
THE PORRO PASSAROUND - TIPS FOR COMMUNICATORS

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REBIRTH, RENEWAL AND ... REAPPEARANCE

The Passaround hibernated through the winter, but with the arrival of Spring, we're emerging from the cave, with some brand new tips. One grows out of my involvement in a different kind of writing - a movie script. I helped create the story that eventually became "The Great Debaters," starring Denzel Washington.

- [1] Speeches: How screenwriting is like speechwriting.
- [2] Speeches: Tough times demand good CEO speeches
- [3] Speeches: Grading candidates as speechmakers

1. *Speeches: How screenwriting is like speechwriting.*

Writing a movie and writing a script might seem as different from each other as Washington, DC and Hollywood. But there is one very close connection. To be a good speech writer, you have to be able to capture a character. That is, you have to be able to craft a piece that not only presents an argument, but also reflects the personality of the speaker.

You have to know how (or whether) your speaker uses humor, how much personal detail he or she is willing to share, and so on. If you don't, you're not writing a speech, you're producing a verbal white paper.

In screenwriting, you're capturing a character, too. In movies, though, the character is usually fictional. You probably have to create that character from scratch, you still have to work to be sure the words he or she speaks are consistent with the personality you want to convey on the screen.

So the next time you find yourself stuck when you're working on a speech, take a break and read a screenplay. Pay attention to how the writer uses specific words and phrases to bring out a character.

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2. *Speeches: Tough times demand good CEO speeches*

When a company's earnings and stock price are rising, it really doesn't matter much whether CEOs or other top executives can perform well behind a lectern, in front of cameras, or at a hearing table. But at a time when it looks like the

economy is heading south, an executive's ability to inspire confidence through speeches and presentations becomes more and more important.

But what should he or she say? Executives can learn a lot by taking a look at presentations by CEOs who led big corporate turnarounds. Those leaders had to inspire people at a time when the economic news was terrible. And there is nobody better to learn from than the man who set the standard for using the spoken word to turn a company around: Lee Iacocca. If you read, you'll learn a lot of lessons.

One of the most important lessons from his book, "I Gotta Tell You, Speeches of Iacocca," is accept blame when you screw up. Here's Iacocca at a press conference in Milwaukee, announcing the closing of a big auto plant in nearby Kenosha.

"We made a mistake with Kenosha, and I'm here to admit it. We are guilty as hell of being cockeyed optimists. And we're paying the price for it now...Now I see our life support was a mistake, and the expectations we created have just added to the pain."

3. Speeches: Grading the candidates as speechmakers

Now that the presidential race is down to the final three, how do each of the remaining contenders stack as speech makers? They've Here's one writer's purely subjective grades:

Obama: (A -) Brilliant, moving speeches, but he falters a bit in the "debates," (really joint press conferences.) He's got that "you know" verbal tic, and he sometime strays from talking about real people.

Clinton: (B) Still trying to sound natural in her speeches, but she does a great job in speeches and the debates of tying her policy points to the stories of real people.

McCain: (B) He shines when he speaks (or appears to) off the cuff. But when he has to present a text, he gets wooden.