

T HE LOST ART OF INTRODUCTION

Although it would seem the following should be blatantly obvious, it is not. All too many administrators (not leaders) will bring an outside guest to speak to their staff and then do an abysmal job of introducing them. Almost by definition, when we bring in an outside person to address our employees, we should have some reason for doing so – and that reason should almost always include a hope that the guest speaker can have a positive impact on the performance of our employees.

A good introduction will establish the creditability of the speaker and substantially increase audience interest and anticipation; a great introduction can literally double the impact that speaker will have. A great introduction requires that you research and prepare before you approach the microphone. One should spend as much time preparing a three-minute introduction as you do for a 15-minute presentation. If you are giving less time than that to an introduction, you are doing a disservice to the speaker, the audience, and your company...not to mention that you are looking like a brain dead administrator to anyone with a dynamic sense of leadership who might be observing your slothful ways.

Here are a few basic elements of a good introduction:

- ◆ Provide a brief but rich personal history of the speaker
- ◆ Build the speaker's experience and creditability regarding the specific topic he or she will be addressing
- ◆ Emphasize the guest's significant educational achievements, major accomplishments, and honors
- ◆ Explain how fortunate we are to have access to this speaker's knowledge and experience, even if it is only for a brief period of time
- ◆ Imply that the speaker is in substantial demand, and that having had a chance to listen to him or her will place the audience in a highly advantageous position

- ◆ Introductions are not a good place to use humor, particularly “buddy humor” between you and the speaker – the audience doesn’t care if you are friends
- ◆ Never try to use an introduction to build your own credibility – it’s not about you

Almost all great comedy teams have a straight man – the person who does the set up to let the funny guy get the big laugh. Many times the work of the straight man goes unnoticed, but without the central contribution of the straight man the act will flop. An outstanding introduction is a key part in achieving the goal you invited the speaker to accomplish.