



What makes a speech great?

Flattery and Empathy

Presenter

Connecting with an audience is one of the most critical aspects of great speech making.

Simon Lancaster

There are a number of ways that an orator can establish a rapport with an audience or win their approval if you like and one of the first and easiest ways is flattery that no one ever objects to being told that they are brilliant.

"I know that you didn't do this for me. You did this because you believed in the most American of ideas that in the face of impossible odds people who love this country can change it."

Simon Lancaster

Also empathy is just very important showing that you feel what the audience feels or you understand what the audience understands. And also it's very important just having some common ground with the audience. I think Barack Obama is the King and his trick was not necessarily that he was agreeing with everyone. It was creating the impression that he was agreeing with everyone. And he did that by creating such deliberately blank phrases that anyone could interpret into them whatever they wanted to.

"And those who tell us that we can't, we will respond with that timeless creed that sums up the spirit of the people – "Yes, we can."

Simon Lancaster

Yes we can. What does that mean? Everyone's going to hear that phrase and think something very, very different. Of course it's just it's a feeling. It's a positive statement. But to some people that will mean yes, we can get the house we want. To others yes we can get the job we want. To others it might just feel good. The point is everyone will read it a different way. Another great Obama line "They said this day would never come". What day? Who said?

"They said this day would never come. They said our sights were set too high."

Simon Lancaster

And so ambiguity is often a very powerful device as well because people will listen to things and reach their own interpretations. They'll kind of take a sentence and then fit it in with all of their values, beliefs and opinions and twist it and hear what they want to hear. One example of this is Tony Blair's "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime". What a great sentence. If you're a "hang 'em castrate 'em" kind of guy then you will just hear the first three words of that and think "fantastic. He agrees with me." If you're a more liberal, 'sympathy for the down trodden' then you're going to hear the "tough on the causes of crime". The kind of "oh it's not really their fault." And so people will read different things into a sentence like that and yet that shows empathy.