



Now Pitching...



INTRODUCTIONS

That Pave the Way to Winning Speeches

By Craig Harrison (~2150 words)

In baseball the visiting team always bats first. This means that sometimes, even before the home team comes to bat for the first time, they're already behind several runs. As a speaker I now know the feeling. Recently I gave three speeches in one week. In each case, the quality of my introductions by those in charge had me feeling as though I was "playing from behind" before I spoke my first word. While I eventually won my audiences over, I felt extra pressure to have a 'big inning' in order to prevail. Let's face it, It's easy to strike out without the right person pitching your introduction.

Why Introductions are important

Audiences have needs. They need to know who is going to speak to them. They also want to know the speaker's topic. And they naturally wonder what qualifies the speaker to be speaking to them on this topic. What value does the presentation hold? Simply put, as listeners, they are asking what's in it for them? They wish to know the benefits to be derived from their listening to your speech.

That's a lot for us as speakers to answer to, in addition to advancing our own message. The good news is, our introducer can address these audience questions, immediately and directly, when instructed by us to do so. In fact, our introducer can do a better job than we can in accomplishing several of these objectives. That's why we drafted them. Their role on the team: to pitch our speech to an expectant, curious and sometimes skeptical audience in advance of our presentation.

The Starting Nine: Ways of Helping Your Introducer Score for You

Below are some guidelines for helping your introducer ace his or her role in setting the stage for you, the featured speaker.

1. Make sure your introduction is typed, in big print (18pt.), and that bold, italics or underline are used strategically, though not excessively, to add emphasis and give additional guidance. If possible, keep your introduction to one page. The easier you make the introduction for your introducer, the better they can deliver it. AVOID ALL CAPS! They're harder to read and thus slower to read.
2. Spell complicated or foreign words phonetically to help your introducer pronounce them correctly. For example: if your name is Orunamamu, you might spell it OH-(pause) Roon-a-MAH-MOO! I recently had the pleasure of introducing John Eweglaben. It would have been so easy to pull an Ed McMahon, and simply say, "Here's Johnny!" Instead I had John spell his name out for me phonetically, and then practiced. Incidentally, it sounds like "A-wig-LAY-Bin." Try these:

Osafran Okundye

Oh-sah-Fran A-kun-DAY

Tony Bacezwski

Tony Ba-SHEV-ski

Mademoiselle Carolyn Millet Madam-MO-zell Carolyn Me-AAAAAYE

3. Ask that your introducer read your introduction several times in advance out loud, and then again in your presence aloud so that you can correct any mistakes and give them confidence they are reading or reciting it properly. (This is akin to the warm up in the bullpen before the first official pitch.) Introductions have their own rhythm so it's important they don't just read it to themselves but out loud to you to insure they can mouth it conversationally.

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4. Ask your introducer to honor your introduction by not ad-libbing. While many introducers think this adds to their introduction, often they bring in extraneous material or go on too long, confusing listeners with unneeded information. Explain how your introduction, as is, directly leads into your presentation, and that deviating from it will undermine your presentation's impact.
5. Work out details of the transfer; How will you reach the stage or lectern? From what side will you arrive? Will you shake hands? Receive a microphone? (In which case they might need to turn theirs off.) Assume control of theirs? (Thank them for NOT turning theirs off before handing it to you.) Will you be carrying props? Give your introducer cues so he or she can assist you and not detract from your impact.
6. Make sure your Introduction has the basics: Your name, business title if appropriate, and the title of your talk.
7. Do you want your introducer to lead applause at the end of their introduction? If so, remind them in writing. Are there jokes within the introduction? If so, instruct them to laugh as a way of insuring the audience knows it's a joke, and that it's OK to laugh. Are pauses critical to the timing of your introduction? If so, spell them out in print so the Introducer knows to honor them. I often bracket instructions. For example: [pause for laughter.]
8. You know best what tone you wish your introduction to set for your speech. Let your introducer know! Are you trying to signal a good time ahead? Perhaps, you wish to set a somber or serious tone. Use cues in your introduction to support your preferred tone. For example, if your introduction signals something serious, you might ask the introducer to deliver some lines softly (whisper) or to demarcate key points in a deliberate fashion (pause here for emphasis). That which is important may be underlined or **emboldened**.

9. Just as a batting practice pitcher sacrifices his arm to warm up batters on his own team, so too should your introducer warm up or loosen up the audience. If interaction is desired, let the Introducer know questions found in the introduction are not just rhetorical, but are expected to be responded to by the audience. For instance, "Are you following me?" (If this sentence is followed by silence from the audience, it should be asked again by the introducer, more loudly and expectantly. *[Now pause for audience reaction!]*)

Stuck in the On-Deck Circle

Some introducers forget that they are there to enhance your presentation. They may be under the (mistaken) impression that *they* are the focal point and their banter is more important than your introduction. Others are so enamored of hearing their own voice they forget to welcome yours. More than once I've waited side-stage while a loquacious emcee or introducer droned on, putting the audience to sleep and eating up valuable stage time.

Curves Cross Up Your Receiver

Every once in a while a catcher will call for a certain pitch and, through miscommunication or defiance, the pitcher will deliver a curveball when a fastball was asked for, or vice versa. More than not receiving the pitch requested, the change of pace can disrupt the timing of the team. So too with introductions.

