

# The Lustberg Communicator

Volume 19, Number 2

“Communication should be an intellectual act of love.”

Summer 2010

## Lustberg on... Whaaadyasay?



Photo by Mary Norman

Arch Lustberg

There's no point in saying something if what you say isn't understood. The whole point of speaking is to convey information. So why are so many

people wasting their breath making noise that's meaningless to others?

If you're riding the Metro subway in Washington, D.C. and you understand the station announcement made by the conductor, count yourself lucky. If you can listen to the stack of voicemails on your office phone and understand every word, call *Ripley's Believe It or Not*. If you can decipher the captain's entire spiel on your next flight (“flytennens parefrdpotcha”) you may have a future as a translator. What ever happened to articulation?

Most people confuse “diction” and “articulation” which is understandable because the definitions are closely related. In a nutshell, diction has to do with the words that are selected to make a point, and articulation is the way those words are spoken.

The sad fact is that both are being flushed down the toilet; and I'm overdue on the exploration of what's happening to articulation. Or in today's speaking style, “wuzapping t'ticalation?”

Once upon a time the gold standard for American speech — intelligence, diction and articulation — was found on radio.



The announcers, reporters and hosts had something interesting to say and they phrased it well and said it clearly. That excellence was passed along to television in its early days.

No one ever had to struggle to understand Walter Cronkite or his network news colleagues. I'm not talking about over-articulation — that can sound affected, too precise. Even Cronkite had some funny Midwesternisms like “fisheen” and “hunteen” for “fishing and hunting,” and he signed



off the air with a somewhat sloppy “Thizz's Water Cronkite,” dropping the “I” in “Walter.” Still, he was perfectly understandable.

It's important to speak clearly. Our minds work faster than our mouths can produce words. If we want our message to get through, we have to make a conscious effort to slow down to speaking and listening speed. Otherwise, we're producing verbal dysentery: sounds that pour out uncontrollably and make a mess.

Adults used to make the effort to be understandable, but the sloppy speech patterns of teenagers seem to have infected the general population. I've been a teenager and the father of teenagers, and I know that they can be self-centered, offensive and rude. Parents don't mimic most of that behavior... so why the sloppy, inconsiderate, rude speech mannerisms? (And slurred speech is rude. You're saying “I don't care whether you understand this or not.”)

We know what we intend to say; but too often we forget to make sure it comes across clearly to the listener. It's a matter of consideration. We have to consider our audience no matter where they are: in a lecture hall, across the table, or on the phone.



“Did you eat yet?” Shouldn't come out “Jeetjet?” And the answer isn't “No, Jew?”

I mentioned voice mail messages earlier. This is the most frustrating situation of all for the listener to be faced with sloppy speech since there's no way to ask “Whaaadyasay?” Not only that, but line static and other techno bugs can interfere with the transmission of sound making it even harder to decipher. Not bothering to speak clearly on a voicemail message is unforgivably inconsiderate. This is the time for the clearest possible articulation.

The most graphic example of slovenly speech is MSNBC's Anchorman Chris Matthews. As the host of “Hardball,” he welcomes viewers back

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# Always Leave 'em **Wanting More**

I recently ran across this wonderful quote, attributed to the great late comic George Burns: “The secret of a great sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending and to have the two as close together as possible.”

We hear it and chuckle, or at least smile, but it’s advice well worth heeding! But a relevant story provides a mental picture and an emotional hook.

“A quarter of an hour! But I’m slated to speak for an hour!” I hear you. But the truth is, the best of speakers struggle to keep an audience interested



for half that time.

And that brings me to one of my favorite sayings. It’s the Chinese proverb, “Tell me and I’ll forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I’ll understand.”

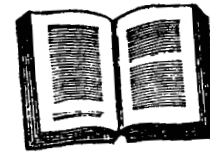
The easiest, most interesting, most effective format is a short talk followed by some means of involving the audience. People are social animals. We’re wired for interaction, and we quickly start to shut down when we don’t get it.

Another advantage of a short talk is that all the time and energy it takes to write and rehearse a long, dull lecture can be focused on writing and getting really comfortable with a short, pithy talk.

I got a call from a woman in panic. Although she was nearing retirement age, she’d managed to avoid public speaking her entire working life, and she carried bad memories of her long-ago oral reports in school.

She phoned me after having

reluctantly agreed to present a one-hour book review at her public library. She’d already written the first draft



and realized that she was facing two missions impossible: becoming familiar enough with the

text to be able to deliver it without reading it, and keeping the audience interested and engaged.

I kept my advice simple, emphasizing five points: breathing diaphragmatically to calm her nerves, making sure she had a strong opening, cutting the talk to fifteen minutes, including lots of personal anecdotes so she could easily “talk the text,” and providing for audience involvement.

She reported back, elated with the results. She’d opened with the line, “When I finished writing the first draft of this review, it was longer than the book!” The positive feedback of audience laughter started her off on the right foot.

Then she spent a few minutes speaking about the author and the book, relating both to her own life experience. She involved the audience with, “I’d be happy to answer any questions you might have; and then if we have time, I’ll read you some of my favorite passages.” After a period of questions and answers she read some excerpts from the book, carefully selected for their vivid imagery, humor or emotional impact. After each reading, she entertained audience questions.

The reviewer and her audience were delighted with the results. She got a big hand, and several members of the audience gathered around her afterwards with more questions, some hugs, and stories of their own.

Develop a strong beginning. Keep your talk short and interesting. Make it personal. Involve the audience. Use appropriate gestures and facial expressions. Finish strong. If you do all that, you’ll give a great presentation... and there’s nothing legal that can match that high! □

## Communicator TIP

### Get the Job Done with a Story

When you speak, you’re attempting an information transplant. You’re trying to move knowledge from your mind to someone else’s mind. But the transplant will be rejected if it isn’t performed in a memorable way.

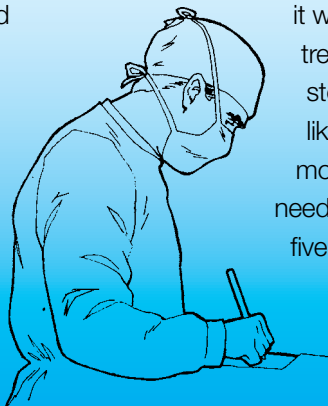
That’s where stories come in. They bring life to data and information.

When you share a fact you may make an intellectual connection. A relevant story reinforces that connection with a mental picture and an emotional hook.

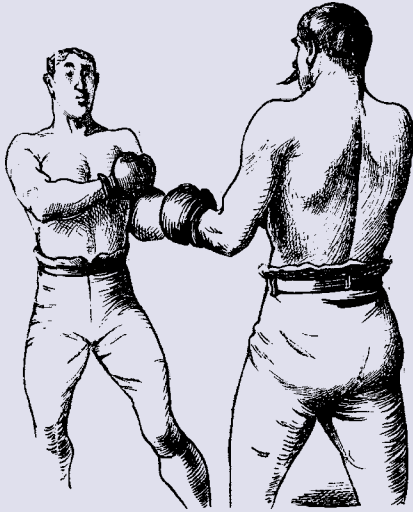
You can say “Twenty percent of Americans are deficient in Vitamin X.” But that’s a fact that’ll probably be forgotten.

Instead, tell a story describing a woman debilitated by the deficiency, and how her life improved once

it was discovered and treated. Follow the story with something like: “There are millions more like her, suffering needlessly. One in every five people in this room are in danger.” They’re going to remember that. □



## Nits & Picks



### Fighting the Good Fight

Back in April, Annetta Cheek was interviewed on the radio and TV. A 25-year Federal employee, Cheek finally “got so tired of all that bureaucratic and legalistic writing,” that she founded The Center for Plain Language.

The Center awards annual prizes for the best, worst and most improved documents published by public and private organizations; and it helps those wanting to improve. One example of a contender for most-improved document is a handout published by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. The title used to be “Cognitive Communications Problems Following Right Hemisphere Damage.” It’s now “Thinking and Behavior Problems from Stroke.”

Remember my formula:  
Simple + Brief + Clear + Concise =  
Easy-to-Understand.

### Send the Right Signals!

Many thanks to TLC reader Al Martella, of Bank of America/Merrill Lynch, for sending in an article about connecting with an audience on an emotional level. A particularly interesting fact: 50 years ago, a study by Albert Mehrabian showed that most communication (93%) is non-verbal. That is, we say more by the signals we send (the way we sound and the way we look) than by the words we utter. If you frown and snarl, “I’m having a great day,” it’s your signals that will be believed, not your words.

Make sure your gestures, posture and expressions complement what you’re saying instead of contradicting it. At first it takes concentration and practice to do that in a public speaking situation, but notice how naturally you do it when you’re relaxed.

### Wired for Trouble

It would be very easy to include an item in every TLC about someone saying something stupid into a microphone that he thought had been turned off. It’s a common, careless mistake.

The latest episode involved the too-close-to-call British election. Prime Minister Gordon Brown desperately needed to win over the lower middle-class voter, and had a televised chat with a woman in a working class

neighborhood. They discussed immigration.

Back in his limo, Brown forgot he was wearing a live mic and complained about the “bigoted woman.” The media played it. Brown apologized, but within two weeks -- after his party did poorly in the election -- he announced his resignation as party leader.

If there’s a microphone in sight, don’t say anything you don’t want broadcast.

### It’s... uh... Easy to Sound American

Astute TLC readers Bob Dean and Eddie Turner both sent me an article about students in China who, in their English language classes, are shown videos of Americans giving speeches. The goal is to help them sound more American.

It works! They quickly picked up all the bad habits and garbage noises – like uh, um, y’know – that any other typically poor public speaker uses. How sad.

When you have to think about what you’re saying, do it silently. Stop. Gather your thoughts. Keep your mouth closed. When you know what you want to say, say it.

For a perfect example of what not to do, try listening (if you can stand it) to an interview with Presidential um Advisor uh, uh, uh David uh Axelrod. ☐



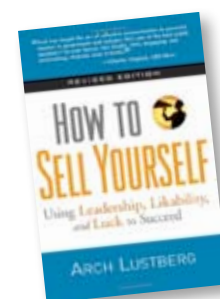
### Whaaadysay?

*Continued from page 1*

after a commercial break with what’s supposed to be “Welcome back to Hardball,” but it isn’t. Instead, he slurs “Wkmbbackahobbl.” When he gets really worked up, which is often, he becomes

completely unintelligible.

Please, don’t make Chris Matthews your role model. Use him as an example of what NOT to do. ☐



Available at the dot com booksellers: Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and Borders.

## Dear Arch

I wrote a blog about you during my Journalism course this past quarter. I included your Open Face video that I posted to YouTube. The video was accessed hundreds of times and I learned that other sites had created a link to it. People as far away as Australia were using it. I have taken it down now that my course is over. Once I finish my degree I hope to teach public speaking at colleges and universities. I'm working on the course curriculum right now. Your book will be the textbook. Your work continues to impress people across many demographics!



*Eddie Turner  
Turner Technologies*

What a great pleasure it was to get to know you at this year's Leadership Florida Session. I do feel so privileged that I was chosen to introduce the best speaker of our year. You left our group with some very useful information and it's been very interesting noticing the nuances in many of our speakers' actions. Again – thanks!

*John Horne, Owner  
Ana Maria Oyster Bar  
Landside Restaurant  
Cortez Restaurant*



## Wisdom of the Ages

**“There is no power like that of true oratory. Caesar controlled men by exciting their fears; Cicero, by captivating their affections and swaying their passions. The influence of one perished with its author; that of the other continues to this day.”**

*Henry Clay (1777-1852), U.S. Statesman & Orator*

**“He uses statistics as a drunken man uses lamp posts – for support rather than illumination.”**

*Andrew Lang (1844-1912), Scots Writer*

**“He can compress the most words into the smallest idea of any man I know.”**

*Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), 16th President.*



## The Lustberg Communicator

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## Bringing Arch to You



There are three ways Arch can improve your organization's communications:

- Making a live presentation geared to your gathering
- Producing a training video -- tailored to your issues and challenges -- to be used over the years
- Conducting a customized virtual seminar, so your troops can watch and learn from their own desktops or meeting rooms

To talk about any of these options, call Marguerite Stone at (703) 979-4150; or email her at [lustberg@erols.com](mailto:lustberg@erols.com). Here's how Arch's calendar is shaping up for the months ahead:

### June

- 5 Salt Lake City, UT
- 11 Lexington, KY
- 22 Salt Lake City, UT

### July

- 13 Madison, WI
- 15 Colorado Springs, CO

### August

- 24 Lexington, KY

### September

- 28 Little Rock, AR
- 29 Philadelphia

### October

- 23 Salt Lake City, UT

### November

- 6 Austin, TX

For updates, visit our website at [www.lustberg.net/schedule](http://www.lustberg.net/schedule)



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