

*TURBO-*  
*CHARGE* YOUR  
NEXT SPEECH

**By Wes Bleed**

## ***About the author:***

Wes Bleed is a Chicago-based journalist, speaker and public affairs specialist. He's an award-winning communicator, with honors from several news organizations such as the Associated Press, Chicago Headline Club and the Radio & Television News Directors Association.



Wes is the former news director at WGN Radio in Chicago. For many years he was a contributing reporter for the ABC Radio Network, with his reports heard nationally.

Wes trains political and business leaders to be more effective communicators. He also handles public affairs and media relations for both public and corporate clients.

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# INTRODUCTION

Whether you are a professional speaker or novice presenter, there are definitely ways to make sure your presentation is as effective as possible. What follows are proven steps that will turbo-charge your speech so that you not only speak with confidence, but that your audience actually hears and understands your message.

**WARNING:** Just because you say something does NOT mean your audience will understand what you said. Your message could get lost amid distractions in the room, concerns on the part of the audience members that cause them to lose focus or simply the fact that an audience member doesn't "like" you.

We've all been in the audience, so we know what it's like to be present but not really paying attention. Such is the challenge you will face as speaker.

**W**hat makes an effective speech? While the answer can vary from person to person, there are some essentials that every speech must have in order to be effective:

- Compelling content
- Stable (yet simple) structure
- Dynamic delivery

Even if you're giving your first speech and are racked with fear, these three points will give you a greater chance of success. Think back to the last good speech or presentation you heard and you'll probably recall all three were present.

## COMPELLING CONTENT

A speaker with something to say is going to be far more successful than someone who rambles or has no clear direction. What to do?

In order to have good content you need to know:

1. The subject
2. The audience
3. The setting (or occasion)

Let's look at each one.

**1. SUBJECT:** Are you prepared to talk about your topic?

Have you done your homework? Do you have the latest trends or sales figures? Or, are you going to wing it, hoping the audience is in a forgiving mood?

Knowledge of your subject can range from first-hand experience to serious academic study. The more prepared you are to address the subject, the more effective you can be in presenting your message.

**What do YOU Think?**

Get this and you're halfway home: Knowledge of the subject is not enough. The audience wants to know what YOU think about the subject. They want your perspective, your interpretation and analysis.

To merely recite statistics and facts is not only boring; it's a waste of time for anyone who can do his or her own research.

### **Tell Them a Story**

It's also important that you arrange your information so that the audience has the best chance of retaining what you say. The best approach to raw information is to repackage it into anecdotes, easy-to-digest statistics and quotations from everyday consumers or industry experts that will help make your point.

An example might be:

*"I remember the customer who walked into my store and asked about..."*

*"Studies have shown that 7 out of 10 Americans believe..."*

*"As (industry expert) has put it: "When your customer says..."*

Feel free to tell two stories or use more than one statistic or study to back up your point.

And don't forget to make this about what YOU think and feel about your subject. Synthesize your material through your own experience.

## 2. AUDIENCE: How much do you know about the group that will hear your presentation?

Are they co-workers who will understand your "inside" stories or are they from another industry with only a general awareness of your topic?

The answer will help determine how you phrase things, how much time you spend explaining an issue and whether you can use industry jargon without fear of being misunderstood.

### **Research Your Audience**

The easiest and quickest way to know your audience is to do some research. Look up the organization on the Internet, check out the company's web site, and ask questions to find out what you need to know to be an effective speaker. If you're speaking to a group at your own business, learn what you can about that department by asking around or checking with the manager.

You'll also want to know what kinds of challenges they face, what's their industry like and what new legislation might be in the works that could affect their business or cause.

If you speak often on the same basic subject but appear before different audiences, this research will help you tailor your illustrations to each new group. Appearing before a group of doctors, your customer service illustration should be about the time you walked into a hospital instead of the time you walked into a convenience store.

