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Resource

The Power of a Stump Speech



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The Power of a Stump Speech

by Gary Mayes

As I write this, we are neck deep in a presidential campaign. Every day, every candidate is working hard to get his or her message out to people in a memorable way. In a world of complexity, political candidates know they only have a sound-bite to communicate the heart of their message.



This unique challenge of politics is the territory that gave birth to the notion of a stump speech. Others have called it an “elevator speech.” No matter what you call it, the point is simple: if you cannot communicate your central message in 30 seconds you won’t be able to communicate it effectively in 30 minutes.

When it comes to vision, the stump speech is a very simple, highly flexible communication tool. It is laser-like in its ability to communicate essential information. The discipline of crafting a stump speech will enable you to communicate vision in almost any setting. It is a powerful tool for reinforcing and anchoring basic understanding of vision and direction.

“The real power of a vision is unleashed only when most of those involved in an enterprise or activity have a common understanding of its goals and direction.”

John Kotter, *Leading Change*

If you are a leader, you face the constant challenge *and* constant opportunity to connect your people to this common understanding that Kotter speaks of. Mastering a stump speech will give you the ability to connect vision to any conversation or any meeting.

A stump speech is far more than a polished branding message to be delivered in formal settings, it will serve you in a host of common scenarios every leader encounters. Some examples...

- You are interviewing a potential new hire and need to provide a simple picture of what your organization is about.
- You are writing a thank you note recognizing someone’s contribution and need a simple way of reminding them why their efforts matter.
- You are making an announcement about some new initiative and need to connect this effort with the big picture of your vision.



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—Gary

- You are in a large gathering, at an airport, or in some other way meet someone who wants to know more about what you do.
- You are in a fund-raising conversation and need to present the essence of your vision in an uncomplicated way.
- You are leading a discussion to evaluate a project or major initiative and you need to reinforce the core criteria by which things will be measured.
- etc. etc.

What makes a good visionary stump speech?

- It connects vision to the realities of real need with real opportunity.
- It is very concise, 1-2 sentences, yet built on a power-packed outline which hooks the imagination and emotion of the listener.
- Each term and phrase is essentially the bullet point of an outline that can be expanded into longer conversations or presentations at a moments notice.

Think you have your stump speech down pat? Here's the test:

Imagine you step into an elevator with someone new to your business, church, or organization. They are getting off one floor up, so you don't have long. They ask you what your vision is...

What are the exact words you would use to answer them before the elevator doors opened again?

If the ideas are right there on the tip of your tongue but difficult to express, it would serve you well to go back to work.



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Now, if that scenario seems hard to identify with, then try this one:

You are in a leadership team meeting and you are being asked to justify a proposal you are making. Could you, without hesitation, complete this sentence, ***“the reason I believe we need to do this is that because our vision is _____ [insert 1-2 sentence stump speech here]_____.***

Worksheet

The Stump Speech Challenge:

You have a good handle on your vision. Take the challenge and develop a stump speech you can use. Specifically, it will help you to create two versions of your stump speech that answer the question: "What is our vision?" First, create an outline for a two-minute version and then work to condense it into one or two sentences.

An old communication principle applies: if you can't make your point in 1-2 sentences you can't make it in 1-2 hours. You can always expand, but being concise is the true challenge.

Your goal, answer the simple question: **What is your vision?**

Try to connect your vision to the realities of real need with real opportunity in a way that hooks the imagination and emotion of the listener.

2 minute version: [list bullet points & key phrases/words]

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1-2 sentence version: [write it verbatim]



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