

title:
author:
publisher:
isbn10 | asin:
print isbn13:
ebook isbn13:
language:
subject
publication date:
lcc:
ddc:
subject:

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The things that really matter about

Making the Best Man's Speech

John Bowden

essentials

Published in 1999 by
How To Books Ltd, 3 Newtec Place,
Magdalen Road, Oxford OX4 1RE, United Kingdom
Te: (01865) 793806 Fax: (01865) 248780
email: info@howtobooks.co.uk
www.howtobooks.co.uk

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data.
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Edited by Julie Nelson
Cover design by Shireen Nathoo Design
Produced for How To Books by Deer Park Productions
Typeset by Anneset, Weston-super-Mare
Printed and bound in Great Britain

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Preface

A best man's speech can make or break a wedding. In *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, Hugh Grant dredges up the speech from hell. 'Apparently Paula knew that Piers had slept with her younger sister before I mentioned it,' he explains cheerily, 'but the fact that he had slept with her mother came as a surprise.'

And now it's *your* turn 'to say a few words'. *You* won't allow the combination of champagne, nerves, inexperience and indiscretion to ruin the bride's big day, will you? Of course not. Whether you feel honoured or lumbered or both you're going to do a great job. If you follow the simple guidelines suggested throughout this book, yours will stand out as a speech to remember and for the *right* reasons. It will be a wedding gift to the bride and groom and an entertainment for the crowd.

JOHN BOWDEN

1 Learning the Essentials

Taking the trouble to prepare a few special words and gathering up the courage to deliver them must rank amongst the most enchanting wedding presents you can give.

5 Things That Really Matter

- 1 CONFIRMING THE PROGRAMME
- 2 KNOWING YOUR PURPOSE
- 3 MAKING HAPPY TALK
- 4 KEEPING THE AUDIENCE INTERESTED
- 5 REMEMBERING THE GOLDEN RULES

So you have been asked ‘to say a few words’ on the big day. The problem is we don’t get much practice, do we? That’s why this first chapter gets back to basics by telling you for the first time, about the essential requirements of any successful best man’s speech.

You are replying on behalf of the bridesmaids. If there are no bridesmaids, regard yourself as speaking on behalf of the guests. What you must do is make a humorous and optimistic little speech which keeps everyone entertained and amused. If you can successfully combine a few friendly insults about the

groom with a couple of congratulating remarks about the bride *and* groom you'll be hailed a hero!

The audience is on your side. They are willing you to do well. Quite frankly, they won't give a damn if you fluff a line or two. What they *will* mind, though, is if it becomes embarrassingly obvious that you have not even bothered to make the time or effort to find out what is expected.

Is This You?

I've never been a best man before. Help! Of course I want the speech to be witty and entertaining. But more than that, I want it to be over. I know I'm supposed to be amusing but I'm not sure what message, if any, I'm supposed to convey. I've made a wedding speech before. I think it went reasonably well. The couple in question are at least still talking to me. Unfortunately, they're not actually talking to each other. What I really need is a simple checklist of do's and don'ts for a best man's speech.

1 Confirming the Programme

Traditionally, the show opens with the *bride's father* who plays the sober, sensitive straight man of the wedding. He's given away his darling daughter and, after picking up the tab, that's probably about all he can afford to give away.

Second comes the bridegroom who's expected to be middle of the road: he needs to show he understands the importance and significance of the occasion, yet he needs to be amusing too. Tricky. He'll probably spend so much time sitting on the fence that he'll end up with splinters in his bum.

And finally comes the star of the show, the best man. His speech should contain plenty of humorous asides and friendly insults but these should all be underpinned with a few congratulatory thoughts and optimistic remarks. As we shall see, the best way to achieve this

balance of irreverence and sincerity is to follow the
Ping Pong Principle of:

praise ... sting

roast ... toast

ping ... pong!

However, this conventional pattern of speeches assumes that the bride was brought up by two parents and today over two million people in Britain haven't been. And things have changed socially and culturally too. Girl power and all that. Today far more women than ever literally want to speak for themselves.

So now it's perfectly acceptable for speeches to be made by other people instead of, or as well as, the traditional big three perhaps by a close family friend, by the bride's mother, by the bride and groom jointly, or by the bride herself. It all depends on the particular circumstances, attitudes and backgrounds of the newlyweds.

The speeches should begin after the guests have finished eating. Make sure their glasses are charged *before* anyone speaks. If there is a toastmaster, he will say something like 'Ladies and Gentlemen, pray silence for Mr Ben Nevis who will propose a toast to Mr Sydney and Mrs Pearl Harbour.' If there is no toastmaster, the best man should do the honours, but in a less formal manner: 'Ladies and Gentlemen, please be silent as Mr Ben Nevis proposes a toast to Mr Sydney and Mrs Pearl Harbour.'

The important thing is to find out what the programme of speeches will be and precisely where you will fit into it.

2 Knowing Your Purpose

The main purpose of every wedding speech is to propose a toast or to respond to one, or to do both.

The bride's father (or close family friend, relative or godfather): proposes a toast to the bride and groom.

The bridegroom (possibly with the bride): responds to the toast and then proposes a second toast.

The best man (or best girl): responds to the second toast on behalf of the bridesmaids (and any other attendants).

A simple acknowledgement of your purpose within the first few sentences of your speech is all that is required: 'It seems strange replying to the toast to the bridesmaids because, as you can see, I'm not a bridesmaid ...'

3 Making Happy Talk

This is a happy day. Your speech should reflect this. It should be:

Optimistic: this is not the time to share your personal woes, paint a gloomy picture of the present or offer dire predictions about the future.

Always look on the bright side of life!

Enlivened with humour: the bride's father and her new hubbie have probably already done more than enough of the serious and emotional stuff. What the audience wants now is to relax, sit back and have a good laugh.

Keep any serious messages to an absolute minimum.

A tribute to the happy couple: even though your offering should be sprinkled with insults, they should all be friendly and liberally sugared with praise.

Let them know you don't really mean a word of it the insults, that is, not the praise!

4 Keeping the Audience Interested

Your aim is to communicate with your audience to establish a dialogue with them to turn listeners into participants. How? By involving them. By allowing them not only to hear your speech but also to experience it.

Nowadays, the average audience has the attention span of a two-year-old. People have been programmed to absorb soundbites. Talk at length about people or places they don't know and they will soon lose interest.

Worry if the audience starts looking at their watches: panic if they start shaking them to make sure they're still working.

As you plan and prepare your speech, remember these three little words:

KISS THE BRIDE

This will remind you of two vital things. First, the word KISS will remind you to:

Keep
It
Short and
Simple

Don't suffer from the illusion that you can make your speech immortal by making it everlasting.

In the Bible, the story of the Creation is told in 400 words (that's under 3 minutes) and the Ten Commandments are covered in less than 300. Try to say everything you need to say in less than 1,000 words

(7 minutes). Size *does* matter. And no speech can be entirely bad if it's short enough.

Stand up to be seen. Speak up to be heard. Shut up to be appreciated!

Secondly, the words THE BRIDE will remind you that it is *her* big day. Don't spoil it by embarrassing her or by knocking the institution of marriage.

5 Remembering the Golden Rules

Just about everything we do in life is governed by rules. Making a best man's speech is no different.

This simple ten-point plan will ensure the contents of your speech will not be cited as grounds for divorce:

Structure the speech around the bridegroom's life story from the first time you met him, ribbing him along the way. It's also quite nice to refer to some news stories and world events which were taking place around the time of his birth.

A fairly risqué[risqué] joke is usually acceptable if it's about you: 'I never speak longer in public than I can make love in private ... so in conclusion', or about the bridegroom: 'Mike's been so unlucky with women that we used to call him Bedspread because he's turned down so often.'

Never embarrass the bride. A wedding day is a day of romance and a few crass words can shatter it.

No direct references at all to the sexual act, and certainly none to bodily parts. Innuendo is fine, though: 'The bride and groom will be going upstairs soon to put their things together.'

No direct or indirect reference to the previous sex lives

of the bride or groom.

Avoid slightly sour quotes, like: 'Marriage isn't a word, it's a sentence.'

Include a few little compliments about the bridegroom even if this will be a novel experience!

Learn your opening and closing lines by heart but rehearse the rest of your speech not to be perfect, but to be comfortable. If you feel comfortable, so will the audience.

Never, however well it's going, talk for more than ten minutes. Leave them wanting more.

Enjoy yourself!

MAKING WHAT MATTERS WORK FOR YOU

Make sure you know the order of speeches.

Don't forget to respond to that toast.

Keep the overall tone light and upbeat.

Your speech must be interesting even to people who have not met all the characters you are talking about.

Follow the ten golden rules and you won't go far wrong.

2

Saying it With Humour

Your speech needn't be 'squeaky clean', but it mustn't be vulgar either. Include something old, something new, plenty borrowed, but absolutely nothing blue.

