

# The Importance of People

Column Editor: Harold Benjamin  
Contributor: J. Abner Peddiwell, Ph.D.

## Salute on Coming Aboard

*The present editor assumes his new duties with humility. The luster given to this column by the wit and wisdom of his predecessors he cannot hope to heighten but can only try not too much to dull. He wishes particularly to salute the colleague from whom he has just received the baton of service in this post. Fruitful investigator of the class structure of American educators, creative student of winking masks used in primitive ceremonials, and ever, whether in jesting or serious guise, defender of his country's children against all their ill-wishers or ill-workers whomsoever—. But this sounds like a citation for a degree honoris causa. It is. William Van Til, by authority of your grateful and chuckling readers, we confer upon you the title of Philosophus cum Lingua in Gena. May you always keep at least the tip of it there, even when the going is roughest. You are, we are sure, the only holder of the Ph.L.G. in existence. In deference to this distinction and to your tolerant and scholarly interpretations of Peddiwellesc, we append an interview with the professor from Petaluma as our first, hesitant step up the ladder which you have scaled in this column during the last two years.*

Harold Benjamin  
Professor of Education  
George Peabody College for Teachers  
Nashville, Tennessee

## Style Sheet for Educational Speakers

THE Sage of Petaluma was in a brittle humor. He toyed with the stem of his beverage glass and stared briefly over my shoulder.

"So you're back again," he said tonelessly.

"Why, yes, Doctor," I answered. "It's about the column I just inherited from Bill Van Til. I—"

"I know," interrupted the old man coldly. "You took it over blithely, slap-happily—if I may strike off a new adverb—and a useful one it may well prove to be for you and this column which you now want me to fill."

"Well, not exactly that, sir. I just thought that you might have something that—" I left the excuse hanging.

"Hah!" The simple ejaculation had the force of an oath. "You thought you would have me think for you again."

"Now, Doctor," I offered soothingly.

"Forget it. I'll fill the column myself this time, but if you ever happen to—"

"I won't happen to," said Peddiwell flatly. "I have stopped composing written contributions to the science and art of education. That form of communication is becoming *passé*. I have noted the clear trend of the age and have taken up another means of transmitting my thought on educational matters."

"Indeed," I breathed carefully, "and you have become—?"

"An educational speaker," the professor announced proudly, "or rather a discussion leader, resource person, workshop consultant, and similar new high-toned kinds of pedagogical orator."

"Orator!" I cried. "Hardly that, Dr. Peddiwell!"

"The word offends you?" inquired

the old man. "If it does, I will expunge it from my vocabulary. It is old-fashioned. It implies one who expresses his thoughts and feelings to others with charm, force, and unforgettable clarity. I understand your instant rejection of the term. In a world where simple ideas need to appear complex and hard to remember, an unforgettable clarity is a great handicap. Where vacillation with political winds and a lack of conviction are become virtues, force and precision of speech are vices. Where dull stodginess is a guarantee of academic respectability, charm can easily become a symbol of the wrong side of the intellectual tracks. I have accepted these current facts of professional life. You see in me a new pedagogical man. I have now become an educational public speaker—or should it be a public educational speaker or a public speaking educator? If knowing the ropes will insure my success, I am determined to make the name of J. Abner Peddiwell as familiar to the school teachers and patrons of this country as that of Allen Zoll."

"But Zoll is a—," I began.

"Certainly," the professor interposed, "and he is also a—, but we are getting off the subject."

"Er—how did you happen to make this decision to hit the September and October trails to the state and regional teachers' meetings, the February and March roads to the administration, supervision, and curriculum conclaves, the May and June pathways to the commencements convocations, the July treks to the summer workshops and seminars, the August highways to the symposia of—?" I halted, suddenly aware of Peddiwell's disapproving stare.

"What's this?" he asked. "Have you been making speeches too?"

"Well—er—yes, in a way, I have—quite a few."

"In a way," the old man sneered. "That proves it. I thought that the level of educational speakership must have dropped somewhat when I began getting so many invitations, and now I find that you—and others, no doubt—are rushing from coast to coast and border to border talking, talking, talking. Why don't we get more education done instead of talking more about it?"

"But, Doctor," I expostulated, trying to keep the hurt feeling from my voice, "the people in education want —"

"Yes, yes, certainly, but they don't know what they want, and that is why I have been working up a style sheet for all of us to follow in these addresses, speeches, talks, conferences, panels, discussions, and the rest. Here are the rules. They deal with the four main elements of time, subject matter, symbolism, and exhaustiveness.

