

Speechwriter's Newsletter

The insider's guide to writing and delivering effective speeches

April 2007

Conference Coverage

Speechwriters sing together

■ A record crowd at Ragan's Speechwriters Conference built their power, improved their effectiveness ... and sang the blues.

In the ballroom of the Mayflower Hotel Feb. 8, 250 speechwriters shouted into one another's ears at the Speechwriters Conference cocktail party. They networked over the rock 'n' roll strains of Geico communication manager Greg Marsh and his Marsh Brothers Band.

During the last song, though, they stopped networking and started singing Marsh's "Speechwriter Blues":

*"I was driving home one Wednesday, in the midst of a lousy week.
You called me on my cell phone; said you'd been asked to speak.
You needed half an hour's worth on doing business right;
You've known about it for a month, but the event's tomorrow night!"*

*I got the speechwriter blues!
You gave me the speechwriter blues!
And when you got the speechwriter blues,
You got nothin' but bad, bad news!"*

It was a refreshing break in a conference dedicated not, primarily, to singing the speechwriter's blues but to solving the speechwriter's problems.

Former Reagan/Bush speechwriter Clarke Judge, now the head of two dozen right-leaning writers who make up the White House Writers Group, gave the first good idea in his keynote address.

He urged speechwriters to build their political muscle inside the organization not by becom-

ing promoted to positions of real power, but by building what he called a "coalition of communication." Every organization, he said, contains lots of people in the management of various functional areas who understand that the organization could benefit by a focused communication strategy and more powerful speeches.

Speechwriters who want to increase the power of the executive communication program need only to find these people, gather them as an informal group and talk with them about the company's messaging—internally, externally, to the financial markets and the world.

"No one in the organization has the license to build this [coalition] but you," Judge said.

The communication coalition idea was on everyone's lips for the rest of the conference. "Thank you for giving me a name," said one grateful attendee during the Q&A, "for what I've been working toward."

*"I drank eight cups of coffee. I worked the whole night through.
I brought the speech to your office and presented it to you.
You said, 'I love the concept, the pace, the tone, the flow.
Just rewrite pages two through 12 and we'll be good to go!"*

Freddie Mac speechwriter Richard Feen introduced a more Machiavellian political idea during his session on writing policy speeches. He hesitated to recommend it—he said it's dangerous—and then he described it in detail.

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Here's how it works.

After doing your own research, you write the policy speech, just as lean and muscular as you like it, not censoring yourself or adding in gratuitous plugs to please the inevitable approvers of the draft. Then, you send it to all approvers—every VP and department head that might possibly have some input—and you tell them (nay, encourage them!) to lard it up with any and every additional point they think the speech ought to make.

When you receive this draft, you make all suggested changes, and you turn it in. But along with this “Trojan horse” draft, as Feen calls it, you also turn in your original. “I want the Trojan horse to be so bad that the real one shines by comparison,” Feen said.

Feen reiterated the danger of “getting caught” with this parallel draft strategy. But his larger point was not lost: “Policy writing is not for the faint of heart.”

*“I went back to my office and I tore out all my hair,
But I got the damn thing ready
with hours still to spare.
My words, they shone like
diamonds; they flowed like a
mighty stream.
But that night, you butchered my
baby, and it made me want to
scream!”*

Sessions and roundtables buzzed with get-ahead-quick schemes.

“Take [the CEO’s] secretary out for coffee and plumb her for personal stories about him,” one attendee recommended, adding, “She can also help you decipher his one-word e mails.”

Make room for rhetoric in town meetings—and time for given and take—by sending attendees financials that execs want to share head of time.

Get your speaker comfortable with the Q&A format by giving them a way to deal with a question they can’t answer. “Ask [the questioner] for an example, elaboration or an explanation,” Mucciolo said. Such a move will put the questioner’s own vanity at stake, said Mucciolo. “They’ll feel so much pressure to be clear that they’ll usually spoon feed [the speaker] the answer.”

Cash in on a client’s praise after a great speech. “If I had an office, I could concentrate even better,” Feen suggested speechwriters should suggest.

“You fumbled the most basic phrases; you mispronounced the host’s name.

You screwed up every single joke; your delivery’s a crying shame. You said “Uh” maybe 100 times, and came off like a dunce. Imagine how good you might have been if you’d practiced even once!”

