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Lesson No. 04, Matters of Personal Appearance

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EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPEAKING

LESSON No. 4

MATTERS OF PERSONAL APPEARANCE



NORTH AMERICAN INSTITUTE
CHICAGO

MATTERS OF PERSONAL APPEARANCE

LESSON No. 4

One of a Series of Lessons in
EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPEAKING

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**NORTH AMERICAN INSTITUTE
CHICAGO**

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MATTERS OF PERSONAL APPEARANCE

In striving to develop a delivery in speaking which will prove the most effective, one must not forget to consider carefully matters of personal appearance. It is a pretty well recognized fact that one's personal appearance and bearing have an important relation to success in all matters of life. But it must be remembered that when one stands before an audience, he becomes the centre of interest. All other things are lost sight of for the time being. The very fact that there are many looking at a speaker has the effect of intensifying the attention which is put upon him. Under these circumstances, whatever he suggests by his appearance and bearing will be immediately seized upon by the audience and interpreted accordingly. It is not too much to say that this measurement by the audience begins the very moment he makes

his entrance. It cannot be avoided. There will be an impression, good, bad, or indifferent made upon them before the first word has been spoken.

The author has many times seen the extremes in this matter occur. One speaker has won his audience before he has spoken. Another has lost the interest of his audience before he has spoken; while others have made an indifferent impression.

Where one can inspire confidence in himself, through the influence of a strong and attractive personal appearance, before the speech opens, his task is made far easier. In cases where the personal appearance has not attracted the audience or has disappointed them it will be, in all probability, a difficult task to win them. It may be impossible to win them at all. The famous French actress, Madame Bernhardt, is a remarkable example of the power of personal magnetism over an audience. She has but to appear from the wings of the theatre and the audience is strongly impressed and attracted. It is all in the radiation by the physical nature of the spirit

within. It becomes very evident, then, that one cannot give too careful attention to the bodily appearance.

This conclusion leads to the consideration of two great laws of the human being which must be well understood: first, the law of the influence of the mind upon the body; and second, the law of the influence of the body upon the mind or spirit. The action of each must be recognized, developed, and strictly adhered to. The first law, that of the influence of the mind upon the body, is more generally understood, and intelligently used by the speaker. The other must be equally understood and intelligently used. The poet, Browning, put the law this way in his poem, "Rabbi Ben Ezra": "Nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul." This helping of the soul by the flesh is the one law which is to be considered at this point.

Consider, then, the proper setting up of the body—one that will give it an appearance of strength and of prepossessing qualities. The feet must be kept close together, one slightly in advance of the other,

the toes separated by an angle of about forty-five degrees. The weight is to be carried forward upon the balls of the feet, equally distributed. The hips are to be carried backward, the chest high and forward. The head is to be erect, the chin held at right angles to the spinal column.

In practicing this position of the body, there is another consideration to be borne in mind. There must be cultivated an easy, graceful and light bearing as one steps upon the platform and takes his position before the audience. His body must present the appearance of being light upon the feet. There must be conveyed a sense of bodily alertness, of readiness for any emergency of a physical nature that might arise; the physical powers must be ready to be put into action at a moment's notice.

Remembering, then, the second great law, that of the influence of the body upon the mind and spirit, we shall learn, through the practice of these positions, that an alert, alive, buoyant, and vital body tends to bring about the same conditions in the mind. With the mental powers aroused

the opening of the speech will immediately attract close attention. Again and again it occurs that a speaker consumes five, ten, and even fifteen minutes before he has really waked up, before the delivery has gained any momentum. How often has it been said, "He is interesting enough after he gets started." Like the short distance runner, the speaker must get "off the mark" instantly. He cannot afford to waste valuable time in getting started. The great majority of speeches are short, and it often happens that a man reaches the end of his talk before there has come a real fusing of his powers.