3 Things That Really Matter

1 TELLING FUNNY STORIES

2 ROASTING THE BRIDEGROOM

3 REHEARSING AD-LIB LINES

When it comes to questions of taste and taboos, propriety and political correctness, things continually change. You have to keep up with the times. You must use your own judgement and common sense about the question and perhaps take advice from the bride and groom.

Know your audience. Judge how broadminded they are likely to be. If you have any doubts about a joke, cut it. It may be a stunningly good wheeze in your opinion, but if you offend or embarrass your audience, you will have a very hard time winning them over again.

The important thing to remember is that a wedding is a family occasion. Any speech which aims at the lowest common denominator will not inspire affection or respect, and such a performance is ultimately barren of genuine humour.

Is This You?

I want my speech to be funny, but I'm not a naturally funny person. I know I'm supposed to take a few pot shots at the groom. But how far should I go? The bride's family and groom's family hardly know each other. How can I create a speech which they will all find amusing and entertaining? My problem is that the groom is a very serious man. How on earth can I find funny things to say about him? I'm expecting a little ribbing from one or two people in the audience. It would be useful to have a few lines prepared which I could throw back at them, if this happens.

1 Telling Funny Stories

Everyone loves a story. If you can find an entertaining and relevant anecdote or gag you are onto a winner. You will not only hold your audience's attention but also bring your speech to life by evoking strong images in their minds.

Matching your choice of anecdotes and jokes to the nature of the audience is easy when the group *all* know the bride *and* the groom well. At a wedding reception this is often *not* the case.

Tell jokes and stories which everyone present will find interesting and amusing.

The bride's Great-Aunt Maud won't be interested in a long story about how you and the bridegroom conned your way into last season's 6th Round FA Cup Replay at Maine Road and the groom's workmates won't take

kindly to a detailed description of an eight-year-old girl's Saturday morning ballet lessons.

But if an incident or an amusing episode is so well known

to at least half the crowd that they will expect you to make some mention of it, you can avoid boring the other half by not relating the whole story. What you must do is merely allude to it. Let's assume the groom had a nasty bout of food poisoning while on his hols last year. There is no need to bring all that up again. One simple gag will do the job:

'James went to Greece last summer ... Had the shish kebabs all week.'

Now everyone present should find that line amusing with the possible exception of James.

Long stories are always risky. If a thirty-second anecdote dies a death, you're in trouble. If a three-second one-liner flops, probably no one will even notice.

Finally, remember to keep your speech clean well, cleanish anyway. Nobody will be shocked by a little innuendo in fact, that's expected:

'I gave (*groom*) a book called *The Joy of Sex*. I thought he could take it on the honeymoon and read it during his off moments.'

However, your humour should never sink to the lavatorial. The good news is: it is often possible to tone down a good 'dirty joke' to make it acceptable in even the most polite society. By changing a few swear words, a joke is not necessarily killed. It can still be well worth using. You just have to accept that by toning down the language, you are also toning down the reaction.

2 Roasting the Bridegroom

Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest target of them all? Most best men consider it their main role in life to have a serious go at the bridegroom. What most of them fail to realise is that before their verbal onslaught begins, they should first extract the Michael from *themselves*:

'My ambition is to be the last man on earth so I can find out if all those girls were telling the truth.'

'In my youth I used to manage the five Nolan Sisters. These days I can only manage two.'

'They all laughed when I said I wanted to give a funny best man's speech, but they're not laughing now.'

Self-mockery of this kind is a subtle demonstration of your underlying self-confidence (honestly!). It offends nobody. More importantly, though, it grants you licence to take a pop at the bridegroom. If you are seen to be able to take it, it follows that you will be allowed to dish it out and that's when the real fun starts.

The important thing to remember is that all your insulting remarks about the bridegroom have to be 'friendly' and they must have the ring of truth about them in order to be funny.

Try to hit the button, but don't be *too* cruel. Even if your victim is liable to take it well, many members of the audience are going to be concerned for his feelings if you cross that sensitive line.

The idea is to make a verbal caricature. Take a defect,

mannerism, personality trait or quirk and exaggerate it.
Does he have a beer belly, red nose, wig? Is he a
constant

moaner? United supporter, anorak? Any or all of that would make for a much better speech.

Let's do a little friendly mocking. Our target? Alan Murdock, who has just wed the lovely Laura. What does everyone present know about Alan? Well first, he's a salesman who likes a drink he thinks water is fine, so long as it's taken in the right spirit. Second, he's a little canny with his dosh. And third, he's show can I put it? fat. That's all we need to know. Okay, let the roasting begin:

'Doesn't Alan look wonderful? We're all overjoyed that he is winning his long battle against anorexia. But he was a little under the weather last week so he went to the doctor's for a check-up. They found the problem. There was a small amount of blood in his alcohol system. Alan drinks so much lager, Fosters think he's a wholesaler. You know, he could become a millionaire if he wanted to. He wouldn't need to win the Lottery or go on Chris Tarrant's quiz show, he could just take his empties back to the off-licence. But Laura, I've some great news for you: Alan isn't going to drink any more. Unfortunately, though, he isn't going to drink any less either.'

But would this material be funny if Alan were a teetotaller, or if Steve Backley might mistake him for one of his javelins? Of course not. The audience laughs at the parody of what it recognises as Alan's characteristics and little foibles. All your jokey insults need to have this kind of credibility. The more obvious the characteristic, the more effective the speech will be.

Never contrive a characteristic to justify a joke, no matter how funny you think it. It simply won't ring true. The rule is: characteristic leads to joke, never vice versa.

For instance, don't laugh at the groom's colourful use of language, unless you are sure the audience knows he really could swear for England and is not merely the kind who just might bleat out an apologetic 'oh, blast' and then only if mauled by a lion.

But what if you believe his reputation for tightfistedness is unjustified? What if you consider it no more than a coincidence that Alan is always in the gents when it's his round? Tough. You must make jokes on the basis of the way other people perceive an individual, rather than focus your humour on the true situation, as only you see it.

'When I called on our not-so-handsome groom last week, I found him carefully stripping the wallpaper. "Are you redecorating?" I asked. "No, moving," he replied. That man is so mean for his son's sixth birthday, he bought half a cake with three candles and held it in front of a mirror.'

And don't call the kettle black. Make absolutely certain none of the lines you're using against the bridegroom could apply equally (or even more so) to you. If you wrote off your car last year, don't take a pot shot at Alan's poor driving. If you are follicly challenged, don't even think about announcing that the groom has been voted The Man Most Likely To Recede.

There are ways of manipulating a joke so it doesn't reflect on you. Here is a little trick which will give you the benefits of insulting jokes whilst shielding you from too much responsibility. The idea is to attack the nasty things people say about the poor old victim. You appear

to defend this unfortunate, misunderstood individual,
and even side with him in outrage. Here's how:

‘I’ve heard it said that Alan is the most independent salesman his company has ever employed. They say he doesn’t take orders from anyone. They say waiting for him to close a deal is like leaving a light burning in the window for Lord Lucan. It’s not true. It’s not nice. It’s not fair. I can tell you for a fact, he made fifteen cold calls yesterday and they all gave him two firm orders. They all said, “Get out and stay out”. So why do people spread these silly stories?’

You may even mildly rebuke the audience for dignifying such scandalous rumours with laughter:

‘Why are you laughing? We’re talking about a man’s reputation here. Alan is good. He could sell Salman Rushdie a timeshare in Tehran. He doesn’t know the meaning of the word rejection. Mind you, he doesn’t know the meaning of lots of other words either.’

It is safer to use so-called positive humour against the bridegroomportray him in a way he would wish to be seen.

For instance, if Alan is proud of his golfing prowess and wealthy life-style, you could say:

‘Alan drove four successive balls into the water and then blew his top. He turned, grabbed his bag and threw the whole lot into the pondbag, clubs, balls and all. Then turned to me and said, “Now I’m going to jump in there and drown myself.” I said, “I doubt it.” “What do you mean, you doubt it?” he snarled. And I said, “You never have learned to keep your head down.” Later, when Alan had calmed down, he decided he’d buy a

new set of golf clubs. He bought Wentworth, the Belfry and St Andrews.'

3 Rehearsing Ad-lib Lines

Rod Stewart sang about ‘well-rehearsed ad-lib lines’. You must be able to think on your feet, but it’s always useful to know a few humorous lines you could use under the right circumstances.

Remember: all those brilliant ad-libs you hear on television are very well rehearsed.

During a wedding speech, you’re most unlikely to be faced by loud-mouth drunks or other nasty punters. And other interruptions, such as boisterous latecomers or early leavers, are likely to be minimal. However, these things can happen, and it is best to be prepared for them. So here are some lines that could prove useful in handling the kinds of problems or distractions you may encounter:

Your microphone starts playing up: ‘Well, Mike, that’s the end of our double act; I’m going solo.’

