Chapter 19
Persuasive Strategies
from
PUBLIC SPEAKING: AN IDEA PERSPECTIVE
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General Educational Objectives: This chapter helps you to:
1. understand types of audiences based on attitude similarity.
2. understand three message strategies.
3. apply the rules for using strategies to different audiences..

Specific Testable Objectives: As a result of studying this chapter, you should be able to:
1. classify audiences based on their attitude toward the topic.
2. state and apply the rules for stating the purpose.
3. state and apply the rules for placement of purpose.
4. state and apply the rules for placement of strongest argument.
5. state and apply the conditions for being one sided.

Attitudes are cognitions that can't be seen directly. Still their manifestations often make it possible to determine them sufficiently for us to make useful predictions as to how an audience will react to a particular message. As we work with an audience or with members of an audience on an individual basis, we can infer attitudes. Indeed, most people are typically willing to tell us how they feel about important issues in their lives. In these feelings are found clear cues as to their attitudes.

From people's willingness to express their feelings comes the formal process of opinion surveys. In this context, the word, *opinion*, is used to mean an expression of an evaluation. Evaluative statements, including those expressing an intention to behave, appear to be the most efficient means of measuring attitudes.

Based both on data from opinion research and on statistical theory, we have sufficient reason to accept that whenever a large number of people respond to an opinion measure, their scores can be arranged in a "normal" or bell-shaped curve. Few people will take an extreme position in either direction; as the scores move toward the center from either direction, the number of scores increase.

Given this large group of people, it is likely that they can be divided into three groups in relationship to the purpose of any speech. At one end of the continuum will be the individuals who agree, more or less with the speech; at the other end will be individuals who disagree with the speech. Those who tend to agree, we call **Partisan**; those who tend to disagree we label as **Hostile** and those between these two groups, we term **Neutrals**. See graph 19-1.

Graph 19-1

%

of

People

| Hostile   Neutral   Partisan

_____
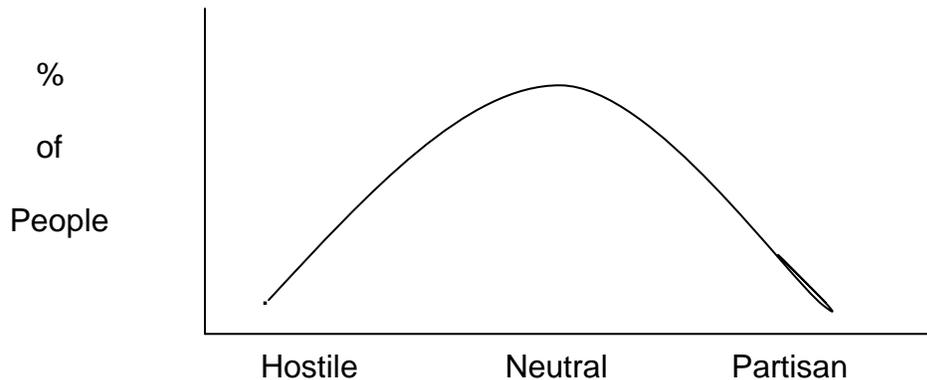
Five types of audiences

Graphs similar to 19-1 are helpful for media campaigns. However, here our focus is more on public-speaking situations. In such cases, the audiences tend to be less diverse. Most generally, they fall in the **partisan** area.   That's true because we usually invite speakers who agree with us; and people in the group who rise to speak are members of the group. Sometimes, the majority of listeners fall into the neutral category; seldom would the majority be classified as hostiles. We generally only speak to **hostiles** when we truly love them or when we must in order to save face and serve as a role-model for our partisans.

Identifying the majority of listeners as hostiles or as partisans can be useful to us. Knowing that a person or members of an audience is neutral is less beneficial. For neutrals, additional analysis is needed, but this analysis may not be difficult. We begin by asking why the people are neutral. Probably some aspect of the situation, characteristics of the audience or nature of the topic will answer this question in one of three general ways.

One reason that people are neutral is that they don't know enough to make a decision. These individuals are categorized as **Uninformed Neutrals**.

Another reason that people are neutral is that they don't care enough to make a decision. They don't think that the issue is relevant to them. These people are referred to as **Unconcerned Neutrals**.

