

## *LESSON- 1*

### **How a Course In Public Speaking Can Help me?**

This course deserves your commitment because of the significant benefits it offers. Personally, you should benefit from the opportunity to grow as a sensitive, skilled communicator, and from the practical advantages such growth makes possible. You should also become a more effective member of society. Self-government cannot work without responsible and effective public communication, and public speaking is the basic form of such communication. The public speaking class can expose you to different cultures as you hear others express their lifestyles, values, and concerns. Such exposure can counter *ethnocentrism*, the tendency to feel that our way to live is the only right way.

A college course in public speaking offers benefits in three important dimensions of your life. These include personal benefits, social benefits, and cultural benefits. Each area of benefits becomes a powerful argument justifying your commitment to this class.

#### ***Personal Benefits***

You should benefit personally from this class in two ways. First, you will have an opportunity to grow into a sensitive, creative, and skilled communicator. Second, you will enjoy the practical advantages brought about by improved communication skills.

**Growth as a Public Speaker.** The most basic benefits of this class, those that make all the rest possible, are the sensitivity and creativity you should develop as you learn to be an effective speaker. Public speaking encourages you to look inside yourself and explore what really matters to you so that you can share these convictions and concerns. Additionally, the class teaches you how to consider the welfare and needs of your listeners. What issues concern them? Are these the issues that *ought* to concern them? How might the audience react when you speak on these issues? “What personal experiences can you draw upon to make them come alive for listeners? How can you build a base of knowledge so that you can speak responsibly?”

One special sensitivity you also should acquire is an appreciation for the power of speech. The biggest lie we ever learn is that “Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me.” Sometimes words can hurt more than sticks or stones. But words can also create, build, and transform. There is a magic to the art of speaking that has been acknowledged since civilization began. From the time of Homer, nearly three thousand years ago, poets have marveled over the forces that move speakers to eloquence. The Oglala Sioux, for example, think that speaking must have divine origins. They believe that the ability to make a good speech is a great gift to the people from their Maker, Owner of all things.”<sup>1</sup>

As you speak before a group, you will become aware of how people respond to you. A responsive audience can make your thoughts and feelings come alive in ways you have never experienced before. One of your authors experienced this phenomenon in a dramatic way:

When he moved to Memphis in 1966, Michael was asked by a friend to speak at a campaign kickoff for the first black candidate for mayor in Memphis. The organizers wanted to emphasize the candidate's appeal across racial lines but could get no other white person to speak at the event. He agreed, with some apprehension. "What would happen to him?" - that concern for the self rather than for others that Martin Luther King shamed as he told the parable of the Good Samaritan in his speeches - bothered him as well. Yet he agreed to speak. The audience was huge, and he stood up among the parade of black speakers, an unknown person before an unfamiliar audience, significant only because of his race. His opening lines were, "Long ago a man far wiser than any of us said, 'A house divided against itself cannot stand.'" He paused, and from that audience there came a thunderous "AMEN!" He was startled, but he smiled, and they smiled, and then he went on. As he spoke, it occurred to him what their acceptance meant, how supported he felt by their encouragement, and how strong and vital his message seemed, as he talked about opening the rusted doors of opportunity to those who had been left on the outside.<sup>2</sup>

There is a mystery here that is hard to penetrate, but it has to do with the joint creation of meaning, an awareness that the speaker and listener work together to make sense of the uncertainty that surrounds them. Such moments can be unforgettable and significant to all who experience them.

There are other important skills you will acquire as you grow into a successful speaker. You will learn how to find a worthwhile topic, how to research it to strengthen your message, how to structure and order your presentation, how to use language that will etch your thoughts on the minds of listeners, and how to present a speech that commands attention. These are not only arts of speaking but arts of living as well. They can make you more effective, not just as a speaker but as a person.

You will also learn to be a more effective listener. Listening is often the forgotten part of the communication process, though most of us listen far more than we speak. Education in public speaking can help you critically evaluate what you hear. Becoming a sophisticated consumer of messages is increasingly important in our society. The daily barrage of media messages directed at us makes the ability to sort out honest from dishonest public communication a basic survival skill. People who cannot make such distinctions are open to exploitation. You will also learn how to become a constructive listener who plays an essential role in the creation of meaning. We examine listening in more detail in Chapter 3.