You fluff a line: ‘Sorry, I’m breaking these teeth in for the dog.’

You forget a name: ‘I’m so sorry, there are three things I always forget: names, faces and, er, ... I can’t remember the other.’

To a heckler: ‘Oh well, every village has one.’

To anyone leaving: ‘S/He’ll be back in a wee while.’

To anyone returning: ‘Could you hear us out there? We could hear you in here.’

A catch-all when anything goes wrong: ‘I hope that

camcorder is still running. That's certain to be worth £250.'

But don't take the rise out of anyone until you've established yourself as the likeable, loveable chap that you are. I would

also counsel restraint; once you have responded to a friendly heckler or made a humorous remark about someone making a call of nature, it is best to get on with your speech and leave any further disruptions to go unnoticed.

MAKING WHAT MATTERS WORK FOR YOU

Judge how broadminded the crowd is likely to be. Then beg, steal or borrow whatever material you need to make your speech amusing and entertaining *for them*.

Speakers who can't laugh at themselves leave the job to others. Show your audience that you don't take yourself too seriously. Then take a few pot shots at the bridegroom but make it patently clear to everyone that you don't really mean a word of it.

Be prepared to deliver one or two humorous 'ad-libs', should the circumstances demand them.

3

Being Congratulatory and Optimistic

Never overlook the five elements of a best man's speech which are almost impossible to overdo: welcome, congratulate, flatter, thank, praise.

3 Things That Really Matter

1 SUGARING YOUR TEASING
REMARKS WITH PRAISE

2 OFFERING ADVICE TO THE
HAPPY COUPLE

3 WEAVING IN A COUPLE OF
QUOTATIONS

A speech that is all humour however good the humour can sometimes become tiresome and vacuous. You need some congratulatory and optimistic words to counterbalance your jokes and teasing remarks. Your speech needs to be underpinned by some good, old-fashioned sincerity. So welcome the guests, congratulate the newlyweds, flatter the bridesmaids, thank the hosts, and praise well praise just about everyone and everything.

If it moves, praise it; if it doesn't move, praise it. Praise the hosts ('the nicest of people'), the groom ('the luckiest man in the world'), the bride ('doesn't she look radiant?'), the room ('these magnificent surroundings'), the occasion ('this wonderful event') and the meal ('it was nice to see the menu was in French it made such a pleasant surprise each time the food arrived'). The good

news is: there are ways of mixing and matching flattery with irreverent humour, so you don't need to be too nice for too long!

Is This You?

I don't want to ruin my image by talking affectionately about anyone, let alone him! Of course I want to wish them well, but I want to do it in a way that doesn't make me sound like a complete wally. I know some great quotes about marriage, but they're all a bit cynical. I'm not too sure how serious to be. Do I have to include this tosh?

1 Sugaring Your Teasing Remarks with Praise

The problem is that many of us are not very comfortable using gushing, extravagant language, especially when praising individuals. Fortunately, then, it's good to know that even effusive praise need not sound sycophantic in a speech.

The same flattery that could appear too florid or subservient when spoken in private seems quite acceptable in a public tribute. And your speech is a public tribute.

Funnily enough, a sincere compliment and a teasing jibe often fit well together, each reinforcing the other in a kind of verbal synergy. This is known as the Ping Pong Principle. The trick is first to set up a situation which you can exploit with a teasing remark, before turning this into a genuine little compliment. If the praise comes immediately after the crowd has had a good laugh at the groom's expense, its effect on them will be at least doubled.

'When I asked (*groom*) about the wedding arrangements (*set-up*), he said, "Oh, I'll leave all that to

you. But I do want Bellsand at least three cases of it
(*tease*).” Well I don’t know about Bells, but I work with
(*groom*) at Grange Hill

Comprehensive and I can tell you that he is certainly one of the best Teachers I know (*praise*).’

‘I know many of (*bride*’s) friends and family hadn’t met (*groom*) until today (*set-up*). Believe me, those of you who do not know (*groom*) are the luckiest people in the world (*tease*) that’s because the pleasure of getting to know him lies ahead of you (*praise*).’

‘It was good to see (*groom*) relaxing and letting his hair down for a change last night (*set-up*). Mind you, these days he hasn’t got much hair to let down (*tease*). But it was a real change to see him letting something down last night because as I can personally testify, (*groom*) you’ve certainly never let down any of your friends (*praise*).’

Alternatively, you may wish to build up the bridegroom with a public compliment before quickly bringing him down to earth with a bang. If so, you simply reverse your tease and praise.

‘Alan Murdock unusual name that, so I looked it up last night (*set-up*). Murdock, apparently, is a Gaelic word meaning handsome, generous, witty and intelligent (*praise*). Alan is Anglo-Saxon for not very (*tease*).’

‘(*Groom*’s) contribution to civic life is incalculable (*set-up*). In his short lifetime this man has done so much for the Red Cross, the RNLI and the Rotary Club (*praise*) by staying out of them (*tease*).’

‘(*Groom*) is really quite well off (*set-up*). But he never brags about it (*praise*). In fact, you could sit in a pub

with him all evening and never know he had a penny
(*tease*).’

It's a comedy trick that works every timeset-up line, praise, teasing punchline. You draw the attention of the audience to your target compliment them and then comes that twist.

People are most affected by what they hear *last*. If you want to leave them with the compliment, then the formula is set-up, tease, praise. But if you want to leave them laughing, it's set-up, praise, tease.

2 Offering Advice to the Happy Couple

As best man, you are expected to impart one or two pearls of wisdom to the newlyweds. Leave any really serious or emotional stuff to the bride's father, or to the groom, if he's that way inclined. The guests can be counted upon to treat their contributions with genial respect.

Any advice you proffer should be light-hearted and humorous.

'There are two things that are vitally necessary if your marriage is to succeed. And they are honesty and wisdom. Honesty: *always* no matter what happens, no matter how adversely it may affect you *always* keep your word to your partner once you have given it. Wisdom: *never* give your word.'

'Marriage is something you have to work at, nurture, add to you know, like a compost heap.'

'If you're clever you'll always have the last word in every argument. If you're *really* clever, it will be "sorry" '.

‘Advice to the bridegroom? Easy. When she hands you a dishcloth, blow your nose on it and hand it back.’

‘Never go to bed angry ... stay up and fight.’

‘Let (*bride*) know who’s boss from the start. There’s no point in fooling yourself.’

‘(*Groom*), if (*bride*) doesn’t treat you as she should be thankful.’

(*Bride*), treat him like a dog three meals a day, plenty of affection and a loose leash.’

‘Always remember the two little bears: bear and forbear. If you can bear up when times are hard and forbear from losing your temper there will be many anniversaries of this day to be celebrated in the years ahead.’

3 Weaving in a Couple of Quotations

Everyone enjoys hearing a particularly witty turn of phrase or apt quotation during a wedding speech. It can really lift a speech and it’s a great way of saying the obligatory nice things about the groom without embarrassing yourself. You simply put your words and sentiments into someone else’s mouth.

Try to avoid anything remotely negative, sneering or cynical. The problem is, many of the best quotes about love and marriage *are* negative, sneering or cynical. So if you feel you really *must* use one or two, reverse them to show this most definitely does *not* apply to the happy couple:

‘Someone once said that he had gone into marriage with his eyes closed her father had closed one of them and her brother had closed the other. Well, all I can say

is that William went into his marriage with his eyes wide open. And seeing how Mary looks today, who could blame him?’

Very few quotes will be received with a knee-slapping bellylaugh. Their merit usually lies in their encapsulation of a truth, a smart observation or a humorous example.

Quotations are intended to promote smiles and nods rather than helpless mirth. For this reason, they should be spread thinly, like caviar, not piled on liberally, like marmalade. One or two quotes are plenty enough for any wedding speech.

Quoting people can sound pompous. Just give a couple of appropriate lines and do it in a very casual way. If you are quoting someone famous, it is a good idea either to make it clear you had to look it up or to give the impression you're not absolutely sure of your source:

'I am reminded of the words of Groucho Marx reminded, I should say, by Linda, who looked it up last night ...'

'Wasn't it John Keats who wrote that . . .?'

'I think it was Bob Hope who said ...'

If you want to quote someone less well known, don't mention him or her by name. If you do, the reaction will probably be an audible 'Who?' Rather, say something like:

'Someone once said ...'

or

'It has been said that ...'

Alternatively, you could attribute the quotation to someone more famous. Oddly enough, this ploy will immediately increase your audience's appreciation of those words of wit and wisdom. But make sure the person you name sounds as if he *could* have said that. As Woody Allen didn't say, 'The key is to entertain, not to be factually accurate.'

Here are a few positive and optimistic quotations that you could weave into your speech:

Love and marriage

'Marriage is that relation between man and woman in which the independence is equal, the dependence mutual, and the obligation reciprocal.'

(Louis K. Anspacher)

'Partnership, not dependence, is the real romance in marriage.'

