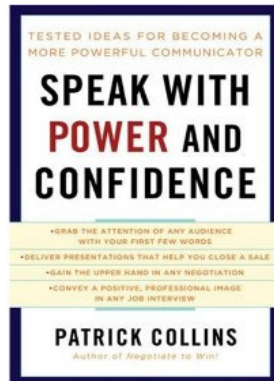


Speak with Power and Confidence

Tested Ideas for Becoming a More Powerful Communicator

About the Author/s

Patrick Collins is founder and president of Power Communication Strategies, and lectures and conducts seminars worldwide on negotiation and other communication topics. He served on the faculty of John Jay College of the City University of New York for more than 20 years as professor of communications and a department chair, has worked with ABC news on a variety of projects, and hosts a public affairs program on educational television in New York. Collins is also author of *Negotiate to Win!: Talking Your Way to What You Want*.



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■ The Big Idea

In **Speak with Power and Confidence**, Patrick Collins provides an easy-to-use guidebook of tactics and tips to manage three elements of every communication encounter:

I. **You.** Create a relationship with the audience before saying a word through:

- *nonverbal signals*, such as meaningful pauses, direct eye contact, and comfortable posture
- *language choice*, which is conversational but not patronizing
- *listening skills* which are active and receptive

II. **The Message.**

- *speeches*: follow 7 steps to crafting a speech; begin writing in the middle
- *audiences*: craft a message which is relevant
- *handling tough questions and Q&A*: answer the question which has been asked and know when to stop
- *sales presentations*: be open about one's goal, and do not be afraid to sell
- *special occasions*: choose from several formats

III. **The Situation.** Follow specific strategies for the *job interview*; *handling the media*; *the witness stand*; *a crisis*; *conducting a meeting*.

FEATURES OF THE BOOK

Reading Time: 15 hours, 279 pages

In **Speak with Power and Confidence**, veteran communications consultant and educator Patrick Collins offers a comprehensive guide to communicating effectively in a wide variety of situations. He provides detailed tactics and tips for speaking from a podium, in the boardroom, sales presentations, job interviews, and more. Anyone required to speak in public scenarios will benefit from this book.

It comprises fourteen chapters grouped into three parts, each focused on a main element of communication: oneself, the message, and the situation. Each chapter offers an “At a Glance Summary” as well as a “Quick Review” of numbered highlights for ease of reading. The last chapter serves as a condensed form of the previous thirteen.

Reading the book from cover to cover will provide a broad understanding of business communication in general, but its clear structure and detailed index make it easy for readers to find guidance tailored to their particular topic or circumstance.

INTRODUCTION

Knowing how to captivate listeners, explain ideas, and handle tough questions with credibility has become a critical life skill in situations ranging from the job interview, running a successful meeting, or speaking from a podium. Although frequently ignored in formal curricula, effective communication and interpersonal skills, are arguably more important now than ever in this age of corporate downsizing.

In *Speak with Power and Confidence*, communications educator and consultant Patrick Collins provides an easy-to-use guidebook of tactics and tips for managing the three elements of every communication: oneself, the message, and the situation. Those practicing his advice will be able to gain the advantage in a wide variety of communication encounters.

THE FIRST ELEMENT OF COMMUNICATION: YOU

The first step to becoming a more powerful communicator is to learn how to effectively manage oneself. Speakers begin to create a relationship with their audience before saying a single word. Three broad areas deserve study and attention: nonverbal communication skills, language power, and listening skills.

Nonverbal Communication Skills

A speaker is able to establish authority and take command from the first moment at the podium by being well prepared, familiar with the presentation site, and managing the room beforehand by adjusting microphones, checking the height of the podium, and arranging chairs. Many speakers are reluctant to use silence, but a meaningful pause before the speech, and several throughout, indicate self-assurance and poise, rather than uncertainty. If a speaker begins a speech hurriedly and without introduction, they will interrupt conversations in the audience without fully gaining their attention from the outset. Silence within the speech can be used to draw attention to important ideas and phrases.

Speakers should be comfortable and professional in their attire, and dressed appropriately for the situation. The message, not their appearance, should be most memorable. Maintaining direct eye contact with individual audience members makes them feel as if they are being addressed directly. This does not necessarily come naturally, and may require some practice. Digging through notes, nervous glances, or silly tactics such as speaking to a distant object in the room should be avoided.