One reason for this lack of effective opening of the speech, may be found in the dead, or at least indifferent state of the body. When the speaker begins he has to arouse not only his brain, but also the whole physical nature—that must be made thoroughly alive. Without practice, it takes time to secure the arousal of the physical self, together with the emotional nature. Let time be taken, therefore, before entrance upon the platform, to arouse the physical

forces. This may be accomplished through physical exercises at first, but later it must be secured through right thinking and the will. Through this activity the brain will become fused and will begin the process of speaking with all its powers ready to respond immediately upon demand. The speaker's effort may be compared to that of the short distance runner in athletic contests. Much care is given to securing that position of the body which will enable him to get off the mark the most rapidly after the signal to start is given; he is trained to have every muscle, nerve, and part of the body so alert, so completely aroused—and on edge—that he can get off the mark with no loss of time. A second lost, or a part of a second lost in the start may mean the loss of the race at the other end. So with the speaker. He really needs to get started the very moment he makes his first statement. His first word, almost, must attract favorable attention. This cannot be the case with the physical and mental powers but partially aroused.

This bodily position just discussed, will be affected by many conditions. The position described will not always be maintained. The body is an agent of expression, and as such, it will be called upon to express many different ideas and emotions. What various changes of attitude and action it will undergo, will depend, in a great degree, upon the nature of the speech, and its purpose, which in turn will decide the nature of the ideas and the feelings to be expressed.

The body will, therefore, respond differently, and present a difference of appearance, as the purpose of the speech varies. If one is speaking to a group of people with no other purpose than to amuse or to entertain them, it will be readily seen that a different attitude and mode of expression will be shown by the body from that which would result if the speaker felt the exaltation of some great message, or were driven to speak by an irresistible compulsion to utter some deep conviction, or were impelled by a great eagerness to persuade his hearers to act in a manner which he is about

to describe. Again, if the speech is an effort to explain some truth of a purely intellectual nature,—one with which there is mixed no emotional quality—the expression of the face, and general bearing, and action of the body will be very different from that called forth in the other situations described. The body will not be so thoroughly vitalized; it will not rise to such fulness of height; it will not tower; it will not be so aggressive. The face will not show the emotional fervor, the eye will not sparkle so keenly,—there would come into it a sharper, more intent and intense, more calculating look.

The three compelling forces which appear in utterance are the mind, the will and the spirit. Every speech, of whatever purpose, will be influenced more or less by all three of these forces, although certain types of speeches will be predominantly influenced by one or another. If the speech is primarily intellectual, the mind will be the dominating influence and the physical nature will not respond so completely or



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CORRECT STANDING POSITION, SIDE VIEW

intensely as in other types. While in the intellectual type the body must never be heavy, it will not be so active as in other types; there will be fewer gestures, and they will be more circumscribed in size. The position and the attitudes will be less aggressive and compelling. Those parts of the body which are given to intellectual expression will be used to the exclusion of other gestural agents. The expression of the eye will be one of keenness, directness, shrewdness, and steadiness.

When the will is the dominating force in speech, the physical self will take a very much more aggressive attitude. It will appear less yielding, and will grow in steadiness and strength of position. The face will show a firmer aspect and at times grow into actual rigidity of features. The eye will change its point of vision less often and will gain in directness to such a degree that it will become piercing. The common expression, "He seemed to look right through one," expresses this thought. All gestures will gain in strength, firmness and

swiftness, and will lose in ease and grace of movement.

When the utterance is primarily spiritual, that is emotional, the body becomes unusually alive. It shows a great stirring within; it often rises to its fullest height; the face takes on an exalted look, and the eyes shine with a real brilliance. The facial expression will change and color in rapid succession as the feelings change from one intense state to another. The full range of emotions may be run in a few moments, and the bodily expression portray now the extremes of fear, despair and degradation, and the next moment the highest joy, fervor and exaltation. In this matter of the adequate expression, through or by means of the body, of the emotions, Americans are found decidedly lacking. The warmer blooded and more emotional races, such as the French and the Italians, are far freer in pantomimic expression, as it is called. It is desirable that in all kinds of speech Americans shall express more fully through the body. Those who expect to

speak from the platform must put themselves under thorough discipline in this direction until satisfactory adequacy of bodily expression is acquired. As the last thought to be remembered in this lesson, this may be put down as frequently true, that adequacy of vocal or speech expression is not secured because the body is bound, because it is not free and does not express the same things which the voice is trying to express.