### Marks of Good Speakership

"First, always start your speech, whether it is a full-dress lecture or a 'brief' contribution or summary, with the observation that you do not have enough time to express your great ideas. The best language to use for this purpose is the standard form: 'In the time at my disposal I cannot do more than just touch a point or two very sketchily.' Such additions as, 'I could talk for hours and not get started on this great topic,' or 'You know, I teach only the barest elements of this subject in a course meeting three hours a week for a whole semester,' while affected by some extremists, are not recommended. There is always the implied possibility that the speaker could talk for years and never get started on any topic, or that he could teach a course ten hours a week for twenty semesters and never get the naked elements of

his subject clothed in any ideas of consequence.

"After these preliminary remarks about time, pay no further attention to it. To speak less than 60 minutes when allotted 45 minutes on the program is a chief hallmark of the misguided amateur. To speak only 15 minutes on a five-member panel given a total of 50 minutes for the 'preliminary statement' is even worse. In all such discussions it is assumed that a speaker's sincerity and enthusiasm vary directly with his degree of time-hoggishness.

"The speaker's final reference to time should be made about half-way through his lecture. At this point you must say, 'Finally,' 'And in conclusion,' or 'In the seventh and last place.' This wakes your hearers up and deepens their frustrations as you drone on and on. To add, 'I really haven't anything more to say,' 'I'm just about finished,' or 'I'm going to stop in just a moment,' and then talk 30 minutes longer to prove that you have no further ideas may seem to be good tactics at first glance but is often dangerous.

### Content Is Unimportant

"Second, the content of your speech should be presented in a generally foggy manner. Never describe an issue, state a proposition, or outline a problem and then reach out and hit it on the nose. Make the initial statement with refined haziness. Step around it warily, shadow-box a little, and then ease by on the other side. This will give you a reputation for profundity, balanced judgment, and tolerance of all opinions. It will often help you get repeat engagements. People will wonder what you mean and may perhaps figure that you will break down the second time and give some hint of your real views.

"The actual content of your remarks is not important so long as you talk about sharing experiences, group dynamics, resource units, and constructive co-core elements. It is hardly necessary to warn you that you must talk about these and similarly respectable topics without saying anything about them. What *can* you say about constructive co-core elements, for example?" The old man waited inquiringly.

"Why, I—er—don't believe I know much about that topic," I began.

"You don't know anything about it," said Peddiwell flatly, "because I just made it up this moment, but you could talk about it. You could start by saying, 'In a democracy the development of constructive co-core elements depends first of all on the complete recognition by every teacher and parent in the community that all behavior is learned, but it must never be learned at the expense of true group creativeness.' You see?"

"Well—er—yes, sir. And then you could go ahead and tell how to make children learn true group creative behavior."

"No, no! Never tell 'em *how*. You can flirt with *why*, *what*, *where*, and even *when* in a properly dull and muddled way, but don't fuss with *how*. If you do, the first thing you know you will be getting down to brass tacks on some point or other. This is fatal to the approved pattern of speakership.

"Third, give some sort of symbolic filip at the end. This lends a final professional polish to your contribution. Recitation of poetry on the house-by-the-side-of-the-road level, appeals to Divine Providence for guidance, choked-up references to Mother, Valley Forge, or Marse Robert, or some combination of these standard techniques are always quite professional, but when over-done are the tools of the oratorical has-been.

It is well to give them some kind of up-to-date flavor. Within the last six months, for example, it has become fashionable to end an important pronouncement with the title of an old-time song. My own preference in this connection for the educational speeches I have been making recently is an up-state New York hillbilly gem entitled, 'I Lithp Exthept When I Thay Ithaca.'

"Fourth, be exhaustive. After you have walked around a supposed subject a few times, change it into one or two other subjects and repeat the process. Raise objections to your own statements and then answer them triumphantly. This gives variety and stability to your speech and makes the customers feel they are getting their money's worth."

"Money?" I asked dazedly.

"Why, yes," said the professor. "I am talking only of and to paid speakers. You don't mean to imply that you are an amateur who speaks for nothing?"

"Well, some of the time," I admitted.

"Oh, that's different," cried the old man generously. "You don't need to follow the rules then. We must make a clear distinction between the amateurs and the professionals. I have recently made such a distinction in verse."

"Verse? You have written a poem?"

"Composed," corrected Peddiwell severely. "A poem is in the nature of a song. I have composed a sonnet."

"Let me hear it," I begged.

Whereupon the old man threw back his head, struck the shadow of a bardic pose, and intoned the following:

#### CONFESSION OF A PAID SPEAKER

*Who beats his gums in careless enter-  
prise,  
Yackety-yacking merely for the hell  
Of it, telling tall tales or even lies,  
Should not be much condemned, he  
might as well  
Be praised, he plays a most important  
role  
In public entertainment; but the case  
Of one who works his larynx, lungs,  
and face  
For pay is different, he puts his soul  
Each hour into the outcome of a race  
Between his agile tongue and doc-  
ile brain,  
Takes a deep breath and counts it a  
disgrace  
To halt while two cc's of talk re-  
main.  
But who am I to jeer at these poor  
bums?  
I earn my bread by sweat of my own  
gums!*

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