Effective Public Speaking

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ABSTRACT
The importance of public speaking and how it can be effectively used, is what the entire treatise is all about. At the beginning the paper looks at the great impact effective public speaking had made in society in the past, with specific attention to Martin Luther King JR’s famous speech at Abraham Lincoln’s Memorial in Washington in 1963 and Adolf Hitler’s oratory in Germany between 1934 and 1944. The paper proceeds further to look at the factors to consider in effective public speaking which are thoroughly discussed vis-a-vis the effects they have on audience. In the paper, adequate attention is given to Aristotle’s three factors: ‘ethos’, ‘pathos’ and ‘logos’. On the whole, the paper concludes that good and effective public speaking can be a veritable weapon to promote self-actualisation, enhance leadership potential and contribute to better understanding in our present globalised world.

Keywords: character, logic, passion, preparation, practice, natural voice

INTRODUCTION
Public speaking has been defined in various ways by different authors. But one that is so basic is the one defined by Compton’s Encyclopaedia Phot-PY Vol. 19 (Britannica: 646 _ 647). It simply says that “Speaking becomes public speaking when a person addresses a group of more than one without interruption and takes responsibility for words ideas being expressed”. It goes further to categorise public speaking to include ‘A speaker who has a reason for speaking, and a message meant to accomplish a purpose’.

From the above definition, it is quite clear that public speaking is not by chance or rather an informal talk. It is a well arranged and structured in a way that the speaker knows in advance when he is scheduled to make his speech. As a result, he prepares his message before it is delivered. From the foregoing, we can therefore say that public speaking is to give formal talk to a group of people on a special occasion.

According to Lucas (2001) in his book The Art of Public Speaking (7th edition), a public speaker has basically three purposes for making a public speech:

(i) To persuade people to do something the speaker feels it is right.
(ii) To inform people about things they are not aware of (enlightenment).
(iii) To entertain people and make them feel happy and good about themselves.

However, public speakers most often seek to persuade an audience to adopt new opinions, to take certain actions, or see a particular situation in a new light.

Importance of Effective Public Speaking
From the classical Greeco-Roman era, public speaking has been playing a pivotal role as an instrument of persuasion in the education and civil life of the society. Aristotle’s Rhetoric composed in the 3 BC is still considered the most important work ever written on the subject. Ideas have been spread through public speaking with ripple effects on society. One of such powerful public speeches that had tremendous impact on society was the one delivered by the famous civil rights and Negro integration leader, Martin Luther King JR, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington, on the 28th August 1963, which has become known by the title ‘I Have a Dream’, before thousands of black Americans. That speech with several others he made in his crusade for the rights of the American Blacks changed the stereotype attitude of majority of Americans towards their ‘Black Negroes’. It was so powerful that
even the racists among the Americans immediately recognised that Luther was expressing an idea that could not be resisted, that they had to assassinate him. Adolf Hitler of Germany was able to hold the Germans captive by his breath taking speeches of jingoism in his avowed determination to make Germany dominate the rest of the world when he became the Reich Chancellor of Germany(1934 –1944). History books abound with many other powerful political leaders who changed their societies with their oratories. They include Abraham Lincoln of United States, in his anti-slave and civil war campaign. British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill during the second World War(1939-1944), Nelson Mandela of South Africa, just to mention a few.

Today the importance of public speaking has even become more compelling to the extent that every professional needs it, to become successful.

At seminar for staff training, at meeting, in the church, political and labour rallies, the skills of public speaking are required for effective communication. According to Lacocca (2001) in The Art of Public Speaking (7th edition), you can have brilliant ideas, but if you can’t get them across, your brain won’t get you anywhere (p. 3).

This Lacocca’s assertion was corroborated by Okobi, the President of the Nigeria Chapter of Toastmasters International when he says as published in 21st June 2007 Vanguard: *Survey after survey shows that presentation skills are crucial to success in the workplace. The person with strong communication Skills has a clear advantage over tongue-tied colleagues, especially in the competitive job market today. Many people pay thousands of naira and or dollars for seminars to gain the skill and confidence necessary to face an audience.*

This clearly demonstrates that in modern times, to get to the top in any professions, you must have the ability to make a presentation.

**Requisites For Effective Public Speaking**

The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, identifies three essential factors which a public speaker should consider when preparing a speech. They are summarised in three Latin words: ethos, pathos and logos. **Ethos:** Aristotle’s ‘Ethos’ refers to the word ethics in English. By this, he means the character, quality or integrity of the person delivering a public speech. According to him, an audience gives respect to a speaker who it believes has high moral character and deep knowledge of the topic he is speaking about. So for a public speaker to enjoy the confidence of his audience, he must appear credible, prepare well and demonstrate much interest in his subject matter. In other words, a good public speaker should seek to understand all sides of an issue before speaking about it in public. This also implies that he should be honest with what he says. Ethos also includes being courteous in your presentation by avoiding name-calling and other forms of abusive language. For Aristotle, sensitivity and awareness of the time and place of a speech is also part of the ethos. In other words, speaker should talk in a way appropriate to the occasion. Telling jokes, for example, in a funeral service is inappropriate.

