

# Technical Affairs

By Mike Aamodt, Associate Editor

This month's column contains some thoughts on introducing speakers as well as a piece of HR humor. If you have any questions you want answered, or have a piece of HR HUMOR to contribute, email them to me at [maamodt@radford.edu](mailto:maamodt@radford.edu). Don't make me have to come find you!

## I'm Pleased to Introduce.....

I was putting the finishing touches on a column about reducing turnover when I took a break to give a talk at the monthly meeting of a local human resources group. My experience at that meeting motivated me to save the turnover column for the next ACN issue and provide some thoughts about the proper way to introduce speakers—especially ones that are speaking for free (well not exactly free, I did get a chicken lunch!). I thought the column might be useful, because many ACN readers either speak at such events or are called on from time-to-time to introduce speakers or trainers at professional and community meetings.

My experience the other day wasn't terrible, but it reminded me of an occasion a few years ago when I was asked to speak (for free again) at a local professional group. When I arrived at that meeting, I was told that the person who arranged for me to speak had a work-related emergency and would not be able to attend. No problem, I thought. The person probably arranged for someone else to introduce me. I enjoyed a good breakfast and some good conversation with the folks at my table but noticed that it was 8:15 a.m., and I had been told that the group ate at 7:30 and started the program at 8:00. By 8:25 I got a bit nervous because I was supposed to speak for 45 minutes and the meeting had to end by 9:00. I asked the people at the table when the program would start and they replied, "Good question. None of the officers are here who normally run the meeting." So, I stood up and said, "Let's get started this morning. Any business before I introduce myself—your speaker?" A few people made announcements and then I introduced myself, gave a short version of my talk, and closed the meeting. It didn't seem odd to anyone that a speaker who had never met anyone in the group before had actually run the meeting!

What's the big deal? For those of you who conduct training programs or do public speaking, the introduction is one of the most important aspects of the talk. It provides the speaker with credibility, signals the importance of the topic, and sets the tone for the talk. Furthermore, a properly prepared introduction shows the speaker that you appreciate the time he/she has spent preparing for and giving the talk to your group. A proper introduction makes a speaker's job easier, whereas a terrible introduction can ruin the talk. With that said, here is some advice working with and introducing speakers.

### Prior to the Talk

1. Provide the speaker with details about what you expect. Important details include the desired length of the talk, the time at which the meeting will begin and end, and what you want the group to get from the talk (e.g., awareness, motivation, knowledge, a new skill).
2. Tell the speaker about your group. Do they tend to participate? Do they like humor? What types of presentations have been well received and poorly received in the past? For example, when planning programs for our Kiwanis club, I always told speakers that a few of our members would fall asleep right after dinner and to not take it personally. They have fallen asleep at meetings for 20 years and will probably do so for the next 20.
3. Find out what equipment the speaker needs and find a way to get it. When people are speaking for free, you should not expect them to drag their own equipment to the talk. Let the speaker know of any limitations. For example, if the laptop only has a CD drive, let the speaker know.
4. Find out how the speaker wants to be introduced and ask for a short bio. Do not ask for a resume. Most people who do a lot of speaking have a bio prepared that provides the information they want the audience to know.
5. Ask the speaker how to pronounce his/her name.
6. Send the speaker an email confirming the details of the talk as well as directions to the speaking location. Mention to the speaker how you want to handle handouts. That is, should the speaker email you a copy of the presentation so that you can make copies or would the speaker prefer to make the copies and be reimbursed?
7. Two days prior to the talk, call the speaker to confirm details. Such a phone call will also reassure the speaker that the equipment needed will be there and that the talk is still on.
8. Practice your introduction like you would a speech.

### During the Meeting

1. Be there early to meet the speaker and have the audiovisual equipment already set up.
2. Help the speaker load the presentation if a computer is to be used and show the speaker how the equipment works.
3. Introduce the speaker to members of your group and be sure that the speaker has a good location to sit. That is,

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don't put the speaker at a table where he/she might be alone or at a table that makes it difficult to get to the location where the presentation will be made. Some speakers are socially self-sufficient and have no problem mingling, but there are many who need your social assistance.

