Welcome!

Take the High Road: How To Deal with a Hostile Audience

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& Modified
for Classroom Use

"Could you give a talk to 4,000 angry people in the auditorium in two minutes?"
Our discussion of public speeches begins

- Special occasion speeches
  - Are those that are prepared for a specific occasion to mark a special event
  - These speeches can be both informative or persuasive or a mix of both
  - The underlying function of this speech is to entertain, celebrate, commemorate, inspire or set the social agenda (O’Hair)
Functions of Special Occasion Speeches

- Entertainment
- Celebration
- Commemoration
- Inspiration
- Social agenda-setting
Types of Special Occasion Speeches

- Speeches of Introduction
- Speeches of Acceptance
- Speeches of Presentation
- Roasts and Toasts
- Eulogies and Tributes
- After Dinner Speeches
- Speeches of Inspiration
Our writing project will focus on those that set the agenda

- Agenda setting
  - Agenda-setting recalls the mission of the organization in an entertaining way
  - Establishing and reinforcing goals and values of the group sponsoring the event

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<th>Occasions that call for agenda-setting speeches</th>
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Today, we will examine

- One of the top 100 speeches of last century
- A commencement address
  - Given by Barbara Pierce Bush
  - June 1, 1990 at Wellesley College
    - “Choices and Change” (A conversation about diversity)

What can we learn from her experience?
We can learn ...

- Take the high road
  - To maintain impeccable
    - integrity
    - honesty
    - decorum
  - While remaining audience centered
    - Through a process called Identification

Exactly what is identification?
What is *Identification*

- Establishing a meaningful connection through
  - Shared values and experiences
  - Sincere compliments (social niceties)
  - Effective use of humor
  - By reframing the story

How does this concept apply to this speech?
We will examine the controversy
  - that surrounded the speech

We will watch the speech
  - “Choices and Change”
  - A conversation about diversity

We will examine
  - How she took the high road
  - How the techniques she used can help us
Event
- Barbara Pierce Bush was the second choice
  - Alice Walker was their first choice
    - Author of the book, *The Color Purple*

The Controversy
- 150 seniors led by Christine Bicknell
  - Sign a petition stating that Mrs. Bush
  - Not a good role model for the modern woman
- Inspired a national debate
  - On the merits of the petition
  - The role of women in modern society
Place: Wellesley College, June 1, 1990
- Women’s liberal arts college
- Embraced the idea of diversity (school mantra)
- Time honored traditions
  - The class color
  - The hoop race
    - First to get married
    - First to become a CEO
Narrator (speaker): Barbara Pierce Bush
- First Lady and wife of a sitting President
- Was known for her
  - Warmth
  - White hair
  - Relaxed manner
  - Keen wit
  - “everybody’s grandmother”
Purpose: Mrs. Bush stated in her autobiography, *A Memoir*

- “I wanted to make a point that we are not all alike and we have to respect each other’s differences.”

In her autobiography she states

- that she and her staff worked on the speech
  - on and off all spring

She advised her to staff to compose a speech that did not

- Cater to Wellesley
- Complain
- Apologize

Background continues...
Background continues...

- **Audience centered speaker**
  - one who establishes a meaningful connection with listeners
  - opens dialogue rather than forcing ideas on people

- **Identification**
  - a process of bonding with the audience
  - through shared values and experiences, sincere compliments, and the effective use of humor
Framing

Constructing the message so that the receiver can understand the context in a new way.

Hostile audience

- one that rejects the speaker
- rejects or has no interest in your message
- or whose presence in mandatory
Diversity

- The ideology of including people of diverse cultural backgrounds
- Embracing diversity
  - Implies acceptance
    - Regardless of choices
    - Regardless of change

Culture

- Patterns of human activity and their symbolic structures
- Is manifested in
  - Music
  - Literature
  - Lifestyle
  - Painting/sculpture
  - Theater
  - Film
  - Similar things
Now, let’s hear the speech

American Rhetoric: Barbara Bush -- 1990
Wellesley College Commencement Address
Trained speech writers know

- That before you begin to write a speech for a hostile audience you should
  - Find out why the audience members
    - Object to you or your message
  - In her autobiography, Mrs. Bush states that she called Christine Bicknell to
    - Find out why she did not want her to speak
    - Thus gaining insight on how to frame the message
Using this insight the speech writers can address these issues in the speech:

The students felt that:

- Mrs. Bush was not a good role model for the modern woman
- What they failed to consider was:
  - the issue of **choice**
  - the issue of **change**
  - the issue of **generational identity**
You ask what that has to do with the speech and their acceptance of her as a speaker

- Wellesley embraced diversity
  - Which implies that you accept
    - Difference in others
    - Freedom of choice
    - Realize that change
      - does not occur rapidly
Barbara’s choices – right for her time

- Women did not have the career options
  - Like they have today
- When she was born (1925)
  - Women had been “personal property”
- Women were expected
  - To support of their husband’s career
- Few upper class white women
  - Worked outside of the home
Now, let’s take that speech apart

- We will examine how the three components of identification that were used to frame an acceptable message
  - Shared values/experiences
  - Sincere compliments
  - Appropriate humor
Shared Values and Experiences

• All through the speech she brings up shared values and experiences
  ➢ Experiences common to all people
  ➢ Experiences that she has shared with Wellesley
These are exciting times [2]

Ten years ago, when I was invited here to talk [3]

Wellesley, you see, in not just a place but an idea--An experiment in excellence...[4]

The story of the mermaid [4,5]

- Is an invitation to a new experience
- They are not so different after all
- There is another view of the situation
In effect the speaker is creating a shared perception

- A **new view** that helps them to make sense of the diversity of choices that are available.
- A **new view** that helps them to be aware that we are in an ever-changing world.
More Values and Experiences

- It is the construction (framing) of the story
  - That directs the interpretation of the situation
  - That functions as an argument to view and understand the world
- Bush invites them to take another look at diversity
  - One that says we are not all giants, wizards, and dwarfs
  - One that allows for the mermaids to play in the game

Now, let’s examine the issue of compliments.
Compliments are dispersed throughout the speech

- For a compliment to work in a hostile situation it must be sincere.
  - I am really thrilled to be here today...[1]
    - After the controversy the audience can breathe a sigh of relief
  - I was struck by both the natural beauty...[3]
    - Everyone there that day can appreciate
  - You should be proud that this is the Wellesley spirit [6]
    - Reminding them of their call to embrace diversity
Compliments

- Establish a positive tone
- Can remind the audience of better times
- Create a relaxed atmosphere
- Brings an air of “graciousness” and civility to the environment
- In this situation it makes the audience more receptive

Finally, let’s look at the role of humor in diffusing a hostile situation.
Examples of Humor

- [1] My new friend, Christine Bicknell
- [5,6] Story of Giants, Wizards, & Dwarfs
- [6] Known for the color of my hair
- [10] Life moves pretty fast
- [11] I’m not going to tell George
- [14] It’s not called babysitting
- [17] I wish him well
Humor

- Function
  - Builds rapport
  - Puts people at ease
  - Helps us to connect in a warm way
- Handled well
  - Excellent way to make points
  - Makes you more likeable
  - Disarms hostility
  - Show that you don’t take yourself too seriously
  - Helps paint pictures in the audience’s mind
We learned that Mrs. Bush had the strength to make her own choices, to stand up to the pressure to slim down, dye her hair, hide her wrinkles, or wear clothes her grandkids couldn’t drool on.
Finally,

- She won a potentially hostile audience with sincere compliments, her keen wit (humor), and through sharing common values and experiences in a new way that brought them back to embracing diversity.