

Strategy: Personalization Is Important

I'm going to dip into my own experience here, which I don't do that often, and particularly my experience as a speaker. We all give speeches. A speech that lasts 15 seconds in a meeting or a little presentation at a customer meeting. And that could be an internal customer as well as an external customer. There is a particularly important key—and I see it especially since I'm on the road—and that key is to find something local that people can identify with. And what we're trying to do with any audience, and, to some extent, we're trying to do it with a boss who we've kind of lived around for even 10 years, we're trying to form a bond.

Hostage negotiators, above all, try to form a bond with the person who's been the bad guy. But what I do when I arrive in a town, to the extent that I can—some foreign places obviously don't have English language newspapers—is I grab every darn newspaper I can grab and I look for some story. And it's not a big news story, in nine and a half cases out of 10, because I don't want to touch anything controversial. It's a little story about something that somebody did in some particular little town.

Personalization. Personalization is incredibly important. The dark side is, for heaven's sakes, do not say negative things. I was once giving a speech in Tampa, Florida. I had a miserable experience in the local hotel. The speech was on customer service. I used my negative customer service story, which was incredibly powerful, and turned the entire audience off. Because they thought I was giving a "I hate Tampa" story, which I wasn't at all, technically or rationally, but that's the way they read it.

You've got to make a bond. You've got to personalize. And, again, it's as true if you're selling a jet aircraft engine as it is if you're at a little meeting.