

MODULE

15

Writing and Delivering

The six deadly sins — and why you own
every piece of a speech

WHAT THIS MODULE COVERS

Notice the title says *writing and delivering*. Say "write a speech" and everyone thinks about words. Say "deliver it" and the whole thing changes shape.

Every speech contains two things: **what you are saying**, and **why you are the one saying it**. The second is what makes it work. The best speeches give an audience a snapshot of who you are as a human being — your character, your values, what is in your heart. Notice what is not on that list: how smart you are.

This is not an argument for dumbing anything down. It is an argument for delivering substance through your values rather than your intellect, because that is what people connect with. Bill Clinton said "I feel your pain," and his opponents laughed — a governor with a limousine, maids and chefs. But he grew up poor with an alcoholic father and a brother who was an addict, and as America got to know him in 1992, they believed him. That is a value argument, and it carried him a long way.

Cody Keenan, Obama's speechwriter, told Steve how he starts a major speech. Not with policy. He asks the president: **what value do you want this speech to be about?** They flesh out the value first, and only then add the policy.

Speeches are one-way communication — but you can turn them into two-way. Tears, laughter, nodding heads and fear are all the audience talking back to you.

People say speeches are the hardest form of human communication. Steve says that after this training you will find them the **easiest**, because **you own every piece**. You choose the emotions, the gestures, the repetition, the pauses. Nobody interrupts. In an interview you do not own it — someone else asks the questions. In conversation you cannot predict the reaction. In a speech, all of it is yours.

6

deadly sins of
speechmaking

1

question Obama's writer
asks first: what value?

100%

of a speech is yours to
control

KEY CONCEPTS

Sin one — too fast a pace

The one that kills most speeches. We write in 12-point font, which puts ten to twelve words on a line, and then we read them fast. The eye cannot break that into four-word segments and find its place again. Everything downstream fails from here.

Sin two — a flat voice

Entirely caused by sin one. Too fast means no time for emotion, no inflection, no tonal movement, no gestures.

Sin three — reading

The vast majority of people read a speech, and reading produces exactly one emotion. One note played over and over is not a song.

Sin four — no emotion or passion

Ask what your emotional triggers are and what you can build in that brings real passion to the delivery.

Sin five — poor presentation

Bad posture, weak eye contact, a missed first impression. Credibility is constant, and when you are believable people are far more likely to like you.

Sin six — words that do not connect

Big words chosen to demonstrate intellect. People do not connect to them.

The grab

Do not open with "I'm here today to talk about healthcare." Trained speakers open by working the room — "what a great crowd" — which is really a polite way of saying get off your phone, I am about to speak, and I want all of you.

FROM THE VIDEO**Winston Churchill's deliberate mistakes**

Churchill was asked why people believed him when he spoke. His answer: because I believe me. If I did not believe myself, they would see through it and they would not believe me either.

One biography records a stranger technique. Churchill was regarded as an intellectual, and sometimes as arrogant with it. So he would write speeches in which he deliberately planted a mistake — stumbling over a word so he could correct himself.

He did it to humanise himself. A man writing speeches a hundred and twenty years ago understood a great deal.

REMEMBER

- Write to the heart, not the head. Substance delivered through values.
- Start with the value. Add the policy afterwards, if there is time.
- You own every piece of a speech. That is what makes it the easiest form.
- Check your draft against all six sins before you deliver it.

PRACTICE

Exercises

Type directly into the shaded boxes below and save the file. Come back to your answers after you have practised — this is your record of what changed.

EXERCISE 1

Audit against the six deadly sins

Take a speech or presentation you have given, or one you are about to give, and run it against all six.

PACE — how many words before each pause? Where is it worst?

FLAT VOICE — where did your tone stop moving?

READING — did you read it? How much of it?

EMOTION — which passages have no feeling behind them at all?

PRESENTATION — posture, eye contact, first impression. What failed?

WORDS — which words did you choose to sound smart rather than to connect?

Tick each one once you have done it:

- ☐ Checked all six
- ☐ Found at least two I commit regularly
- ☐ Rewrote one passage to fix them

EXERCISE 2

Start with the value

Do what Cody Keenan does with the president.

For your next presentation: what value do you want it to be about? One word or phrase.

Why does that value matter to you personally? This is the part that makes the speech yours.

Now, and only now — what is the policy, plan or ask?

EXERCISE 3

Write a speech only you could give

The test is simple: if someone else could deliver it word for word, it is not good enough.

What anecdote from your own life belongs in this speech?

What do you believe that your competitor or colleague does not?

Read your draft back. Could anyone else give it? What would you have to add so they could not?

BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

One thing from this module I will use the next time I speak:

When and where I will use it: