



Keep your audience on the Edge of their Seats!

No Phrase No Stage

In the very first speaking tip of the 52 Speaking Tips, you learned about the importance of having a foundational phrase for your stories, your activities, and your other anchors. However, now it's critical to understand an extension of that speaking tip. Write this down: No phrase, no stage.

What does that mean? It means if you don't have a foundational phrase, don't take your story to the stage. Why? Because it's not ready yet. The story does not have a clear enough point.

Now you might say, "Craig, my creative process just doesn't work that way. Sometimes stories happen around me and I start developing them and I don't have a foundational phrase for them. What do I do then?"

I'm glad you asked, because that's the same thing that happens to me. I have lots of stories that I don't get to tell, because I don't have a foundational phrase. So what do you do? Here's what I do: get a foundational phrase as soon as possible, and the way I've done it is with the following process.

1. Give your story to a Toastmasters audience.

The "no phrase, no stage" doesn't apply when you're practicing your speech in Toastmasters, so take it to them and see what they say. Toastmasters is for feedback and for tweaking. So give your story to Toastmasters.



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2. Ask your audience: “What did you get out of that message?”

You’re searching for the foundational phrase. Ask them what they got out of that story; what was their takeaway? They’ll tell you.

3. Take their suggestions, put them into a foundational phrase, and try it out in your next speech.

Here are three examples of how I’ve done this. It’s about a two-minute audio, but I think it’s worth it. Listen to this:

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You ever gone to a drive through restaurant, placed your order and been misunderstood? I can’t mention the name of this restaurant, but its initials are K, F, and C.

So imagine this: you’re in my passenger seat, we’re driving through the KFC, and I always order three thighs, because that’s the part of the chicken I like. So we get up to the intercom and she says, “Welcome to KFC. May I help you?” I said, “Yes, I would like three thighs.” She said, “Small or large?”

And before I could even register it, I just blurted out, “Do you have large thighs?” [audience laughing]

Okay, I’m going to recommend that you never ask anyone that! And she came back and she said, “Yes, we have small and large sides.”

I went, “Oh, sides!” but I was laughing all the way home! I almost got a lot more than some chicken!



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But I couldn't use it because I didn't have a foundational phrase! I love that story! It makes me laugh. But then I took it to Toastmasters and somebody said, "Craig, what you say is not necessarily what they hear." That becomes a leadership message. I have to take responsibility for both sides of the communication process.

So "no phrase, no stage." Take it to Toastmasters; they'll help you find a phrase.

Here's another example. My daughter was six years old last year and she said to me, "Daddy, I'd like a bunk bed."

I said, "What for? You're one person." [audience laughing] But I relented and I got her a bunk bed. But then my three-year-old son climbed the ladder to the top. I said, "You can't be up there, Ace. You gotta get down. I don't want you falling. You're three. When you're older you can go up, but right now you can't go up there, okay, Ace? You can't go up."

He said, "Okay, Daddy."

I come home the next day – where is he? [audience: Up on the top.] And so I said to him, "Ace, what are you doing up there? You're not allowed up there! Get down! What are you doing up there? What are you doing up there?"

He looked at me and said, "Coming down." [audience laughing] Now, he's going to be a speaker! I mean, come on, what do I do with that?

But I took it to Toastmasters. I could not for the life of me find a foundational phrase. And you know what somebody said? They said, "I got one!"

I said, "What is it?"



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"Sometimes you have to ignore your parents to get to the top." [audience laughing]

I'd never thought of it that way. So you take it to Toastmasters, get yourself a foundational phrase, and you keep building it on that.

Your foundational phrase is also the barometer. Have you ever wondered, "What should I keep in my story? What should I keep out?"

If it doesn't support it, take it out. If it does support it, keep it in.

Now I've got another one that I haven't given before, so I want you to give me the foundational phrase. And if you give me a foundational phrase that's good, after this I'll give you a prize. I really will. So here's the quick story:

As a parent, you've got to watch what your kids eat, but it's hard when you're eating junk. But I had to watch what my kids were eating. We were eating too many desserts. I have a one dessert per week rule for my kids, but my wife kept giving them desserts. She got them chocolate chip cookies one day, and it was like the fourth time that week.

