

# Speechwriter's **S/N** Newsletter

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## CHICAGO SPEECHWRITERS' FORUM

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### William Rush, voice consultant

What does a voice consultant do? "I facilitate getting the speaker's voice to appropriately reflect the words you've written," William Rush told the most recent meeting of the Chicago Speechwriters' Forum. "After what we look like, our voice is our most important communications tool. What our voice says is often more important than the words we choose."

Rush, a former professional singer, has coached voices in several Broadway touring companies, including *Annie*. He's also taught Chicago commodities traders how to shout in the trading pits without damaging their throats. Working with CEOs and other speakers, Rush finds that "most of them avoid coaching out of blind fear. They worry about being told, 'You ain't got no talent.' Without a lot of support, most speakers would rather go through the hell of winging it than risk the slow torture of rehearsal." Yet, Rush says, in a normal speaking situation (a 15-minute speech with a speaker of moderate skill), coaching can take up only about five hours. "It's more effective if it's spread out, not five hours all at once," Rush cautions. "Saturation coaching is the least effective, but many speakers would rather get it over with all at once." Rush feels the most effective strategy for changing speaking habits is to work for shorter periods over a long time.

"Anxiety is present whenever you have something to gain or something to lose," Rush says. The key to decreasing anxiety is communication: "Speakers need to know concretely how you'll be able to help them. They need to know how much time it will take. What you will do with them. They need to be included in the process to every degree possible. They need to be supported in practical sorts of ways so they can succeed." Rush tries to include speechwriters in the coaching process from the beginning. "The speechwriter often knows more about the speaker, his mission, their speaking style, and things like that. When this happens, you get a very synergistic situation where one and turn out to be four."

Is there a set number of times a speaker should rehearse a speech? One Forum member recalled a piece of advice from many years ago that speakers should run through their speeches no less than seven times before delivery. "That's a perfectly wonderful concept reduced to a prescription, and when you do that, it doesn't work," Rush believes. "It's meant to ease anxiety, but I think you should stay with the concept of the speech."

One skill Rush teaches is how to make a statement sound decisive. "I teach people to speak with declarative sentences. In a declarative sentence, the last syllable must come down in tone. If it goes up, then it's a question." But he cautions speakers to avoid falling into the "Ted Baxter syndrome": constantly speaking in a deep tone of voice that sounds phony. "You need to find your own optimum vocal pitch, so you can determine where you need to go higher for key words and lower for the endings of sentences."

And how can the speechwriter help the speech coach? "Just put out the best document you can that's appropriate to that speaker," Rush says.

*(William Rush Voice Consultants is located at 320 N. Michigan, Chicago, IL 60610, 312-328-1039)*