Although many speakers worry about what to do with their hands, Collins suggests that speakers think about movement in general rather than to focus specifically on hand gestures which may create the unwanted appearance of being stiff or scripted. It is helpful to decide ahead of time whether or not to remain behind the podium both during the speech and after during a question and answer period. It is also helpful to think about a stance and a posture which are natural and comfortable. The goal is to provide a clear message without distractions, which often result from a speaker's subconscious mannerisms.

Vocal quality should be authentic and comfortable. Perfection in a speech is impossible, and is overrated among professionals who value impressions over content. The best ways to improve vocal variety, inflection and fluency, and to reduce anxiety and error, are to master the material, write readable notes, and be excited about the subject.

Language Power

The most effective speakers are conversational, neither talking above the audience nor patronizing them, and avoid overusing “trendy” words. Speakers should know the meaning of every word in their speech and should clarify the meaning of abbreviated or technical terms, especially the first time they are used. They should adopt an energy level and tone appropriate to the circumstance, and keep in mind that members of the audience are able to think much more quickly than the speaker is able to speak. Using emotional words, while maintaining neutrality and political correctness, can energize a speech and engage the audience, as well the effective use of illustrations, imagery, stories, and analogies.

‘Command phrases’ (e.g. “let me repeat that...”) and ‘ordinal phrases’ (e.g. “first of all...” and “secondly...”) serve to get the audience’s attention and also go a long way toward redirecting it when focus is momentarily lost. Other tactics for sustaining attention include referring to the specific audience, and referring to a specific audience member (“according to Joe in engineering...”), although this should not be confused with the annoying habit of delivering side remarks to an audience member that no one else knows.

Listening Skills

Although the “speaking” part of communication usually receives the most attention, effective listening is equally important. Speakers who have developed good listening skills have a significant advantage in overall ability to communicate.

Statistics show that people are generally poor listeners. Audience members often anticipate the message and tune out the speaker, are sometimes inclined to hear what they want to hear, and in controversial situations may be predisposed to argue with the speaker before a word is ever spoken. The result may be a glaring fatality of efficient communication on both sides of the podium. Collins advises adopting an attitude of acceptance and curiosity when listening, taking responsibility in active listening, and refusing to succumb to personal taste or distractions.

THE SECOND ELEMENT OF COMMUNICATION: THE MESSAGE

The next step to communicating well is learning how to prepare and deliver a clear, memorable message, whether in a speech, meeting, or sales presentation.

Speechwriting

A speech that is well-structured and focuses on a topic which is both interesting and familiar to the speaker and which is appropriate to the audience and the occasion will be the most memorable. The best speech is written beginning in the middle.

Collins recommends these seven steps to crafting a powerful speech:

1. Select the topic. Important consideration should be given to how much time will be available for the speech, as well as what is appropriate to the audience.
2. Write an idea list. Brainstorm topics associated with the selected topic.

3. Choose a showcase idea from the idea list which is most important to communicate.
4. Choose spotlight ideas that support or are related to the showcase idea.
5. Write the text or body of the speech. Speech length estimate: about 125 words per minute for an average speaker.
 - Begin by creating a sentence about the showcase idea.
 - Next, write down the spotlight ideas and construct an essay about each spotlight idea. Ordinal or transitional phrases will alert the audience of movement from one topic to the next and will help them catch up if they have missed something.
 - Choose between writing a speech in outline form or a full-text speech. If using an outline, write out facts that are difficult to remember. If choosing full-text, create the body of the speech by fleshing out the outline in sentence form.
6. Write the introduction after completing the body of the speech. Length should be 1½ minutes for a 5-7 minute speech; 3-4 minutes for a speech lasting fifteen minutes or longer. Possible introductions:
 - a funny or insightful anecdote to set a casual and honest tone
 - quotations and stories to entertain and give sticking power to a message and to humanize the speakerAvoid the following in introductions:
 - humor which is offensive or bland, and may cause many audience members to tune out when the message turns to a more serious tone.
 - beginning with a rhetorical question, unless certain of the audience's unanimous perspective.
7. Write the conclusion after the rest of the speech is complete. Provide an indication that the speech is wrapping up; after this indicator, do not continue more than two additional minutes. The conclusion should either summarize the showcase idea or reinforce the most important spotlight idea; it may echo the introduction, but should never be an exact replica. Final words should be kept brief and definite, ending with thanks and appreciation.

