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Understanding Public Speaking

IT ALL BEGAN WITH DEMOSTHENES

It all began back in 351 BC with an Athenian orator and public official by the name of **Demosthenes**. Despite the fact that he was born with a speech impediment, Demosthenes decided that he wanted to become the best public speaker of his time; so he packed up some supplies and sojourned to the Athenian woods. After pitching camp, he took to his task. While out jogging, he put several small Grecian pebbles in his mouth and began to recite some of his old speeches and verses.

At first, he sounded much as you would expect him to have sounded—like a fellow with rocks in his mouth. After a few weeks of practice, however, he began to sound “normal.”

As you may have guessed by now, he spit out the Grecian pebbles and was all the better for the experience—the theory being that if he could speak normally with pebbles in his mouth, he would be that much better without them. Unfortunately, you cannot follow in Demosthenes’ footsteps. First off, you will not be able to find any Grecian pebbles or Athenian woods unless you happen to live on that side of the ocean. In addition, you would lose many of your teacher

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friends if you walked around with rocks in your jaw. So what can you do?

Don't worry, public speaking will come to you. Since oratory was one of the three major studies of the Middle Ages' Seven Arts (along with logic and philosophy), you can still achieve classical skills in this modern age. Public speaking cannot be taught in a normal, lecturing kind of way; it is not something that you are born with; you can't even discover it in the normal sense by downloading it from the Internet—it must be experienced. You can only learn by doing. Think of this book as your roadmap to the experience of public speaking. Don't be afraid to grow.

Also, do not worry about the size of your audience (which, in the future, will often be referred to as the *speaking group* or the *listeners*). This program will work with two people or 200 people. Any veteran speaker will tell you that the size of the audience is not the issue—preparation is.

This book talks to developing and experienced educators who want to develop their skills in the most important life skill a person can have in the new millennium—the ability to stand up before a group of people and communicate a message.

Thinking. Planning. Communicating. These universal life skills appeal to everyone in all different countries and in different learning environments. The best way to reach your academic and professional goals is to stand up and express exactly what is on your mind. This book is on your side to reach those goals by helping you to obtain the skills needed to move forward.

POSITIVE SPEECH CONDITIONING

This book uses a technique known as positive speech conditioning (PSC). PSC recognizes that you cannot just jump behind a podium and deliver a blood-stirring speech the first time at bat. Growth comes only from practice. A child does not spring up from her crib and run a 10K race. First, she learns to crawl, then walk, and then run. In the same manner, a child

usually does not decide to abandon the idea of walking if she falls over a few times (“Sorry, Mom, I gave it a good shot.”). You will gain confidence along the way because you’ll have a solid base upon which to build.

DELIVERY STYLES

Before you begin, you should know about the various tactical-speaking delivery styles. Whether you are delivering a classroom speech, or talking before your professional peers, you can decide which style is best for each speech when the time comes.

The three fundamental ways you can deliver a public speech are having your materials and notes in hand, memorizing your speech verbatim, or giving an **extemporaneous**—or off the cuff—speech. Certain situations call for different styles. For example, the formal speech before the board, which you have known about for some time, warrants either a memorized or a prompted speech; speaking off the cuff could appear disrespectful.

1. Materials in hand. Here you have your speech in front of you, either in a major outline form or word for word. The advantage is that it is hard to lose any material. The major disadvantage is that you cannot establish as much eye contact with the group.

2. Memorized. If you have the time to sit down and memorize a speech, you will be greatly rewarded in terms of group interaction. In Chapter 19, you will find memory enhancement tips and suggestions for interacting with an audience.

3. Extemporaneous Speaking. Extemporized speeches are pretty much off the cuff. These are the most difficult speeches to deliver since you have to think on your feet, and unless you are very confident about your ability to synthesize information, process the data, and say it all in a normal, conversational tone, you may want to avoid this style as much as

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possible early on in your career. Of course, there are times when you simply must speak at a moment's notice, as you will discover in Chapter 13.

BASIC SPEECHES

The public-speaking lessons, skills, and suggestions are all embedded within certain settings inside and outside school, where teachers, principals, and school administrators represent themselves and their schools in the community. The table of contents reflects subtitles for some chapters, and these subtitles, refer to the various educational settings and groups you might encounter as your speaking career develops (e.g., the first subtitle, which appears on Chapter 4, is "Assemblies and Other Large Groups of Students"). While these settings are offered as examples, this is not a comprehensive list. It is quite possible that you will only be interested in certain topics or skills. If that is the case, skip about the book and take from it what you need to be successful.