To this last agonizing point, second-day keynoter Tom Mucciolo shared just how simple presentation skills are to understand—and how hard they are to master. Presenting is all about angles and space, the speaking coach said: The angle of the speaker’s shoulders to the audience, the proximity of the speaker to the audience, the visual availability of the speaker to the audience.

“Hidden hands equal a hidden agenda,” Mucciolo said. And an open body says you’re confident and open to the audience. “An open body says, ‘Take your best shot.’”

The audience asks, “Can we see your whole body? If we can, we get a lot of the truth [from body language]. If not, we have to guess.”

Mucciolo’s most important point: Body language makes up a huge percentage of the content that the audience takes away, especially in large settings where most of the audience can’t see the speaker’s eyes and mouth.

Speechwriters and blogs: They sleep in separate bedrooms

In advance of her post-conference workshop at the Speechwriters Conference, CEO blogging expert Debbie Weil surveyed attendees to gauge their interest in the subject.

About 12 percent of respondents said their organization publishes a blog and less than 10 percent said the organization plans to launch one this year. What’s the big holdup? Four out of five answered affirmatively to, “the time it will take to manage the blog.”

And as for personal blogs, only 12 percent have one, prompting Weil to scratch her head, saying in her session, “I can’t imagine as a writer anyone not having a blog.”

In the interest of balance, Weil shared a cartoon that showed two dogs, one saying to the other, “I had my own blog for awhile, but I decided to go back to just pointless, incessant barking.”

Singing the blues is one of the functions of any Speechwriters Conference—this is the only chance many have to escape their isolation to commiserate with others who face the same struggles. One first-time attendee expressed surprise and relief to hear her problems represented across all industries. “Corporate executives are the same species,” she said.

But speechwriters emerged from this conference with more than cold comfort: They charged back to the office with pragmatic and imaginative ideas for making the speechwriting function work better in the organizations—and for making their organizations work better for the speechwriter.

As one speechwriter said gleefully as she dragged her suitcases out the front door of the Mayflower, “I’m going to be so obnoxious when I get back!”

Demographics: Speechwriters travel more, but their work is still lonely

It’s anecdotal, but in the amorphous world of speechwriting, it’s also about as solid a survey as you’ll find. Here are some gleanings from the Speechwriters Conference registration list:

- **Of the 250 attendees, only half a dozen work in dedicated speechwriting or executive communication departments.** The rest are scattered all over the organization chart—mostly in corporate communications, PR and marketing.

- **Only 22 attendees have “speechwriting” in their title.** Other common titles are variations of “manager of executive communication,” and what appears to be a burgeoning euphemism for the speechwriter: “senior writer.”

- **Government speechwriters are working too hard.** Perhaps it’s the hell-bent Democratic Congress at work, but only about two dozen attendees worked in government, and only about 20 percent of the crowd was from the D.C. area.

- **Speechwriting is becoming a more international profession.** Twenty attendees attended from outside the U.S., 10 of them from outside North America. The attendee who flew farthest: Lorne Christianson, a speechwriter at HSBC Corp., in Hong Kong.

- **And the most exalted title any attendee had on a business card was “Advisor on Executive Communications.”**

A speechwriter's dare

■ In the interest of making
speechwriting more fun
this year, *SN* offers a
free registration to next
year's Speechwriters
Conference to the
speechwriter who
manages to most
usefully work an oddball
pop-culture phrase into
a speech.

In a luncheon session at the Speechwriters Conference in February, six speechwriters served up "Thirty Ideas in Thirty Minutes," which stayed with me longer than the killer raspberry-chocolate mousse. The panel handed out power tools—killer tips and strategies from a six-member panel of experts.

Of course, in every audience, there will be that person for whom warning labels on power tools are written.

Caution: Do not attempt to stop blade with your hand.

Presenter Richard Feen, executive communications chief at Freddie Mac, evidently forgot that part when he challenged his audience to write into a real speech the tagline from the NBC hit series *Heroes*: "Save the cheerleader, save the world."

I couldn't wait to take him up on it. In fact, I didn't wait to take him up on it. Even before Feen left the dais, I was on the case. There were, after all, prizes. Valuable prizes. A Freddie Mac t-shirt and key chain. These opportunities don't come by every day.

Right there, in the corridor outside the banquet room, I made my pitch to my client on how and why this line *needed* to be in his speech. I was back at the table in time to gather fifteen more ideas ... and panelist Dean Fletcher's unattended and untouched mousse.

That afternoon, I fleshed out the segment, polished it and turned it over to the principle. Then I held my breath.

The next morning, the Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission would stand before the Practising Law Institute with these words of wisdom: "Save the cheerleader, save the world."

Yikes. What was I thinking? Had the promise of a t-shirt stripped me of all judgment?

Nope. The speaker was not only unscathed, but delighted with the results. More to the point, I have a happy client *and* a Freddie Mac t-shirt.

The line not only made my speaker's point in a fresh, surprising way, it worked to get him quoted in media. Not paraphrased, *quoted*. Feen's idea proved to be a great creative jumpstart for a segment of the speech I'd been struggling with, as well as a successful technique to ensure the message came through intact and unfiltered.

Was it a risk? Of course. Anything fresh or memorable entails risk. A 100 percent safe speech is ineffective and forgettable, and that's not what we're paid to write. Let the other guys drag out the templates, plug in the numbers and platitudes, then run it past legal to be washed, bleached and sanitized. For our part, bring on those dangerous power tools.

Richard Feen's a genius. His suggestion to use popular culture references reminds us of what we already know—grab audience attention with humor and the unexpected. Leverage the equity of familiarity. And by presenting it in the way he did, he didn't just tell us, he showed us.

Songs, commercials and entertainment taglines now have new value. They're no longer mere background noise. They're pegs to hang ideas on.

And while the coveted Freddie Mac t-shirt and keychain are no longer up for grabs, you can still get in on the fun. David Murray and Ragan Communications have agreed to expand on Feen's idea, turning his challenge into a year-long competition.

I'm pleased to announce the first annual Richard Feen Excellence in

Speechwriting Competition. Your challenge is to write into speeches the following phrases, to be delivered between now and December 15, 2007:

1. Return your tray tables to their upright position.
2. Fat, drunk and stupid is no way to go through life, son.
3. Be vewwy, vewwy quiet. I'm hunting wabbits.
4. Drove my Chevy to the levee but the levee was dry.
5. Ask your doctor if Cialis is right for you.
6. I'd like to buy a vowel.
7. Head On, apply directly to the forehead. Head On, apply directly to the forehead.
8. I'd just as soon kiss a Wookiee
9. That's the way I like it, uh huh, uh huh.
10. Marcia, Marcia, Marcia.

To qualify:

- The phrase should have meaning and purpose within the context of the speech.
- The speech must be a real speech to a real audience.
- In case two or more speeches qualify, the winner will be the speechwriter who, in the sole determination of the judges, best used the phrases to the benefit of the speech. Bonus points if it gets press or air play.
- Documentation of each instance should be e-mailed before December 15, 2007, to David Murray at dmurrayil@earthlink.net.

Genuinely fabulous prize package: In addition to the inherent prestige and honor of the Richard Feen Excellence in Speechwriting Award, the winner will receive paid registration to the 2008 Ragan Speechwriters' Conference.

WARNING LABEL: Do not combine with alcohol. Do not operate heavy machinery. Entrant acknowledges that participation in this competition entails risks and reward. Entrant warrants that he/she is sufficiently skilled to undertake the challenge. Ragan Communications is not responsible for damage or distress, including loss of job or fingers.

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Speech of the Month

How to use a speech to beseech

■ In a provocative 'State of the
Schools Address,' Norfolk (Va.)
Public Schools Superintendent
Stephen C. Jones begged his
audience to think of every
child as their own.

The following is an abridged version of a 30-minute address delivered on Jan. 25. So much do SN editors admire the speech, written by Norfolk Public Schools communications manager Vincent Rhodes, that we've refrained from making our usual comments to create as much room as possible for the text. —ed.

Some of what I share tonight might be a bit unsettling, but I think it's something we need to discuss. As we talk about changing institutions, there is a tendency to become pessimistic. But I submit to you tonight that we cannot afford to lose our ability to dream. We cannot lose our ability to articulate our aspirations.

For too long we have tolerated mediocrity and hopelessness in public education. For too long we have accepted excuses for why some children cannot perform. We have been happy because an individual teacher or single school found a way to succeed with "those kids."

Here, Jones introduces students who have overcome obstacles.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Regardless of skin color or special need, "those kids" are *our* kids ... Those kids are my kids. I accept responsibility for each of them.

My question for you is this: Are you willing to accept responsibility for *every child* in the city of Norfolk?

The poor kids, the rich kids, the brown kids, the white kids, the boys, the girls, all of them.

These kids are *my* kids.

Are they yours?

In the wake of No Child Left Behind, many people ask: How can our current public education system ensure the success of every student. The frightening answer is that it *can't*.

I believe our response to this challenge will determine our future as a city. I agree with former Secretary of Education Rod Paige that public education is *the* critical civil rights issue of the 21st century.

Paige contends in a 2004 Wall Street Journal editorial: "If a child is denied a quality education, his future [is] dimmed by ignorance, indifference, callousness and disregard." ...

We have declared that we will become world class by the year 2010.

Here he lists a number of goals, from equality of opportunity to higher

SAT, PSAT and ACT test scores.

- a vision where ... students use disparate information to generate new knowledge ... where they employ "habits of the mind" to overcome new challenges ...

- a vision where gender, race and ethnicity aren't predictive of an academic outcome ...

- a vision where we see dramatically increased performance on SAT, PSAT and ACT tests making our students more competitive in the higher education market ...

- a vision where our students are prepared to enter challenging and emerging fields such as computer simulation and biochemistry.

We have thrown away the old paradigm and built a new one. We are assuming individual responsibility for every child. And, we are attempting to focus the hearts and minds of every community member on the message that "all truly does mean *all*."

Ladies and Gentlemen: We face a tremendous adaptive challenge. There is a well-meaning but insidious belief that "this is as good as it gets." People are thrilled because we won the Broad Prize [for Urban Education]. People are pleased that more of our students are performing at higher levels.

But, there is a secret belief in our communities—and sometimes a not-so-secret belief—that "all means *all*" is a nice thing to say, but it can't become a reality.

A while back I had a meeting with some influential leaders. When I told them we wanted every student to complete an Advanced Placement course or its equivalent and to be fluent in another language before graduation, their jaws dropped.

That reaction puzzles me. I am absolutely certain that each person in that meeting wanted that accomplishment for their own children ... In fact, they had probably done everything possible to ensure their children got the necessary experiences along the way. So, why not do the same for *all* children?

I know that my three grandchildren will have those benefits ... I know that my wife and I did everything we could to ensure that our son took higher-level math in high school ... even though he didn't like it and even though it wasn't one of his natural gifts. We pushed because we knew he needed it.

If my son can do it, why not every child? If it's good enough for my grandchildren or grandchildren born to wealth and privilege, why not every child? Folks, this isn't wishful thinking. We *know* success is possible.

Here, Jones provides several examples of "challenged" schools achieving 100 percent proficiency on various tests.

This is *not* as good as it gets. ...

I will say it now unequivocally: We are committed to every single student. Not one should drop out ... Not one should be left behind ... We are not satisfied with our performance. We are not finished, not by a long shot. ...

We can do great things ... We can ensure every child is a success ... But making that happen is a matter of *will* for this community. In my opinion, it is the greatest, most important question facing us as a city.

Make no mistake, our city leaders have been faithful partners in this endeavor. They believe in strong public education. But in fairness to them, they cannot effectively plan for the long term unless we tell them what we truly need. And our city leaders need to hear from you as well. City Council cannot make the tough choices to do what is necessary to fully fund our needs unless they know it is a high priority for the community.

We will continue to pressure the state to pay its fair share of expenses, but if we truly are to do what is right for our children, we cannot wait. ... We need a *sustained* and *predictable* revenue stream—one that doesn't pit books against *bricks*.

We know there is no "silver bullet" for fixing public education, but silver is required. If we want every child to complete Algebra I by the end of eighth grade, we need highly qualified math teachers ... But, they are hard to come by.

If we want every child to complete at least one Advanced Placement or equivalent course prior to graduation, we need to train more teachers and increase the rigor of our curriculum ... We need support courses and more enrichment opportunities.

If we want every child to fluently speak another language by graduation, we need to hire more language teachers and begin instruction in elementary school.

All these things sound great, right? Higher level math ... AP courses ... mastery of another language other than English ... Aren't these all things

you would want for your child ... or grandchild ... or niece or nephew?

Then why as a city would we not want these things for every single child?

Ladies and Gentlemen: THOSE KIDS ARE MY KIDS.

Are you ready to say it? This is revolutionary thinking.