A final personal bonus of your public speaking class is that it makes you an active participant in the learning process. You don't just sit in a class, absorbing lectures. *You* put communication to work. The speeches you give illustrate the strategies, the possibilities, and the problems of human communication. As you join in the discussions that follow these speeches, you learn to identify elements that can promote or block

communication. In short, you become a vital member of a learning community. It is no accident that the words *communication* and *community* have a close relationship: they both derive from the Latin word for *common*, meaning “belonging to many” or “shared equally.”

**Practical Benefits.** The personal growth you experience in a public speaking class also makes possible a number of practical benefits. The skills you build in this class can help you in other classes, in campus activities, and in whatever career you undertake. The reasons for these practical benefits are clear: studies indicate that, on average, we spend 75 percent of each day communicating with others. Of this time, we spend about 45 percent listening and 30 percent speaking.<sup>3</sup> No wonder, then, that the public speaking class applies so closely to vital arts of living.

The practicality of learning how to communicate better extends into the world of business. Corporate managers report that they spend 60 percent of their day communicating face-to-face. A Wisconsin Office of Academic Affairs study identified oral communication skills as a basic factor in the evaluation of job candidates. The study also found that these skills correlate highly with success at work. Similarly, 250 companies surveyed by the Center for Public Resources rated speaking and listening skills among the most critical areas in need of improvement for people entering the workforce. An American Council on Education report, *Employment Prospects for College Graduates*, advises readers that “good oral and written skills can be your most prized asset” in getting and holding a desirable position.<sup>4</sup>

The abilities you develop in this class also can help you in life beyond the workplace. Picture the following scenarios:

The local school board has just announced that it may remove *A Catcher in the Rye*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* from the high school library. It will hold a public hearing on this issue at its next regular meeting. Because you feel strongly about this issue and others refuse to step forward, you decide that you must attend the meeting and speak out for the sake of your children and your principles and beliefs.

A real estate developer is planning to build a shopping center and office complex on fifteen acres of undeveloped land near your home. You believe that such a development will not only devalue your property but also destroy the beauty and serenity of your neighborhood. The Land Use Control Board has scheduled a public hearing next week. To protect your pocketbook as well as your lifestyle, you need to speak at that hearing.

At such moments, important family and personal values may depend on your ability to speak effectively in public.

Clearly, the study of public speaking offers important personal benefits. This class should help you develop sensitivity and creativity, understand the power of spoken words, begin to master the art of effective oral expression, become a more effective listener, and share the excitement of an interactive learning community. As a result of these benefits, many students experience an incredible sense of personal growth in the

public speaking class. What they learn and what they become prepares them for the opportunities and challenges they will encounter later in life.

### ***Social Benefits***

Studies of ancient life have made it clear that we are social beings. From the beginning of time we have lived in societies that make our lives possible. It is natural for us to belong to groups and to seek out the company of others. We draw much of our personal identity from the groups we belong to, and our status and effectiveness within these groups depends largely on our communication skills.

Anna Aley, -a student at Kansas State University, found herself living in substandard off-campus housing. She brought that problem to the attention of her classmates in a persuasive speech. Anna felt exploited and endangered by that situation and cared deeply about others who shared her fate. Her persuasive speech (the text of which follows Chapter 13) was selected by her classmates for presentation in a public forum on campus. During that presentation she made such an impression that the local newspaper printed the text of her speech and launched an investigation of the off-campus housing problem; The paper then followed up with a strong editorial, and the mayor established a rental inspection program in the community. Anna's experience is a dramatic example of how speeches, even those given in a classroom, can benefit society.

Although not all the speeches we give and hear are so momentous, our words create ripples of meaning that can spread far beyond the time and place in which we speak. We never know how the speeches we give might ultimately affect the lives of others. Even now, we recall brave classroom speeches given by students thirty years ago supporting civil and human rights in our nation. Their words continue to resonate in our memories and in our lives.