You'd be surprised how far a little research will go in making it sound like you developed your speech just for that specific audience, even if you've delivered your talk to dozens of different groups.

**3. SETTING:** Is this an afternoon business conference, a luncheon speech or an after dinner keynote presentation?

The formality of the event and the timing of the speech will make a big difference in the audience mood and its willingness to listen to what you have to say.

### **What's the Goal?**

You also want to know the goal of the event: is it an annual kick-off or an end of the year awards dinner? Is it a "go-fight-win" kind of event, or picking up the pieces from a devastating set-back?

I once tried to deliver an informative message to an after-dinner group that was expecting jokes and funny stories. Sorry to say, it didn't go over well.



## **What's the Mood?**

The mood and expectations will vary from event to event. As a result, your content will need to change to fit the program.

You may want to tone down the humor or add a bit more, depending on the event.

## **What's the Order?**

It's also good to know what's come before and what will follow you. Are you the last speaker after hours and hours of presentations? If you are, good luck. Most people are thinking about dinner, getting to the airport or anything but your speech.

On the other hand, a speech early in the morning will need to focus more on setting the tone for the rest of the day. You'll need more stories and inspirational quotes and less lecture.

## **STABLE STRUCTURE**

Along with content, a speech needs structure. That is, it needs a beginning, middle and an end. That might sound overly simplistic, but you'd be surprised at how many people think that they can merely begin to talk and somehow they will magically reach their conclusion.

Structure, like the foundation of a house, should start with a firm understanding of what you are trying to build or accomplish.

### **What's Your Goal?**

Are you giving an update or progress report? Are you trying to persuade your audience to accept your premise or argument?

Are you hoping to inspire your group to do more or try harder at reaching their goals? These all make a difference in how you will construct your speech.

For example, if you're trying to persuade your audience, you may spend more time on research to make sure you have good facts and statistics to back up your argument. If you're trying to inspire your audience, you'll probably want more stories and real life examples to make your point.

### **K.I.S.S. Method**

Structure is also important for taking the audience from one point to another. I recommend the K.I.S.S. method: "Keep it Short and Simple."

The idea here is that most people will remember only about 10% of what you say anyway. So, get to the point and don't waste their time.

Here is one example of a speech structure that's simple and yet highly effective:

**Introduction**, ending with your main point or argument.

**Point number 1**

Story, statistic or quotation.

**Point number 2**

Story, statistic or quotation.

**Point number 3**

Story, statistic or quotation.

**Summary**

Restatement of your main point or argument.

Call to action: what you want your audience to do next.

## **Stay on Track**

Structure helps the audience follow what you say and helps you keep on track. You can also edit your speech on the fly by simply dropping an illustration or quotation and moving on to the next point.

## DYNAMIC DELIVERY

Now that you've determined the kind of audience you'll be addressing, you've done your research and structured your speech, your delivery is where you go from words on paper to oratory.

This is no slam dunk.

Writing a great speech and delivering a great speech are quite different.

You'll need to keep 3 things in mind:

- Voice
- Tempo
- Oral Cues

**VOICE:** This may seem obvious, but you want your voice to be at its best. This means to be at your best physically.

Be rested and relaxed. Get plenty of sleep the night before your presentation.

## **No Caffeine**

Watch what you eat and drink. No pop or coffee before you speak. Caffeine tends to dry out your throat and mouth. Pop causes you to hiccup (or worse). Milk can cause phlegm.

Water is refreshing, and does the job perfectly.

I also take it easy on food. If I'm an after-dinner speaker, I will often leave half of my meal uneaten (and that is a major sacrifice, let me tell you) so that I won't feel full or uncomfortable when I get up to speak.

## **Breath Support**

You also need to get good, solid breath support under your voice as you speak up and out to the audience. This will be crucial if you don't have a microphone.

You don't want to yell, but you do want to project beyond normal conversation.

Nervousness can cause you to speak in a higher register than normal, so be ready to modulate your tone.

