



# Leadership Through Speeches: A Visionary Model

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**Abstract.** Leadership within an organization concerns effective communication. But how can we effectively inspire and motivate others to work enthusiastically for something that will materialize in the future? How can we ask them to put their energies and trust into something that has not yet happened? We do it by appealing to our audience’s imagination, by painting a picture or a vision of what can be. But to do this our audience needs to trust us both professionally and personally. In a nutshell, we need to have credibility or as the ancients used to call it, ‘ethos’. This article discusses the need to create this necessary feeling of trust. It presents us with the Monroe model for visionary type speeches as a means of achieving this end. Finally, it closes with some practical exercises on the draft speech, using the Monroe model, given by the CEO of Carmela.

**Keywords:** communication, leadership, credibility, authenticity, and visionary speech model.

## 1. Introduction

Visionary speech-making for business people falls neatly into Aristotle’s first dimension of oratory, political speaking. It is concerned with the future; it is about things to be done; it is about painting a picture of what could be in a manner that will inspire confidence in an audience. This greatly depends on the personal credibility of the speaker who must show, in Aristotle’s words, good sense, good moral character, and goodwill. A good visionary speech moves people to action but it needs the authenticity springing from these three aspects of credibility.

A simple but effective model for such speeches is the Monroe model with its has five dimensions: an attention grabber at the beginning which grabs the attention of the audience and introduces the problem or topic, a clear problem statement, a brief solution or answer, a vision of this solution which normally comprises about 75% of the speech, an action step to implement the solution, and, finally, a link with the topic.

William Thackeray, the English novelist, wrote “*The two most engaging powers of an author are to make new things familiar and familiar things new. This notion of familiarity can, with some imagination, be transferred to a speaker’s need to make the vision familiar while offering reality in a familiar but new light.*” Creating this familiarity requires the skills of visionary rhetoric, which lie at the heart of speech-making and leadership.

Painting this picture is partly utopian and is built on the imagination, in order to motivate listeners to think about what may be possible. But it greatly depends on the personal credibility of the speaker, as the speaker is selling something that has not yet fully materialized. He cannot usually establish personal credibility overnight. Such classical writers as Cicero say that this credibility needs to exist before, during and after a speech. In many cases, the speaker must have established a reputation long before the speech takes place.

However, there are cases when he has to establish it in the speech itself. In Aristotle's words, a speaker in his speech must show good sense, good moral character, and good will in order to achieve this. Establishing this credibility could take up to 80% of a speech at times. In other cases, the success of a speech will depend on pre-speech information to build up the credibility of the speaker.

In visionary rhetoric the values of both the listener and the speaker must be linked to support this vision, to help the listener identify with the message. This issue of identification is imperative. Speakers normally link it to an appeal to the intellect based on factual information. However, identification is also related to the audience's involvement not only in the speech itself, but also in potential action to be taken after the speech. This is why the action step is important.

An example of visionary rhetoric is the speeches delivered by Jack Welch in GE in the post 1989 years. Welch eliminated 100,000 jobs and 24 pay levels within his restructuring plan. He restructured the entire organization and then had to sell this organizational dream, the "*boundaryless corporation*," to motivate those who stayed on or survived.<sup>1</sup> The technique used was simply "You can trust me, I have proved myself a leader" (ethos). The speeches of Jack Welch were not isolated feats of visionary rhetoric but part of a well-thought out communication strategy; a strategy that can be seen in the contents both of Welch's speeches and the written communication process. In GE's Annual Report for 1990, for example, exactly the same utopian appeal built on common American values can be found as in his speeches.<sup>2</sup> He uses patriotism, freedom, pragmatism and common sense. He uses, according to Jay Conger, analogies with the New England settlers, the spirit of pioneering and freedom found in the discovery of the West. He uses resourcefulness, entrepreneurship, and the spirit of value for your dollar and cents. In general, he uses American mythology to legitimise his vision, and to drag GE back to its roots.<sup>3</sup> However, Welch had credibility. His credibility was based on his past behaviour and on what he was saying at that moment. Indeed this credibility would accompany him into the future. His audiences felt it was authentic.

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1. Jack Welch, "*A Boundaryless Corporation ...*", Executives Speeches, December 1992, p.2.

2. GE, Annual Report, 1990, p.2.

3. See Conger & Kanungo, pp.169-171.

## 2. The Need for Authenticity

Speechmaking for managers, apart from the social occasion, is about leadership; it is about bridging the gap between vision and action. A good speech moves people to action, but this needs authenticity.