4. If there is food at the meeting, be sure the speaker gets served first so that he/she will be finished eating well in advance of speaking.

## The Introduction

The first purpose of an introduction is to get the attention of the audience and to signal that it is time to quit eating and talking to others at the table and time to listen. If you want the audience to continue eating during the talk, let them know that eating is ok.

The three goals to a good introduction are to motivate the audience to listen, establish the credibility of the speaker, and set the tone for the talk.

## Motivating the Audience to Listen

An audience will be motivated to listen if the talk will do something for them. For example, an opening sentence might be, "Most of us have had the unfortunate experience of working with a difficult colleague. Tonight's speaker will provide us with some insight on how we can handle difficult employees" or "I think all of us have struggled with the new state disability law. Our speaker tonight will explain how to comply with the new law."

## Establishing the Credibility of the Speaker

The key here isn't to recite everything about the speaker's life, but instead, to give the audience enough information to realize that the speaker actually knows something about the topic. Phrases such as, "Our speaker has 20 years experience preparing affirmative action plans" or, "Our speaker has written three books on employee selection" should do the trick. Ask the speaker what key information he/she wants included in the introduction. If you are reading from a bio given to you by the speaker, pretend you wrote the introduction. Never say, "Let me read you some information given to me by the speaker." When the accolades appear to come from you, the speaker looks good. If the audience thinks they came from the speaker, the speaker appears conceited.

If the speaker has some affiliation with your group, be sure to mention it. For example, I once spoke at a State IPMA meeting and included information in my bio that I had been a member of IPMAAC since 1985. The audience seemed to like the fact that I knew who they were.

## Setting the Tone for the Talk

To make the speaker appear human, a few words on his/her personal life are often appropriate (e.g., married with a daughter in high school, likes to bowl, originally from this area but moved when he was five). However, any personal information should be given with a purpose, such as making the speaker appear likable or demonstrating the speaker's similarity to the audience. When using personal infor-

mation, be careful about stereotyping. A former student told me of a conference she attended in which the introductions for the women who spoke included family information whereas the introduction for the men included professional credentials.

A little humor in the introduction can establish that the tone of the talk will be light. Caution: Ask the speaker how he/she will begin their talk. If the speaker plans to use humor to start their talk, you don't want to use humor in the introduction and run the risk of stealing their thunder. Avoid using canned jokes (e.g., a rabbi, a priest, and an HR analyst went into a bar...) – they seldom work and can distract from the point of the introduction.

Have your introduction memorized and be energetic when making the introduction. After making the introduction, ask the audience to welcome the speaker and stay at the podium until the speaker gets there.

## A Note to Speakers

It would be nice if introductions were always perfect, but the reality is that they often are not. It is a good idea to prepare your speaker's bio to send to the person who will introduce you. Keep it short enough that it will take only a minute or two to read. This bio can be customized for each talk by changing an item or two that you want emphasized. It is helpful to phonetically spell your name or title if you think it might be mispronounced. Be sure to bring a copy of your bio/introduction with you in case the person introducing you forgets their copy—an all too common occurrence.

I hope the above hints will prove useful. If you have some hints that I left out or have some good stories about bad introductions, send me an email, and I will include them in the next technical affairs column.

## HR HUMOR

**A big corporation recently hired several cannibals.**

**"You are all part of our team now,"** said the HR rep during the welcoming briefing.

**"You get all the usual benefits, and you can go to the cafeteria for something to eat; but please do not eat any of the other employees."** The cannibals promised they would not.

**Four weeks later their boss remarked, "You're all working very hard, and I'm very satisfied with you. However, one of our secretaries has disappeared. Do any of you know what happened to her?"** The cannibals all shook their heads no.

**After the boss had left, the leader of the cannibals said to the others, "Which one of you idiots ate the secretary?"**

**A hand rose hesitantly, to which the leader of the cannibals shouted,**

**"You fool!!! For four weeks we've been eating managers and no one noticed anything. But nooooooo, you had to go and eat someone important. —ACN**