A third group of neutrals are informed and they care. They simply see reasons to support more than one option and thus can not determine the best stance on an issue. These individuals are the **Undecided Neutrals.**

Adding these three categories of neutrals to partisans and hostiles gives five categories of audiences based on their attitudes: **Partisan, Uninformed Neutral, Unconcerned Neutral, Undecided Neutral, and Hostile.**

These categories become most useful in making appropriate adjustments in addressing any issue with an audience. Below, we will consider dealing with your purpose, dealing with exceptions (i.e. potential arguments against your position) and the placement of the strongest argument.

Purpose and thesis

The link between the type of audience and the best purpose for the speech is fairly direct:

If the audience is partisan, its members are a great resource for the speaker. The speaker is best advised, generally to ask for their help in getting the task accomplished. Thus, a "we" approach makes sense: as in "Here is what we need to be doing." Generally the task that "we" need to be doing involves the influencing of others. Determining who the "others" are is an important responsibility for the speaker.

For the uninformed neutral, the speaker's purpose is logically to provide the most useful information and to help the audience to understand and appreciate its significance.

For the unconcerned neutral, the speaker's purpose is most likely to be to help the audience see that the topic is important to them and that the outcome of decisions on the topic does affect their lives.

For the undecided neutral, the speaker's goal must be to enable the audience to see that it is time for them to make the right decision, that their help is needed in accomplishing what must be accomplished. A sense of urgency for them to decide should be conveyed.

Certainly, the least obvious link to purpose is in the case of the hostile audience. While most speakers would generally love to change the stance of those who are strongly opposed to them, the speakers understand that it is highly unlikely to happen. So, why do they waste time even trying? The answer generally comes down to the issue of the speaker's image. The speaker can not allow it to be said that he or she would not make the speech and, typically, by making the speech, the speaker gains publicity. Partisans know about the speech and are impressed. The partisans, then, are encouraged it to speak out for the cause even when they might not want to. Thus, it is important that in speaking to a hostile audience that the speaker remain true to his or her position. No attempt should be made to deceive, but the wording should be tailored not to offend or alienate the audience. Typically, the speaker asks a hostile audience to give the speech a fair consideration: i.e. that they be reasonable, and open to reason.

Placement of purpose

The type of audience is one consideration in when the speaker first presents the purpose to the audience. However, the more important consideration is the difficulty of this thesis. The more difficult the purpose either in terms of how confusing it might be to the audience or how much it may require of the audience for its accomplishment, the more justification there is for stating the idea as part of the introduction or in establishing

the preview to the body of the speech. Simply stated the rule for complex purposes is to present them early regardless of the audience's attitude.

If the thesis is sufficiently clear that the audience can determine it from the points of the speech, then the audience's collective attitude becomes involved as follows:

For a partisan audience, an argument is often made for not presenting the purpose at all. The logic of this argument is strong: If they figure it out for themselves, it becomes theirs. Since partisans want to help, they are likely to conclude what is needed and feel good in doing what they've decided to do. An application of this logic sometimes results in what is called the "pseudo-informative approach," where the speaker actually denies having a persuasive purpose at all. Caution is recommended in using this approach because if the audience recognizes the speaker's intent, it may cost her or him essential credibility to accomplish the needed goal.

The main problem with not stating a thesis, even for a partisan audience, it that the audience may misunderstand what is actually needed. In some cases, the speaker may have the direct opposite of the intended effect, sometimes referred to as a *boomerang effect*. You can gain basically the same benefits by stating the purpose at the end of the speech as part of the conclusion. Given that the audience has deducted the purpose, you are then in the enviable position of agreeing with the audience.

With an uninformed-neutral audience, if the thesis is simple, placing it in the conclusion can be effective. Note, however, that typically with uninformed audiences there is much that the speaker generally wants to accomplish, thus the need for an early purpose statement.

For an unconcerned-neutral audience, the thesis is often simple and may well be best placed late in the speech.

For an undecided neutral audience the speaker must recognize that the thesis can never be simple. Undecided individuals have not made up their minds in large part because they see the issue as very complex. The goal of the speaker may well be to help them see the issue in simpler terms; still, the speaker, to accomplish this purpose, is going to have to deal with the apparent complexities in order to resolve them.

