

# THE Speech Doctor

WILL SEE YOU NOW

The sound of cutlery on glass has been known to reduce even the most hardened individuals to quivering wrecks. Many people are natural public speakers and have turned speech making into an art form: some even basing entire Presidential campaigns on this skill alone. But if you're the type of person whose palms moisten at the thought of standing up and speaking in an engaging and entertaining manner, former dentist turned public speaking expert, Dr Ray Lowry, is fully qualified to provide a cure for your wedding speech woes

Whilst studying medicine at university, Ray Lowry would spend his spare time performing and writing comedy for radio and television. Despite racking up professional writing credits for the likes of comedian Dave Allen, The Two Ronnies and Kenneth Williams, he eventually arrived at an unavoidable conclusion. 'I realised after a while that I was going to get a bigger pension if I concentrated on medicine and dentistry so I packed in the professional writing.' Continuing to write in his spare time, Ray's progress as an academic saw him present and attend numerous conferences and witness his fair share of corporate car crashes along the way. Seeking material to improve his own after-dinner speaking technique, Ray discovered that there was very little in the way of help on this subject and that the standard in general was low. 'I'd sat through so many abysmal speeches by people who should of known better, so took it upon myself to find the right sort of training. Gradually I wheedled out all the bits that mattered and ended up devising my own system, using it with people in the academic and business world to a great success.'

Now retired from the medical profession, Ray has written a book, *Be an Entertaining Speaker*, and runs his own presentation skills company, helping everyone from CEO's and radio personalities to first time speech makers and university students develop an interesting and engaging



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BO BENNETT

public speaking style. Swapping the dentist's drill for the microphone, Ray works as a public speaker himself and has also entered the world of stand-up comedy in a bid to hone his own skills. 'It's great practice in terms of understanding an audience, writing material for them, performing it and getting immediate feedback. I'm never going to make a living out of it because I'm too old now, but it's very good at teaching you the necessary presentation skills.' Ray believes there are a number of people who could benefit from help with speech writing and presentation but they are held back either by a reluctance to admit weakness or the belief their speaking skills are up to scratch when really, they're not.

## Tips FOR THE TOP TABLE

Amongst Ray's clients are people hoping to deliver a winning wedding speech. If you've spent some of your wedding preparation sitting staring at a blank sheet of paper, allow Dr Ray to prescribe some tips on how to deliver a memorable and entertaining speech for the big day

### Start Planning Early

The difficulty with wedding speeches is that the people performing them are often amateurs to start with; they may never perform a speech again and they're likely to be nervous. People get so panicky they often bury their head in the sand until it's too late. Start planning the speech far enough in advance to think about it with a cool head. Consider your role: who's there? Who can't you offend? How far can you go? What sort of material will go down well? Have a look at other people's material, get an idea and feel for it. Weddings speeches are once-in-a-lifetime; most people only ever do it once, it's a bit like going to hospital for an operation, as you can't do much to prepare for it, it just happens.

### Don't Rely on the Internet

These days people think, 'Oh, I'll just surf the Internet for something.' The trouble is there's even more rubbish on the Internet than there is in the books! A lot of it is just old fashioned technique but there's not an awful lot of it about. I do a lot of reading on the subject of speeches and while there's a lot of material out there: how to do this, how to do that, wonderful ideas about eye contact and how to hold your body, there's not much out there on how to actually write a speech.

### Be Yourself

I've done a lot of market research with audiences over the years, asking people what they want from those up on the platform. One of the main things they tell me is that they want someone to be grounded, so be yourself, tell things about yourself – people love that. When I do stand-up comedy I tell real anecdotes about myself but use comedic techniques to make them stronger. The audience don't realise some of the speech is technique and some of it is real life. Don't just tell a series of jokes, try and adapt a true story about yourself or the person you're talking about, tell me a bit about them in your own words and make it up from there. It'll sound more authentic. I often say to people, 'Tell me the story in your own words, as if we were in the pub,' in 30 seconds they'll give me the gist of what they want to say and I reply 'That's your opening!'

### To Prop or Not To Prop?

My own personal belief is that speeches tend to be better without props, but some people need and want to use them. Physical props are difficult to handle because unless you're well rehearsed they can interrupt the flow and it can look awkward. In the business world I do a lot of work with people who use Powerpoint and I'll often say to them, 'Turn the Powerpoint off, you'll have more impact,' but they still won't. I'm not adverse to mixing technology with public speaking but I wouldn't advise it.

### Keep it Short But Sweet

Short is better, if you leave them wanting, they'll love you for it. If you go on too long they'll hate you. The mistake a lot of people make is not thinking about the timing. I'll rehearse my speeches with a stopwatch, it sounds ludicrous but people sometimes go on too long and end up chopping off the last bit or editing the last ten minutes and the whole thing goes off kilter. If you can perform a short sharp speech, that is really good, people will say 'Oh I wish they'd go on longer.'

### Memory Game

I always recommend people memorise their speech, it goes back to the point about being yourself. If your eyes are wandering over prompts the speech will come across less and less natural. If all else fails remember the first and last bits, this way you can make eye contact with people and do the important bits. I teach memory techniques, people say 'Oh it's all well and good you saying that but I don't know how to remember these things.' I don't think people use their imaginations quite as much as they used to. Some people seem to have lost the old fashioned technique of being able to learn speeches.

### The Old Ones Are the Best

You can actually use an awful lot of material that a stand-up comedian will tell you is old hat, but a lot of younger people will have still never heard them before. For example there's an old Chic Murray line that I find funny, he checks into a hotel and the receptionist says 'Have you got a good memory for faces?' and he says 'Why?' and the receptionist says 'Because there's no mirror in the room.' They're the sort of lines you could build into a wedding speech, some people will know you're plagiarising some of the old comics but the younger guests will think they're wonderful.

### Keep the Laughs Coming

Make sure you've got a good amount of jokes, a good formula would be to try and aim for a laugh every 30 seconds. The audience might go off the boil otherwise, make sure there's something punchy there most of the time. A lot of it is about pace, you've got to open fast, grab the audiences attention, take them along, get them a bit breathless and then you can slow down and do some longer stuff and come up with a climax at the end. It's not all about laughter, it's about being able to tell a story. Storytelling is the basis of a speech.

### Unleash the Entertaining Speaker Within

I think most people can improve and be more entertaining than they think. Even if it's just about varying the tone of your voice and the pace. When I work with people on their speeches I listen to them and we do a diagnostics session and I can usually tell if it's a writing or performing problem. Most people have got a good speech in them, they just don't know it.

### The End is Nigh

Signal the end of the speech well before the end. This way people will know they won't be waiting for another 10 or 20 minutes for you to finish.

### Practise Makes Perfect

If you were driving to work in the morning and you had an accident, by the time you'd told the fourth or fifth person what had happened when you got to work, that story would be much better than when you first told it because you would have edited it, sharpened it, and you'd know which bits people responded to best. Intuitively, people know how to make things more entertaining but don't think that applies to speeches – it does!

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