Once I was to be introduced by a colleague I had known in a previous organization. This actually comforted me, as my presentation was to be videotaped that day and I was looking forward to his smooth, effective and heartfelt introduction. As usual, I had long ago gotten my typed, one-page introduction to my friend the emcee, and was waiting side-stage to be introduced.

Imagine my surprise when my friend ad-libbed to discuss how long he's known me, what he thinks of the politics of my hometown, and how he once met my mother. Not only did he dilute my well-crafted introduction's intended impact,

but he ate up valuable time and compromised my videotape. Whether well intended or just self-indulgent, introducers sometimes balk when asked to deliver our pitch "straight as she flies."

Batting Cleanup

There have been times I have been over-introduced. You'd have thought I cured cancer, won the second world war, and was the first man on the moon. While we all like to receive well-deserved praise, sometimes our credibility is actually undermined by being over sold.

Once I was introduced with the statement "Craig is a professional speaker, he can speak on *any* topic!" While not wanting to embarrass or contradict my introducer, I was more proud of the fact that I only speak within my area of expertise when outside Toastmasters, the true mark of a professional. I nicely clarified my introducer's remarks to regain some credibility and focus on my true strengths.

Another time I was introduced as one who had built several Toastmasters clubs the audience knew. My introducer had done his own research and overstated my contributions. I chose not to correct him at the time, yet later was assailed by others in the audience for appearing to take credit for their work.

Remember, as a leader from the platform you have an obligation to be accurate, truthful and correct, whether in your language, facts or the overall presentation of your speech and yourself. Since mine was a presentation on leadership that day, I missed an opportunity to set the record straight and also share recognition with others who did the work discussed. Error: Speaker!

Know Your Role

So you're speaking and need to be properly introduced. Are you batting leadoff, the first speaker at a day-long conference? If so your introduction can set the tone for the entire day. Alternately you may be required to set the table

for ensuing speakers. Your audience may be there to hear Zig Ziglar, Jeanne Robertson or Jim Cathcart, and not you. Know your role that day and tailor your introduction accordingly.

Are you the main event? If so, your introduction may differ from that of an opening act or warm-up speaker. Develop an appreciation for the differences.

Humor and Humility

Some speakers instruct their introducers to cite their various awards, degrees and accomplishments, whether or not they relate to the presentation at hand. Their intent is to establish credibility, and thus respect, from their audiences. This is important, to a point. Try not to overwhelm your audience with all your credentials. Show your good taste by picking the ones most relevant to your speech or credibility and let the rest go.

Two other ways to garner respect from audiences: use humor and some humility. Sometimes haughty credentials serve to estrange a speaker from an audience. While speakers want to impress their audiences, their emphasis on what makes them qualified can also separate them from their listeners. Use of humor, humility and even some self-effacement serves to show audiences the speaker is actually one of them, struggling with the same issues and challenges as they are. That's endearing. Give the audience reasons to like you and they surely will.

At an event full of accomplished speakers with numerous degrees and certifications, one speaker was introduced as having her MHR. Her introducer paused to await reaction, yet there was none. Later the speaker hearkened back to her introduction and explained that the audience too were all MHRs. She informed everyone that the MHR she possessed meant she was a Member of the Human Race. She combined humor and humility to endear herself to her audience. That's a two-run homer!

Foreshadowing with your Introduction

Often your introduction can set up a running joke, plant the seeds for a future story or scene, or introduce a theme to be revisited throughout your presentation.

Just as the catcher will throw back the ball to the pitcher after a pitch, many times the speaker acknowledges his or her introducer immediately following their appearance. For instance, after a funny introduction, the humorist might add "I'd like to thank Barbara for her gracious remarks. I started to get nervous when I heard all the accolades. I thought perhaps she was introducing a different speaker! Thanks Barbara, and your check's in the mail."

The Designated Hitter

One longtime professional speaker, Tony Brigmon always brings his introducer with him. Knowing that introducing speakers isn't everyone's strong suit, Tony gives meeting planners an option. When it's time for Tony to be introduced the MC announces that a personal friend of Tony's has asked to introduce him. Then a man who looks a great deal like Tony comes up on stage and begins the introduction. "It's a pleasure to introduce Tony Brigmon of Grand Prairie, Texas. Heck, I've known him all my life. What a nice guy, a caring individual and a gem to listen to. You'll notice him right away, when he comes out he often waves his hands like this. Now, please give a warm welcome to Tony Brigmon!" And then the introducer (who we know as Tony), walks backstage, pauses a minute, and then comes back onstage waving wildly to an adoring audience. Tony's already scored humor points with his creative introduction (of himself).

A Pitch in Time...

Just remember this, you can hit a home run whether you're pitched a fastball, curve ball or knuckle ball. While your introduction can help or hinder you, ultimately it's just your introduction. You've still got the power to connect with

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your audience, score points with listeners and win them over to your point of view. You can make every audience feel like the hometown fans with a well-designed introduction. Are you ready? Batter up!

DTM Craig Harrison of Laugh Lovers Toastmasters (96430-57) in Oakland, CA is a professional speaker, corporate trainer and communication coach who makes communication and customer service fun and easy. He can be reached at 510-547-0664,

at www.ExpressionsOfExcellence.com or via e-mail at craig@ExpressionsOfExcellence.com

Sidebar of an actual introduction, in big print, with a Key to explain bold, ital, underline, parentheses, etc. accompanies this article.
(See next page.)