Tonight, I am asking you to support a significant, long-term investment in public education ... If you are a parent, the value of investing in public education is obvious ... it can ensure that your child is not limited when it comes to choosing a career path or a college education. It's the difference between a graduate flipping burgers or flipping a coin to determine which Ivy League university he or she will attend.

If you are a community member or business leader, the return on investment may not be as clear. But if ever there was a case of "pay me now or pay me later," this is it. I heard a startling fact recently ... I was told that planners make projections for how many prison beds will be needed by looking at the numbers of students not reading on grade level by Grade 3. Investing in world-class public schools can keep that number low.

If you want your business to prosper ... If you want to preserve your home values ... If you want social justice ... invest in our schools.

If you want to ensure that our graduates become the next generation of compassionate citizens ... If you want to ensure they are capable leaders ... invest in Norfolk Public Schools.

Now, [the *Virginia Pilot* editorial writers are] quick to point to our recent middle school math scores and other difficulties as reasons to aim lower. But I'm talking to you tonight about investing ... and any reputable financial planner will tell you to invest for the long term.

Short-term fluctuations can be expected. The same can be said for public education. After all, kids are not widgets. We cannot machine them to precise specifications and tolerances. There will be variations and occasional set backs. But the true predictor of success is our long-term performance.

Let me share our "prospectus" with you ...

Here, he lists a number of impressive increases in test scores and national plaudits the Norfolk schools have received.

Folks, this is an impressive track record ... one that clearly demonstrates we are worthy of significant investment. You would be hard pressed to find a better return on your dollar. We are a proven, responsible steward of public funds and we continue to hold ourselves accountable for improved results.

We know no hidden pot of money exists in the city coffers. But we are willing to explore every avenue ... take advantage of every partnership available ... to help us move forward in our journey to achieving world-class status.

Are you willing to support us? Are you willing to think revolutionary thoughts? ...

I'll leave you tonight with some thoughts from a revolutionary ...

Frederick Douglass. In an 1857 speech he said: "Let me give you a word of the philosophy of reform. The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions ... have been born of earnest struggle. ... If there is no struggle there is no progress."

Ladies and Gentlemen: Our struggle lies ahead ... a struggle to recruit and retain highly qualified teachers ... a struggle to change attitudes and spread the belief that this is *not* as good as it gets.

The revolution has begun ... Its fate is in your hands.

We need your advocacy ... and we need your support. We can become a world-class school system by the year 2010 with your help ... if ... you are willing to claim *all* Norfolk's children as your own.

Good night and thank you for your attention.

Speechwriters sing: 'Hooray for Hollywood!'

■ **The Academy hires**

**speechwriters to write for
Oscar winners; good for
speechwriters, good for
the Oscars.**

If the acceptance speeches during the Oscar Awards this year were a little better than usual, we should thank the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

It hired three speechwriters to help winners write acceptance speeches that might be more than a laundry list of people to thank.

"We just know the audience gets much more involved with the winner if they're speaking from the heart about what the moment means to them," said Academy president Sid Ganis, according to *The Vancouver Province*, "as opposed to listing 15 names no one's really heard of."

Speechwriters who tape their speakers should destroy the tapes. That's the lesson learned the hard way by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, whose speechwriter's tapes got into the hands of opponent Phil Angelides. Angelides leaked the tapes to the media, and soon the public heard Schwarzenegger call Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata "a very sick man" and say assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez lacks "passion" on issues, but is a real "political operator."

Schwarzenegger's Communications Director Adam Mendelsohn issued a statement shortly after the tapes surfaced:

"In what can only be called reprehensible and shameful, those associated with the Phil Angelides campaign have leaked the private conversations of Governor Schwarzenegger to the media again. This type of behavior is exactly why people have such a low opinion of politicians.

"There are over three hours of private tapes. They show a Governor who is thoughtful, concerned and focused on solving some of California's most serious problems. Governor Schwarzenegger discusses his hope of inspiring kids to accomplish their dreams. He shares his ideas on tolerance and the need for as many tolerance museums as gymnasiums. The Administration is releasing the recordings in their entirety to the media because the people of California deserve all the information directly rather than through anonymous leaking.

"On four separate occasions our speechwriter recorded the Governor during practice sessions. The purpose of these sessions was to have a free-flowing, private discussion about a wide range of topics. The information

was then used for speeches, opinion pieces and to develop policy statements for the Governor. There were no additional recordings."

Nicely handled.

