

# KEYNOTE *Connoisseurs*

## IDENTIFYING AND APPRECIATING THE SUBTLETIES OF GREAT KEYNOTES

BY GLENNA SALSURY, CSP, CPAE

**m**y calling as a professional speaker occurred in Orange County, California, on a Thursday night in 1980. I was mesmerized by the speaker, Jim Rohn, CPAE, who was a transformational communicator. I became a connoisseur of professional speakers that very evening!

What magic did Jim Rohn have?

A connoisseur is defined as a *discerning judge of the best in any field*. Now I had no conscious or knowledgeable wisdom as a judge of speakers. But I had an *inner* knowing that proved to be accurate. And the longer I remain immersed in the world of speaking, the more I continue to become consciously aware of the elements essential to creating great keynotes.

**“A connoisseur is defined as a discerning judge of the best in any field.”**

Sam Horn, one of the wisest word-smiths in NSA (and the world at large), observes, “Connoisseurship is a prerequisite to craft.” In addition, she points out

that the word “noise” (hidden in the word connoisseur) is defined as *dissonant verbal clutter*. In contrast, music is defined as *resonant verbal harmony*. It could be said that a great keynote is “music to your ears,” as opposed to noise.

Late in life, Michelangelo said, “I am still learning.” In his second book, *Second Force*, Dr. Gary Emery suggests, “Mastery is learning because you love to learn, not to enhance your superiority.” With that in mind, what do we know and what can we learn about masterful keynoting? How do we recognize or judge the best in the field of professional speakers?

*“He shouts at me. I hate that.”*  
*“She tells sob stories and manipulates emotions.”* “He is so full of himself. Disgusting.”

*“I was mesmerized as she spoke. I felt she was speaking just to me.”* “He was so knowledgeable and seemed to really want us to grasp what he was saying.”  
*“I could listen to her all day.”*

You probably have said or felt responses similar to these. You have a

# TIE Ship



kind of *inner knowing* when you are in the presence of a speaker who captures your heart and your mind.

Gifted wine connoisseurs have an incredible ability to recognize fine wine. This does not mean that all wine connoisseurs *like* the same wines. It simply means that they all know how to discern the *elements* of a fine wine. And, conversely, they all possess an awareness of what constitutes an inferior wine.

What are the *elements* that combine to produce a powerful, memorable message delivered verbally? And what is the *determining* factor that confirms this in the hearts and minds of listeners?

Answering the second question first, the answer is *connection*, an inner receiving of the words spoken, a desire to internalize what is being said, to apply it to my own life as the listener. *Connection* is most often expressed in the words, “*I felt like he was speaking directly to me.*” Or, “*I could have listened all day.*”

So, returning to the first question, what are the *elements* that come together, as in fine wine, that create the *felt, discernible* connection?

# “What are the **elements** that come together, as in fine wine, that create the **felt, discernible** connection?”

## THE INVISIBLE ELEMENTS

First and foremost, gifted speakers are comfortable in their own skin. This involves being free from preoccupation with oneself. It means being free from ulterior motives, hidden manipulations. Rather, there exists a genuine, heartfelt desire to share something of tremendous value to individuals, the listeners.

There is a wide chasm between delivering information and delivering truth as you know it. Your personal truth resides in your viscera. You care deeply about some truths as a person. Those truths are foundational to a transformational keynote.

There are many varieties of speakers. There are humorists, educators, engineers, musicians, financial gurus and jugglers, to name a few. As with fine wines, there are

spectacular Chiantis that match perfectly with heavy Italian cuisine. There are refreshing Sauvignon Blancs that enhance veal piccata. It is not the *kind* of speaker that determines *connection*. Rather, it is the authentic desire to *connect* that identifies a powerful presenter.

If you agree with these observations, you will recognize three *invisible* elements present when *connection* occurs:

- Freedom from self-absorption
- An awareness of one's visceral truth
- An authentic desire to reach, or connect with, the hearts and minds of others.

Perhaps it is helpful to pause and ask what causes *meaningful* connection to occur in one-on-one communication. You are fully present with the other person with no hidden agenda.

You share personal truth and insights. And your desire is for the other person to truly understand what you are expressing. It is this very same atmosphere that is created by the finest of platform presenters.

