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KEEPING IT (YAWN) INTERESTING

Sooner or later, every writer asks himself, How can I make this stuff interesting? Here are a couple of tips, plus one more OpEd secret courtesy of the New York Times.

- [1] Speeches: Making it Personal
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- [3] Op-Eds: Even more research

1. Speeches: Making it Personal

Lots of speeches use personal details to intro the speaker. Personal details can also be a great way to introduce new ideas to your audience, especially ideas that might otherwise get translated into wonk talk. So when you're doing a speech, don't just look for things in the speaker's background that will make the him/her likeable. Also look for a personal detail or experience that can be a springboard to the central topic of his speech.

For example, there could be something interesting or unusual about the speaker's background that illustrates the broader point she is making. One of my clients was the first head of her professional society who was a working mom with kids still in school. We leveraged a lot of speech material from that.

With a little digging, the chances are good you'll find something personal that helps keep that speech interesting.

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2. Speeches: Learning from your kids

I've talked in past issues about how important it is to make your point in a speech (and sometimes even in a press release) by telling a story. Which leads to the logical question: how?

If you've got kids, you probably already know, because they've badgered you to tell them stories, and let you know what doesn't work (too boring, Daddy) and what does (Ooh, scary.)

Believe it or not, the general guidelines for interesting kids stories are the same for stories in a speech.

START WITH SOMETHING YOU KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE UNDERSTANDS. For speeches, that means starting your story with a reference that will mean something to the group you're addressing. Enviros will know about the endangered species act; patient advocates might not, for example.

SET UP A CONFLICT QUICKLY. Stories with conflict draw in kids and audiences, too.

STOCK THE STORY WITH OBVIOUS HEROES AND VILLAINS. In a speech, setting up heroes and villains not only entertains, it also helps to win the audience over to your point of view.

DON'T FORGET THE STICKING POINT. If you're using the speech to make an argument, you need one telling fact or detail that will resonate with the audience, and stick with them. "This research will help 100 million Americans struggling with incurable medical conditions...." "Invasive species are destroying a million acres of our national wildlife refuges every year".... Etc.

A HAPPY ENDING. You always have one for your kids, of course. It's a little trickier in a call-to-action speech. You tell the audience to believe there CAN be a happy ending, but only if they do what you want them to do: lobby for more money for national parks, support a certain kind of cancer research, or even vote for a candidate.

3. [OpEds: One More Bit of Research](#)

Here's what the New York Times says about its OpEds.

"The OpEd editors tend to look for articles that cover subjects and make arguments that have not been articulated elsewhere in the editorial space. If the editorial page, for example, has a forceful, long-held view on a certain topic, we are more inclined to publish an OpEd that disagrees with that view. If you open the newspaper and find the editorial page and OpEd in lock step agreement or consistently writing on the same subject day after day, then we aren't doing our job."

So add one more question to your research list: has the paper you're targeting done an editorial on your subject recently? Happy digging.
