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Lesson No. 20, How to Secure Action

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HOW TO SECURE ACTION

LESSON No. 20

One of a Series of Lessons in
EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPEAKING

By

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NORTH AMERICAN INSTITUTE
CHICAGO

HOW TO SECURE ACTION

THE FIRST PART OF THE COURSE

LESSON No. 20

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HOW TO SECURE ACTION

At this time we come to a discussion of the last one of the four purposes behind speech. It is not only the last, but the most important, and, moreover, the most difficult to master. Action is the end of all of the greatest oratory in the history of the world. Few forces have been equal to that wielded by the great orator. He has made and unmade cities, states and governments, and he has profoundly changed social and moral conditions. He has not only led men, but time and again driven them to courses of action which he has fixed upon.

In the final analysis it is of little worth that one be able to set forth an idea clearly or to convince of its truth, if he cannot so intensely impress the hearer that he is willing to act as has been pointed out by the speaker.

If one considers impartially the great

amount of speaking that is heard from the pulpit, from the lecture platform, from the political platform, and from the teacher's desk, it must assuredly be admitted that the results obtained from this speech are not adequate to its amount. It would seem that if public utterance today possessed the effectiveness possible, the effectiveness of the speech of past ages, the results ought to be far greater than they are. The writer firmly believes that a great deal of present-day speaking is decidedly lacking in power because there has not been made by the speaker an adequate preparation, and further because the speakers have not realized the greatness of their art and, therefore, have failed to put themselves through that discipline which alone will develop the highest power of speech.

The student is therefore urged with particular earnestness to give due attention to the study and practice of all of the phases of public appeal, but to make the processes of securing action a matter of very thorough observation, study, and discipline.

Make a careful study of the methods used, in the following illustrations, to secure action. It is by an appeal to the desires.

1. If you want power in this country; if you want to make yourselves felt; if you do not want your children to wait long years before they have the bread on the table they ought to have, the leisure in their lives they ought to have, the opportunities in life they ought to have; if you don't want to wait yourselves,—write on your banner, so that every political trimmer can read it, so that every politician, no matter how short-sighted he may be, can read it, “We never forget.”—*Phillips*.

2. Shall the children of the men of Marathon become the slaves of Philip? Shall the majesty of the Senate, and the people of Rome stoop to wear the chains forging by the military executors of the will of Julius Caesar? Shall the thirteen Colonies become, and be, free and independent states?—*Choate*.

3. In this present controversy they appear to me to be fighting for something

which means nothing but hatred between the two countries, which means nothing but to produce waste of public treasure, which means nothing but stopping the transaction of your own vital and necessary business; and finally which means nothing but incurring the judgment and condemnation of the civilized world. Sir, these things cannot last. In the faith that they will not last, and in the faith that every manful protest will tend to bring them nearer to the day of their doom, I move the rejection of the bill.—*W. E. Gladstone.*

4. Duty determines destiny. Destiny which results from duty performed may bring anxiety and perils, but never failure and dishonor. Pursuing duty may not always lead by smooth paths. Another course may look easier and more attractive, but pursuing duty for duty's sake, is always sure and safe and honorable.—*Wm. McKinley.*

5. There is nothing more detestable than disgrace; nothing more shameful than slavery. We have been born to glory

and to liberty; let us either preserve them or die with dignity.—*Cicero*.

A detailed examination of the foregoing illustrations will show that action is secured by an arousal of the feelings or emotions. You said yesterday, "I know I ought to spend more time upon this public speaking course, but some way or other, I don't feel like it," or in another connection said, "This is not the right course to follow, but it is what appeals to me now and I am going to do it."

The point is that knowledge or clear understanding of an idea, or the belief or the conviction of truth are not sufficient frequently of themselves to produce the action implied in the idea or in the conviction. Some way or somehow a strong feeling or intense desire must be created before action is likely to follow.

In his oration upon the eloquence of the revolutionary periods, Rufus Choate expresses the idea thus: "If you bear in mind that the aim of deliberative eloquence is to persuade to an action and that to persuade to an action it must be

shown that to perform it will gratify some one of the desires or affections or sentiments—you may call them altogether passions—which are the springs of all action; some love of our own happiness, some love of our country, some love of man, some love of nature, some approval of our own conscience, some fear or some love of God, you will see that eloquence will be characterized first by the nature of the actions to which it persuades, and secondly by the nature of the desire or affection or sentiment—the nature of the passion; in other words, by the appeal to which it seeks to persuade to action.”

To put this into a principle, action, as a rule, is secured only when there is sufficient desired feeling or emotion or passion aroused to compel it, and the emotion or passion is aroused by means of satisfying or appealing to those motives which form the springs of action in the lives of those appealed to.

The most fundamental and universal motive of life is stated in a well-known proverb: “Self-preservation is the first law

of nature.” Another tremendous motive power in life is expressed in a saying in the language that “money makes the mare go.” Another of the dominating impulses of life or motives is that of ambition. Again in deciding upon various actions, people are continually questioning, “Well, what will people say?” So reputation forms another appealing force in life. There are those, however, who do not care so much what people say, but are far more interested in what they are. So character becomes one of the impelling motives of life. Some one has said, “Show me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.” Again, it has been said, “Show me what books people read, and I can tell you what they are.” And still again it is maintained, “Tell me what company a man keeps, and I can tell you what he is.” The question of what food we eat or what literature we read, or what kind of company we keep is decided largely by our likes or dislikes. Therefore, we arrive at the conclusion that taste, or our tastes, form a powerful influence for action. But

there are others who will not be moved hither and thither by their tastes, but who will view each action in the light of that which is wise, so wisdom forms a force in the lives of many. Closely akin to wisdom is the motive of duty; stern though it may be, it is the one motive that will keep the world steady. The humanity in most of us may be appealed to, so we find that sympathy is a motive that can be relied upon to produce action, and finally, but by no means least, are those great moving forces that may be classed under the head of affections.

These, then, are the elements in a people's nature that must be appealed to if action is to be secured in any desired direction.

1. Self-preservation
2. Money
3. Reputation
4. Character
5. Ambition
6. Tastes
7. Wisdom
8. Duty

9. Sentiment

10. Affections.

It must not be thought that in any one situation it is probable that all of these motives will be used. Here again the speaker will find it necessary to study the occasion and the type of his speech, and particularly the limitations of his audience to discover just those motives that are to be used. And in this particular connection, wisdom would dictate that he discover just how thoroughly the motive of selfishness or that of altruism complicates or aids the work he has to do.

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 to the School.

Take each subject below in turn and decide what desires, or sentiments, or motives can be used to move an audience to action.

1. An appeal to provide a playground in the ward or village.
2. An appeal for an ordinance to protect the milk supply.
3. An appeal to an audience of voters to vote for a child labor law.
4. An appeal to a group of young men to be men of character.
5. An appeal for patriotism.
6. An appeal to support a given candidate for mayor.
7. An appeal to vote out saloons.
8. An appeal for better roads.
9. An appeal for eleven months of school rather than nine.