

Obama uses catch phrases as thematic glue to hold together and simplify the wide-ranging speeches that are typical political fare.



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## Speech lessons from Obama

CANDIDATE'S CAMPAIGN speeches amount to a master's class in public speaking

I DON'T KNOW who I'm voting for in november. And I can't imagine that anyone reading this column cares. But there is one thing that I have decided about the presidential race: If you want to watch a great speaker, check out Barack Obama.

Whether or not you like his politics, his speeches offer great lessons in how to connect with audiences. He simplifies complex messages. He tells personal stories. He speaks with passion. And he appeals to big dreams.

### Simplifying messages

Obama uses catch phrases as thematic glue to hold together and simplify the wide-ranging speeches that are typical political fare. On the night that he won the Iowa caucus, he gave a wide-ranging speech touching on many topics. But he held the speech together with variations of the phrase "the time for change has come." when he won the South Carolina Primary, the phrases were "we're up against ..." and "Yes we can."

Business people can use a similar rhetorical strategy. I urge clients to pick three "bumper stickers" to repeat throughout a presentation. I worked with a consultant recently whose bumper stickers were "Streamline your process", "save money" and "reduce your risk." In a 30-minute speech, this consultant made each "bumper sticker" the theme for a section of the speech. These short, listener-focused phrases give presentations focus.

### Telling personal stories

Obama uses personal stories well. In his widely quoted speech on race this week, one of the most memorable sections was the description of his white grandmother: "A woman who helped raise me, a woman who sacrificed again and again for me, a woman who loves me as much as she loves anything in this world, but a woman who once confessed her fear of black men who passed by her on the street, and who on more than one

occasion has uttered racial or ethnic stereotypes that made me cringe."

Personal stories work in all presentations. three years ago, I worked with a chief executive who wanted to show that he was listening to complaints from his sales force. During a speech, he produced from his pocket a printout of an angry e-mail he had received and read it aloud. "I got this e-mail the other day," he said. His team members still talk about "the e-mail speech."

### Speak with passion

Obama has a gorgeous deep voice. But I'm more impressed with what he does with that voice. He speaks with passion and intensity. whenever he speaks, he seems like he's having an animated conversation with a close friend. He seems pumped. And that excitement is contagious.

All of us can learn to speak with more passion and intensity. I worked with a consultant on a speech detailing an idea that could revolutionize airport security. Yet he initially spoke like he was reading the telephone book. The excitement in his voice needed to match the excitement of his idea.

### Appeal to big listener needs

Like most good politicians, Obama also appeals to what he perceives to be the big needs of his audience. "Yes we can heal this nation," he said to a crowd in wisconsin in February. Great business speakers also appeal to big dreams. I worked with the hiring partner of a major Atlanta law firm who was preparing to give a speech welcoming the firm's summer associates. He planned to speak about the schedule for the summer and what they could expect. After some coaching, he chose to address what these interns cared most about: how to get hired by the firm.

Barack Obama may or may not be our next president. But his campaign speeches amount to a master's class in public speaking. 