

MODULE

01

Communication

The paradigm, the three hurdles, and why
the words matter least

WHAT THIS MODULE COVERS

Almost everything you were taught about speaking well is built on the wrong assumption — that the words carry the message. Twenty years of testing say otherwise, and this module shows you what actually connects.

The old paradigm assumed roughly 70–75% of an audience connects to a speaker through the words. Give a person ten hours to prepare a speech and most will spend nine of them hunting for the right word, and one hour practising — and "practising" usually means reading it aloud.

Steve's research, developed over twenty years at Harvard and in training across 50 countries, found something different. Audiences connect through a combination of body language, facial and hand gestures, posture, voice, pace and inflection — with the words playing a real but much smaller role. What binds all of it together is passion and emotion.

This is why **96% of people cannot remember a single word** a speaker said. That is not a failure. If they say "I can't remember a word, but he made me feel inspired, he made me laugh, he made me cry," then the connection was made.

The reason speaking feels so much harder than conversation is that it is **one-way**. In normal life you talk and someone talks back. From a podium nobody answers, and that silence is what makes people nervous. Steve's position on nerves is blunt: he does not try to make you less nervous. He gets you concentrating on your presentation instead of on the audience, and the nervousness falls away because there is no room left for it.

96%

cannot recall a single word a speaker said

12

words most speakers say before pausing

4-5

words the human ear can absorb at once

#1

reason people never run for office: speaking

KEY CONCEPTS

The three hurdles

Every audience puts you over three bars in order. **Credibility** comes first and is built almost entirely on first impression — posture, control, confidence. **Believability** is the highest bar: if you say it in a way that shows you believe it, they are far more likely to believe it too. Clear those two and **likability** tends to follow on its own. Get someone to like you after your presentation and you have them.

One-way versus interactive communication

About 98% of daily talk is interactive and naturally emotive — you learned it before you could speak, from parents showing you love, surprise and disapproval on their faces. Speeches strip that back-and-forth away. The work of this course is turning a one-way speech back into something that feels two-way.

The twelve-word problem

Tested worldwide, most people speak about twelve words before pausing. Audiologists at Harvard put the ear's absorption limit at four to five, maybe six words, then it needs a break. At twelve words the audience is not being rude when it checks out. It physically cannot keep up.

Conscious versus subconscious communication

When a friend tells you their dog died, you do not consciously decide to lower your voice and put a hand to your chest — that is subconscious. But communication is also conscious: you can choose your emotions, your pace, your words. That conscious layer is what this course trains.

FROM THE VIDEO**Phil Davidson — county treasurer candidate, Pennsylvania**

Davidson delivered his entire announcement speech in one emotion: anger. He said even his own name angrily. He paced like a tiger in a cage, leaving the podium and returning to it — at one point apparently to read his own name.

Steve's point is not that Davidson was hopeless. Ask what he did well and most audiences say "nothing." But his pace was actually good, and pace is one of the hardest things to correct. Stop the pacing, add emotional variety, and there is a workable speaker there.

One emotion for a whole speech is like a song played on a single note. Nobody listens to that.

REMEMBER

- The words are real but they are the weakest leg. Delivery carries the message.
- Do not read your speech. Read your audience.
- You will not be made un-nervous. You will be made too busy to be nervous.
- Credibility, then believability, then likability — always in that order.

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

Establish your baseline

Steve films every student in the first week of the semester before teaching them anything, because that recording becomes the reference point for everything that follows. Do the same today, before you go any further into this course.

Record a three-minute video of yourself speaking on any topic you care about. Start the recording before you walk into frame. Then watch it once. What did you notice first?

Which of the three hurdles — credibility, believability, likability — do you think you cleared, and which did you miss?

Tick each one once you have done it:

- ☐ Recorded three minutes
- ☐ Started filming before entering frame

- ☐ Watched it back all the way through
- ☐ Saved it somewhere I can find it

EXERCISE 2

Count your words per pause

Most people run twelve words before taking a breath. The ear can hold four or five.

Play back thirty seconds of your baseline recording and count the words between each natural pause. Write the counts here.

What is your average? How far above four or five words are you?

EXERCISE 3

Name your one-way fear

Speaking frightens people because nobody speaks back. Naming precisely what you are afraid of makes it much smaller.

When you imagine standing up to speak, what exactly are you afraid will happen?

Has that thing ever actually happened to you? If so, what did you do afterwards?

BEFORE YOU MOVE ON

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

When and where I will use it: