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YOUR GUIDE TO SECURING THE
POWER OF PERSUASIONCOACHING AND TRAINING SERVICES
TO DEVELOP POWERFUL AND PERSUASIVE
COMMUNICATION SKILLS

IN THIS ISSUE

Analyzing President Obama's Inaugural
Address, and his transition from
the language of candidacy to the
language of leadership.For previous issues of *The Beacon*,
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Beacon (bē'kən), *noun* 1. a guiding light.
2. a lighthouse or signal buoy to warn or guide
vessels at sea. 3. a person, act or thing that
warns or guides.

President Obama's Inauguration Speech: The Transition from Poetry to Prose

"The key to a good speech? Three things. Be clear. Be brief. Be seated."

• Franklin Delano Roosevelt

In the December 2008 issue of *The Beacon*, I made reference to then-president-elect Barack Obama: "He has mastered the art of the campaign, but can he master the art of governance? Remember... politicians campaign in poetry, but they govern in prose. He has the poetry mastered. Now comes the prose." *In the Spotlight December 2008*. As I sit here in the dark, cold and very early hours of January 21, 2009, I come back to these words to discuss and analyze President Obama's inaugural address.

Over the last two years, we have heard some lofty oratory from President Obama. He has consistently communicated ideals and concepts articulately and clearly, and in a remarkably inclusive way. His speech at the 2004 Democratic Convention thrust him into our national consciousness. His March 18, 2008, speech in Philadelphia on race was perhaps the most thoughtful discussion of the topic I have ever heard. And his Iowa Caucus victory speech in January 2008 was a battle cry to his followers that they could win the presidency. His ability to captivate has been clear and real.

The spectator in me has enjoyed the poetry of his language, and he has always left me wanting more. But the coach in me has been curiously waiting for a little less poetry, and a little more prose. Said another way, I've been waiting for President Obama to take his oratory down a few thousand feet and start speaking more specifically about what his presidency will be *about*.

Every truly great leader has the ability to speak in two very distinct ways: at times in poetry, and at other times in prose. In other words, every great leader has the ability to speak to big issues in an inclusive way and motivate people *to want to act*. That's the poetry. And every great leader also has the ability to speak specifically, with clear action steps, and direct people *to actually act*. That's the prose. If you speak constantly in poetry, never in prose, the risk is that people will eventually tire of the big stuff and want specifics. And if you speak constantly in prose, without the emotional

appeal of poetry, the risk is that you may never be able to motivate people to follow the action plan you have designed. Poetry and prose are both necessary for truly great leadership.

Yesterday's inaugural address was a clear transition away from the lofty oratory of *candidate* Obama, and towards clear, action-oriented messages to specific audiences that I was hoping to hear from *President* Obama. Regardless of your politics (and I'm *not* commenting on politics here... just communication skills), I believe there are many valuable communication lessons for would-be leaders in this speech, and I'll outline the most important ones I heard.

First and foremost, the preparation for any speech should begin with a clear goal. When you prepare to speak, ask yourself: Are you trying to introduce yourself to an audience and build some credibility? Are you setting the stage for a future call to action and trying to cause your audience to think certain things? Or are you making a specific call to action, and seeking to influence actual behavior? Every speaker should always know exactly where he or she is trying to lead the audience.

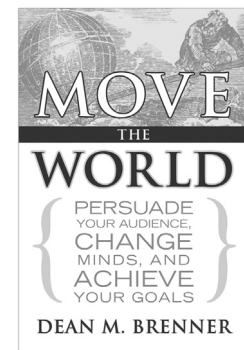
I can't be sure, *exactly*, what the goals of President Obama and his speechwriters were with this address. But I'm fairly certain that their goals were as follows:

1. Set a tone of hard work ahead and common purpose;
2. Manage expectations in preparation for results that will take time;
3. Make clear that our economic challenges are significant and at the top of his list;
4. Communicate to the entire planet that America will continue to play a strong global role.

In crafting his speech, President Obama maintained a focus on these goals and achieved them with a mastery of both poetry and prose. Here's how:

1. He set a somber tone, right from the outset... a tone appropriate for this moment in our history: *"That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood. Our nation is at war... Our economy is badly weakened... Homes have been lost; jobs shed; businesses shuttered... Our healthcare is too costly; our schools fail too many; and each day brings further evidence that the ways we use energy strengthen our adversaries and threaten our planet. Less measurable but no less profound is a sapping of confidence across our land - a nagging fear that America's decline is inevitable, and that the next generation must lower its sights."*
2. He made it clear that each of us has to contribute. He created ownership over our collective future: *"What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility - a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation, and the world, duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task. That is the price and the promise of citizenship."* Incidentally, the echoes of the inaugural

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addresses of Presidents Kennedy and Reagan were clear here.

3. This speech was inclusive, as his speeches always are: In a speech of slightly more than 2,000 words, President Obama uttered the word “we” 62 times, “us” 23 times, and “our” 71 times. By my count, that’s 156 pronouns that are *inclusive*. Conversely, he only said “I,” “me” or “my” five times. As he consistently does, Obama spoke in a way that caused his audience to feel like they were part of something, together. This speech was not about him... it was about all of us. That’s a powerful lesson. *The Beacon March 2008.*
4. Throughout this speech he spoke *directly* to specific audiences. Here are a few clear examples:
 - a. To our friends abroad: *“And so to all the other peoples and governments who are watching today, from the grandest capitals to the small village where my father was born: know that America is a friend of each nation and every man, woman, and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity, and that we are ready to lead once more.”*
 - b. To our enemies abroad: *“To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society’s ills on the West - know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.”*
 - c. To the skeptics: *“Now, there are some who question the scale of our ambitions, who suggest that our system cannot tolerate too many big plans. Their memories are short. For they have forgotten what this country has already done - what free men and women can achieve when imagination is joined to common purpose, and necessity to courage.”*
5. He provided his audience with a clear work list: *“For everywhere we look, there is work to be done. The state of the economy calls for action, bold and swift, and we will act... We will build the roads and bridges... We will restore science to its rightful place, and wield technology’s wonders to raise healthcare’s quality... We will harness the sun and the winds and the soil... And we will transform our schools and colleges and universities... All this we can do. All this we will do.”*

The primary lessons for all would-be leaders are that every speech should have a purpose; every speaker should be conscious of whom he or she is speaking to at all times; and every speechwriter should be aware of the tone of the moment. All three were present here.

This speech, while still containing *some* poetry, was prosaic, sober, calm and cool. Our President has moved from lofty oratory to more specific action plans and messages. We have now seen the transition from *candidate* Obama to *President* Obama. Now we wait to see if he can execute on his grand plan.

Thank you for sharing this issue of *The Beacon* with colleagues or friends who will benefit from our advice. If you know of anyone who should receive *The Beacon* directly, please email Subscriptions@TheLatimerGroup.com



Dean M. Brenner
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. M. Brenner". The signature is fluid and cursive.

