

The Different Ways You Learn to Be a More Effective Speaker by Patricia Fripp, CSP, CPAE

There are many ways we learn; let us look specifically how they relate to improving the spoken word.

We learn by what we see, hear, experience, vicariously, on reflection, and by teaching others.

*** Learning by What You See ***

From now on when you are listening to and observing a great speaker, or a member of your Toastmasters Club, or perhaps a business speech or sales presentation, I encourage you to look with fresh more educated eyes.

Observe how they move around the front of the room or the stage, and if you arrive early how they act in preparation.

At the Fripp Speaking Schools, I often ask "What did you see that will help you become a more effective speaker before we even started?"

Frequently I hear comments like, "You were set up and organized before we arrived," "You interacted with the group."

A couple of years ago, I was hired to deliver a one-day presentation skills training for a group of twenty engineers, scientists, and astronauts. We met for a 7:00 am continental breakfast ready for the 7:30am start. They were sitting in their seats eating and I made a point to introduce myself to each person and shake their hands. After being introduced my opening line was, "What have you already learned that would make you a more effective speaker before we officially started?"

Being an intelligent group, they all shouted out at the same time. "You went around and met everyone before you started." This is the point...we are rarely nervous of one individual. We're only nervous when they become an audience or a committee. Letting the audience reinforce what they see helps internalize the message.

There's a lot you can learn that will make you more effective by what you see. For convention speakers your performance actually starts when you're at the airport baggage claim. How you interact with other passengers and act when you're on the shuttle bus to the hotel leaves an impression with people who are probably going to be in your audience.

*** Learning by What You Hear ***

Certainly you learn by what you hear from the content of the speech. You can also learn by watching the vocal variety. Notice if the speaker pauses to give you the chance to reflect on what you have heard. Few speakers understand the importance of the pause and are comfortable with silence. We speak to be remembered and repeated, this requires appropriate pauses and good variety.

* Learning by What You Experience *

As you listen to the Toastmaster World Champions and other great speakers, you learn new ideas and techniques then go out and try them. A word of warning, don't try six new techniques in one presentation. It will be too much and confuse you. Just take one technique at a time to incorporate in your own presentation.

Perhaps you are going to make better eye contact on silence. Or, you are going to pause longer. Maybe you are going to add more creative gestures. Record your presentation for evaluation. Ask yourself what you learned from the experience of incorporating the new ideas.

* Learning Vicariously *

In group coaching sessions such as part of a Fripp Speaking School or evaluation at your Toastmaster Club, you will notice we all have to master the same techniques. When watching someone else being coached it is easier to observe in them what you intellectually understand, however have not internally mastered. By learning vicariously you benefit in a way that is too close to home when you are "in the hot seat."

* Learning from Reflection *

We've often heard "There's the speech that you plan to give, the speech you gave, and the speech you wish you'd given."

Whenever you finish a presentation...reflect. Do an after-action analysis. What did you do superbly well that you should repeat? If you were giving the speech again what would you improve?

Always start with what you did right. Your future success will come from building on your past success, which means you have to acknowledge it. This is one reason at least some of your presentations have to be in a mutually supportive environment.

* The Best Way to Learn *

The best way you learn is to teach somebody else. Whenever you attend a speaking school or presentation skills seminar, and learn something new find a chance to teach somebody else. Take the best ideas, use the handout or workbook, and explain to somebody else what you learned. It can be your spouse at dinner, in a staff meeting, or your Toastmasters Club.

Remember, you can't give away what you don't have. Once you teach somebody else what you learned, it reinforces and improves your speaking skills.