly every situation in oral communication, not just in public speaking. Consider a homely example. You and I are eating lunch together. I want one of the rolls that are on the table by your elbow. In my request, I would want to use proper vocabulary, some vocal variety would be nice, my rate of speech would be important, a gesture toward the rolls would be beneficial, and direct eye contact certainly wouldn't hurt. If I get the roll, I've communicated; if I don't I didn't, and I would know that some elements of my request need to be changed.

Whether you want to ask for a roll or motivate an audience, the same elements apply. The delivery of a talk is a compound of preparation, vocabulary, voice, eye contact, body language, notes, and props. Used properly, they'll help you create a favorable impression—the goal of all public speaking.

**Preparation.** Try in advance to gain as much information about the physical conditions of the meeting place as you can, and then arrive well before the appointed time to get everything properly coordinated. Make certain that the person presiding has any special instructions for the talk, and the necessary information to introduce you properly. Be aware of how the audience will be seated in relation to you, what kind of lectern you must use, and where you will be seated before the talk. Be sure that the microphone works (unless you are exceptionally adept at projection, use the microphone if one is provided; your audience will appreciate it). Know that any props you plan to use are functioning properly and in their places. Is the lighting right and the heat comfortable? (Too-warm rooms mean drowsy listeners; you may have to shorten the talk or work even harder at delivery). In short, leave no stone unturned in assuring the best possible physical conditions for your talk. Remember the Scout motto 'Be prepared' and put it into effect.

**Vocabulary.** If you're talking range management with your peers, you can use the vernacular of the trade—buzz words. But if you're talking to your son's first grade class, your vocabulary

must be different. What I'm trying to say is that you will lose your audience if you speak under or over its level of understanding. As Clayton Marlow pointed out earlier in this series (*Rangelands*, Oct. 1979), you must know your audience and adjust your approach to it. If you do not, you'll be wasting both your time and that of your listeners. The real time waste can be determined by multiplying the number of listeners by the number of minutes spent together.

In general, choose vocabulary which will allow you to talk to your listeners, not at them. Use humor if it fits. A story or a joke is not necessary, but if you know one which reinforces the message, by all means incorporate it. But do it right: make it appear spontaneous. And preserve spontaneity throughout the talk by taking care that your vocabulary does not contain too many uhs—terrible time wasters and distractions.

**Voice.** The most important asset of the audible *you* is your voice. No one else has the same vocal signature; it is uniquely your vehicle of communication. The range of tone, inflection, rhythm, and modulation employed—your vocal variety—gives color and emphasis to your words. So make sure you use a vocal variety natural to you and appropriate to your material. No one likes to listen to a monotone.

Try to develop a low-pitched, resonant speaking voice. One way is to imitate a good radio announcer. Make sure your material is delivered with the right inflection: the voice must sound different when telling a story than it does when issuing a command. Use different rhythms; seldom will you want to be either a stilted orator or a motormouth. Don't be afraid to pause—then continue the march of your speech. And remember that sometimes you can convey power with a shout, sometimes with a whisper. Both can be effective.

Almost everyone has access to a recorder these days. Listen to your vehicle of communication. Is it getting you the mileage needed?

**Eye Contact.** Looking directly at your listeners makes them want to believe you. This is especially important during the opening of your talk, when you must establish yourself, and during the closing, when you must conclude the message. Commit the opening and closing to memory so that you can be looking directly at your listeners.

Look at all of them. Strive to look at every member of the audience at least once during the talk. If you can't look people in the eye, look right above their heads or at their foreheads. When you find a receptive face, spend a moment to make sure that individual is with you. Then move to the next point of contact. Again, effective oral communication is almost a one-to-one encounter, even though there may be thousands there.

The author is the field audit manager for the Oregon Division of the Industrial Indemnity Insurance Company in Portland, Oregon. He is a member of Sundial Toastmasters Club and has attained the status of Distinguished Toastmaster.



**Body Language.** Remember that old draft poster 'Uncle Sam Needs You'? Recall how effective that pointing finger was? That was because the body message of Uncle Sam—appearance, stance, gesture—reinforced the word message.

Body language begins with your appearance. Make sure that your image conveys the message you want it to. If there is any question about the occasion, always dress up, never down. And don't be exotic: a 'white sport coat and pink carnation' has limitations. Stance is an important aspect of body language. A speaker making a very important point while slouching, hands in pockets, is simply not convincing. Stand erect but relaxed, and talk to your audience much as you do in conversations. Finally, appropriate gestures will reinforce your words, just as inappropriate ones will defeat them. An effective gesture should always convey some reserve of power, and it must appear spontaneous.

Practice delivering body language; it is just as important as practicing the verbal message. Do it 'live' before the mirror even to the extent of wearing the clothing you'll have on during the talk. Speak to that person in the mirror with all the oral and physical strength you have. If you can convince your reflection, you can probably convince the audience.

Make sure your body is sending the same message as your words. If it does not, people will instinctively believe the body, no matter what words are used. The body is a powerful tool in public speaking; make it underline every word with conviction.

**Notes.** Be certain that notes are an aid to speaking, not a crutch. If you need them, then by all means use them. But use notes properly so they don't become a distraction. In other words, make notes be just that—notes.

Decide whether you are more comfortable with cards or paper. Number each prominently. Keep notes flat in a briefcase, never folded in a pocket. Never clip notes together because flipping the sheets over will cause a distraction, particularly in front of a sensitive microphone. As you make your opening, slide the first sheet off the second so both are exposed. As you finish one, smoothly place two on top of it exposing three. This will allow you not to be hobbled by your notes, so that you can pay full attention to the audience, giving your talk an air of spontaneity.

**Props.** If appropriate and used properly, visual aids can reinforce your message, but be sure that they do not become only a distraction. A prop that is too small or too complex to convey the point desired is worthless; if it cannot be readily appreciated by everyone in the audience, discard it. Always carry tools, equipment, and spares to make sure your props work and will keep working. Prop failure will inevitably create a distraction, and may make you look foolish. For instance, a marking pen that runs out of ink is not very helpful. Again, as elsewhere in effective public speaking, practice the use of your props.

Aside from the common distractions of physical conditions and malfunctioning props, beware of pencils, pipes, eyeglasses, keys or anything else you fiddle with. If your listeners gets more interested in your 'prop' than in what you're saying, you'll lose them. Remember that every distraction you permit is a block to effective oral communication!

Practice, and practice again, the delivery of your talk—preparation, vocabulary, voice, eye contact, body language, notes and props—until it becomes almost second nature. Then you can weave your message throughout the talk tying the opening to the conclusion with a nice bow, and present the package to your audience. You can achieve genuine oral communication. But remember that it's all up to you, not the audience. It's rather like the old itinerant preacher who traveled from church to church with his small son. After the service, an elder in the church arose and thanked the preacher for his fine sermon. In appreciation he was given the day's offering, which turned out to be the dollar he had put in the box. His son looked up and said, "Gee, Dad, if we had put more into it we would have gotten more out of it."

Prepare and deliver. You're the quarterback and your audience is the receiver. You'll never score without being an effective passer of your message. Make the audible you as enjoying, and therefore as effective, as you can. ●