

## DAILY REPORT

## LAW INC

George Carlin reminded us that good speaking isn't just about organizing thoughts and speaking with energy. It's also about taking a position. It's about leadership.



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## Public speaking lessons from Carlin

THE LATE COMIC'S TALENT for holding an audience came from practice, passion and position

GEORGE CARLIN, who died this week, taught us the "Seven Words You Can Never Say On Television." If you were paying attention, the counterculture comic also taught us how to be great speakers. He did three things that we can all learn from: He took strong positions, spoke with passion and practiced a lot.

### Carlin always took a position

Whether it was religion, government, business or sports, Carlin took a stand. That made him compelling. Too often I see speakers who, unlike Carlin, won't take a position. They're afraid. As a result, their presentations are dull and don't help their listeners.

I was working with a speaker who felt that a business initiative should be killed. But his speech only planned to lay out the facts. The speaker hoped that listeners would "see the light" and kill the project. After hearing him practice, I asked, "Why don't you say, 'This project needs to end. It's a waste of resources. And here's why'?" The speaker was afraid to be blunt, making his presentation confusing.

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### Carlin spoke with passion

Carlin also reminded us of the importance of passionate delivery. He spoke with excitement in his voice. He used wonderful facial expressions. He got a total workout as he spoke.

Most people in business speak with little passion. Working with an attorney at a large Atlanta firm, I watched silently as he spoke about a lawsuit. He sounded like he was reading a telephone book.

"Triple your energy level," I told him. "You seem bored. Try sticking your finger in that light socket over there."

He needed to be more like Carlin.

### Carlin practiced like crazy

Like all great comics, he rehearsed a lot.

I once took a comedy class from Jeff Justice, who has been teaching stand-up in Atlanta for years with his "Comedy Workshoppe." It was a great class that focused on how to write and deliver jokes. One of the things that most impressed me was his emphasis on rehearsal.

The graduation was a performance at The Punch Line in Sandy Springs. Before going live, Jeff made us rehearse our five-minute bits over and over until we had the timing perfect.

The reason, he explained, was that comedy depends on saying the words of the joke just right. "One word out of place and it might not be funny," he told us. "So you have to practice saying it just right." He was right. All of us in the class learned that much of stand-up depends on perfect word order. So we practiced a lot.

Watching Carlin, you could see that he did the same thing. He was a true word lover and it was obvious that he practiced saying things a certain way to ensure that they were as funny as possible. You could watch his routine five times and it would sound the same each time.

I'm not saying that you should memorize presentations word for word. Unlike stand-up comedy, a presentation does not depend on saying every word in perfect order. But rehearsal is critical. Great speakers practice a lot. They may not say things exactly the same way every time. But they do have a strong sense of the words they want to use and where.

George Carlin left a wonderful legacy of anti-establishment comedy. Regardless of whether you agreed with him, we can all learn from how he held an audience. 