## Vocal Variety

However, vocal variety is essential. Avoid a monotone delivery. When your story gets exciting, your pace should quicken and your voice should get a bit louder and even a bit higher. Why would you expect your audience to get excited, if you don't sound excited?

Be conscious of the vocal style you need at the appropriate times during your presentation. Think of your vocal expression as verbal punctuation marks.

**TEMPO:** People think and process words at a much faster pace than you or I can speak. So, while you're busy speaking, the audience members are wondering what you're going to say next, thinking about the statistic you just gave or are contemplating their next meeting.

A quick and engaging tempo can help guard against that.

That doesn't mean you race ahead with each new sentence.

If you're telling a story about getting your heart broken by a high school sweet heart, you'd want to slow down and speak more softly as you recount the ordeal. You want the audience to feel your sense of loss.

## **Pause with a Cause**

In fact, an effective pause allows a key point sink in while you also take a breath and regroup for your next statement. This is called a “pause with a cause.”

It’s a moment of reflection and can be quite powerful as you tell a story or make a point. It also creates the verbal equivalent of white space on paper. It allows the audience – and YOU – time to breathe.

Overall, though, you need to keep the presentation moving or the audience may lose interest. So, you won’t want to be thumbing through notes and saying, “Let’s see, what’s my next point? Oh, yeah, it’s....”

## **Preparation is Key**

Obviously, the more prepared you are, the better you will be at maintaining an effective tempo.

**ORAL CUES:** These are devices that help the audience stay with you. As I mentioned, the mind tends to wander, so it's important that you keep bringing the audience back around to you.

I've heard some speakers go so far as to say, *"Look at me..."* or *"Eyes up here."*

I'm not a big fan of that. There are less offensive ways to keep the audience focused.

Something as simple as *"So, here's the main point I want you to hear..."* or *"And I so I'm sure you can agree with me on this one important point...."* can do the job quite well.

## **Tee it Up**

The idea is to tell the audience that what comes next is very important. Politicians do this all the time: *"And let me just say..."* or *"And make no mistake...."*

If you can set up key phrases and points with oral cues, the audience will have an easier time following your points and likely will remember more of what you said.

Now, here are two "bonus tips" that will help you make your speech more memorable.

## **BONUS #1**

This is an extra idea that will go a long way toward making your speech effective. It's extremely simple. If you have 3 points to deliver, then say each point, literally.

Instead of, "I think it's important that we give school districts more local control," you would say....

*"And here's point number one: give school districts more local control."*



You can even slow down a bit as you say "*number one.*" Make eye contact as you say it.

## BONUS #2

Make your points memorable with alliteration or another rhetorical device that makes them stand out. As you'll notice with the way I've structure this outline, I have "Compelling content," "Stable Structure," and "Dynamic Delivery." Could I have used other words? Sure, but these made it just a bit easier to remember.

Do this without being corny and you'll help your audience really key in on what you say.

## SUMMARY

So, there you have it. Turbo-charge your next speech with the right content, structure and delivery and you will be far more effective than you may have been in the past.

There's a not so subtle advantage to all of this: confidence. Knowing that you have these three areas nailed down will make you feel more confident and help take away some of those pre-speech jitters.

You will be closer to reaching your true goal: communicating with your audience.

Best of luck!

Be sure to check out additional resources at [www.wesbleed.com](http://www.wesbleed.com), and sign up for our free Newsletter “Open Mic.” You’ll receive additional tips and tricks on a regular basis. You’ll also want to check out our “Open Mic” Blog at <http://wesbleed.com/open-mic-blog.html>.

You can request a free audio program called “Grammar Sins,” about the top grammar mistakes people make in public. It’s a great supplement to this e-book. Just send your request to [info@wesbleed.com](mailto:info@wesbleed.com).

If you would like to book Wes to speak at your next meeting or function, please email us at [info@wesbleed.com](mailto:info@wesbleed.com).

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