Audience Analysis

Speakers should devote a great deal of time to audience research. This may be easy for some audiences, like specific organizations or affiliations, but others may require more imagination. Collins advises considering educational level, age, occupation, and racial or ethnic makeup of an audience. In this way, speakers may avoid offensive remarks, and provide greater clarity and intimacy.

Audiences typically identify with a speaker when they feel included, either in the relevance of the message or through personal acknowledgment. If an organization is responsible for an accomplishment or has an impressive history, it is advisable to pay a compliment to that effect.

Handling Tough Questions and Tough Audiences

A question-and-answer session at the end of a speech provides transparency and invites interaction, and is standard for most speeches. However, many speakers dread these sessions, fearing they may undermine their message, or may invite some hostile remarks.

Strategies for approaching the Q&A session include having an agenda or goal for the session beforehand, and establishing ground rules at the beginning. Useful ground rules include establishing a time limit, regulating one question per person, and asking questioners to identify themselves. It is also helpful to determine ahead of time whether or not to answer personal questions.

The most basic rule to follow in a Q&A is to answer the question which is asked. Otherwise, the audience (whose approval may be more important) will notice evasion tactics and lose faith in the speaker's credibility.

The next rule is to categorize the question into one of eight common types:

1. The yes-or-no question. This simply requires an immediate yes or no, followed by clarification and an example.
2. The Caesar-or-God question. This requires the speaker to choose between two impossible choices. Instead, they should choose neither, and provide an alternative, reiterating the showcase or most applicable spotlight idea.
3. "What-if" questions, though vague, are usually legitimate and in the spirit of true curiosity. Speakers should emphasize the hypothetical nature of the question, at the beginning and the end.

4. The “laundry list.” This masquerades as a question, but is really just a list of emotional complaints. Speakers should address just one issue, bring some civility back to the situation, and move on quickly.
5. Legal or personnel questions often appear very benign, but can sometimes jeopardize the speaker’s career or get someone in court. Speakers should allude to the delicate nature of the question and decline to respond.
6. Personal questions may or may not be attacks, and so presenters should decide beforehand how to handle them, regardless of their seeming innocence.
7. One-to-Ten questions. This question (“On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate...”) lends itself to oversimplification. It is best to use words instead of numbers in the response.
8. Stupid questions. The answer to some questions may be obvious to everyone, or nonsensical. In these cases respond with sensitivity and professionalism, and move on quickly.
The final rule is to follow what the author calls the REST formula:
 - Respond. Answer the question as succinctly as possible in one line or a single sentence.
 - Provide an Example. It is best to give a single example, as this will be remembered more easily.
 - Stop talking. Do not continue to talk after giving the single example.
 - Take the next question (or go your target issue). Select as many as three target issues, or themes for the audience to remember, and integrate them into the answers during the Q&A.

Speakers should both begin and end the Q&A assertively, setting a desired tone. Toward the end of the session, they should alert audiences that their time is almost up. The speaker should then finish on a positive note, minding body language as they give final comments and leave the room.

Making Effective Sales Presentations

The competitive sales presentation poses what is arguably the most challenging and stressful interaction in marketing communication. It is important to establish an objective before creating a presentation. Most sales presentations have one of the following as their objective: new business; renewing a prior account; providing product or service updates; or new employee orientation.

Four different speech formats work well with sales presentations:

1. Problem-Solution format, in which a problem of the prospective client is first outlined in detail, followed by the presenter's compelling solution.
2. Need-Product-Benefit format is similar, but includes a comprehensive listing of the product's additional benefits, instead of merely describing how it satisfies a need.
3. Past-Present-Future format requires extensive research about the prospect's history, and presents the product as the prospect's hope for future success.
4. Disadvantages-Advantages format, the most competitively cut-throat presentation, allows presenters to be openly critical of the competition and employ a 'just-the-facts' approach. Though naming and criticism of the opposition is encouraged, its focus should be on the presenter's product or service, and it should end with optimism.