So I said to my kids, "Listen. Mommy made you cookies, so you can eat them. But you can only eat two cookies. You have to stop after two cookies." And Ace looked at me and said, "And then we take a break?" [audience laughing]

Kids will give you a lot of material, let me tell you. So I don't have a foundational phrase for that, but please, if you can find one, feel free to come up to me afterwards.

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Welcome back. As you heard, my audiences are the ones who are giving me these foundational phrases. And guess what? The phrases always work. They come straight from them. So if you're not a Toastmaster, then simply give your story to a friend or two and ask them, "What did you take out of that?"

Another process is to tell the story on your blog, if you have one, and see what kinds of comments you get. This can help you form a foundational phrase as well. Or tell it on your Facebook wall. This can help you form a foundational phrase as well.

The point is, by the time you get to your next speaking engagement, you need to have a foundational phrase for your story. Otherwise, "no phrase, no stage."

See you next week. Until then, keep speaking up!



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Craig's Top 10 Recommended Resources

1. <http://www.edgeoftheirseats.com/>
2. <http://www.createyourkeynote.com/>
3. <http://www.dynamicdeliverydevices.com/>
4. <http://www.learntoownthestage.com/>
5. <http://www.wcspeaking.com/>
6. <http://www.askcraigvalentine.com/>
7. <http://www.audioforspeakers.com>
8. <http://www.resourcesforspeakers.com>
9. <http://www.thebookonspeaking.com>
10. <http://www.automateyourspeaking.com>

Craig Valentine's Background & Results

Craig Valentine, MBA, an award-winning speaker, management trainer, and speech coach, has traveled the world helping speakers breathe life into their presentations. He has spoken in the United States, Taiwan, Canada, Jamaica, Qatar (Doha), England, Bahamas, Hong Kong, and China. In 1999 he won the World Championship of Public Speaking for Toastmasters International after competing with more than 25,000 contestants from 14 countries.

- *The conference was this past weekend and with your "virtual coaching" I was able to give my own "Killer Keynote". I stood on that stage and gave the speech I had always dreamed of giving-- they laughed where I wanted them to laugh -- they teared up where I wanted to touch them the most -- they came into the scene of my stories -- they heard my message and believed. It was a wonderful moment for me and I will always consider it a gift. Now I would be lying if I said I didn't enjoy the standing ovation at the end...*Susan Lamb-Robinson, Speaker; Toronto, Canada
- *"I now deliver better presentations in 20 minutes than I did in 60 minutes; moreover, my closing ratio has increased 350% thanks to the lessons learned in The Edge of Their Seats Storytelling Home-Study Course. Craig's 9 Step Formula has changed my life."*Kevin D. Gross, MBA, President, Alumni Connection.com
www.AlumniConnection.com



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- *I learned more from you in one hour than I have in years of giving speeches. You are a master of your game. Thank you for inspiring me to find my own voice and greatness as a speaker!! Thank you! Pele Raymond Ugboajah; Author, Speaker, Business Coach; DreamBanc, L.L.C.*
- *Craig Valentine is one of America's finest speakers, 1999 World Champion of Public Speaking and author of what I consider to be the bible of public speaking, "Nuts and Bolts of Public Speaking". He's also got several audio and DVD's on the subject. Craig was the driving force and the biggest reason I made it to the World Championships last year in Calgary. The two days I spent with him, in his living room, in Baltimore, completely changed the way approach public speaking...Martin Presse, 2008 Finalist for World Champion of Public Speaking*
- *Hey man I know you are busy but I wanted to bring you up to speed on us. We just returned from San Francisco where we spoke at the national convention of NAMI. It was great. No notes, we both spoke for about an hour. Based on all the comments they liked it. There were a number of people there who had heard us before and they were amazed at the changes we made. Thanks! Bill Neely; www.billandtena.com; Courage in Crisis*
- *Thank you 1000 times over. I just came home from Niagara, what a fantastic time I had. All of your techniques worked. I offered 7 free, 1 hour consultations if booked today offered only in January. I not only booked those I had a line up afterward. Sarah Hilton; Speaker on Mental Health, Toronto*
- *Thanks for your changes...I gave the speech last Monday and everyone raved about it. Thank you so much for your help. I went in very confident, knowing it was a very good speech thanks to your advice and changes. In fact, they hope to get me back again and several said they want to find out where else I am speaking so they can come hear me again. Christine Duvivier; Managing Director, Impact Partners*