

USE QUOTATIONS TO IMPROVE YOUR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Quoting famous personalities and recognized authorities adds impact to any speech or presentation and is an effective way of getting your audience's attention. When and how do you use quotations and how do you find the right ones for your purpose?

by Caterina Rando, MA, MCC

The job of getting your point across to a audience, a group at work or your boss can often be a difficult task. The more resources you have available the better your chances of success.

My two goals in this article are: 1) Explain to you why you should use quotations in your business communication. 2) Give you some guidelines for usage. 3) Show you how to find the right quotation to help you sell your idea and bring confidence, inspiration, and guidance to your business communication.

In today's ever-changing work environment one of the primary requisites is the ability to communicate, something I believe we should always be working on.

Whether you are an entrepreneur, manager, employee, student or volunteer for a local charity there will be a time when you are asked to make a speech or give a presentation to a group of people. Public speaking is an excellent medium to gain exposure and potential clients.

Why you should use them

1) Quotations are a great resource, often overlooked, that all of us can draw from to **provide inspiration and guidance to an audience**. They can be used to help charge our batteries and stay motivated. Which is why the walls of many corporations are covered with quotations like "Do it right the first time." or "Persistence prevails when all else fails."

2) **The right quotation can highlight your entire presentation** and make the difference between an ordinary one and one that is memorable. The audience will remember you and your message. Quotations can be used to bring together and distill or sum up the points in a presentation.

I once attended a seminar on networking where the speaker gave many examples of the power of networking to increase your business. Then she concluded with a quote which I still remember. "*People do business with people they know*". That was it, most of the entire lecture summed up in that one quote.

3) **Quotations are usually accepted at face value** if they were made by a famous personality. You won't have to defend that person. They said it so it must be true. It will bring credence to your presentation. That is why celebrities are used on commercials. They always tell the truth (right?). It is unfortunate but true.

4) **Quotations can be used to get a laugh** but the humor should always be appropriate to your material. There is no better way to connect to your audience. In the words of Goldie Hawn: "Once you can laugh at your own weaknesses, you can move forward. Comedy breaks down walls. It opens up people. If you're good, you can fill up those openings with something positive. Maybe you can combat some of the ugliness in the world."

5) **Quotations can be also be used to add a light-hearted touch** to any occasion. When my sister Angela married her fiancé, Tom, my father proposed a toast at the onset of the wedding reception dinner. He stated "One of the things that Tom and I have in common aside from the fact that we both love Angela very much is that we are both great fans of Star Trek. Therefore, I think it is very appropriate that I borrow a quotation from our favorite Vulcan, Mr. Spock - To Tom and Angela may they live long and prosper."

6) Quotations can give you support and **help you overcome your fear of speaking**. Whenever you are asked to give a presentation do you get sweaty palms or a racing heartbeat? Do the questions "Where will I get my ideas?" or "How do I find the perfect phrase that says it all?" cross your mind?

You are not alone. As Carol Warner in her book entitled *The Last Word* states: "I never go to the podium alone. I always take a variety of people with me. One time it might be Golda Meir or Dorothy Parker. It is often Eleanor Roosevelt and sometimes it is my grandmother." When using quotations from a famous personality you will gain a strong feeling of self confidence that will assist you in your delivery.

7) **Quotations are great introductions for a speech**. When used at the beginning of a speech they can be used wake up the audience and get their attention immediately.

Recently I was making a presentation to someone for outstanding community service and I began by stating that the famed anthropologist Margaret Mead was once asked what how she defined success and she said "I must admit that I personally measure success in terms of the contributions an individual makes to her or his fellow human beings." I then went on to state the many contributions the person I was honoring had made to the community and by Margaret Mead's standards that individual was a great success.

Think back to the last speaker you heard. Was there something memorable that you walked away with?

Quotes are not only memorable, educational and inspiring, they grab the audience's attention. Starting with a quotation is an excellent way to jump start your presentation so your audience is attentive right from the very beginning.

Guidelines for using them

1. The authority you quote should be recognized as someone who has the right to speak on the subject, i.e. an authority in that field who your audience can relate to.
2. Don't stretch the quote to make it fit the point you are trying to make. It should be concise, relevant and timely to your speech.
3. Stay away from hackneyed quotations that are common. These would only appear amateurish to your audience.

4. The quotations should be used more for emotional or inspirational acceptance of your ideas. One of my favorite inspirational quotes that I save for my talks to the fledging entrepreneur is from Joyce A Myers: *"A Number 2 pencil and a dream can take you anywhere."*

5. You cannot depend on quotations alone. You will need to provide some facts or anecdotes to complete acceptance of your presentation.

How do you find the right quotation?

The libraries and book stores are well stocked with books on quotations. However, here too you will need some guidelines.

The book should have an index by subject to assist you in finding the right quote. It should have timely quotes that are both relevant and concise. Also I like to see a quote book with some biographical information on the author. The author's profession or occupation is important information.

Another source of quotations are newspapers and magazines. You must of course write them down in a note book for future reference.

I'm sure at one time or another you've found a quote that you liked and clipped it out and carried it in a special place or made a notation somewhere. Many years ago my mother had her purse stolen on a Muni Bus. She was returning home from a trying day as a primary school teacher and she placed her purse in a shopping bag together with school papers.

Just as she had sat down, someone snatched the shopping bag from her and ran out the back door. About to months later, my dad received a phone call from a woman who had retrieved my mom's purse from a bush in Golden Gate Park. The lady informed my dad that the purse was of course empty. The woman told my father that she knew my mother was a good and kind woman. My father replied: "Yes, that's true, but how could you tell from an empty purse?"

"It wasn't completely empty", said the woman. "It contained a quotation she had clipped from the newspaper which read: *'I shall pass this way only once, any good that I may do let me do it now for I shall not pass this way again'*".

My dad told me a story about someone who was an even greater collector of quotations. Years ago when he was promoted into management he felt the need to join Toastmasters since he was being called upon to speak on many occasions and he had little training in giving speeches. When he was pursuing a degree in Mechanical Engineering he had felt those speech classes were strictly for the liberal arts majors.

In his Toastmasters group was a trim elderly white mustached British gentleman who not only used quotations frequently in his prepared speeches but also in table topics where you are called upon to speak extemporaneously on the topic of the day, which could be anything. One day my dad confronted him and asked him how he could literally pull these quotations from the air.

He showed my dad a very tattered notebook in which he had meticulously handwritten quotations. Judging from the condition of the book he had been making these entries for many years. He said that he always was a great lover of quotations and had committed most of them to memory. He said that many of them had provided him with much inspiration and helped him through some very dark moments during World War Two and the years following while he was establishing a new business.

I hope through this article you too will become a lover and user of quotations. Collect some of your friends quotes or some of your own. Remember you don't have to be a celebrity to have an original thought!

In conclusion I think it is only fitting that I should end my remarks with a quotation. I have found one which I believe is appropriate for this discussion by English mystery writer Dorothy L Sayers: "*I always have a quotation for everything-It saves original thinking.*"