*“Integrity comes naturally if you live for your vision...*

*To be real, (vision) has to come from the deepest parts of you, from an inner system of beliefs. The total pragmatist cannot be a transforming leader”.*

Charles Handy

Authenticity means articulating reality, as it really is - warts, mistakes, and ambiguities (of course, this can only be achieved if he has created a common perspective of reality). This is what gains the commitment of the listeners. An audience can connect on an emotional level with him as speaker, based on a common interpretation of reality. People don't follow authentic leaders because they have all the answers, but because they see and feel that he has experienced the same confusion and contradictions as they have. Speakers address questions that are relevant to the audience.

But where does this authenticity come from? Effective leaders can, in their speeches, inspire commitment by the communication of a personal vision of the future. However, they must first look inwards, becoming aware of what they want to say, and then developing it into a vision. It is a vision based on personal knowledge of the past, and realistic, relevant experience of the present.

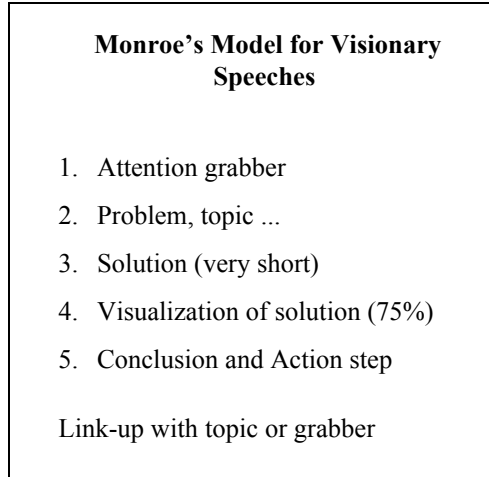
Although communicating a vision is heavily dependent on our level of credibility (ethos), our speech must nevertheless contain elements of our other two proofs of pathos (emotional proof) and logos (content). Every message needs content and argument. After all without this logos, we will have no vision to communicate. Likewise every speech is delivered in an emotional atmosphere. We must strike the right emotional balance for our audience to receive our message. Every speech uses a configuration of the three rhetorical dimensions of ethos, pathos and logos. Speech-writers normally use these three very general rules in a variety of ways according to the circumstances of the occasion.

The model that we follow in these 'visionary' type speeches was popularised by Alan Monroe almost seven decades ago and can be found in a very instructive book, *The Principles of Public Speaking*.<sup>4</sup>

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4. K.M., Gronbeck, B.E., Ehninger, D, and Monroe, A. H. (2000), *Principles of Public Speaking*, Longmans.

In digesting this model it is worth remembering Winston Churchill's remark, *"Of all the talents bestowed upon men, none is so precious as the gift of oratory. He who enjoys it wields a power more durable than that of a great king."* Now let us see the five parts of the Monroe model in more detail.



### 3. A Visionary Speech

#### 3.1. "Grab" the Attention of the Audience

An audience will usually allow us about one minute to get their attention. This requires creativity on our part. We need something that jolts the audience into paying attention to us. If we sound boring in the first minute, we will lose their attention unless it is a subject of vital importance to them. Tell a story, cite an anecdote, use a catchy phrase, involve your audience, and, if appropriate, use a visual aid. German,

The following is an example of an effective attention grabber. It shows that it is time for something new (Cited from a speech delivered by Richard Rosenberg, former CEO of Bank of America). Rosenberg captured his audience's attention by the use of this opening to show where his bank has been, is now, and where it is heading. It is like a wake-up call.

Does anybody here remember what they were doing on October 4, 1957? That was the day the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, which many historians say was the symbolic transition from the industrial age to the information age... Which were the top companies in Chicago on October 4, 1957? Swift, Standard Oil, Armour, International Harvester, Inland Steel, Sears, and so on. Today, which

are the top businesses in Chicago? Ameritech, Abbot Labs., McDonald's, Motorola, Waste Management, and Baxter. Which companies will be on the list in 35 years time?

### 3.2. A Statement of Our Problem/Topic.

Writing your theme statement and making it easy for your audience to follow is hard work. An example from Rebecca McDaniel's book is as follows:

***“Most plane crashes result  
from several possible causes, such as air  
control traffic systems, human errors, engine  
failure,  
maintenance problems, warning-system failures,  
bad weather, or birds.”<sup>5</sup>***

In this theme sentence we have *seven* ideas which are far too many for any audience to remember. Therefore, the sentence must be redrafted. Rebecca McDaniels rewrote it as follows: “Most plane crashes result from human error, machinery malfunction, or environmental hazards”. These supporting details for the body of the speech can be given individually or in combination. They normally consist of general examples, detailed examples, hypothetical examples, statistics, anecdotes, testimony, analogies and quotations. Here we have *three* ideas, which an audience can easily remember.

