

## Introduction

### What Does It Mean to Speak From the Heart?

Communication is powerful. We may think of communication as a tool to transmit our thoughts and ideas to others. Understanding communication as a tool helps us feel in control, as though we can learn to wield communication effectively to express ourselves and persuade others. But there is also a more influential, less tangible quality to communication: It has the ability to create and transform. Communication does not only represent objects, ideas, and people in the world; it also gives rise to our understandings of the world and ourselves.

Take, for example, the language we use on a day-to-day basis to describe females. We might call them *women* or *girls*, *ladies* or *bitches*. While we might say that each of these terms refers to or describes women, it is important to note that each term, by carrying within it connotative meanings or associations, and historical relationships, also shapes our relationships with one another. The first term situates women and men as equals, while the others do not. Further, each term opens some doors and closes others in our understanding of the world. As Toni Morrison (1994), recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, observed: “Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge” (p. 16). Morrison’s insight speaks to the power of communication to transform our worlds toward constraint or possibility. Our communication does not simply name what is; it also gives rise to what might be.

Every time we speak, we affirm our sense of the world and encourage others to do the same. This challenges us to consider very carefully our communication choices. What do our words assert? If we imagine our communication as breathing life into the world, then apathy—a lack of care and regard for others and ourselves, for ideas and their implications—is a real danger. From a practical standpoint, we must fight apathy in our choice of subjects to discuss, our attention to source material to strengthen and nuance our ideas, our efforts to listen to others’ ideas (especially when we find what they are saying confusing or offensive), and our sustained engagement with ideas over time. Speaking from the heart resists apathy, insisting on mindful awareness and purposeful engagement. As Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Freire (1992/2004) observed, “Changing language is part of the process of changing the world” (p. 56). To do so, we must be mindful of our communication. This reflection makes possible our ability to transform our lives and others’ for the better.

Speaking from the heart is more than sharing heartfelt sentiment with our listeners, though it may include that as well. We tend to think of speaking from the heart as feeling moved to speak when we are overcome with emotion, as when we give a toast at a friend’s wedding or eulogize a loved one or shout across a crowd at a protest. Emotions are an inextricable part of powerful communication, and our willingness to honor them will help us engage others—as long as we can remain attentive to the possibility that

others might not feel exactly as we do. But there is more to speaking from the heart than responding to our emotions; it also means speaking with conviction and courage, caring enough about our communication and its implications in the world to do it well. Education scholar Parker Palmer (2011) helps us understand the heart as the space where what we know about the world, in all the ways we might know it, joins our own sense of passion and purpose.

“Heart” comes from the Latin *cor* and points not merely to our emotions but to the core of the self, that center place where all of our ways of knowing converge—intellectual, emotional, sensory, intuitive, imaginative, experiential, relational, and bodily, among others. The heart is where we integrate what we know in our minds with what we know in our bones, the place where our knowledge can become more fully human. *Cor* is also the Latin root from which we get the word *courage*. When all that we understand of self and world comes together in the center place called the heart, we are more likely to find the courage to act humanely on what we know. (Palmer, 2011, p. 6)

Speaking from the heart means taking your communication seriously because it changes you and the others around you, for better or for worse. Your heart may function as a moral compass that challenges you to take risks, educate yourself in rich and substantive ways, and “act humanely” in the world.

Speaking from the heart is engaging in dialogic public speaking. For many of us, the idea of dialogic public speaking seems like an oxymoron, a contradiction. When we think of dialogues, we typically think of friends sitting together, listening intently and problem solving whole-heartedly. Yet, when we think of public speaking, most of us imagine politicians on the Senate floor or entertainers accepting awards—occasions where a solitary figure, often standing at a lectern, speaks over and across an audience. Communication professors have long argued that effective public speaking is really just an enlarged conversation (Winans, 1915). We could look at this cynically, in that whatever challenges you face as a speaker in an ordinary conversation will be enlarged in public speaking. However, we prefer to look at this hopefully, in that you likely already do many things well in conversation with others, and you can draw on these same qualities and skills when you speak in public.

Take, for example, a recent conversation you had with someone—a friend, family member, coworker, or even an acquaintance. How did you feel about communication in that moment? Did you feel heard? If there was a misunderstanding, were you able to address it? Not every conversation functions perfectly; in fact, we would venture to guess that most conversations are full of both success and frustration (and the more important the conversation, perhaps the more aware we are of this). That said, conversations involve the kind of back-and-forth speaking and listening we typically associate with dialogue. We can share an idea, hear it mirrored back for us, make adjustments, ask questions, offer examples, and so on—all in a fairly fluid exchange. In fact, some educators feel that conversation is a powerful means of learning; through conversation, peers can build knowledge together (Bruffee, 1993). Dialogic public speaking exemplifies collaborative learning, too.

To better understand what dialogic public speaking is, it may help to consider what makes a dialogue or dialogic communication special. Dialogue is characterized by a commitment to mutuality—the idea that learning occurs in sustained engagement with another, such that participants remain aware of and attentive to how they formed their own stances while also taking seriously others’ perspectives (Spano, 2001). Practically speaking, dialogic public speaking is the opposite of monologic public speaking; instead of stating their position without regard for listeners, dialogic public speakers strive to engage with listeners, even (and perhaps especially) across what may be profound ideological differences. Our commitment to dialogic public speaking informs what we will share with you in this workbook, from how to select a topic to how to cite your sources—and all points in between.

We aim, through this workbook, to help you acquire insight about public speaking so you can rise to this challenge, to speak from the heart. In the pages that follow, we will offer what we know about public communication in hopes that you can put this information to good use. Though we have organized this information as you might need it for the development of a particular speech, remember that communication, as a process, is both idiosyncratic and recursive. In other words, please feel welcome to navigate the topics in this workbook as they suit you and your unique creative process. Please also remember that, though we discuss principles of meaningful public speaking, you may apply what you learn here to many different forms of public communication, including the messages you share outside of the classroom—in social groups and organizations, in the workplace, and through online social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. We hope that the exercises help not only strengthen your skills but also encourage you to put them to good use. We hope you speak from your heart.

## References

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