(Muriel Fox)

'In the arithmetic of love, one plus one equals everything and two minus one equals nothing.'

(Mignon McLaughlin)

The bride

'In most marriages, the woman is her husband's closest friend and adviser.'

(Helen Rowland)

'Blest is the Bride on whom the sun doth shine.'

(Robert Herrick)

'A woman is like a tea bag you don't know her strength until she is in hot water.'

(Nancy Reagan)

The groom

'Husbands are like fires they go out when unattended.'

(Zsa Zsa Gabor)

'The male is a domestic animal which, if treated with firmness and kindness, can be trained to do most things.'

(Jilly Cooper)

'No self-made man ever did such a good job that some woman didn't want to make a few alterations.'

(Kim Hubbard)

Second marriages

'Marriage is a lot like the army; everyone complains, but you'd be surprised at the large number that re-enlist.'

(James Garner)

'Wedlock's like wine, not properly judged of till the second glass.'

(Douglas Jerrod)

'The plural of spouse is spice.'

(Christopher Morley)

And finally, a little more advice to the happy couple ...

'Success in marriage is more than finding the right person; it is being the right person.'

(Rabbi B.R. Bricker)

*'To keep your marriage brimming
With love in the marriage cup,
Whenever you're wrong, admit it;
Whenever you're right, shut up.'*

(Ogden Nash)

'Laugh and the world laughs with you, snore and you sleep alone.'

(Anthony Burgess)

MAKING WHAT MATTERS WORK FOR YOU

Remember that it is almost impossible to be too optimistic or congratulatory. Even the most effusive praise need not sound sycophantic in a speech.

Follow the Ping Pong Principle throughout your speech: alternate friendly digs at the groom with genuine compliments.

Offer a little light-hearted, humorous and optimistic advice to the newlyweds and include one or two relevant, positive, upbeat quotations in your speech.

4

Finding the Ideal Beginning and Ending

Think of your speech as a gourmet meal. Your opening lines should serve up a tasty little starter that really whets the audience's appetite for the main course. Your closing words should provide a delectable and memorable dessert with a delicious aftertaste.

5 Things That Really Matter

1 GRABBING THEIR
ATTENTION

2 RESPONDING TO THE TOAST
TO THE BRIDESMAIDS

3 ENDING ON THE RIGHT
NOTE

4 READING THE TELE-
MESSAGES

5 BRACKETING YOUR SPEECH

There is no such thing as the *best* opening lines or the *best* closing lines for a best man's speech, because every speech and every speaker is different. In this chapter you will learn a number of techniques that can be used to open and close a speech. They are all tried and tested, so you don't need to worry about choosing a dud. Study the options and decide what would work best for *your* speech and for *you*.

There are dozens of ways to put over a captivating opening or to deliver a compelling close to a speech.

It's just a matter of finding the pattern of words that suits your style and has exactly the effect you are after. Work on your lines until you've got them spot on. Then memorise them. You must know precisely how you are going to open and close your speech. There is absolutely no room for any ad-libbing here.

Is This You?

The only opening and closing lines I can come up with are 'Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen' and 'Thank you'. I'm not sure how I'm supposed to respond to the toast to the bridesmaids. I need to find an opening line that will make them laugh and make me relax. When I rehearse my speech, I find myself repeatedly announcing the end, which never seems to come. I want to top-and-tail my speech to make it sound really professional.

1 Grabbing Their Attention

A speaker who does not strike oil within ten seconds should stop boring. It is vital to have an opening line that really grabs your audience's attention. Entertainers call this 'having a hook'. For the best man, undoubtedly the most useful varieties of these are:

the humour hook, and

the anniversary hook.

Let's consider each of them.

The humour hook

A humorous opening is ideal for a best man's speech. But it must be fresh, to the point, told as succinctly as possible and timed so the punchline will elicit a laugh.

A self-depreciating opening always works it puts the audience with you, not against you.

Here are some examples:

'Ladies and Gentlemen, I'm making this speech today

under a considerable handicap. I'm sober.'

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, just once in a lifetime you get the opportunity to talk about a man blessed with dynamic charisma, devastating wit, stupendous talent and unstoppable personality but until that day comes along, I shall talk about (*groom*).

‘Good Ladies, afternoon and Gentlemen ... I *knew* I should have rehearsed this speech.’

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, I won’t take long. This suit has to be back in twenty minutes.’

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, I’d like to thank the members of the Academy for this Oscar ... oh no, sorry, that was the wrong speech.’

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, may I begin by thanking you for the three great human qualities faith, hope and charity. Your applause before I speak, that’s faith. Applause during my speech, that’s hope. Applause after my speech, that’s charity.’

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, this is the first time I have spoken at a wedding reception except during other people’s speeches.’

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you, I appreciate your welcome because I just felt slightly unwell. I told (*groom*) that I was feeling funny and he said, ‘Well, do your speech before it wears off.’

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you. I’m not crazy about making speeches, but I’ve been going out with (*girlfriend*) for three years now and this is the first chance I’ve had to see if my voice still works.’

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, I’m only going to speak for a few minutes because of my throat if I go on too long, (*groom*) has threatened to cut it.’

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, I’ve been asked to say a few words, so here goes marzipan ... chickens ... pneumonia.’

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, (*groom*) told me that he wanted a best man capable of charming you with his spectacular wit, his staggering charisma and his dazzling personality. Well, I’m here to fill in while his search continues.’

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, what can I say about (*groom*) that has not already been said in open court?’

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, today I have the pleasure of talking about (*groom*) a man who combines the honesty and integrity of Bill Clinton ... with the charisma of a cabbage ... and the sheer intellectual depth of the *Sunday Sport*.’

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, in the interests of political correctness and in order to spare our bridegroom’s blushes, this speech will contain nothing controversial or embarrassing about (*groom*), but instead will refer only to the nice, pleasant side of his character Thank you and good afternoon [*make as if to sit down*].

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, you know I had a feeling it was going to be difficult to follow a speech by (*groom*) and I was right I couldn’t follow a word of it.’

The anniversary hook

But if humour isn't your strong point, why not employ this classic opening gambit? There's nothing like telling people what a special day it is today. You're telling them that

‘Today’s the Day!’ As always, use your own words, but this is the sort of thing you should say:

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, this is an historic day! This day, the 13th of July, will always be remembered because of three world-famous events. Film actor Harrison Ford was born in 1942; Live Aid pop concerts raised millions for charity in 1985; and on this day in 200X, (*bridegroom*) married (*bride*)!’

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, what a cosmic day! This very day, the 11th of August, will always be associated with three truly heavenly events. Two new moons were discovered around Mars back in 1877, our moon totally eclipsed the sun in 1999; and on this day in 200X, (*bride*) totally eclipsed everyone and everything. Doesn’t she look radiant?’

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a truly historic day! This day, the 18th of June, will always be remembered because of three world-shattering events. Napoleon finally met his Waterloo at Waterloo in 1815; Sir Paul McCartney had his first day on earth in 1942; and on this day in 200X, you heard the finest best man’s speech of your entire lifetime! Now who’s going to make it?’

You can find plenty of birthdays and anniversaries listed in specialist books (*Making a Wedding Speech*, in the How To Series, for example, has no less than 732 of them). You’ll also find them in most daily and Sunday newspapers.

2 Responding to the Toast to the Bridesmaids

Remember that tradition demands that you respond to the bridegroom's toast to the bridesmaids.

All that is required of you is a brief acknowledgement of the toast immediately before or soon after you hook your audience. Once that's out of the way you can forget it and get on with your speech.

‘First of all, on behalf of the bridesmaids, I’d like to thank (*groom*), for his warm-hearted words. It really has been a pleasure for us all to have played a small part of your big day ...’

‘On behalf of all the attendants, I’d like to thank you sincerely for those generous words. It’s amazing what some people will say when they’re not under oath...’

‘Thank you, (*groom*), for those kind words about the bridesmaids and attendants, though I would have gone even further. They are the most delightful set of bridesmaids I have ever seen. Be honest, today you are blinkered and you only have eyes for (*bride*) and who can blame you?’

Your opening sentence is the second most important sentence of your speech. Yes, you’ve guessed it: the most important sentence is your last.

3 Ending on the Right Note

At the risk of sounding Forrest Gumpish: a wedding speech is like a love affair. Any fool can start it but to end it requires considerable skill. Your concluding remark should be to your speech what a high note is to an aria: the candescence that triggers applause. If you can find the ideal ending you will inject that ultimate bit of magic.

A shrewdly chosen line, verse or toast which combines

*truth with fun is a far more popular finale than a glum
old proverb.*

Here are some classic closers that you could use, adopt or personalise. While you are not *expected* to propose yet another toast, it's a good idea to do so anyway. A toast is a brilliant device: it flatters the ego, it closes a speech on a high and it gives you an excuse to have a well-deserved drink:

'I must close now I've got a fair bit to do back at the flat ... (*bride and groom*), congratulations on finding each other. Many people search for years and decades for that one special person that will complete their joy. You're so fortunate to have found each other so early in life. Here's to complete happiness now and for ever.'

