

The Four Honors of Public Speaking

By
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Confession

The audience was a group of professional businesswomen with a couple of male guests. I was the keynote for the evening and proceeded to trip over myself in nearly every way possible. Out of this experience came a sense of what I did not honor on that occasion. One's insights from making mistakes are what make progress possible and success within a grasp. Here, in a list, are my faux pas.

- I felt disoriented when I entered the hotel.
- I was disappointed when I saw a small, close room with room for only about 25 people.
- I immediately wished I hadn't worn my best jacket.
- I was comfortable that I could carry off any occasion.
- I failed to greet everyone who came into the room, which was my usual practice when possible (and it was possible on this occasion).
- I didn't check the room from the podium and how it would be for me up there.
- I had a glass of wine, justifying it as only one small glass with dinner.
- I failed to connect with the person who was going to introduce me.
- When introduced I did not acknowledge the introduction.
- My keynote was supposed to demonstrate coaching and its value to performance.
- I found a willing male subject in the audience who wanted to be coached.
- I never set up what I was going to do with the rest of the audience.
- I lost my composure during the "coaching workshop" phase when I saw the looks on some of the audience's faces (confusion, discomfort, displeasure).
- I failed to acknowledge and deal with the audience's problems.
- I rationalized that the audience was a poor one instead of the speaker failing to honor the audience.

Here, then are 4 ways to honor one's audience and make a difference every time. Each is a jewel and, if followed, clearly would have brought value to my audience on that night.

The Four Honors of Public Speaking

○ **Honor your audience.**

Speak on a subject that is interesting to your audience.

Speak in relevant language.

Acknowledge your audience.

Dress to honor your audience.

Speak to be heard and understood.

Create value for your audience.

Everything a speaker does to honor the audience honors the speaker. It's a curious phenomenon and rewarding at the most fundamental level of personal giving. I've often heard the admonishment to remember that speakers want to give something to others and so here is the first of the way to do that. One of the greatest public speakers I have ever heard and seen is W. Mitchell, a man disturbingly disfigured in a fire. He rolls out on the stage in his wheelchair, goes back and forth several times without saying a word, just looking at us. He then says something funny to put us at some ease. He is pure inspiration without pity and is fully connected with his audience every second he is in front of us.

○ **Honor your time.**

Speak no longer than the time you are given.

Time yourself or be timed.

Be on time, but early is always better.

Adjust to time challenges you cannot control.

Stay on track and never wander off into unplanned explanations.

I was listening to a series of entrepreneurs spend a timed ten minutes giving the essential parts of their new business to people with money to invest. About in the middle of the group one of the participants began his talk and took over 20 minutes. He wandered around trying to explain one more thing and then another. The audience was restless. Later when I spoke with one of his management team members I was asked "How did our presentation go?" I remarked that his boss injured his potential by taking far more time than he was supposed to, and not following the rules, so to speak. The response was: "He had no idea he went over and in fact thought he hadn't used up his time."

○ **Honor your subject.**

Speak on a subject that is important to you.

Set your audience up for enjoyment and value.

Enjoy and delight in your subject.

Create original ideas and memorable stories.

Authenticate your information.

Speakers can get stale or sometimes fail to find the passion in a subject. If I am not honoring my audience by being relevant to their experience, the most passionate love of my subject will vaporize in a room of no interest ... oh, it can be felt easily. One must not assume anything but can certainly learn to generate enthusiasm with new stories, renewed insights and authentic appreciation of the power of words and one's responsibility to the four honors.

- **Honor yourself.**

- Take care of your physical preparation.
- Allow time to connect with the audience.
- Appreciate the power you have when you speak.
- Accept genuine acknowledgement and appreciation.
- Prepare well.
- Above all, be yourself.

In the opening story about all of my faux pas, I was not honoring myself. I was making excuses, compromising my own practices, failing to connect with my audience, was truly not prepared, and self-conscious about being myself. One thing I learned about public speaking is that anything other than authenticity is fatal to one's potential to be effective.

Afterthought

Imagine success in public speaking at the level of honor. It's easy to imagine and simple to put into words, of course. It's another challenge altogether to live and work with such values. Let me know if they work for you. *And ... go forth and make a difference!*

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