



by Mohamed Isa

When I told few of my relatives and friends that I was planning to quit my job and study to attain a higher degree, they all told me to go to the hospital to check my temperature! I do not blame them because they see the present and I see the future.

These were the first three lines of my personal statement when I applied to King's College London. I designed it in a way to grab the attention of the Admission Committee. And it surely did! I received the acceptance admission letter from this prestigious university!

This is exactly what you should do when you start your speeches – grab the audience's attention at once so that they end their preoccupations and focus on what you will share with them in your speech. Be creative. Be different. Be profound. You need to think and rethink about your opening because it could make or break your speech. This is the case because the audience will decide in the first 30 seconds whether to listen to you or to tune out!

In December 2015, I was attending an entrepreneurs' conference in Berlin. As part of the program, more than 20 entrepreneurs were trying to raise capital by delivering a three-minute

sales pitch. They had interesting products and services but not so when it came to their speech openings. They all started with a whisper: "Good morning ladies & gentlemen, what a beautiful weather today, thanks for the opportunity to speak to you today about my project which is about ..." What a lost opportunity to impact and influence!

So, how do you start with a bang and not with a whisper? There are number of ways of doing that and starting a firecracker is not one of them! We discussed the first way in the previous article: Getting Business Results by Telling Stories! Just begin with a story that has a conflict in it and the audience would be hooked to listen to how the conflict was resolved. Then, you can continue with the rest of your speech. To see an excellent example of this technique, watch President Obama speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2004.

The second way is to use a shock tactic. Shock the audience with a startling statement. For example: "None of all the Prophets sent by God used PowerPoint. Yes, you heard it right. None of them used PowerPoint. They all used stories to convey their messages." And then I could continue illustrating

this point by sharing with the audience how to deliver their messages effectively to the audience without using visual aids.

Another great way to open a speech is to start it with a powerful quote. Here is my favorite quote by Martin Luther King: "Life's most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others?" It is a great opening for a speech that promotes a charitable cause or for a fund raising event. In addition, the question could serve as a foundational phrase that could be repeated throughout the speech to stress the message. And not only that, it could be used as a powerful closing: "So, ladies and gentlemen, I ask you again: What are you doing for others?"

Let us continue with the theme of Questions. Asking Questions is an effective way for opening speeches because they engage the audience at a deeper level. They make your audience stop their chain of thoughts to focus on answering the question whether verbally or in their minds. To be effective the question has to be simple. For example, I used this question in one of my speeches: Are you hungry? That is it. Just three words. Then, I continued with my speech on the importance of being hungry at all times when it comes to personal growth and achieving your dreams.

These were four effective ways to open your speeches to grab the audience at once. I began this article by sharing the first three lines of my personal statement I sent to King's College London. Let me end it with the quote I used to end the statement with: "Success always comes when preparation meets opportunity." Every time you speak to an audience you have an opportunity to come across as an effective speaker, prepare well and success will be on your side. ©



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