'I must close now I've got to get back to John O'Groats and John's a very demanding lad ... Ladies and Gentlemen, when two hearts are joined by true love, they both grow and mature into a miracle greater than either could be alone. Remember that always. A toast: two hearts are better than one.'

'Before I left home this morning, my little girl said to me: 'Daddy, I hope they clap you and clap you and clap you after you speak. If they don't I'll cry and cry and cry for ever and ever. Ladies and Gentlemen, I leave it to you do you want to be responsible for a child being miserable for the rest of her life? ... (*bride and groom*), may you have the hindsight to know where you've been ... the foresight to know where you're going ... and the insight to know when you've gone too far!'

'Marriage of two mature adults such as you is really a meeting of two minds, of two hearts, of two souls ...

and of three cars, four pets, five rooms and six kids.
It'll be a crowd

of fun. Ladies and Gentlemen, let's drink a toast to all of them ...'

'I leave you both with this thought: remember there are Seven Deadly Sins, enough for one each night ... so have an enjoyable week's honeymoon! Ladies and Gentlemen, a toast ...'

'As I said to the woman I lost my virginity to, thanks for laughing. Ladies and Gentlemen, please raise your glasses. Let's drink a toast to ...'

'Before I sit down I'd like to thank you for being a wonderful audience ... and you can feel proud because I'm very hard to please. Ladies and Gentlemen, a toast ...'

'Here's to happy days ... any fool can have a good time at night. To happy days ...'

'I'll leave you with this thought: should a recently married couple be frank and earnest with each other or should one of them be a girl? Ladies and Gentlemen, a toast ...'

'Ladies and Gentlemen, a toast to the happy couple ... to (*bride and groom*): may you live as long as you want to and want to as long as you live.'

'Now that we've all enjoyed a wonderful meal, I'd like to remind you that wild, uninhibited applause burns up 50 calories a minute. So start burning. Ladies and Gentlemen, may I propose a wild, uninhibited toast to ...'

'Ladies and Gentlemen, back in 1901, US President

William McKinley was making a long speech when some fellow got bored and shot him dead. Now I'm not much of one for believing in signs and omens, but there's no point in tempting

fate, so before any of you reaches for your six-shooter, I think I'll sit down ... But before I do, please join me in drinking a toast to the happy couple ... to the new Mr and Mrs (*surname*) ... to (*their first names*).’ [*Raise your glass you may then wish to pretend you’ve been shot and to slump back into your seat.*]

4 Reading the Tele-messages

If you are the last speaker, signal this by reading the tele-messages after finishing your speech (having first checked that they are not X-rated). Try to keep this final session interesting by giving some background details about the contents of the messages and about the people who sent them. Crack a joke or two, if the moment seems right.

As always, try to end on a particularly high note.

You could end with the funniest or most emotional message, or with one from some friends who live on the other side of the world, or perhaps with one from some very old family friends (in either or both senses of the phrase). Alternatively, you could simply make up the last message. However, if you do this, you must make it obvious to everyone that it *is* a joke:

‘And finally, this one is from that old quill-pusher, William Shakespeare. And it says, “Sorry that I can’t be with you today, but I’m Bard.” Shakey goes on, “It hath been said that all unhappy marriages are a result of the husband having brains. Verily, I have total confidence that this marriage will be an exceptionally happy one.” ‘

You have reached your destination in style; it is now time to let them eat cake.

5 Bracketing Your Speech

This is a device usually associated with seasoned pros. It is designed not only to grab an audience's attention at the start of a speech, but also and at the same time to set up a situation that can be exploited at the end. The idea is to present your speech as a satisfying whole, not just as a series of jokes and stories, however well they may have been crafted and structured.

Bracketing is a wonderful way of linking an attention-grabbing opening with a humorous or romantic big finish.

The two brackets consist of a set-up at the opening of the speech and a pay-off at the end. The words you will end with include those planted clearly at the start, like this:

*Set-*Ladies and Gentlemen, when this little do ends, (*groom and bride*) are *up*: off to Texas. Where more appropriate for a cowboy builder to spend his honeymoon? He almost went to Texas once before, but they were closed so he went to B&Q instead.'

That's your first bracket. You've set up a situation briefly and then quickly reinforced it with two one-liners to make it more memorable. It's a pretty good humour hook in its own right, but there's more to come.

*Pay-*Well now that Texas honeymoon awaits them, so I suppose (*groom*) *off*: will be kissed in places he's only ever dreamt of before.'

Notice the repetition of the planted words 'Texas' and 'honeymoon'. This helps the open-and-closed nature of the brackets and provides a pleasing symmetry.

You could also use this technique to add a little compliment to sugar the teasing joke you opened with. How about this sort of thing for the sporty types?

Set- Ladies and Gentlemen, as (*groom*) left the church today I heard him
up: ask the vicar if he'd be committing a sin if he played tennis on the Sabbath. The vicar replied, "The way you play, it would be a sin on any day." But (*groom*) is improving. He practises by hitting a tennis ball against his garage door. It's really improved his game. He hasn't won yet, but last week he took the door to five sets.'

Pay-(Groom and bride) are excellent tennis players who are both game
off: and set for the perfect match.'

You can get ideas for humorous or romantic brackets simply by listening to the best popular lyricists of yesterday and today: Sir Noel Coward, Ira Gershwin, Cole Porter, Sir Paul McCartney, Hal David, Marvin Hamlisch, Sir Tim Rice to name but a few. This is how master songsmith Sammy Cahn achieved a nice little twist in the tale of 'Call Me Irresponsible':

Set- 'Call me irresponsible, call me unreliable, throw in undependable
up: too.'

Pay- 'Call me irresponsible, yes I'm unreliable, but its undeniably true:
off: I'm irresponsibly mad for you.'

If you make use of a lyricist's brackets, always reword them into the kind of language you use, making sure they no longer rhyme. In this way your audience won't recognise

your source or your sauce and you are sure to come across as a natural and original speaker.

It is quite easy to adapt and paraphrase musical brackets to suit your speech. Let's take a more up-to-date example. These are the set-up and pay-off lines used by Rupert Holmes in 'Nearsighted':

Set- 'If you take these glasses from my face I think you will find I'm
up: undeniably, certifiably just a shade blind. The day is brighter, somewhat lighter, when it's slightly blurred. Nearsighted, it's another lovely day, so I stumble on my way.'

Pay- 'Nearsighted: loving life is such a breeze. Nearsighted: I see just
off: what I please and it pleases me to see you. Though I'm slightly out of focus, I can see my dreams come true. Nearsighted? All I need to see is you.'

This is how a best man might adapt, develop and paraphrase these brackets when talking about a bespectacled bridegroom:

Set- 'Ladies and Gentlemen, they say love is blind. Well (*groom*) certainly
up: can't see far ahead not without his glasses and I'm sure he'd be the first to admit that in the past at times he's been a bit shortsighted and sometimes even made a bit of a spectacle out of himself But today I'm sure, with or without his glasses, he can see his future mapped out very clearly.'

Pay- 'You know, today, for the first time in his life, (*groom*) doesn't need
off: to wear his glasses to see what a bright and wonderful future lies ahead

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of him. And right now I'm sure he couldn't give a damn that he's a bit shortsighted. And why should he? Love is blind. And anyway, all he needs to see is (*bride*) But *we* need glasses to drink a toast to the happy couple. Ladies and Gentlemen: to a bright future to (*groom and bride*).'

MAKING WHAT MATTERS WORK FOR YOU

In the beginning was the hook. Your opening is an opportunity. Grasp it. Devise a great opening that's spot on for this speech, this audience and you. If the shoe doesn't fit, don't wear it. There are plenty of shoes that *do* fit.

Don't forget to respond early in your speech to the bridegroom's toast to the bridesmaids!

End on just the right note. You need a big finish, a final round verbal k.o. Choose a line that combines truth with fun.

Keep the guests interested and involved as you read the tele-messages.

Consider bracketing your speech. Establish a memorable phrase at the beginning and then repeat it, with some amusing or thoughtful twist, at the end.

5 Putting it All Together

To write a great wedding speech requires excitement, empathy, warmth, enthusiasm and flair. Flair is the sizzle in the sausage.

5 Things That Really Matter

- 1 PREPARING YOUR SCRIPT
- 2 USING WORDS TO BE SAID,
NOT READ
- 3 ADDING A SPARKLE TO
YOUR SPEECH
- 4 REMEMBERING RHYTHM
- 5 KEEPING IT FLOWING

Having something worthwhile to say is *never* enough. You need to know how to use words and images to reach your audience's minds and hearts. Your speech needs a touch of flair. Flair is partly intuition, which comes from experience, imagination and a willingness to think and a careful study of this chapter!