Important tips include:

- Meet the audience before the presentation, if possible.
- Deal with possible objections right away, spending the rest of the time putting the doubts to rest.
- Be confident in the right to have the attention of decision makers. Never apologize for 'taking up their time.'
- Be open about one's goal (e.g. a signed contract or placement of an order).
- Adopt client-centered language (not simply product-centered language). This requires thinking about a product from the client's perspective ("What's in it for me?").
- Avoid tentative language, stating what will be rather than what might be.
- Be direct and factual when discussing the competition.
- Do not rely excessively on visual aids. The speaker and the main ideas should be the focus.

The process for creating team presentations is similar, but requires more planning and cooperation. It is best to keep the team small, usually no more than three or four presenters, possibly accompanied by specialists to answer questions beyond the expertise of the presenters. Eliminate traces of competition between sales team members. Give priority to practicing and coordinating the order of the presentation (introduction and conclusion, distribution of subjects, and references to each other).

Special Occasion Speeches

A number of strategies can help alleviate the terror of delivering impromptu and special occasion speeches. Speeches assigned with little time to prepare may be constructed around one of several formats. These include: teach a lesson; define a term; describe the past, present, and future; change the topic; state a problem and give a solution; agree/disagree; begin with an interesting fact. Most speakers discover that they prefer one of these formats, and adapt it to a variety of topics.

It is helpful to develop a repertoire of quotes, stories, and trivia as starting points. An initial pause will help settle the speaker's mind as well as an audience's restlessness. It helps to remember that the audience is breathing a sigh of relief at this time... better you than them!

Some special occasion speeches can be anticipated. Tips for these occasions are:

- Introductions: keep them simple and concise, including biographical or professional information, which the speaker has approved beforehand, if possible.
- Award presentations: shift the focus to specific accomplishments for which the beneficiary deserves the honor being conferred.
- Nomination speeches: highlight the qualifications of the nominee, and express one's personal commitment.
- Award acceptances: prepare remarks if there is any possibility of winning an award. Do not feign surprise, and accept without false modesty.
- Eulogies: minimize any negatives, and describe one's personal relationship.
- Toasts: Craft them appropriately to the audience and the occasion, and avoid being too long. Err on the side of caution with respect to ribaldry.

THE THIRD ELEMENT OF COMMUNICATION: THE SITUATION

Collins addresses a number of common specific speaking situations, providing tips and tactics for each.

The Job Interview

First, repair potential problems in a resume and work history beforehand. Remove or explain any gaps in dates, and make sure the objective statement aligns with the position being applied for and is tailored to the needs of the specific company or organization. Prepare for the interview by doing homework on the company's history and expectations, and be on time for the interview to set a standard for future accountability. Make a note of the names of interviewers and executives, and use them; this makes a candidate instantly more familiar and approachable than those who did not make the effort.

The interviewee should have three or four showcase ideas, or personal strengths, to emphasize during the interview. He or she should make a commanding entrance with a firm handshake, smile, and confident voice to set the tone for the rest of the experience.

Interviewers will inevitably bring up weaknesses in a resume, past mistakes and their resolution, and delicate issues about previous employers. These should be answered with honesty, showing humanity as well as professionalism, with the mutual goal of gaining a clearer picture of a prospective working relationship. The interviewee should avoid demeaning former employers, but do not avoid discussing salary.

Handling the Media

The interviewee should have settled upon an agenda (i.e. a message, or a goal) for the media interview ahead of time. Every publication and journalist has an agenda, and the interview process is weighted in their favor; they will never ask 'just the right question' to illuminate your point. Answers should be brief because listeners will tune out quickly if they exceed fifteen to thirty seconds.

Newcomers to television studios should expect the reality to differ from the image. The studio is smaller than it appears, the pundits will be nothing like they seem, and the lights are excessively hot. Guests should not buy into the behavior of the host or interviewer, either before or during the show, and should take control of the dialogue from the beginning by thanking the interviewer for the

invitation, answering questions directly, and looking directly at the other party, not at the cameras or notes. It is important to act and speak as though still on the air until the segment is certainly over; an offhand comment or facial expression can be cause for much embarrassment.