This is often followed by relating the problem statement to our audience's needs. Then we give our answer which should be of great interest to the audience. Stressing this need is one way of ensuring that they will automatically continue listening. Don't assume that everyone is selfish, dull, and uninterested. Many people are eager to act when called on to contribute to big causes. Offer your listeners an opportunity to be part of something larger than themselves. They will respond, so long as a common understanding has been developed. An example of an introduction in which a speaker creates common ground is one from a speech given by Lloyd Reuss at General Motors in 1986. Here the speaker uses various techniques in the introduction. He uses suspense, for example, in a build-up,

5. McDaniel, Rebecca, *Scared Speechless*, p. 74.

before stating his theme. This is taken from Edward McCarthy's book, "Speechwriting"<sup>6</sup>.

### GRABBER

(Suspense)

Tonight I want to talk about something that has been around ever since we human beings first gathered together into tribes. In fact, society would be impossible without it. Over the centuries some of our best thinkers have been absolutely fascinated by it. There are probably as many theories about it as there are theorists. And today we need it more than ever.

(Theme or topic sentence)

I'm talking about leadership. One writer said that trying to analyze it is like studying the **Abominable Snowman: you see the footprints...but never the thing itself.** Nevertheless, in the next few minutes, I'd like to offer some thoughts on what it is...and on what kind of leadership we need in America today.

(Use of analogy)

(Establishment of common ground)

**I** certainly don't pretend to have mastered this enormous subject, but **I** do have some first-hand experience with it, and **I** have done a lot of thinking about it over the years. And **my** basic conclusion is this: new competitive conditions...and the changing nature of leadership itself, call for a new kind of business leadership that changes individuals within GM – and eventually, transforms the entire organization.

(Use of rhetorical question)

How do I arrive at that? Let me start my answer by touching briefly on the conditions that define business leadership in the 1980s...

In this example, the speaker took the need/relevance section for granted. He realised the audience did not need to have it made explicit.

### 3.3. A Solution to the Problem

Once our audience knows our theme sentence (statement of the problem), we tell them our solution. This should be kept as brief as possible. With this in mind, we can then organize of the body of our speech accordingly.

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6. Edward H. McCarthy, *Speechwriting*, Executive Speaker, pp.80-81.

### 3.4. Visualisation of the Solution

Here we build a picture of our solution in our audience's mind. We do this by using analogies and examples. This will bring colour and spirit into our solution. Suppose we were the CEO of Disney, for example, and we were addressing a group of concerned shareholders. The type of language we use and the anecdotal style would be very important.

“But I have a clear feeling that along the way that leads to revenues and profits we lost the most important propelling force that existed during Walt Disney's early days: I am talking about creativity, imagination, and the power of a fairytale”. We could continue building our picture by saying something like “... and fairytales are precisely what the world needs today as terrorism enters our homes, makes our lives uncertain, and puts us at risk.” We could portray the power of the imagination as an ingrained part of the DNA of Disney.

However, this need not necessarily be always a positive picture. It is quite possible for us to find it convenient to paint a negative picture also. Robert Cialdini in his forthcoming book, *Moment of Power*, tells about the six laws of behaviour that can be useful in persuasion. One of these is the principle of scarcity. It simply says that people want more of what they cannot have. If something is unique or exclusive, people will want it. It is also true that if we don't do something, we will miss this opportunity. In this way we are telling our audience that they will miss out on something exclusive to us if our message is not accepted.

Finally, in any picture we may draw for our audience, the question of authenticity become crucial as we have already stated. Not only must we be seen as sincere and trustworthy, we must be seen as professionally competent as well. To sell a vision, we need this credibility. Visualization of the solution or topic should comprise of about 75 to 85% of our speech.

### 3.5. Conclusion and Action Step

When the speaker moves out of the last subdivision of the speech, some speech writers recommend going back to the attention grabber, for a generalization about the topic. We can also use transitional words such as “*in conclusion*”, and “*finally*”...to achieve this end. Irrespective of which method is used, at the end of the body of the speech, the listener must have a sense of completeness. The audience must feel that they know the vision. The conclusion is a memory drive to help the audience to remember the principal points of the speech. Therefore, we repeat the main ideas (subdivisions) of the thesis (don't give a summary). Don't make the conclusion too short (or too long). It must be in proportion to the speech (5% or so). The audience needs to have the feeling of finality and a sense of involvement. Remember to use the power of the last sentence to reaffirm the

audience's involvement. The conclusion given by Alexander Cunningham at General Motors is a good example<sup>7</sup>.