Not a little attention is to be given to the matter of dress. The effect desired is that, as one appears before an audience, he shall attract favorable attention. It will be easily understood then, that the manner of dress may have much to do with creating either a favorable, or an unfavorable impression. While considerable latitude in taste may be allowed, it will be wise to note the general principle that eccentricity or exaggeration of style is to be avoided. There must also be secured a general neatness and harmony of effect which will induce a sense of satisfaction in the audience. Simplicity, neatness, and harmony of dress

are the ends desired. The law is that nothing shall draw the attention of the audience from what one is saying, either to what he is, or to what he is doing.

Lastly, there is to be considered here the question of proper conduct during speech. There are so many unseemly things done by the public speaker these days, and so many things left undone that ought to be done, that the beginning student is inclined to believe that anything one wishes to do while he is speaking is to be permitted. Here is a speaker who may be likened to a mechanical speaking machine, and here is another who jumps upon a table and speaks from that vantage point, and even lifts a chair high in the air and brings it down smashingly upon the floor, and it all passes in the minds of many as effective speech.

It cannot be gainsaid that the public speaker has just as much need of studying to get the right effects through bodily action as has the actor. The really great actor knows that he cannot trust to chance

to secure the effective result in bodily action. He knows that the wrong kind of bodily expression at a given moment, may entirely destroy the effect he wishes to create. A movement of the finger, the raising of an eyelash, a shrinking of the body, a shrug of the shoulder, may be far more expressive than words. The law is—and this will be more completely developed in another lesson—that there shall be no action of the body except there is a definite motive for it. So, in general, carelessness of bearing and action may very greatly weaken the effect desired. Too much movement must surely be avoided. Walking across the platform, especially making round trips from one end to the other, will prove a detriment to the speech. Moving forward a step or two and then moving back the same distance or any distance, is unwise. Vigorous gesticulation is far from effective. One must avoid speaking to one part of the audience for too long a time, but at the same time the eye point must not change too often.

The point to bear in mind is this, that one cannot be too careful in considering the effect of bodily appearance and action upon speech.

EXERCISES.

These exercises are provided as a means of testing the students' knowledge of the subject and for training through actual practice. Exercises are not to be sent back to the School.

1. In front of a looking glass, study your standing position, and make such corrections as are necessary, bearing in mind the instructions given elsewhere in this lesson.

2. Having obtained this position, practice maintaining it for some moments, at the same time bringing about a perfectly quiet and poised mind, together with an easy, but still and thoroughly composed body.

3. Take the correct position and practice entering from the side, moving easily and alertly to position before the audience. In securing the position walk with the side to the audience and when the point of speaking is reached turn easily upon the balls of the feet, thus facing the hearers. In practicing this exercise, see that the

action, while not too rapid, is sprightly; that the face expresses a spirit of geniality; that the attitude is that of one not only willing, but rather eager to speak to those in front of him.

4. Take position in front of audience and after ascertaining that the position is a strong one, think of some subject and centre the whole attention upon it; see to it that the moment an idea other than those belonging to the subject come into the mind it is displaced by some thought connected with the subject. Do not be easy upon the brain; make it keep to the subject you have chosen. Every few days keep lengthening the time given to the exercise, until you can fill a period of at least fifteen minutes without allowing the brain to wander.

5. Having taken a strong position, slowly let the eyes observe the audience: to the right, then to the centre, then to the left. All the while let the mind more and more keenly concentrate itself upon the audience, attempting to centre their attention more

and more thoroughly upon you by means of the strong, keen eye, and face.

6. Combine exercises four and five.

7. Having assumed the correct position before the audience, assert the will to make the brain and the body arouse themselves, so that in every particular they are thoroughly alive. If necessary at first take deep breathing rapidly to set the blood running. Keep at this practice until you can completely arouse the entire man without the use of the breathing work.

8. Having taken the correct position and found that the whole man is thoroughly alert, practice the following opening sentences:

(a) Gentlemen, I feel honored at this welcome of your organization.

(b) I rise, my lords, to declare my sentiments on this most solemn and serious subject.

(c) My lords, I must beg the indulgence of the house.

(d) Mr. Speaker, I cannot prevail on myself to hurry over this great consideration.

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—Gibbon.

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