

Speech (Continued)

also helped me. I once had the honor of preaching to a distinguished congregation which included Herbert Hoover. An extremely kind man, Mr. Hoover shook hands with me after the service, saying, "That was a darn good sermon."

Later I was asked to address a large gathering of businessmen. I had never spoken to such an assemblage before and was jittery. Then I remembered Mr. Hoover's words. "A former President of the United States told you that you preached a darn good sermon," I said to myself. "If you could do that, Norman, you can get up now and make a darn good speech!"

I have found more platform courage through prayer, however, than through self-praise. Before starting to speak, I silently ask God to help me love my audience. That, I think, is the most important request that any speaker can make of the Almighty. If you really love your listeners you can't be afraid of them. At the same time, you will be trying so hard to please them and lift their spirits that you can hardly fail!

Knowing exactly what he is going to say will help any speaker. You don't have to write out your

shoe. The speaker, he said, a certain Congressman, had been terrible. The chairman then introduced me as "a preacher from New York" and predicted that I would probably be even worse than the Congressman. As I rose to speak, I was greeted with loud boos and catcalls. Above the hubbub, one Early Bird shouted, "You're not a preacher. You're not even dressed like one. Where's your surplice?"

That gave me my chance and I used the old pun, remembered from my unregenerate youth when I used to attend vaudeville shows. "I'm a Protestant preacher," I said. "In my church we don't have a surplus. We have a deficit!"

I probably should have been ashamed of myself, but the old gag seemed appropriate to the mood of the Early Birds and they apparently liked it. At least they settled down and listened to me without further yelling or pan-beating. After the meeting, they even presented me with one of their bibs.

IN ADDITION to gaining your listeners' attention, it is important to win their good will right at the start. This is especially necessary if the chairman or toastmaster has said flattering things

famous movie actor. We faced an audience of several thousand working men and women and I asked him if he didn't feel nervous. "Nervous," he said with a sneer, "why should I be? They're a lot of dumb jerks or they wouldn't be here. They'll eat up anything I say and love it."

Such an attitude is the worst any speaker can have, and I am not surprised that the actor has faded into oblivion. Any group of people, no matter how simple their background, quickly sense and resent any tendency by a speaker to patronize them. On the other hand, they respond graciously if he treats them as equals.

It is easy to show esteem for an audience without resorting to flattery. One way is by expressing sincere appreciation and respect for things you know are close to their hearts.

Making a talk in the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, I established rapport with my audience by telling how much I enjoyed the view from my hotel window. It was thrilling to me, I said—and I meant it—to look out at the mountain pass through which Brigham Young had led the Mormons' covered wagons into the valley of Great Salt Lake in

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speech ahead of time, although this is advisable for beginners. But you should plan it carefully, with a definite goal. What do you hope to accomplish with your remarks? Do you wish to enlighten, persuade, inspire, invoke deep thought, or merely entertain? Whatever your goal, keep it in mind in preparing your speech and try to march toward it from beginning to end.

The beginning is the most important part. If you can't arouse your listeners' interest during the first minute or two, you probably never will. But every opening should be flexible enough to allow last-minute changes. Last-minute circumstances may offer a chance for a better opening than anything you can contrive ahead of time!

An ancient pun helped me out when I addressed a hilarious breakfast meeting of the Early Birds Club in Washington, D. C. The Early Birds, mostly prominent Washington businessmen, wore big bibs tied around their necks and paraded through the dining room beating spoons on tin pans before sitting down to eat. Horseplay continued all during the meal, and the reading of the minutes was quite ludicrous and entertaining.

The food had been awful on that occasion, the secretary reported, the ham and eggs ice cold, the toast burned, the coffee strained through an old

about you. You can't very well call him a liar, but there are several graceful ways you can make it plain that you don't take his remarks too seriously.

One of my friends, the late A. Harry Moore, three times governor of New Jersey, used to deflate himself after a fulsome introduction with one clever sentence, which has become something of a comedy classic: "Ladies and gentlemen, as I sat here listening to that magnificent introduction, I could hardly wait to hear myself talk!"

There are any number of other ways in which you can puncture your ego without being disgustingly humble. In my own case, I often tell of an experience I had as an after-dinner speaker in a Pennsylvania city. The chairman was a local judge who took a dim view of life. Most of the guests had a delightful time blowing up toy balloons, singing, and otherwise sporting themselves. Finally the judge turned to me. "Well, Dr. Peale," he said with a sigh, "shall we let the people have your speech now or shall we let them enjoy themselves for a little while longer?"

Stories like that won't always bring a laugh. But they tend to soften up a tough audience's "sales resistance" and put it in a mood at least to tolerate your other remarks.

Once I spoke from the same platform with a then-

1847, a desert valley which he and his followers had made blossom like the rose.

ONCE YOU are off to a favorable start, you will hold your audience's attention if you speak with enthusiasm and authority. You should be bubbling over with your subject, convinced that the speech you are making will turn out to be the best you ever delivered, and making it plain that while you may be an ignoramus in other respects, you are an expert on what you are talking about. At the same time, you should establish the idea that it is a subject of great importance to your audience.

After you've started the main body of your speech, it is advisable to stick to your theme and drive home your principal points—I'm never in favor of more than three main points—one after another. An occasional digression is permissible for the sake of a laugh, but excessive wandering will confuse your audience and you may get lost yourself.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't use illustrative anecdotes. The more of them you can sprinkle through your speech the better, provided they illuminate the points you are trying to make. Most listeners soon get bored with straight facts no matter how important they are. But if you can present facts in the guise of interesting little stories, or as