

Chapter 17
Image Adjustments
from
Public Speaking: An Idea Focus
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General Educational Objectives: This chapter helps you to:

1. understand sources and approaches to building a positive image.
2. apply principles of building images to factors of speaker image.

Specific Testable Objectives: As a result of studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. define, distinguish and advise the use of two major approaches to a good speaker image.
2. define and distinguish two sources of speaker image.
3. interrelate sources and approaches with each speaker-image factor.

On a casual level, for some of us, our concern with affecting what others think of us ends with our personal hygiene and appearance. However, on a deeper level, we can remember completing applications where we made a special effort to highlight our assets. If forced, we'll admit to sometimes refraining from saying something to prevent giving someone the wrong impression of us.

As professionals and as individuals in the public arena, we probably need to be more concerned with image. It is necessary for us to take definitive steps to build and to maintain a positive image for ourselves in the mind of others. You may think, "I don't want to mislead others into thinking that I'm something that I'm not." However, the intent should not be to mislead, but to project the best that you can be. A positive way to view these actions is that you're creating a positive self-fulfilling prophecy. We do tend to live up to what others think of us. If others have a good image of you, it will help you to be the best person that you can be.

Beyond helping you to be the person you should be, if others hold you in esteem, it will help you to be a more effective communicator. Your goal as a communicator should be to help others. This goal unto itself will help your image. Indeed, maintaining a good speaker image, in the long run, depends on your being a person that others can trust. Thus, you should take positive steps to ensure that others are thinking and saying good things about you. After doing your best to be a considerate individual, the next step is to determine what approach you should take to building that positive speaker image.

Determining an Approach to Speaker Image

To be successful, any approach to building, maintaining or adjusting one's image should emphasize the person's assets. It should also be consistent. Often, people work to offset potential weaknesses in their image only to draw

attention to them. Of course, attempting to compensate for potential weaknesses, while emphasizing strengths, is difficult to do in a consistent way. So, the best advice is to behave in such a way as to maximize strengths and minimize attention on weakness. Of course, if others make a serious issue of your deficiencies, you need to reply, as discussed in Chapter 12.

There are as many approaches as there are people; however, it might be helpful to consider two broad generalized approaches, variations of each often lead to success. These approaches provide a clear contrast making it easy to understand the need for consistency. For lack of better terms, I have named these approaches, “high road,” and “low road:” Both approaches are designed to lead to the same place howbeit with different types of speakers.

Inset 17-1

You persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his.

Kenneth Burke

Each approach contributes to a sense of identification from others, but for different reasons. In the high-road approach, others identify with the speaker as someone they would like to be; someone they believe they can become and someone they believe they are in their finest moments. In the low-road approach the audience identifies with the speaker as someone who represents them as they typically are, who speaks for them at the moment and who they would be if they were in the position of leader.

Each approach, when well executed, yields trust and respect. In the low-road approach, the listeners respect the speaker because he/she does what they would do in the same circumstances. The person speaks for them and says what they would say if they had more time, energy and/or opportunity. In the high-road approach, the audience respects the speaker because they see in her/his behaviors a refraction of excellence. The speaker says for them what needs to be said as well as it can be said.

Inset 17-2

Aristotle divided proofs:

artistic which comes from the communication of the speaker

and

non-artistic which comes from other sources

McCroskey defined types of ethos:

initial --the image the audience has of the speaker before the speech

and

derived —the image generated in the listeners mind during the speech

Application

Consider two hypothetical candidates for mayor of a moderate-sized city. Both candidates are women with outstanding service to the community. Rebecca has served on the city council, chaired important committees, been a leader in charity drives and built a successful law firm. Judy successfully led an effort in neighborhood renewal, organized community watch programs, served as a member of the current mayor's task force on crime, and is president of her local union chapter.

Rebecca, as she is known to her friends, is neat, poised and well mannered. Judy answers to many different names when at the neighborhood bar. In short, Rebecca's background and personality suggest a high-road approach in developing her image. Judy's strengths support a more common person approach.

Based on this analysis of the two candidates, the follow section considers possible implications in each campaign using Holzman's speaker-image factors.

Speaker-Image Factors

Perceived Trust

Both candidates should encourage others to speak to their trustworthiness. Certainly both would ask their respective clergy. Further, Rebecca would rely on former professors and judges where, for Judy, neighbors and fellow workers would testify to her honest.

The main way in which each candidate would reinforce her honest in her communication would be through exemplifying sincerity in her delivery. She would maintain a high level of direct eye contact; she would project a vocal tone to reflect her earnestness with emphasis on the appropriate words.

As long as no direct attacks were launched against the candidate's personal integrity, neither would discuss directly her trustworthiness, but only demonstrate it through examples in making other points. Judy's telling of these examples might be in less formal contexts than Rebecca's presentations. Rebecca's would probably reflect courtroom cases where Judy's could well involve family as well as community involvement.

If the campaign did involve personal attacks, each candidate would deal with the allegations swiftly and directly.

Perceived Expertise

Testimonials for each candidate would stress her ability to get the job done. These testimonials for Judy might well come from individuals who have benefited by her community leadership. Rebecca's advocates, mostly recognized state leaders, would describe her using such superlative as brilliant.

The key to building and maintaining perceived expertise for each individual would be in the substance of their speeches. They would both need to be well informed and rational. Much of the support used to establish this substance would come from each person's personal experiences and accomplishments. Contrast in these presentations would be a matter of focus: Rebecca would stress the importance of excellence and quality in public acts; Judy would stress the importance of working with others for common benefits.

Perceived Friendship

Both individuals would want to stress their involvement in the community and how they worked closely with the people. However, the individuals delivering this message in behalf of Rebecca would most likely include more leaders where Judy's spokespeople might have, at its core, more common people.

Both women would work to be among and be photographed with many different and diverse groups. The primary noticeable difference in these pictures would be the clothes worn by the candidate. While Judy's appeal might be more expensive than the others in the picture, it would be most similar in cut and style. Rebecca would be more likely in high-quality business dress.

The key delivery factor for each candidate would be enthusiasm. Both women should show her enthusiasm for both the campaign and her listeners.

Perceived Common Ground

As suggested earlier, Judy would seek identification with the audience as one of them, their spokesperson speaking what is on their mind. Rebecca would project the image of the person they long to be; she would represent them as they would if they were more able. This contrast in image would be reflected in what other said of them as well as what they said and did.

Language expectancy

Both women would work to use language according to what their listeners might expect from a person with the image they seek to project. Rebecca's language would be favored with commonly understood words that carried the exact meaning she intended, but might not be words that the audience themselves would use. Judy would be clear in her language use but her grammar would likely reflect that used by the audience where it varied from standard usage.

Summary

In this chapter I defined two sources of speaker image and two contrasting approaches for building image. Using two hypothetical mayoral candidates, we considered how each might develop a different image by utilizing the two approaches.

Key Sources:

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