Clearly, the personal benefits of public speaking are tied to social benefits. It is part of our nature to care about the groups we value. When we can help them, we also feel deeply confirmed as human beings. Richard Sonnet in *The Fall of Public "Afan* argues that civilization, serving the best interests of the many, cannot survive without the active participation of citizens. Those who are competent in their public speaking skills are ready to take active roles whenever social problems or crises arise.

The effectiveness of our political system depends on our ability to deliberate and make wise judgments on issues of public policy. At the very least, we must be able to listen critically to those who represent us in government, advise them concerning our positions, and evaluate their performance come election time. We should be able to take part in public discussions in which we learn from others, develop responsible convictions on important issues, and speak our minds for the benefit of others. The entire democratic system is built on open public communication. America's founders realized the importance of freedom of speech when they wrote the First Amendment to the Constitution:

**Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the**

**right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.**

Similarly the Indian Constitution also offers the freedom of speech.

Such freedom is not without its risks, as noted by Supreme Court Justice William Brennan:

**Rulers -always have and always will find it dangerous to their security to permit people to think, believe, talk, write, assemble and particularly to criticize the government as they please. But the language of the First Amendment indicates that the founders weighed the risks involved in such freedoms and deliberately chose to stake this Government's security and life upon preserving the liberty to discuss public affairs intact and untouchable by the government.**

To be, able to speak without fear of retaliation, to have the opportunity to hear all sides of an issue, and to be free to make informed judgments that affect our lives are rights basic to our social system. Acquiring the presentation and evaluation- skills you need to keep this freedom alive is a profound social benefit of this course.

### ***Cultural Benefits***

Several generations ago, if you listened to the radio (in those days before television) or read magazines, you would find one striking assumption: America was the best of all possible worlds. The attitude typified ethnocentrism, the tendency of any nation, race, religion, or organized group to believe that its way of looking at and doing things is the right and proper way\_ and that other perspectives and behaviors are less valuable. Ethnocentrism can touch everything from the values we affirm and the God we worship to the clothes\_ we wear and the food we eat. Clearly, ethnocentrism is a human, not an American trait, as we shall see more clearly in Chapter 4. But Americans certainly had their share of it. Forty years ago, Richard M. Weaver, a noted conservative intellectual and scholar of communication, suggested:

**The Western World has long stood as a symbol for the future; and accordingly there has been a very wide tendency in this country, and also I believe among many people in Europe, to identify that which is American with that which is destined to be. . . . The typical American is quite fatuous in this regard: to him America is the goal toward which all creation moves; and he judges a country's civilization by its resemblance to the American model.<sup>7</sup>**

How we talk about ourselves, especially the images we select to represent ourselves, are often the key to such cultural arrogance. In the first half of this century, the "melting pot" was an especially popular metaphor that expressed American ethnocentrism. This theory, which originated in the great steel mills of the industrial East, suggested that as various ethnic and national groups came to this country, they would be

blended and melted down in a vast cultural cauldron into lithe American Character.” While it held out the promise that all the immigrants who had come to our shores might be absorbed easily into our national life and forged into a powerful new unity, the “melting pot” also said quite clearly - to ourselves and to anyone else who would listen - American is best.”

Another problem with the “melting pot” metaphor was that it created a stereotype, a generalized picture of a race, gender, or nationality that supposedly represented the essential character of a group. We may have stereotypes of Latinos, or of athletes, or of “rednecks.” If we look inside ourselves and confront ourselves honestly, we may discover many such stereotypes. They stick in our minds and become habits of thinking. We may use them because they simplify human interactions or because they are endorsed by a group important to us. Unfortunately, stereotypes can be quite damaging. They may entail harsh judgments about others, and may block us from seeing the real value of a unique person who just happens to be Latino, or an athlete, or from the rural South. They may impede our ability to communicate with others in a genuine way.