While for a hostile audience, the purpose is generally simple, the speaker still wants to present it to the audience in the early stages. Probably, the speaker will spend more time with introductory remarks in an attempt to gain as much rapport as possible. The speaker may even go to the extent of addressing some extraneous issues before coming to the primary purpose for the address. Still, when the speaker does define the topic, he or she needs to be clear in identifying the stance she or he is taking. As stated above, care needs to be exercised in wording the thesis so as not to offend. The speaker will also work to state the position in the most reasonable way possible. Still, the speaker will not say anything in any way that might prompt his or her partisans, who will certainly hear of the speech, to believe that the speaker has compromised the basic tenets of the partisan position.

Placement of strongest argument

As you examine the idea structure of your speech, you may know that some of your arguments are weaker than others. Some points may be strong due to the quality of the supporting material. Your visuals and quotations from trusted authorities may make the point one that any reasonable person would have to accept. Another way for

the points to be strong is that their thrusts are already supported by audience beliefs. The audience already accepts that their children need to be safe and your point is they need to be safe on their way home from school. A really strong argument would be both connected to their beliefs and supported by excellent supporting material.

The question is: Where in the body of my speech should I place my strongest argument? Two possibilities have been supported by research. The first, termed primacy, says to place your strongest argument first while the mind of the audience is fresh. The second, termed recency, says to save the strongest argument until the last so that it will be the most recent one when the audience actually acts.

Since both positions have research support, it is safe to conclude that you don't want to put your strongest argument in the middle of the speech. Given that conclusion, the organizational pattern of the speech may determine when the strongest argument is presented, with one except. Since hostile audiences have a tendency to tune out, for them you should place your strongest argument as early in the body of the speech as possible. So, you should use primacy for a hostile audience. Where the pattern of the speech permits, I recommend the use of recency for all other audiences.

The one-sided speech

There is a tendency for speakers to favor a "one-sided" speech; that is, one which presents only reasons for accepting their positions on the topic. Certainly, it is an easier speech to construct and present than one that considers why their position is superior despite arguments to the contrary. The one-sided speech is also often effective; however, research suggests that it is most effective with only one type audience. To be most effective, a one-sided speech must be presented to an audience that has all of the following characteristics:

1. the audience needs to support the speaker to some degree (probably partisan or potentially uninformed neutral and perhaps unconcerned neutral).

2. the audience cannot be too critical. We know that the smarter, probably better educated the audience, the more likely it is to be critical even if it isn't hostile.

3. the audience cannot be too informed on the issue at hand.

4. the audience must be able to act upon the request before it hears arguments opposed to those presented by the speaker.

While these criteria are demanding, it's probably wise to remember that most speeches are presented to partisans; a large number of audiences do fulfill all four.

The two-sided speech

When I say that a speech is two-sided, there is no implication that the speech is balanced or that it doesn't take a stand on an issue. Being "two-sided" only means that the speaker considers *exceptions* or issues that may not support his or her stance.

In being two sided, the speaker may do some combination of three things:

Simply mention, or present the opposing views. Here, care is exercised to insure that the audience knows that these are not the views of the speaker. For a highly partisan audience, they may seem even to come from the Devil. In addressing a hostile audience, the source of the ideas will most likely be given due deference.

Concede. The speaker will likely recognize that her or his position isn't perfect and admit weaknesses. Most of us believe firmly in democracy and a judicial system

based on open trials; the strong support for either doesn't mean that we don't see problems. Indeed, if we didn't see the problems, there might be reason for concern. Overall, we believe that the strengths of the system far outweigh the weaknesses.

      Refute. In refuting, the speaker shows how attacks against the partisan position are illogical or are not supported by credible evidence. In refuting, the speaker (1) presents the argument that is alleged against his or her side, (2) states why the argument isn't correct, (3) provides support for her or his analysis and (4) shows how the refutation results in support for the partisan position.

Advantages of being two sided

      Four advantages are gained by considering two sides of an issue:

      The audience is *inoculated* against argument from the opposition. The process seems to work very much as in medicine. By giving the listeners the opposing views, weakened by refutation, the listeners begin building resistance before they hear the arguments in full force.

      The audience is less likely to consider opposing arguments during the speech. The process of mentally arguing with the speaker is termed *rehearsal* because it is like the person is preparing what to say in response. Rehearsal is a common activity by most individuals. The more intelligent and/or educated, the more likely the person is to rehearse. Certainly, we can expect rehearsal from a hostile audience.   Obviously, if the person is rehearsing, she or he isn't listening to the speech the way that the speaker would most like.