Ethos also presupposes that a speaker should speak with enough volume, clarity variation of tones according to the message being conveyed in a speech. **Pathos:** ‘Pathos’ is another cardinal element in effective public speaking according to Aristotle. Pathos as it relates to public speaking means having a good knowledge of your audience before addressing it. Aristotle believes that for a speaking to be successful in public speaking, he must know what moves, inspires, and persuades his audience. In other words, an effective speaker studies and considers who might hear his speech in order to determine what might excite their anger, arouse their pity, or provoke them to action whether positive or negative. One of such classic cases is that of Luther King Jr. When he spoke to an audience of more than 200,000 civil rights marchers in Washington D.C, in 1963, he associated the aspiration and struggle of his Black Americans for social equality with the American dream of liberty as enshrines in America’s constitution.

By implication, a good public speaker must tailor his message to suit the psychological make-up of his audience and adapt to listeners’ feedback in the delivering of his speech, which again presupposes that he must be very sensitive to his listeners’ verbal, facial and other physical reactions in the course of his speech. **Logos:** According to Aristotle, the third element in public speaking is ‘logos’. The word ‘logic’ is derived from ‘logos’ in Greek. ‘Logos’ refers to the logical order upon which a speech is presented.
According to Aristotle, for a speech to be effective, it must have good and convincing reasons to support its idea. In other words, ‘logos’ is the way the entire content or argument of a speech is presented for the purpose of achieving its targeted goal: it could be to inform, to entertain or to persuade an audience to change their opinions. ‘Logos’ therefore presupposes that the language of a speaker must be articulate and suitable to the apprehension of his audience. It also includes completion of idea, so the speaker should be thorough exhaustive in his presentation. That means he should anticipate in his speech presentation questions that might arise in the minds of his listeners and clarify them.

Also, for a speech to be successful, the speaker must use words correctly and elegantly. Many listeners frown at wrong use of words and expressions which make them lose interest in a speech and have a poor opinion of the speaker. This also includes avoiding accent and unnecessary mannerisms as fillers, while making the language quite suitable to the purpose of the speech and to the audience. That is why Awake (2003: 9) advises that:

Speak clearly, and pronounce words correctly.
But avoid sounding overly precise or affected.
When we speak articulately and refrain from slurring words, or clipping off words endings, we dignify our speech and do a kindness to our listeners.

On the whole, an effective public speaker must organise his thought step by step in a logical order and steadily build up a compelling treatise - adjusting his words and tone for maximum effect.

Other Rubric of Public Speaking

1. Think Positively
Most people think that public speaking exposes one to public scrutiny which opens one to all manner of criticisms, knowing very well that one is not perfect. So people see public speaking as a source of embarrassment which makes them to shy away from it, and when they have to do it, they would become nervous. This is a very wrong notion as there is nobody who is completely perfect. For a speech to be effective, the speaker must think positively. In other words he should have the feeling that his speech will afford him the opportunity to share his idea with others and also affording him the chance to gain experience and improve his communication skills. Once a potential public speaker has this feeling in mind, he is going to be excited about the opportunity to speak in public. This will energise him to prepare adequately for his speech, which is one of the hallmarks of a successful public speaking.

2. Prepare Adequately and Practise
For a speech to be successful, commitment must be given to it. This requires a thorough grasp of its subject-matter and this demands a full study on the topic. That is the only way to speak fluently and articulately about it. In that way, you speak confidently about the subject which makes your audience to believe what you are telling them. That is why Allens (1986) says:

If it is evident that you are sincere about the ideas you express, if you know you know what you’re talking about,
You can be effective at the lectern, even in the absence of innate rhetorical gifts or in the presence of stage fright (p.6).

There is also the need for adequate practice. According to the general saying, ‘Practice makes perfect.’ Sportspeople always do a lot of practice before the day of the competition. Experience has shown that those who practise well are likely going to win the competition. The same is true of speech presentation. If a speaker practises his speech presentation several times and visualises himself presenting the speech before the real day, his speech is mostly going to be successful-- it is an experience many speakers have attested to.

3. Maintain Eye-contact and Speak Naturally
For a speech presentation to be effective, the speaker should maintain eye-contact with his audience - look at them and talk to them as if they were his long time friends. That makes them to be attentive and interested in what you are saying. On the other hand, it helps the speaker to be aware of his listeners’ verbal, facial, and physical reactions which should help him to adjust his speech if necessary. The tone of the speaker is also very critical in his speech presentation. For the speech to sink down well into the audience, the speaker should use conversational tone. In other words, the speaker should
see his audience as invited friends and speak to them as if he was speaking to some friends in a living room. That will make him sound natural and friendly to his listeners, even if they are not familiar to him. This in turn will make them more inviting and attentive to him.

4. Appearance Should Suit the Occasion
For the speaker to have a good impression on his audience he dress to suit the occasion; ditto for his mood. However, in a normal situation, the speaker should appear relaxed. Looking ruffled could make his audience lose confidence in his ability to address the subject he is handling.

CONCLUSION
In a globalised world of today that has become more interdependent than ever before, there is virtually no limit to what we can share with one another. The importance of public speaking and how it can be effectively deployed therefore cannot be overemphasized. That is why the above guides should be practised with a view to acquiring the right skills which can promote self-actualisation, enhance leadership potential, foster human understanding and contribute to the betterment of humankind.

REFERENCES
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