The stereotype inherent in the “melting pot” theory seemed harmless on the surface. It offered an image of the ideal American citizen, but that citizen always had a decidedly white, definitely male face. Asians, Middle Easterners, and African Americans - just to mention some of the “out” groups - did not mix very readily into a common pot. There simply was no such pot. Moreover, often these people, joined by Native Americans and others, *did not wish* to lose their ethnic identities. Within the melting pot, women simply disappeared. It was hard to champion the economic and political rights of women when the ideal citizen was always a man. Eliza-beth Lozano summarizes the shortcomings of the melting pot stereotype and begins to explore an alternative view of American character:

**The “melting pot” is not an adequate metaphor for a country which is comprised of a multiplicity of cultural backgrounds and traditions. We might better think of the United States in terms of a “cultural bouillabaisse” [stew] in which all ingredients conserve their unique flavor, while also transforming and being transformed by the adjacent textures and scents.<sup>8</sup>**

A public speaking class is an ideal place to savor this rich broth of many cultures, especially in a multicultural country like India. When a public speaking class encourages us to analyze ourselves and our audiences, we discover these many flavors of the Indian experience. It can help us open our minds to the valuable contributions our varied backgrounds make to our lives. Understanding our audience would be simple if we were all the same, but how dull that would be! And how exciting it can be when we discover *how* to appeal to and identify with the many cultures our audience represents.

You will probably discover that you yourself are “multicultural.” One of American authors describes herself as part Swedish, part Welsh, part German, and all hillbilly.” The other is Scotch, Irish, and English with a dollop of Creek Indian. Just imagine the complex cultural heritage of our children! “Communication scholar Dolores V. Tanno describes her cultural background as an unfolding ethnic identity” that includes, in order

of her own realization, “I am Spanish,” “I am Mexi-can American,” “I am Latina,” and “I am Chican ‘a,” and expresses her joy in discovering these various identities.<sup>9</sup>

As we strive to understand our own and others’ unfolding identities, we must guard against the subtle intrusion of stereotypes into ‘our thinking. Casey Man Kong Lum has pointed out that the main problem confronted by Chinese immigrants in New York City may not be relating to the Ameri-can culture but to other Chinese. As he notes, there are seven major Chi-nese dialect groups, each with its own sub-groups.<sup>10</sup> To the extent that different languages imply different cultures, any conclusion that The Chi-nese feel. . .” or The Chinese perspective on this problem is . . .” must surely be a distortion, if not a fiction.

Perhaps the best protection against such creeping stereotyping” is to remember that we are, in the final analysis, talking to individuals. Navita Cummings James, a communication scholar at the University of South Florida, sums up the attitude we- must preserve:

**I am a child of the American baby boom. I am a person of color, and I am a woman. All of these factors have influenced the creation of the person I am today, just as the time and place of each of our births, our genders, races, and ethnicities influence the people we are today.<sup>11</sup>**

When all is said and done, we are all unique. But the many cultures you may encounter as you speak in your class can provide a liberating learning experience. In most such classes you can almost see ethnocentrism evaporating and hear stereotypes cracking and breaking.

Throughout this section, we have introduced the “melting pot” and “cultural bouillabaisse” as ways of thinking about American character. One of our favorite metaphors for the complex culture of the United States entered public dialogue at the conclusion of Abraham Lincoln’s first inaugural address, as he sought to hold the nation together on the eve of the Civil War:

**The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.<sup>12</sup>**

Lost in the immediate crisis of that war, Lincoln’s image of America as a harmonious chorus implied that the individual voices of Americans not only can survive but, when heard together, can create a music that is more rich and beautiful than when heard alone.

Lincoln’s image of a harmonious chorus may seem out of place beside the noisy contemporary American scene, but it holds forth a continuing dream of a society in which individualism and the common good can not only survive but enhance each other. In your class and within these pages you will hear many voices: Native Americans and new Americans, women and men, conservatives and liberals, Americans of all different colors and lifestyles. Sometimes these voices may seem bitter, alienated, dispossessed,

but all of them are a part of the vital chorus of our nation. The public speaking class provides an opportunity to hear the voices in this chorus and add your voice to them.