

COMMON SPEAKER PITFALLS

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As a speaker, you may have the greatest content in the world, but if you do not connect with your audience, it can all go to waste. It's like being on the phone and having something important to say, but there is static on the line and you can't hear the other person. No matter what you have to say, your message won't get through.

By understanding what stands in the way of connecting with an audience, you can make small adjustments that will lead to deeper and greater connections. Below are 20 reasons many speakers fail to connect.

1 The audience does not relate to the speaker.

When the speaker talks about success after success after success, audience members may think to themselves, Well, of course these strategies work for him. He's special. These strategies would never work for me. Whenever audience members feel the speaker is too special, they tend to cast off his or her advice.

2 Audience members are not sold on why they should listen to the speaker.

Your biography, speech description and introduction should clearly show how the audience will benefit from your presentation. They should be excited before you even take the stage.

3 Audience members are not sold on why they should take the next step the speaker suggests.

If you do not sell the results that people can gain by following your advice (e.g., happiness, joy, recognition, money, saving time, reducing effort or doing more with less), they will not act on it.

4 The audience is given too many steps to take.

"A confused mind says no" is an old saying. I've added to it: "A clear mind says go." Giving one exact next step to take helps you connect with your audience during and after your speech. For example, in one of my speeches I ask people to visit my website, and I stay connected with them. Because I don't give several next steps, I can use my entire speech to build the case for getting them to take that one step. That's a powerful and clear message.

5 The audience does not feel involved.

I remember watching the movie *Lean On Me* decades ago and hearing the line "No involvement, no commitment." Hearing that line has produced change in every aspect of my life. People buy into what they help create, so in speaking it pays to make them part of the speech creation. How? By asking questions. Engage your audience members in quick activities. Listen to them as you speak. Involve them in your stories. Jump on spontaneous moments. Find ways to get and keep audience members involved.

6 The audience does not feel this is the only time you have given your speech.

In other words, they don't feel it's fresh. Instead, they feel like it's something you have rehashed time and time again. Perhaps it is, but your audience shouldn't get that impression. As a speaker, it's important to find ways to make the speech fresh for you so it will be fresh for your audience.

I use what I call the Fabric Softener Approach. When you include a fabric softener sheet while doing the laundry, it refreshes the entire load. In speaking, I rarely give a speech without trying out at least one new line or story. In doing so, that new piece becomes like the sheet of fabric softener—it actually makes the entire speech fresh for me, and that helps keep it fresh for my audience. I also dedicate every speech I give to someone somewhere so that it's just as important every time I give it.

7 The speaker is not all there.

If you are not emotionally involved in your stories during your speech, you do not stand a chance in connecting with your audience.

8 The speaker has not done the pre-speech research necessary to meet audience members where they are. Too many speakers give what they want to say rather than what the audience needs to hear. That's a recipe for trouble.

9 The speaker does not match the energy of the audience.

Have you ever seen a speaker come out way too energetic and loud for the laidback audience in front of him? Have you ever been that speaker? It's not about bouncing off the walls. It's about matching your energy to the energy of your audience members, and then moving them to where you want them to be.

10 The speaker does not tease audience members before sharing the message.

Get your audience to thirst for your message before you quench their thirst. Otherwise they won't value what you're saying as much, and they won't have enough curiosity to stay connected.

11 The speaker favors a side of the room and does not look at everyone in the audience. I

have seen so many speakers turn slightly and face one side of the room for most of their speech. Each person must feel you are speaking to him or her, or you will not connect. Look at everyone throughout the entire speech.

12 The speaker does not respond (at least visually) to the audience's reactions.

There will be many moments during your speech where audience members will react in certain ways. If you keep talking without at least visually acknowledging their reactions, you will not connect with them. Instead, it will seem as if you could give the same exact speech without your audience even being there. Speaking involves a back-and-forth flow of energy. Blocking that energy is like blocking the blood flow in a person's body. The results are disastrous.

13 The speaker "tells us" instead of taking us back to her story.

Don't tell a story from the past; let your audience experience your story in the present. You can do that with dialogue, expressions, reactions and involvement.

14 The speaker does not use relatable characters.

If your stories are about climbing Mount Everest and doing things your audience has never done and never wants to do, you might have a problem connecting, unless you use journey-related

universal principles that can bridge that gap.

I remember speaking to a group in a nursing home early in my career and wondering, How will these older folks relate to me? The answer is they didn't have to. I told stories about advice I received from my grandfather and they, being grandparents and great-grandparents, related to him. So they related to me indirectly through my characters.

15 The speech is a verbal autobiography that leaves audience members wondering what they should get out of it. Don't make people work that hard. They need to know what they'll get out of your speech from the beginning—not just at the end. The speech can't be, "I did this and I did that and I did this other thing ... and you can do it too." That's not audience-focused enough to connect. You need to be audience-focused from the very beginning.

16 The speaker does not come out with a bang. Audience members realize in 30 seconds whether or not they want to hear more. Make those 30 seconds count.

17 The speaker sounds like someone else. You must be yourself or you'll never connect. I remember watching a speaker who had great content—but there was a problem with his delivery. He faked a Southern accent. It seemed as though he was trying to have a Zig Ziglar-type drawl. This completely destroyed his connection. Why? Because it wasn't his way; it was Ziglar's way. Only Zig Ziglar can be Zig Ziglar. The rest of us need to be ourselves on stage.

18 The content is not original enough. As soon as someone starts talking about the starfish or the bricklayer, many people will think they have heard this before, and they will tune out.

19 The speaker's stories don't stir anything in the audience. If a speaker's stories are one-dimensional and flat, he will not provoke any emotion (tears and regret, happiness and joy, etc.) in the audience and, therefore, the speaker will not connect.

20 The speaker does not get the audience to reflect. If the audience does not reflect, the speaker will not connect.

Perhaps you have been guilty of some of the above-mentioned mistakes. I know I have. This list is in no way exhaustive—there are many other reasons speakers fail to connect with their audiences.

Which ones can you think of?