### GRABBER

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|------------------------------|---|
| (Use of rhetorical question) | Can the entrepreneur survive in large companies? Certainly. But only if those companies remember that size and security are not ends unto themselves. Large companies should take heed not to let their sheer size crush entrepreneurs. |
| (Personal pronoun)           | Where will we find tomorrow's entrepreneurs? By looking into the mirror? By accepting the need for risk? By realizing that we must accommodate ourselves to the entrepreneur, and not vice versa?                                       |
| ("If...then")                | If we go back to our business and preach, cajole – fight, if necessary – in support of entrepreneurship, we just may produce a light so bright that it will cast away the darkness.   |

Restate the choice, visualize a new future, ask for action, and answer their questions.

## 4. Conclusion

In conclusion the following points may be helpful to remember:

- Most of us have listened at one time or another to very polished speakers who made us, as an audience, feel enthusiastic and 'fired up'. They impressed us with the quality of their voices, their diction, easy manner and, at times, entertaining approach. However, after these speeches, both their content and purpose can fade, and one is left just with a vision of an entertaining or polished speaker. All too often today, techniques and entertainment in speech-making are what is valued most: cosmetics over substance. Very few speakers really engage their audiences and push them to consider issues seriously.
- Leadership today is not about urging others to do better and improve, as it was traditionally understood inside hierarchical organisations. It is about motivating and inspiring people. Why can some people persuade

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7. See Edward H. McCarthy, *Speechwriting*, pp.61-69. McCarthy gives some very good examples of the use of personal pronouns, rhetorical questions and so on.

successfully? The power to persuade others is a complex subject. For the world of business, that power lies within a business leader's own *authenticity*; making sure that what he says is what he believes. In an age of cynicism and distrust, *authenticity* is the only thing that works. Effectiveness comes from inside the speaker. Why could such people as Jack Welch inspire others? Because of their core beliefs and personal experiences, together with relevant message content, speakers can move people to *act*.

### PRACTICAL EXERCISE

1. Analyze the speech on 'Carmela'\* from the point of view of identification and recognition in relation to the audience. [Carmela is a subsidiary company of Timmus international. Although Carmela is profitable at the moment, there is a need for change if the situation is to be maintained in the future.]
2. All speeches need to create a common understanding of their messages. How well do these speeches achieve this goal?
3. Read the speech aloud a number of times as if you were addressing a particular audience. Do you feel the language flows in a way that suits your delivery? What changes would you make to suit your delivery style?

\*This speech should not be seen as an example of a well drafted speech. It can be very useful for classroom discussion on corporate speech-making.

### CARMELA SPEECH\*

I will start with a question. What do Intel, Microsoft and Carmela have in common? My answer is simple. They all face the need for change, which means they have to adapt fast so as to maintain their positions as profitable companies.

I have been here at Carmela for the past three and a half years. It has been a very interesting time for me. It has been both challenging and invigorating. We have performed very well during this time. Definitely the confidence that Timmus International had in Carmela has been justified, and you all definitely have played a big part in achieving this. But, my friends, we still have a lot to do.

The times are changing, and in order to continue our excellent performance, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. The changing face of the industry and emergence of new opportunities necessitate our making some changes to secure our future and to continue being a profitable and growing company.

To achieve these changes, we as a company have decided to diversify and explore new opportunities. Now we must leverage our core competencies. Doing this will enable us to grow and establish ourselves in a stronger position.

Diversification is necessary for the following four reasons: the industry for our product is in decline and we have overcapacity, we are too dependent on a few suppliers and we have to develop our expertise further.

Although Carmela has always done well, the fact is that the motor industry is stagnating at this moment and marred with increased competition and falling margins. Also we have an overcapacity situation. Many companies in similar situations eventually have gone bankrupt because of their inertia. We at Carmela can't afford that. We can adapt, as we have shown in the past, and work as a team to combat these adverse conditions. We have set ourselves a goal of achieving 30% growth. I know we can do it, but not just by staying in our comfortable niche, rather by diversifying into other high growth and profitable markets.

A second frightening fact is our dependence on our three traditional clients. The changes in the industry have affected them too and there is no guarantee that those contracts will be renewed. We have to diversify our customer base too so that we are not at the mercy of their whims. I know we can do it because we have the expertise, we have Timmus International behind us, and our product is of the highest quality. We have to go out and get new clients both in our current market and in newer markets to achieve our targets and secure our future.

The third fact, which is more optimistic, is that there are lots of new opportunities out there. These opportunities come not only from the market but from the discovery of new materials as well. The effort we have already invested in our R&D puts us in a unique position. We are capable of developing new products. We are also capable of marketing these products in markets outside our traditional one. This will help us diversify our risks and increase our knowledge base. This attractive position gives us firm support for our policy of diversification.

Friends, finally I would like to reiterate that Carmela has a great future and we have to make strategic changes to ensure that we continue with our past performances. You have shown that you can adapt to changes and work as a team to deliver the best. I believe that with your support and effort we can achieve our plans to diversify, to combat the changes that the industry is undergoing, and to continue being the great company we are.

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