Speaking of California, speechwriters in the northern part of the state are organizing. HP speechwriter and blogger Ian Griffin (<http://www.exec-comms.com/blog>) convened a dinner at Ragan's Speechwriters Conference for people interested in helping him form a Northern California Speechwriters Forum.

Griffin explains on his blog that the group plans to hold face-to-face meetings soon, but that "the main form of communication will be via the Web."

He's started a Yahoo Group where speechwriters can share job postings and professional development tips: http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/nc_speechwriters/join.

To contact Griffin directly: ian.griffin@exec-comms.com.

Leaders without language. Veteran Democratic political speechwriter Thomas LaFauci wrote of his disappointment in this year's State of the Union Address and the Democratic response. The former speechwriter to House Speaker Tom Foley and Senators John Kerry and Joe Biden wrote in the *Boston Globe* Jan. 26,

"We did not hear the language of leadership on Tuesday night. Sadly, we live in a time when rhetoric is pejorative, and the war of words is waged with safe, easily digestible sound bites and 30-second ads, rather than with soaring oratory that raises the roof and touches our hearts.

"Antoine de Saint-Exupery said, 'If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.' Anyone can put words on paper and call it a speech. But great oratory takes a clear vision, a vibrant imagination, and a profound understanding of the sound words make. That's what I didn't hear."

And President Reagan's former speechwriter Clarke Judge lauded his late boss's ability to edit, claiming in his keynote speech at the Speechwriter's Conference that Reagan once cut a text Judge had written in half without eliminating any whole sentence.

Tips & Tactics

Speechwriters Conference yields ideas you can use today

These ideas were gleaned at the Speechwriters Conference:

An exchange between two speechwriters, one of whom was trying to figure out when he might have time to read blogs. The other suggested Friday afternoons are a good time to surf the blogosphere.

"On Friday afternoon I'm just getting cranked up," said the weary military speechwriter, who went on to explain that Friday afternoons he writes a speech for his commander.

"Okay," said the other. "What are you doing on Monday mornings?"

"Still recovering from Friday afternoon!"

Don't roll your eyes when your speaker asks, "Why are we doing this event anyway?" It's a sign that he or she is wondering—maybe for the first time!—how the speech fits into his or her strategic role as leader of the organization, according to White House Writers Group director Clarke Judge. This is as good a chance as any for a speechwriter to start a conversation about creating a more organized, disciplined executive communication strategy.

A question that should occur to a speechwriter before accepting a speech: "Should I be the speech-

writer?" Freddie Mac speechwriter Richard Feen says some subjects are too complex and foreign for the in-house speechwriter to handle; and other speeches require more access and in-house knowledge than a freelancer might have. Turning down a speech is difficult for either type of speechwriter; but taking an impossible assignment is potentially disastrous.

Employee town hall meetings were a big topic at the conference. In a breakfast roundtable, speechwriters shared how they keep these meetings entertaining. Several said they use an interview format, wherein the corporate communication VP or a division manager or even a friendly local or industry reporter interviews the CEO in front of the audience. And to get questions from the audience without always-transparent plants, Bank of America executive communication director Todd Rubenson goes into the audience before the meeting and asks a few audience members to come up with questions and ask them. "Be a leader," he tells them. "Step up."

Is your speech focused enough?

One test is, "Can you come up with a catchy tagline for the talk?" If so, do it, says Feen, who uses taglines to quickly convey to media people what the speech is about. If not, it's back to the drawing board with the speech.

Statistics are a crutch; they're not your legs.

Reuben Bronee, speechwriter to the premier of British Columbia, prefaced his session on using statistics creatively by saying, "A speech that relies too much on numbers relies not enough on a good idea."

An audience member asked Bronee where to find illuminating statistics.

Bronee answered a dumb question with a rhetorical one: "Isn't Google a beautiful thing?"

If you're working for UPS, don't send them a package with FedEx,

was Fletcher Dean's advice to freelancers. Dean, who writes speeches in-house at Eastman Chemical and moonlights on the side, knows whereof he speaks: "Know the person you're writing for."

Don't let your speech's message be diffused by the Q&A.

Dean writes a second conclusion for his speakers to deliver, reiterating the points of the speech, after the Q&A is over.

Do your speakers suspect you're ignoring the changes they recommend? When you send a revised draft, send two: First, the clean revised draft, and a second "track changes" draft, said veteran political speechwriter Bob Lehrman, who testifies that most speakers are satisfied with the existence of the track changes draft. "They never even look at it," he says.

