

NOW HEAR US!

Public speaking for union leadership



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What speaking experiences have you had in the past year?

In the last 12 months have you:

Experience	Yes	No
1. Given a talk or presentation before an unfamiliar group?		
2. Spoken using brief notes rather than a written out speech when addressing a group?		
3. Served on a union committee?		
4. Chaired a union committee?		
5. Represented the union with management representatives in union/management meetings?		
6. Served on a community board or committee?		
7. Chaired a community board or committee?		
8. Chaired any type of meeting?		
9. Interviewed witnesses in a grievance procedure?		
10. Served as precinct chair or co-chair in your local political party?		
11. Worked in a political campaign?		
12. Held an elected political office?		
13. Held an appointed union office?		
14. Held an elected union office?		
15. Met with legislators or city / county officials to express your views as a union member or citizen?		
16. Made a motion at a union meeting?		
17. Given a report at a union meeting?		
18. Written a letter or article for a newsletter or newspaper?		
19. Initiated a conversation about a political, economic or union values topic and attempted to persuade your conversational partner?		
20. Had a serious political conversation with a friend or co-worker?		

Your Voice is Worth Hearing

Every union activist's voice is worth hearing and needs to be heard: by union leaders, by rank and file members, by the community and by politicians and candidates for elected office.

Your voice carries the authority of your unique experience in the workplaces where you help build our society, deliver the vital services which sustain it, and live out on a daily basis the hopes of most people for work with dignity under a union contract.

No one can speak about what you can speak about as well as you can speak about it.

No one can tell your story better than you can.

It's just a question of a little bit of courage and a lot of practice.



Few people are called upon to do much public speaking. Therefore, most of us at first react with panic or think, "I can't do that."

But of course you can – and as a union activist, often times you must!

Outline Your Issue & Tell Your Story

People's understanding of the world is shaped by the stories they tell, hear, and come to believe. If we want people to personally connect to the issues we care about, or to join us in taking action, then it's critical for us to tell convincing, persuasive stories.

There are many ways to outline an effective speech. But for almost any issue-based, persuasive speech (where you are hoping to convince listeners to take some action), you can start off with three basic steps:

1. Introduce yourself and your values
2. Describe the problem
3. Describe the solution and call for a specific action

Then, within these three steps, you can work include stories that your listeners can easily relate to.

1. Introduce yourself and your values.

- What would you like the audience to know about you, so they relate to your message?
- What values or beliefs do you hold, that are relevant to this discussion?
- Sample sentence starters:
 - My name is _____ and I have worked at _____ for _____ years [or I have lived in _____ for _____ years].
 - I'm a proud union member because I believe _____.
 - I chose to join my union because I believe _____.
 - I chose to work at _____ because _____.
 - The work we do at _____ matters to me because _____.
 - My family and I chose to live in _____ because we value _____.

2. Describe the problem

- Make it personal – what does the issue mean to you, your co-workers, your family, or your friends? Tell at least one story that gives a “human face” to the problem.
- How have you seen this issue affect you or others who are close to you?
- Sample sentence starters:

- Right now _____ is having a real impact. [In my workplace or community], I've seen: _____.
- We can see the effects of _____ right here in _____. To give just one example, let me tell you about _____.
- I can tell you from first-hand experience what _____ is like. Here is what happened to me...
- Just the other day, a co-worker told me about how _____ is affecting her/his family. S/he said _____.
- If we do nothing about _____, the result will be _____.

3. Describe the solution and call for a specific action.

- Describe how this problem can be solved.
- Ask your audience to take an immediate, specific step toward solving the problem.
- Sample sentence starters:
 - It doesn't have to be this way. All of us who care about _____ have the power to _____.
 - There are clear solutions to this problem. Just by _____ we could turn things around.
 - Today I'm challenging every one of you to _____.
 - Before you leave today, I'm asking you to _____.
 - How many of you will commit to _____?

Framing Issues

When developing any union communications, it's worth thinking about what message we are sending. Are we simply responding defensively to someone else's story about us, or are we telling our own positive story about what we stand for and believe in?

Some basic concepts of message "framing" can help remind us to analyze our stories and messages critically, and to make sure that we're not falling into the trap of simply countering or repeating the opposition's terms rather than articulating our own vision and values.

This can be harder than it sounds. For most of us, our natural instinct is to argue back when we hear something we think is incorrect or that we disagree with. But if all we do is repeat or respond to others' arguments, we risk forgetting to tell our own positive, powerful stories.

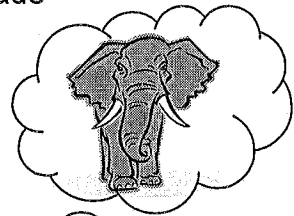
What is conceptual "framing"?¹

A large body of research² shows that "people are conditioned to ignore information that doesn't fit into their existing framework for understanding the world." This means that in many cases, simply sharing facts and statistics is not enough to reach or persuade people because "assumptions, emotions, internal narratives, and pre-existing attitudes can get in the way of facts making sense."²

Framing describes the way in which humans naturally fit issues into broader, familiar story lines by drawing mental pictures and making connections to core values. When certain frames are repeated over time, they begin to define how people think about issues.



Example: TAX RELIEF → frames taxes as burdens, tax cutters as heroes, government as an enemy of the public



Basic lessons from psychology ("Don't think of an elephant!")

- 1) Every word evokes a frame.
- 2) Negating a frame brings up the frame.
- 3) Bringing up a frame reinforces the frame in people's minds.
- 4) Instead of continuing to use existing (negative) frames:

SPEAK DIFFERENTLY

- **Don't use the terms of the opposition.**
- **Come up with your own frames and redefine the debate.**
- **Use frames that communicate your union values.**
- **Repeat, repeat, repeat!**

¹ For more on framing, see George Lakoff, *Don't Think of an Elephant!: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate* (Chelsea Green, 2004).