If we face an important interview, we prepare ourselves to make the best possible impression. We look good. So, if we are about to meet an audience, we should polish our words as well as our shoes. We should sound good.

Today people's expectations are high and their attention spans are low. Merely to gain and hold an audience's attention requires flair. If you want to keep them

interested, your speech must sparkle. So let's get polishing.

Is This You?

I don't know what sort of script to prepare if any. The last time I made a wedding speech I think I must have sounded as if I was reading the news. I was too matter of fact. I want my speech to be more than just an unconnected series of jokes and reminiscences. Of course I want what I say to be entertaining, but I also want what I say to sound good. I want to make my speech memorable and for the right reasons!

1 Preparing Your Script

The best talkers are those who are most natural. They are easy, fluent, friendly and amusing. No script for them. How could there be? They are talking only to us and basing what they say on our reactions as they go along. For most of us, however, that sort of performance is an aspiration rather than a description. Our tongues are not so honeyed and our words are less winged. We need a script.

But what sort of script? Cards? Notes? Speech written out in full? It's up to you. There is no right way of doing it. Here is a simple method favoured by many speakers:

Write the speech out in full.

Memorise the opening and closing lines and familiarise yourself with the remainder of the speech.

Summarise the speech on one card or one sheet of paper using key words to remind you of your sequence of jokes, anecdotes, quotations and so on.

The main advantage of this method is that the speaker will not only be sure to cover everything he wants to, but also come across as a natural and spontaneous speaker who is not merely reciting a prepared speech.

2 Using Words to be Said, Not Read

Most people can write something to be *read*, few can write something to be *said*. Indeed, most people are unaware that there is even a difference.

We are used to writing things to be read: by our lecturers, our friends, our relatives, our bosses, our subordinates. Such everyday written communication is known as text. What we are *not* used to doing is speaking our written words out loud. Writing intended to be spoken and heard is known as script.

Every effective speaker *must* recognise that there are very important differences between text and script, namely:

Text	Script
is a journey at the reader's pace	is a journey at the speaker's pace
can be re-read, if necessary	is heard once, and only once
can be read in any order.	is heard in the order it is spoken.

Therefore, you must prepare a speech for an audience which *cannot* listen at its own pace; which *cannot* ask you to repeat parts it did not hear or understand; and which *cannot* choose the order in which to consider your words.

We seem subconsciously to understand the best words and phrases and the best order of words and phrases when we speak, but we seem to lose the knack when we write script.

The lesson is clear: speak your words out loud before you commit them to paper. You will find that each element, each phrase, each sentence, will be built from what has gone before. Instinctively, you will take your listeners from the known to the unknown; from the general to the particular; from present to future.

Written words should be easy to find; spoken words should be easy to remember. Consider how the same sentiment might be conveyed by a writer, first using text and then script:

Text:

‘The meaning of marriage is not to be found in church services, or in romantic novels or films. We have no right to expect a happy ending. The meaning of marriage is to be found in all the effort that is required to make a marriage succeed. You need to get to know your partner, and thereby to get to know yourself.’

Script:

‘The meaning of marriage isn’t to be found in wedding bells it isn’t the stuff of Mills and Boon romances there is no happy every after. No, the meaning of marriage is in the *trying* and it’s about learning about someone else and through that, learning about yourself.’

3 Adding a Sparkle to Your Speech

Use words and images creatively and imaginatively and your speech will come to life. Things happen in the minds and hearts of your audience. If you look into their eyes, you can see it happen. It's a great experience.

Paint word pictures. People today spend more time watching TV and films than listening to radio. They are used to visual images so you must give your speech a graphic quality, not by telling a joke or story, but by painting word pictures that allow your audience's own imagination to take over. Don't tell a gag, paint it:

‘Soon after we met, Dave invited me to his eighteenth birthday party and he gave me details of his address and how to get there. He said, “A number 8 bus will bring you right to my door 69 Della Street. Walk up to the front door and press the doorbell with your elbow. “Why my elbow?” I asked. “Because you'll have the wine in one hand and my prezzie in the other, won't you?” ‘

One mental picture is worth a thousand words.

Use figurative language. Try to make your speech colourful and original. Similes and metaphors are particularly useful devices. A simile is a figure of speech, usually introduced by ‘like’ or ‘as’, that compares one thing to another:

‘She was simmering like a corked volcano.’

Because a simile's function is comparison, it is not as evocative as a metaphor. A metaphor does not so much

compare as transform one thing into another:

‘Adam had laid out four squadrons of flowers that sprouted, mute and soldierly, exactly where he had planted them.’

Metaphor is more subtle and more revealing than simile, stimulating imagery beyond the original transformation. Adam’s squadrons of flowers suggest something about Adam himself, evoking military associations and the sense that he is used to getting what he wants.

The right metaphor can really lift a wedding speech:

‘Marriage. Ever since humans gathered together in caves, they we have displayed a basic instinct for becoming couples. Your man and your woman. Your Romeo and Juliet. Your yin and your yang. It’s as natural as his and hers bath towels. If the life of humankind were music it would all be duets. It’s been a bit of a musical day one way and another. Violins in harmony with cellos, Debbie in harmony with Tony. The past in harmony with the future. And, as the Bard of Avon put it: ”If music be the food of love, play on.” ‘

Engage all the senses. Sensory details bring breadth and depth to your descriptions. We can learn a lot from writers of popular fiction. This is how Stephen King brought a character to life in *Carrie*:

‘Norma led them around the dance floor to their table. She exuded odours of Avon soap, Woolworth’s perfume and Juicy Fruit gum.’

And how about this from Katherine Mansfield:

‘Alexander and his friend in a train. Spring ... wet lilac

... spouting rain.'

So few words, yet the wetness is palpable.

As you speak, try to involve your audience. Allow them to do far more than just listen to you. Help them to hear, to see, to smell, to touch, to taste. Allow them to experience your speech.

4 Remembering Rhythm

A good speech, like a good song, needs a regular beat. It should have a rhythm of its own: peaks, troughs, crescendos and a climax. It should have a lyrical quality that is music to an audience's ears.

Here are another three techniques that will add an almost magical, melodic quality to your speeches:

The rule of three. 'Three' is a magic number. People love to hear speakers talk to the beat of three. The effect of three words, three phrases or three sentences is powerful and memorable:

'May you be blessed with happiness that grows ... with love that deepens ... and with peace that endures.'

'We wish you fun and excitement for today ... hopes and dreams for tomorrow ... and love and happiness for ever.'

'May real joy fill your days ... warm your nights ... and overflow your hearts.'

Parallel sentences. Sentences that are parallel add a rhythmic beauty that helps an audience anticipate and follow your thoughts:

'Marriage is a celebration of love. Marriage is a

celebration of life. Marriage is a celebration of joy. As you walk through life, hold hands and never let go.'

Alliteration. The repetition of sounds and syllables, usually at the beginning of words, can help create just the right mood. Your speech will become special and spellbinding:

‘Water your garden with friendship and faith and favour. And then watch it grow. You deserve a garden of love.’

Using words colourfully and creatively will bring your speech to life like a shot of whisky in a cup of coffee.

5 Keeping it Flowing

The way a speaker keeps things flowing takes a little thought, but it's so worthwhile in its effect. How often have you winced at a clumsy transition or a hoary cliché[cliché]: ‘Which reminds me of the story of ... ?

Have you noticed how entertainers, politicians and TV presenters move easily and unobtrusively from one topic to another? Like them, you can make your speech flow smoothly and gracefully from beginning to end by making use of a few of these simple devices:

A bridge is a word that alerts an audience that you are changing direction or moving to a new thought:

‘So that’s how Ed met Sophie. *But* romance didn’t blossom right away ...’

A trigger is a repetition of the same word or phrase to link one topic with another:

‘That was what Bill *was like* at school. Now I’ll tell you what he *was like* at college ...’

A rhetorical question is a question which you ask and answer:

‘So that’s the kind of man you’ve married, (*bride*). So what advice can I offer you to help keep him under control?’

Some members of the audience may know both the bride and bridegroom very well, while others may only know one of them. Asking a rhetorical question is also an excellent way of telling people something while not insulting the intelligence of those already in the know:

‘What can I tell you about a man who won the school prize for economics, represented the county at hockey and passed his driving test at the sixth attempt?’

A flashback is a sudden shift to the past to break what seems to be a predictable narrative:

‘We first met in ...’

‘We both worked for ...’

‘We became good friends when ... (yawn, yawn!)’

It would have been far more interesting to have provided an unexpected flashback link, such as:

‘Today he’s the confident, man-about-town you see before you. *But five years ago* he wasn’t like that ...’

A list is a very simple way of combining apparently unrelated incidents:

‘I remember three occasions when Tim got into trouble at school ...’

But don't rely too heavily on lists because a catalogue of events soon becomes extremely tedious to listen to.

