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## Five Common Mistakes Made by Leaders When They Speak

Many of the failures in leadership are failures to communicate well. No matter how smart we are or how good our strategies are, they are doomed for failure if no one understands them.

In previous articles, I dealt with poor written grammar, so much so that some of my friends refer to me as “the grammar cop.” In this article, I deal with five of the more common communication mistakes made by leaders when they speak.

1. **Poor grammar.** Grammatical mistakes are not limited to written communication. They are much too common when leaders speak as well, including some leaders who are highly educated and in positions of great influence. The most common speaking grammatical error that I have noticed in recent years is the incorrect use of reflexive pronouns. For example the reflexive pronoun “myself” is used improperly in this sentence: “The award was presented to Janice, John, and myself.” The correct pronoun is the non-reflexive “me.”
2. **Too much information.** An audience can only absorb a limited number of facts in a given presentation. Some leaders attempt to cover a multitude of items, leaving the hearers bored, confused, and frustrated. Speak to the essential issues and provide supplementary written material if necessary.
3. **Too many visuals.** PowerPoint and other visual aids can be either a help or a hindrance to a speaker. Too often leaders try to put too much information in visual aids. At that point the aid becomes a barrier to communication. Consider having no more than one visual aid for each three minutes of speaking. You might be surprised how much the retention of your listeners improves.
4. **“Insider” language.** Acronyms should be banned from speaking presentations. At my organization we have one acronym for every molecule that exists in our building. Those who are on the inside may think it’s okay to use acronyms with other insiders. The problem is that the pattern of speaking develops into a habit that will creep into external presentations. Indeed, good speakers avoid acronyms and insider technical words unless they are clearly explained to the audience.
5. **Insufficient pathos.** Aristotle divided the means of persuasion into three categories. Ethos is used to establish the credibility or character of the speaker. Logos means persuading by reasoning or logic. Pathos means persuading by appealing to the readers’ or hearers’ emotions. Too few speakers attempt to speak to the hearts of the audience through personal illustrations, humor, or captivating stories. As a consequence, the presentation is often deemed dry and boring, regardless of the quality of the content.

I continue to be a student of effective communication. I still have a long way to go. What could you add to this list? What stories or examples do you have of either effective or ineffective speaking?

Read more from Thom [here](#).

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