²²²² Patrick Reinsborough and Dowly Canning, *Re:Imaging Change* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010), 28-29.

Framing labor issues: “Special interests” or public interest?

Too often, labor issues are seen as “special interests” that only affect small, isolated groups of workers. Communication on any issue is an opportunity to share union values with members, politicians, and the public and to emphasize how every labor struggle ultimately affects our communities, economy, and workforce as a whole.

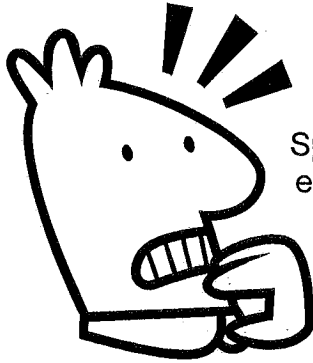
Messages on labor issues can do this by articulating core union values and identifying the ways that strong unions serve the public good. Effective message frames:³

- Connect with the **public interest** and **core, shared values**.
- Are **short and easy to remember and repeat**.
- Provide frame and **context, not just facts**.
- Anticipate and **neutralize the opposition’s messages**.
- Have to be **true**.
- **Work with all audiences** – workers, public, politicians, etc.
- Have some **emotional punch**.
- Are likely to **hold up** throughout a campaign.

EXAMPLES: Traditional “special interest” messages vs. Effective message frames

GOAL	Traditional messages with “special interest” frames	Effective public interest and union values message frames
Pay increase for low-wage janitors, reduction in health insurance costs, and employer neutrality so workers in non-union operations can join without interference.	These workers make only \$7 an hour. Even though they clean 30 offices in four hours every night, their paychecks are below the poverty line. They can’t afford hundreds of dollars per month for health coverage for themselves and their families.	We’re standing up for the American Dream . If you work hard to provide important services in our city, you shouldn’t have to choose between food on the table or medicine for your children .
Protect public employee health benefits from proposed cuts.	These public employees gave up increases in their pay package over the years in order to win and maintain health coverage. These are benefits they have earned.	We’re working hard to win affordable health care for everyone in this state. Public officials should join us in that effort, instead of taking affordable care away from thousands of working families .

³ List adapted from Matt Witt, www.TheWorkSite.org



Speech Anxiety: It's Part of Being Human . . .

Speech fright is normal. Studies have shown that at least 70% of people experience anxiety about speaking in public.

It is human nature to avoid or dread situations that involve others evaluating your "performance."

It is also human nature to worry about whether you will meet expectations, or to worry that you don't know enough, don't have enough experience, etc.

These worries can in turn kick off physical reactions (an adrenaline "rush") that cause trembling, nausea, shortness of breath, or other symptoms.

. . .but Anxiety Can be Controlled—or Concealed!

- ✓ Think of speaking as "communication" rather than a "performance." Most audiences do not expect you to deliver a perfect speech; rather, they are genuinely curious to hear about your thoughts and experiences.
- ✓ Be natural, and talk to the audience much as you would to your friends in ordinary, everyday conversation.
- ✓ Seek out repeated exposure. The more you speak, the more comfortable you will become.
- ✓ Remember, *everybody* becomes anxious when speaking before a group. Even those (entertainers, teacher, etc.) who do a great deal of it typically experience some degree of nervousness before each talk. The trick is to accept the nervous energy and use it to express your enthusiasm for your topic.
- ✓ Remember that you know more than the audience does about your topic.
- ✓ Share your anxiety with a good friend, but DO NOT share your anxiety with the audience.
- ✓ Remember that most audiences will never notice your anxiety—unless you draw attention to it.
- ✓ Wear something you are comfortable in; try to get enough rest and food before the presentation.

- ✓ Don't feel the need to apologize for tongue tangles; just keep going and most people will not even notice your mistakes—unless you call attention to them (avoid "let me start over").
- ✓ Get off to a good start; focus your mind on your introduction and let the rest follow from there. For most people stage fright subsides after the first few seconds, and the audience "warms up". The worst part of a speech is the anticipation of it.
- ✓ Take deep breaths and try relaxation exercises prior to speaking.
- ✓ If hands tremble. . .anchor them on podium or in pockets; if legs tremble, lean on podium or sit on table.
- ✓ If voice wavers, take deeper breaths, use more air, and focus on speaking at a louder volume than you usually do, which will tend to even out your voice and mask any anxiety.
- ✓ Visualize yourself successfully communicating with the audience. Focus on what you want your audience to know or find out from your speech, rather than your anxieties.
- ✓ Look up and scan the room occasionally to connect with as much of your audience as possible. This both indicates interest and supplies you with useful feedback about how you and the topic are going over. To start out with, choose one or two people to pay attention to, preferably among those who are "with you." This can help reduce the size of the audience in your mind, which aids in reducing your anxiety.
- ✓ Practice as much as you can, repeating what you plan to say until you are thoroughly comfortable with the content. Memorize the first and last sentences of your speech so that they come "automatically."
- ✓ Be brief. Audience attention is limited. It is better to make a few points well than to attempt more and lose the audience.

Evaluating a persuasive speech

- 1. Did it tell a story that most people could relate to? Did the speaker articulate values that listeners might hold in common?**
- 2. Was it well-organized? Did it clearly lay out a problem or issue, and call for specific solutions?**
- 3. Non-verbal components: did the speaker maintain good eye contact, appear comfortable, etc.?**
- 4. What was most effective about the speech? Why?**
- 5. What could be improved? And how?**
- 6. What strengths should this speaker build on?**