

The Benefits of Public Speaking to the World Around Us

Brief: Successful public speakers learn to think about ideas, evaluate their truthfulness, and then organize them into a message to share with others to influence the world around them.

Learning Objective: Identify ways that the skills of public speaking can benefit the world around us.

Key Terms:

- **Influencer marketing:** A form of social media marketing in which focus is placed on influential people rather than the target market as a whole.
- **Leadership:** A process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.

Public Leadership as Influence

Martin Luther King Jr., Winston Churchill, and Nelson Mandela are notable 20th-century examples of effective orators who used the power of public speaking to have a significant impact on society. While each had his own unique oratorical style, they shared the ability to apply the knowledge of persuasion to motivate others to take collective action to achieve desired goals. They had a huge impact on society despite strong forces who worked to undermine their goals.

Leadership has been described as “a process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.” Throughout history, there’s been a strong correlation between leadership and communication skills.

While you might never find yourself in a position of world leadership, you will likely be presented with many opportunities to apply public speaking skills to influence others. Whenever you’re in a position to persuade multiple people simultaneously, such as in a meeting or when addressing a large group, you’re applying the same principles masterfully employed by King, Churchill, and Mandela.

Global Leadership as Influence

Today, the reach of technology is pervasive and global, but this has not always been the case. In the past, influencing others involved speaking directly to an audience face-to-face. We know



Martin Luther King Jr.

about Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address because it was written down and can only imagine the impact it had on his audience.

Today, digital technology means that speakers can share messages and thoughts with audiences anyplace in the world for the cost of an internet connection and a camera, or simply a smartphone recorder.

Today's business world understands the enormous impact that one influential person can have. Many businesses invest a large percentage of their advertising dollars on influencer marketing, a form of social media marketing in which focus is placed on influential people rather than the target market as a whole. Using these same principles, social reformers across the globe are using their communication skills to create positive change.

Using the Power of Influence in Everyday Life

Aristotle defined rhetoric as the "faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever." Aristotle believed that anyone—including you—can use these skills to speak with confidence in everyday situations.

For example, imagine you want to persuade a family member to loan you money. Chances are you will work through strategies for persuading them why you need the money and why they should provide it. You'll reflect on what has and has not worked in the past, including previous successful and unsuccessful strategies. From this analysis, you'll construct a message that fits the occasion and audience.

Now, imagine you want to persuade a friend to go out to get Mexican food for dinner. You're not going to use the same message or approach that you used with your family member. The same logic exists in public speaking situations. Aristotle highlighted the importance of finding the appropriate message and strategy for the audience and occasion in order to effectively persuade.

Successful public speakers learn to overcome fear of failure and lack of confidence in order to deliver a message to an audience. They learn to think about ideas, evaluate their truthfulness, and then organize them into a message to share with others. Through your training in public speaking and through your experiences speaking in front of audiences, you too will develop a greater sense of self-confidence and learn to master these important skills.

From Concept to Action

Think of a time when a person of influence convinced you to do something. Perhaps you purchased a product because a famous person or a friend said it was a good choice. Or perhaps you changed a behavior because someone you respect, maybe your mentor or teacher, suggested you do so. What was it that you found persuasive? Was it the logical

arguments they offered? The conviction of their beliefs when they said it? Your respect for their position? Or, a combination of all of the above?

OER IMAGE SOURCES:

"Martin Luther King Jr I Have a Dream." Pixabay. <https://pixabay.com/photos/martin-luther-king-jr-i-have-a-dream-393870>. Accessed 13 March 2019. [CC0]

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"Influencer Marketing." Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Influencer_marketing. Accessed 13 March 2019. [CC BY-SA 4.0]

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