A pause is a non-verbal way of showing your audience that you have finished one section of your speech and are about to move on to another.

A physical movement is another non-verbal signal that you are moving on to something new. If you turn to the bride, your audience know that you are going to talk to her, or about her.

A quotation, joke or story can also serve as an excellent link. Here a one-liner is used to change the topic from the wedding to the bridegroom:

‘... but the bride wanted a very simple marriage, and that's what she got ... starting with the bridegroom ...’

MAKING WHAT MATTERS WORK FOR YOU

Rehearse using a variety of types of script cards, notes, speech written out in full before deciding which one suits you best.

Think like a listener and write like a talker. Speak your words out loud before you commit them to paper. Use effective language, not necessarily correct language.

Use words and images creatively and imaginatively so they reach your audience's minds and touch their hearts.

It is important that what you say sounds good. Your speech should have its own rhythm. Give it light and shade, valleys and peaks. Just as the varied rhythm and intensity of a fireworks display adds anticipation and excitement, so a landscape of valleys and peaks will keep an audience interested and involved. People need valleys before they can seek peaks.

Make sure your speech flows smoothly and gracefully from beginning to end, thereby creating the illusion of a natural progression.

6 Delivering Your Speech

This above all: to thine own self be true.

3 Things That Really Matter

1 FINDING YOUR STYLE

2 GIVING OUT THE RIGHT
NON-VERBAL MESSAGES

3 MAKING FEAR YOUR FRIEND

What you say is so much more important than *how* you say it. A speaker without a powerful or melodious voice can register just as convincingly as a great orator as soon as the audience tunes into the fun and caring behind his words.

A little advice on delivery technique can help smooth the edges without stifling individuality. But a great deal of expert advice will remove the wonderfully imperfect distinctions about us and create unremarkable clones.

So while this chapter will stress the importance of projecting positive body language and having the right attitude to your speech, it will not put you in a strait-jacket of artificial presentation techniques. If you abandon everything that is natural to you and substitute ‘acquired’ mannerisms, you will come over as unnatural, awkward and insincere.

Essentially, you just need to be yourself but yourself made large. If you offer your homage, your humour and

your heart to listeners, they cannot resist.

Is This You?

I want my speech to be funny, but I can't tell jokes. The last time I made a speech it felt like I was standing aside from myself, listening to a voice that didn't belong to me. It was very strange. As I stand up in front of an audience a kind of lead veil comes over me and all I can see is a close-up of myself. I hear my voice in a very loud way and every word I utter sounds awful. When I speak in public, my voice dries up and it destroys all the natural flow, all the rhythms and any kind of creative spark or anecdote that might come in is destroyed. Terrible. I am extremely nervous about giving this speech.

1 Finding Your Style

It is exceedingly difficult to discuss style and technique in general terms, since the ability to be entertaining and to tell jokes and stories is such a personal business. However, there are certain 'rules' and guidelines which appear to be universal. Here they are:

Make the speech 'yours'. Did Elvis, Sinatra and Johnny Rotten all sound the same singing 'My Way'? Of course not. The artist makes the crucial difference. So, too, does the speaker.

The central dilemma facing many best men may be put thus: I want my speech to be funny, but I'm not a comedian. Unless you are a gifted comic, you can take the much simpler but equally effective course to win your laughs play it straight. Leave broad comedy

performance to the professional clowns. For most of us, the best way to tell a joke is to do so seriously.

But we all have *some* abilities and talents. Don't hide your light under a bushel. Any regional accents or dialects which you can do well (and only if you *can* do them well) should be incorporated into your stories. A punchline is doubled in effect in the appropriate Cockney or Brummie accent, especially after a 'straight' and serious build-up.

Have you any funny faces, impersonations or mannerisms of speech which infallibly convulse friends and relatives at parties? These eccentricities, suitably broadened out, might work just as well at the reception.

Whatever individual characteristics you have that are special to you should be nurtured and cultivated and worked on, for it is those personal and unique quirks of appearance, personality and expression that will mark you out as a speaker with something different to offer. And that is never a bad thing.

Be conversational. When you are sitting leisurely, with family or friends, your conversation will be naturally relaxed and chatty, because that is the language of easy communication. When you make a best man's speech, the words you use should be more considered, imaginative, creative and rhythmical than your everyday language, yet the way you say them, the way you deliver your speech should remain unaffectedly relaxed and chatty.

If you 'put on an act', you will be perceived as phoney, boring or lacking in personality. As a result, you won't come over well. Certainly you may need to speak a little louder or make other concessions to accommodate

the needs of your audience, but, in essence, nothing in your delivery style should change.

Casual conversation is not constructed in a literary way. You do not always finish your sentences. You repeat yourself. You use ungrammatical constructions but you are obeying a different set of rules. You are obeying the rules of effective spoken communication which have been learnt, instinctively, down the ages. Don't abandon these rules when you speak in public.

The key, then, is to recognise what you are doing when you 'get it right' and achieve any successful communication, be it formal or informal, business or social, and then stay with it in any given situation, regardless of the stress level.

Be heard. You must be audible. If you are not, all else is lost. If there is public address equipment available, find out how it works, get plenty of practice and then use it. Don't trust in luck and don't believe people who tell you to leave it all to them. Accept personal responsibility. You are the one who will look awkward if things go wrong.

If there is no sound-enhancing equipment, speak as clearly and as loudly as is necessary to be heard. If the only other person in the room was at the back, you would talk to him or her naturally, at the right level, without shouting or strain, by:

keeping your head up

opening your mouth wider than during normal speech

using clearer consonants

slowing down.

If you remember that you must be heard by that same person, at the back, during your speech, however many other people may be in the room, you will make those same four natural adjustments to your delivery.

2 Giving out the Right Non-verbal Messages

We speak with our vocal cords, but we communicate with our whole body. An audience does a lot more than listen to a speech it experiences it. Everything about a speaker's manner and demeanour contributes to the overall impression that the audience takes away.

Body language is potent. When you address a group of people they are constantly responding consciously and unconsciously to what your body is saying to them.

So what hidden messages do you give out when you speak? If you are unsure, watch yourself in a mirror, or ask a kind but critical friend. You will probably find that you need to work on one or more of the following:

stance and posture

movement and gestures

eye contact and facial expression.

However, remember that while each of these may be considered in isolation, a positive change made to any of them will also have a direct and immediate positive effect on the others.

Stance and posture. Your stance and posture are important. You are making a fundamental statement with your body. An aligned, upright posture conveys a message of confidence and integrity. Early man frightened his enemies by inflating his chest and spreading his arms to present a much wider profile (see Figure 1). Modern man uses exactly the same technique, consciously or unconsciously, when he

wants to convince others of his dominance (see Figure 2).



Fig. 1.
The aggressive caveman

Our instincts tell us that people who shield themselves even with just their arms are defensive (see Figure 3); while people who do not shield themselves are perceived as open and friendly (see Figure 4).

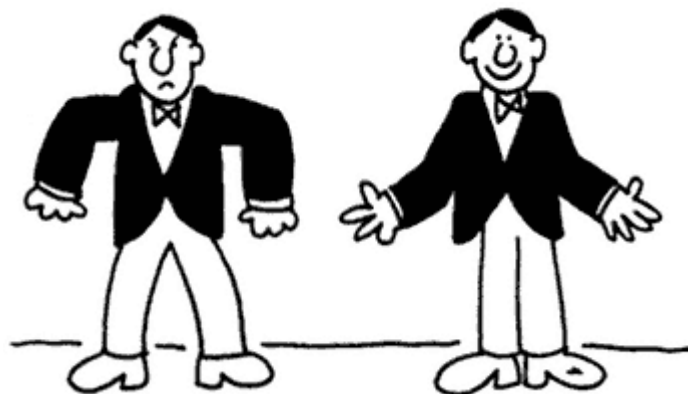


Fig. 2.
Don't threaten the guests!



Fig. 3.
The defensive cavewoman

Movement and gestures. You should be far more than just a talking head. You don't want to be so motionless that you look like a statue on loan from Madame Tussaud's. But, equally, you shouldn't attempt an impersonation of racing pundit John McCririck's arm-waving histrionics.



Fig. 4.
Don't defend yourself against the guests!

Try to identify any annoying movements or gestures which you display. Do any of these faults apply to you?

playing with your watch

talking with your hand in front of your mouth

pushing your glasses back up your nose

jingling coins in your pocket

waving your hands about for no reason

rustling your notes

shuffling your feet

swaying

making pointless gestures.

Try to eliminate any such habits because they are a powerful means of distraction. Your audience will become preoccupied with when they will happen next and will start watching you rather than listening to you.

Early man attacked his victims by holding a weapon above their heads and bringing it down with great force (see Figure 5). Our legacy from this is that, even today, our ancestral memories perceive similar positions and movements as hostile (see Figure 6).