      The audience is going to respect the speaker more. By discussing both sides, speakers demonstrate that they are well informed on the topic. They avoid the risk of anyone thinking that they aren't even aware of the potential pitfalls of their proposal. The speakers also demonstrate their ability to examine both sides in an open-minded way. Thus, by discussing both sides, the speaker's expertise is at least maintained and potentially increased.

      The speaker will feel better for being ethical. From the audience's standpoint, being perceived as ethical is included in the third advantage. However, we hope that you'll want to strive to be ethical. (From a business standpoint, it can also reduce lawsuits).

Placement of exceptions

      There is a tendency for speakers to discuss attacks against each positive argument in the context of the positive argument. This approach does result in the speech being two-sided; however, this approach also tends to reduce the credibility of the speaker in the eyes of the audience, and may confuse the audience in the process.

      Thus, it is better to deal with necessary exceptions as block. Generally, this block is down played through placement. Given principles of primacy and recency (covered above), material in the middle section of the body of the speech has the least impact. Thus, with the exception of a hostile audience, the section devoted to discussion of the oppositions views should be placed in the middle. With a hostile audience, the block needs to be dealt with early to reduce rehearsal.

Putting It All Together

Each speaking situation is different to a degree, and any "cook-book approach" that I give is going to be incorrect often. Obviously, if you have good reasons to know, in advance, that the recommendations I provide will not be best in a particular situation, you should not follow the cook book. It, Table 19-2, is provided as a base line for decisions. You use it when you wouldn't know how to proceed otherwise. I have incorporated within this table a consideration of the types of audiences based on orientation presented in Chapter 15. If you haven't studied Chapter 15, you may want to familiarize yourself with the classification of audience found there; however, you can probably follow Table 19-2 without doing so.

Table 19-2
Three Primary Message Strategies for Five
Types of Audiences based on Attitude toward the Topic

Partisan and concerted audience – They are supportive of your position but not
ready to act.

Thesis should ask for their support and help, as specifically as seems
appropriate and should be in the conclusion of the speech.
Strongest argument should be the last point.
Exceptions, placed in the middle, should be oriented to inoculation: "Here is
what's wrong with what is being said against us…."

Partisan and Organized -- They are supportive and ready to act

Purpose should be to inform them of (as much as possible) what should be done.
Thesis should be in introduction.
Strongest argument should be the last point.
Exceptions, placed in the middle, should provide counter arguments to any
opposition they are likely to encounter

Uninformed to include pedestrian audience

Purpose should be to provide them with relevant and useful information. Thesis
should be part of preview to speech.
Strongest informational section should come as last point.
Exceptions, placed in the middle, should inoculate.

Unconcerned to include passive audience

Purpose should be to generate interest and help audience to see relevance.
   Thesis should, normally, come in the conclusion. Exception is where
   apathy is a result of complexity issue.
Strongest argument should come in final part of the speech.
Exceptions, placed in the middle, should be focused on overturning any reasons
   they have for not caring.

Undecided to include selected audience

Purpose should be to show the need for a decision on the issue. Thesis need to
   be part of introduction or preview to speech.
Strongest argument should be final point: recency
Exceptions, placed in the middle, may be extensive.

Hostile and concerted audience

Purpose should be to protect and maintain image. Thesis is a request for reason
   to prevail and should be present early, either in introduction or during a
   consideration of exceptions. Speaker's stand should not be distorted
   beyond its being worded in the least offensive language possible.
Strongest argument needs to come early, probably at the heart of the first
   refutation to one of their potential arguments
Exceptions need to come early. Probably, they're best immediately after a
   lengthy, and perhaps irrelevant introduction or after concessions in the
   exceptions.

Summary
   In this chapter, I defined five types of audiences based on their cognitive stance toward the position advocated by the speaker: partisan, uninformed, unconcerned, undecided and hostile. I, then, discussed the appropriate statement of the speaker's purpose for each of these audiences. Next I advised placing the strongest argument last whenever logically possible for all the types except hostile where I recommended placing the strongest argument early. Finally, I discussed being one-sided versus being two-sided in the speech. I listed advantages of being two-sided and explained how the opposing arguments might be best used. I also integrated this information into a table showing, most likely, the best decisions for each type of audience.

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