Why it's important to witness the delivery of the speeches you write.

"Second-hand opinion is like second-hand smoke," Feen said. "It can kill you."

It's not enough to spout messages at the media or the investment community.

The speechwriter's job is to *integrate* the organization's messages into themes and messages that have currency in the world, Judge said: "The more you integrate your messages with [the media's message] the more powerful you're making your principal's messages."

Ballsiest idea we heard at the conference:

One attendee organized an employee town meeting around a dialogue between the CEO and the head of the union.

The whole point of practicing a speech.

Leaders' "personalities come out when they are no longer fighting the text," Judge said.

"When you hear 'We don't have a big budget,' listen," said freelancer Colin Moorhouse. "And if someone says they need a speech but they don't have a lot of money, run, run, run!"

We owe speakers a full text, said Rubenson.

Even if they speak from bullet points, a full text will help them know the right transitions—and transitions are a big part of the speechwriter's contribution.

And if you don't know him or her yet,

get to know your organization's historian or archivist, said Feen. And if you don't know why that relationship could be useful—get a new job, says *Speechwriter's Newsletter*.

For more, refer to the copious posts issued by HP speechwriter Ian Griffin, who blogged the Speechwriters Conference (<http://www.exec-comms.com/blog/?p=165>). —ed.

Speeches of the Month

Overheard & Understated ... at the Speechwriters Conference

■ A rare speechwriter joke and other goodies

Overheard in sessions, hallways and bathrooms at the Speechwriters Conference, Feb. 7-9, at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C.:

Former Gore writer and American University rhetoric teacher Bob Lehrman committed speechwriter blasphemy when he said that capturing a speaker's voice is a "far overrated virtue." Ruther, he declared "preposterous" the notion that it's the speechwriter's job to "give a client what they'd do if they had the time."

"What if I hire a roofer?" Lehrman asked. "Do I want him to do the kind of roof I would do if I had time?" *SN* has asked Lehrman to elaborate on these point in a future column for these pages. Should be interesting.

You think you waste too much of your time preparing PowerPoint slides? One conference attendee has to do PowerPoint for executives, even though they don't use it when they give the speech. When she asks them why they need it, they say, "To keep us on track."

When? "In case we rehearse."

Something all speechwriters should keep in mind. "People spend 99 percent of the time thinking about themselves," said Toronto-based speechwriter Liam Scott in a session how to create corporate theater. "Actually, that's probably a little low."

A counterpoint to speaking coaches' assertions that speeches hinge on presentation ability: "95 percent of your speakers will be mediocre to

poor," said freelancer Colin Moorhouse. "The only thing they have in their arsenal is the words you give them."

You know you have a pretty elaborate executive communication strategy when, like Bank of America executive communication boss Todd Rubenson, you're not at liberty to hand the strategic plan out to other speechwriters.

Eastman Chemical speechwriter Fletcher Dean summed up the experience of working at an engineering company: "It's a sea of Dr. Spocks."

"Don't let the speaker say, 'I'm passionate,'" advised freelancer Liz Mitchell. "Have them *show* passion in the speech."

Something a speechwriter must assert with clients: "I am somebody, I have a brain," says Richard Feen, who suggested that getting an advanced college degree helps speechwriters make that case.

And when things go bad—when you're bawled out by a client—don't take it personally, says Feen, who recalls being dressed down by a CEO and walking out of the office in a daze. The administrative assistant comforted him, saying, "Honey, he wouldn't yell atcha if he didn't really like ya."

Unless we see a big shift over the next few months, don't look for a lot of sessions on CEO blogging at next year's Speechwriters Conference. Judging by the number of shaking heads and frowns in Debbie Weil's sparsely attended session on the subject, ghostwriting the boss's blog is not something speechwriters are all that eager to do.

Many speechwriters seem deeply skeptical of all blogs and their content: "Who knows if it's accurate?" said one. "Who cares?" retorted another.

And finally, Clarke Judge told a joke. Jesus is walking down the road and comes across a cripple who's crying. He heals the cripple and the cripple gleefully runs back into town to tell the happy story. Further down the road he comes across a blind man, also crying. He heals the blind man, who runs back into town to celebrate. Finally Jesus comes across another man who is crying.

Why are you crying, my son?" "I'm a speechwriter and I can't think of any jokes."

Jesus sat down and cried with him.

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