Other than food and shelter, the greatest needs of all human beings are love and appreciation. The audience that *experiences* feeling loved and appreciated will *feel* connected to the speaker. How is that *feeling* conveyed by the speaker?

## THE VISIBLE ELEMENTS

Now, turn to the more concrete aspects of masterful speakers. What does that presenter know and understand about me as a listener? Powerful presenters will have asked and answered many, if not all, of the following questions before setting foot on the platform:

- Who is in the audience?
- What do they have in common?
- Have I spoken to them before?
- What is the size of the audience?
- What are the meeting planner's expectations, objectives and goals?
- What is the demographic mix (male/female, age span, ethnicity, etc.)?
- Who else is on the program?
- What else is on the program?
- How much time will I have?
- What is unique about the locale?
- What has unfolded in the news about this company or group or geographical location?
- How will my core message touch this audience personally and professionally?

Listeners are *individuals*; each one is listening from a personal perspective. Recently, I spoke to 150 teenagers at a leadership retreat in the mountains. The *application* of my core truths to those great kids was quite different from the day I spoke to 1,000 gypsies in Sophia, Bulgaria! Yet each of those unique audiences needed to feel my love and appreciation for them. That is best displayed by revealing my *understanding* of *who* they are and *what* they want to hear or know. Only



by discovering the answers to the questions is a speaker able to truly *connect*.

Another *concrete* aspect in platform eloquence is related to physical details. Listeners intuitively sense if the presenter is at ease. This means that a speaker needs to be comfortable in his/her surroundings.

- What kind of microphone do you prefer?
- Is there a lectern?
- What is the room setup?
- Is the audience seated together and not scattered?
- What is your most appropriate comfortable clothing?
- Will you need a place for props?
- Have you arranged for your audio/visual needs?

The underlying reason for knowing the answers to these two sets of questions is: *You will be free from yourself in direct proportion to your personal onstage comfort and your solid knowledge of your audience.*

The body language of the presenter reveals key information to an audience. And the inner motive or heart attitude impacts body language in *visible* ways. The *nervous* speaker is often jerky and stiff; the self-important speaker has a kind of strut or stance, etc. In contrast, the presenter who is comfortable and has a genuine desire to *connect* will often lean into the audience, look directly at *individuals* in the audience, occasionally call people by name and move with ease. Body language is a direct result of an inner emotion.

Crafting a powerful presentation flows out of being a connoisseur of keynoting. As you contemplate the invisible and the visible, concrete elements in masterful presenters, you will begin to internalize the invisible and take action on the concrete.

Two additional realizations combine to elevate masters in the world of



Glenna Salsbury urges speakers to become connoisseurs of the speaking profession.

communication. First is a deep personal understanding that *you are one of a kind*. No one is going to “get ahead” of *you* because no one can be you. This reality, internalized by the speaker, produces the freedom to be fully seen, to be authentically present. And, it defeats the need to compete or compare oneself to others.

The second realization is equally powerful in fueling platform presence. That is the *sense of calling*. If you genuinely believe that you have been ordained to share your unique truths, you have *a* calling and audiences will experience your passion. Your calling can enhance your *connection* as long as you know and understand your audience.

The great Roman lawyer Cicero felt *called* to rescue Rome from its downward political spiral. His fiery oratory in the Roman Senate has caused him to be acclaimed by many as the greatest orator in history. The Gettysburg address was delivered by Abraham Lincoln out of a deep sense

of God-given *calling* to bring healing to this country. Those with a sense of calling sometimes change the face of the world through words.

Returning to the wisdom of Sam Horn, “Connoisseurship is a prerequisite to craft.” Jim Rohn was a connoisseur of the craft of speaking. His words *resonated* in me. He moved me to *action* that has enhanced my life and, hopefully, the lives of all who continue to hear me.

We are at our best when we continue to be *learners*. “Mastery is learning because you love to learn...” May you become an informed connoisseur of the speaking profession.



Glenna Salsbury, CSP, CPAE, has been a member of NSA since 1980. She provides keynotes nationally and internationally and coaches those who want to enhance their platform presence. ([glenna@glennasalsbury.com](mailto:glenna@glennasalsbury.com) or [ISpeak4U@aol.com](mailto:ISpeak4U@aol.com))