



HOW TO DAZZLE ANY AUDIENCE WITH AN ENTERTAINING INTRODUCTION

by **Cara Foley**

At some point in our career, most of us will be asked to introduce a speaker, often at a major event where our clients, customers, prospects and other influential people will be. If you're smart, you realize this is an opportunity to showcase not only the speaker, but your own command of the platform.

It's tempting to rip the bio off a website and run through it briefly before the event, but doing an introduction "off the cuff" is a recipe for disaster. Whether you're giving an award, acknowledging a retiring professional, or bringing up the keynote speaker for the main event that evening, your role is an important one.

Every speech has a purpose, and needs to be planned. There is nothing worse than watching someone slog through a list of a person's accomplishments, without regard to length or significance. Bios are not written to be read. No one cares about all that detail. Your job is to capture the essence of the person and share with the audience a few important memorable facts that will get them excited about meeting the featured speaker.

Even the most seasoned speakers can fail the job of introductions. One of the greatest public speakers of our time, Bill Clinton, first gained national recognition with a huge flop.

Clinton's introduction of Michael Dukakis at the 1988 Democratic National Convention was so long and boring that people actually cheered at its conclusion! Johnny Carson spoofed the speech on the Tonight Show, and most political commentators at the time agreed that this was a major blow to the then Governor's future political plans. One disgruntled delegate observed, "He wrote eight drafts, but forgot to throw out the first seven!" (Sam Smith, *Shadows of Hope*).

Constructing a brief yet interesting introduction is an extremely difficult task for any speaker. The first thing you should know is that it takes time to write a brief introduction. You have to learn about the person, and then capture their essence.

Alan Perlman, author of *Writing Great Speeches*, says the goal of any introduction is three-fold:

1. First, it should give the audience a sense of the upcoming speaker's topic.



2. Secondly, it should make known the speaker's personality and major accomplishments, especially those relevant to the speaking topic.
3. And, lastly, and perhaps most importantly, an introduction should create a sense of audience enthusiasm for the both the speaker and topic.

Here are four helpful tips to consider when constructing your next relevant introduction:

- **Finesse the Obvious**

Many times, important details of the person's biography are already well-known to the audience. Preface these facts with phrases such as "As we all know..." or "most of us are probably aware..."

- **Watch Length**

If you're having trouble keeping length to a minimum, try to remember the task at hand – you are to introduce another speaker, not give a speech of your own. We usually recommend one to two minutes.

- **Stay Positive**

Introductions should never include anything that could be construed as derogatory, condescending, or otherwise uncomplimentary. Even if it is a roast, be careful with seemingly humorous anecdotes – do they reflect positively on the speaker, as well as you?

- **Build Anticipation!**

With all of the above said, don't forget to have some fun with your introduction! Test out new techniques to build the audience's anticipation of the speaker's arrival. Try to discover something interesting or quirky about your speaker, then generalize that information to everyday life. Make the audience momentarily wonder where you're going and then swiftly close in on the speaker and their topic.

Clients often ask us, "are great speakers born to greatness, or did they learn this skill?" And, we always answer in the same way – you are as good as you decide to be! Follow the above simple guidelines when planning your next introduction, and you'll certainly avoid the embarrassment that Bubba experienced in 1988.

To learn more specialized techniques for writing great speeches, including introductions, the staff and consultants of Bates Communications recommends Alan Perlman's [Writing Great Speeches](#) from The Essence of Public Speaking Series.