Stand-up or “on-the-scene” interviews can pose special problems. Helpful ways to maintain control of the interview include having reporters step back, identify themselves, and ask one question at a time. A graceful and generous exit will eliminate reporters’ angry claims that their questions were ignored.

Although the press interview may seem casual and is normally polite and intimate, executives should not allow themselves to be lulled into a false sense of comfort. It is always advisable to make one’s own recording of the interview as a valuable reference as well as to encourage the reporter’s commitment to accuracy.

Preparing to Be an Effective Witness

Executives may be asked to provide professional opinions in a variety of circumstances, including before regulatory committees or in court hearings. In court, the witness’s approach should be to simply dispatch information. It is not the job of the witness to win the case or theorize about the outcome. Three ways to maintain credibility during these situations include: (1) aim for total accuracy, which is easier if answers are brief; (2) pace the response and remain calm when answering questions, and be cautious when referring to documentation; (3) use qualifiers such as “to the best of my recollection...” to avoid getting backed into a corner.

Giving a deposition and testifying at trials and hearings pose some subtle difficulties. Depositions are information-gathering interviews performed by the opposition before a trial, which can be helpful for both parties. It is best to remain matter-of-fact and to minimize defensiveness, maintaining one’s composure and refuting negative language with calm correction. It is important to be an active listener throughout the proceedings, and to seek clarification on questions not fully understood as well as to avoid anticipating questions. Witnesses should not linger over a perceived misstep or error, and instead focus on the present to avoid making additional mistakes.

Handling Crisis Communications

Communicating effectively during a crisis is as important as how the actual crisis is handled. The first step to doing this effectively is to anticipate and plan for a crisis, and this requires properly defining what constitutes a genuine crisis. Legitimate crises which require specific communication plans include environmental accidents, consequential and numerous product failures, major litigations, hijacking or terrorist situations, and bankruptcy filings or severe financial reversals.

Creating a plan requires first designating a team of external and internal advisers. External advisers may include public-relations people who are experts at crafting stories, deciding which medium to use, which audiences to target, and in what sequence. Internal advisers serve as spokespersons with the local media, or as liaisons with senior management for the external public relations advisers. Public relations advisers often clash with legal advisers, as they come from two different communicative philosophies; PR professionals want to disclose while legal personnel want to conceal, so a balance must be maintained.

“Issues advisers” handle information specific to certain company operations, while “constituency managers” are experts on how to address the needs of specific portions of the public. Employees who are closest to the actual operations picture frequently are able to provide more accurate information than those who work at the division level.

Appropriate communications media should be selected, ranging from employee briefings, press conferences, hotlines (avoid recorded messages), and print and electronic media ads. Maintaining visibility and transparency throughout the event is important, as is the use of symbolic communication. Executives are advised to make use of every tool and method to communicate the facts, and to announce that the crisis is over once a solution has been reached.

Conducting Successful Meetings

Business meetings, while rarely exhilarating, are undoubtedly “a necessary evil of corporate life.” When managed with competence, they provide an excellent opportunity to demonstrate leadership skills.

Meeting agendas should be communicated beforehand so attendees will know what to expect and will bring ideas and concerns of their own. Agendas usually include a reading of the minutes or a statement of purpose; old business, including unfinished items from previous meetings; new business, or the submitted agenda items; and election procedures, if applicable.

General tips for effective meetings which create interaction include establishing a regular meeting schedule; beginning and ending on time; and deciding ahead of time on the level of formality, depending on the size and atmosphere of the group, the importance of the meeting, and the leader’s knowledge of parliamentary procedure. It is important to determine the legal consequences of the meeting beforehand.

A common tendency is for meetings to become gripe sessions, and establishing a tone of formality and a clear agenda will help minimize this. If morale is especially low, executives should create another meeting to air formal complaints. Leaders should be discreet in handling delicate or confidential information, reminding attendees of the consequences of impropriety and using secret ballots and discretion in voting procedures.

CONCLUSION

Transparency and honesty is at the heart of all effective communication, and the main challenge is to eliminate distractions and mannerisms that impede the message, or ‘getting ourselves out of the way.’ Speak with Power and Confidence provides a comprehensive guide to improving the ability to communicate in a wide variety of situations, and ends with twenty-seven “quick fixes” which review many of the tips which have been detailed in the text.

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