Here are a few sentences that could well be heard during a best man's speech. Speak them out loud and support your words with appropriate and expressive gestures. Watch yourself in a mirror or ask friends how effective your gestures are:

'You know, I'm in a position to marry anyone I please.

The problem is, I don't seem to be able to please anyone.'

'The time has come for me, too, to take a wife. The only question remains is: whose wife shall I take?'



Fig. 5.
The hostile caveman

‘(*Groom*) told me he bought that suit for a ridiculous figure. Looking at him today, I’m afraid I must agree.’

‘There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for (*groom*), and I know there’s nothing he wouldn’t do for me. In fact we spend our lives doing nothing for each other.’



Fig. 6.
Don’t be hostile to the guests!

‘Ladies and Gentlemen, a toast: To love the only game where a pair beats three of a kind.’

Eye contact and facial expression. These are crucial aspects of effective communication because they gain and then maintain an audience’s attention, create rapport, and give you valuable feedback as to how well you are coming over.

The worst you can do, apart from mumbling inaudibly, is not to look at your audience.

You should have memorised your opening and closing lines, so look at your audience as you deliver them. During the middle of your speech, try to keep your head up from your script for most of the time.

Entertainers use the so-called lighthouse technique to maintain eye contact with their audiences. This means beaming all around the room slowly, tracing an imaginary X or Z shape but continually varying the size and shape of the letter to avoid your eye sweeps becoming routine and predictable. Look at everyone and make this deliberate and noticeable. Stop occasionally to look at individuals for just long enough to give the impression that you are talking to them without picking them out for special attention.

But you must do more than simply look at your audience; you must use your eyes and your facial expression to convey your feelings. This isn’t as difficult as it may sound. You do it every day. Practise using your eyes and facial expression to convey: happiness, optimism, mirth, joy, confidence, sincerity.

There is nothing more captivating than a smile. It shows warmth and friendliness and says, 'I'm really pleased to be

making this speech. It's going to be great fun and we're all going to have a wonderful time!' So smile, smile and smile again.

Once you begin to give out positive silent messages about your feelings and emotions, you will become even more enthusiastic and eager and this, in turn, will be reflected in your body language. You will have broken into a wonderful virtuous circle.

Positive body language not only reflects positive feelings, it creates them.

3 Making Fear Your Friend

Fear is nothing to be frightened of. People get nervous because they are afraid of failing, of looking foolish, and not living up to expectations. Nervousness is caused by the fear of looking ridiculous to others.

Few speakers claim to be able to speak without any nerves. Some will say that lack of nerves is not only unlikely, it is undesirable. They need the adrenaline to carry them along. So how do you make things easier for yourself? First be assured that excessive worry is avoidable, if you follow this advice:

Rehearse. Friends who tell you not to worry should worry you. Don't believe them when they say, 'No need to rehearse, it'll be alright on the night' unless your hidden agenda is to get £250 from Lisa Riley for a camcorder calamity. If you want to calm your nerves and make a great speech, you simply *must* rehearse.

As with the type of script you use, so the rehearsal method you employ must be the one that best suits you.

Some

speakers like to be isolated and unheard in a distant room, with or without a mirror. Others perform their speeches again and again to a sympathetic spouse or friend, either encouraging suggestions from them or requiring nothing more than a repeated hearing to ease away inhibitions.

Rehearse your beginning and ending until you have got them spot on. Rehearse the body of your speech not to be perfect but to be comfortable. Audiences don't expect you to be perfect, but they *need* you to be comfortable. If you're not comfortable, neither are they. And if they're not comfortable, they *cannot* be receptive to your words of wit and wisdom, however hard they may try.

Why do some actors freeze or fumble on the opening night and then pick up a British Theatre Drama Award six months later? It's a fear of unfamiliarity. As the days, weeks and months go by, the fear abates and the quality of the performance improves.

The more rehearsal, the more the certainty of success and greater peace of mind.

Words become more familiar. Awkward juxtapositions are smoothed out. You suddenly think of a way of saying a stuffy sentence in a more straightforward and colloquial style. At the same time you will recognise the parts of your speech that hit the spot, the parts that require a little fine tuning, and the parts that are simply not worth including.

Have the right attitude. Tell yourself that you are going to make a great little speech. And *believe* it. The largely

untapped power of positive thinking really is enormous. It has been estimated that 85 per cent of performance is directly related to attitude. Unfortunately, many

speakers think they are going to fail and, with this attitude, this becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy.

As Henry Ford put it: 'Whether you think you will succeed or whether you think you will fail, you will probably be right.'

Visualise success. Visualisation is the planting of mental images into the subconscious mind. These images must be vivid and real you must be able to see, to hear, to smell, to touch, to taste and to truly live them.

If you can vividly imagine an event happening, it will greatly strengthen the likelihood of it actually happening.

This is not a crankish idea. Controlled medical experiments have proved it to be true. When a patient visualises cancer cells being engulfed by anti-bodies in the bloodstream, it is far more likely to happen than if that patient just lies back and lets nature take its course.

So reinforce your positive attitude with a positive visualisation of your speech. Imagine yourself talking in a relaxed and confident manner. You are looking good. They love your opening hook. But it gets better: your stories and jokes wow them. They are eating out of your hand. Then comes that big finish. Nobody could have topped that. Listen to their cheers and applause. Now that's what I call a wedding speech! What you used to call fear can now be renamed excitement and anticipation.

Be prepared for the worst. Even the best-prepared and

most psyched-up speaker can suffer from a sudden attack of the collywobbles on the big day. You must be prepared for this possibility. This does *not* reflect a negative attitude, it reflects a sensible one.

Taking out an insurance policy does not mean you expect to fall down a manhole or to be struck by lightning.

If you feel the pressure getting to you *before* you speak, remind yourself that this is a happy occasion. The audience is on your side. They are willing you to do well. But if you are still feeling over-anxious, try this simple emergency relaxation technique:

Pull in your stomach muscles tightly. Relax.

Clench your fists tightly. Relax.

Extend your fingers. Relax.

Grasp the seat of your chair. Relax.

Press your elbows tightly into the side of your body. Relax.

Push your feet into the floor. Relax.

Whatever you do, don't drink too much. Booze is like success; it's great until it goes to your head. Don't drink and drivel.

But what if you feel that you are losing control of your voice *during* your speech? Don't panic!

If you feel yourself speeding up, stop and take a couple of deep breaths. That will slow you down.

If you feel you're getting hoarse, then take a drink of water. That has the effect of cooling the back of your throat.

If you feel your voice getting higher as you speak, once

again take a drink of water. That will enable your voice box to drop down as you swallow and that, in turn, will help to bring your voice down.

MAKING WHAT MATTERS WORK FOR YOU

The challenge is to project your personality, not suppress it. Knowing that you not only *can*, but also *should* 'be yourself' will stop you worrying about your 'performance', and allow you to concentrate on what really matters: being yourself and entertaining your audience.

The effectiveness of your speech will depend, to a large extent, on your body language. A relaxed stance and upright posture, purposeful economy of movement, fluid gestures and lively eyes and facial expression will all capture your audience's attention and greatly enhance the impact of your speech.

The greatest antidotes to nerves are preparation and attitude.

Putting it into Practice

1 Be sure to learn the essentials

Find out who's going to speak, and in what order.

Remember that the purpose of your speech is to respond to the bridegroom's toast on behalf of the bridesmaids and any other attendants.

Make happy talk. Always look on the bright side of life!

Say things that *everyone* present will find interesting and amusing.

Follow the best man's ten golden rules.

2 Say it with humour

Use whatever material is most suitable for this particular audience.

Before you have a go at the bridegroom, make a couple of jokes against yourself. Keep all your insulting remarks 'friendly'. Let your audience know you don't really mean a word of it!

Learn a few humorous lines that you could use to counter any potential problems or distractions you might face.

3 Include plenty of optimistic and congratulatory thoughts, too

Use generosity, generously.

Follow the Ping Pong Principle throughout your speech: alternate your teasing remarks with genuine compliments.

Offer a little light-hearted, humorous advice to the happy couple as well as one or two relevant, positive quotations.

4 Plan and then memorise your opening and closing words

Find a captivating opening that's spot on for this wedding, this audience and you.

Don't forget to respond to the toast to the bridesmaids!

Devise a compelling close that will leave them gobsmacked.

Don't just *read* the tele-messages; keep the guests involved by providing a little background detail about each of them.

Consider bracketing your speech to give it a pleasing and memorable symmetry.

5 Put it all together

Prepare whatever sort of script suits you best.

As you draft your speech, think like a listener and write like a talker.

Use words and images creatively and imaginatively so they reach your audience's minds and touch their hearts.

Make sure your speech has a rhythm of its own that will keep the audience engrossed and enthralled.

Keep your speech flowing smoothly and gracefully from beginning to end.

6 Put it across

This above all: to thine own self be true.

Address the guests with confidence, courage and conviction. Relaxed and purposeful body language