

EXCEPTIONALLY EFFECTIVE
SPEECHES

HOW TO END A SPEECH EFFECTIVELY

And have the audience
remember your message



THE RESIDUAL MESSAGE

This is a final, brief, broad "takeaway" that you want the audience to remember. They are short, 10-30 seconds. Quotes, rhetorical questions, or generalizations work well, as do analogies and comparisons. Just make sure that the ending of the speech reinforces the key message in a memorable way. Two possibilities follow.

An example of a residual message might be "Let's go show this city we're dedicated to creating more greenspaces."



END WITH A BANG

This can be likened to a musical crescendo. Build the speech so that it reaches a zenith of power and intensity. If your executive is comfortable doing so, hit the hearts and minds of the audience with a statement or quote reinforcing your message that will have the audience clapping before the speech ends.

See the conclusion of Martin Luther King's "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech.



DISSOLVE WITH EMOTION

Pathos is a great way to end a speech if the executive is comfortable with using it. There may be a personal story from their past that they can use to reinforce the main point, or a short story that would serve the same purpose. With this, it's leaving the audience with a quiet, small voice that they'll reflect on later.

Excellent Communicators follow a solid summary with a very short closing statement, either a tieback to the opening of the speech, a final dramatic statement, or a call to action. Whatever you and the executive choose, make sure they'll be able to deliver an ending to remember.

Sources:

"Dorothy Sarhoff, "Speech Can Change Your Life, 1970; Quick and Dirty Tips.com

Hopefully you will work with executives who are comfortable enough to conclude the speech without a spoken signal like, "What I'd like to leave you with today is..." Other, less seasoned speakers might need a verbal statement to get them to the conclusion. "My purpose today has been..."; "I want to leave you with..."; "Today we have seen evidence of (some problem or success)..."; or a quote can signal the beginning of the end. And for speech endings, metaphors, analogies, the element of surprise and axioms all work, but make sure they're relevant and used in the right spot. Use your judgment and the strength of your presenter when you are wrapping up the speech.

Above All Else, Have a Little Fun

Even with all of the information provided in this article, I encourage you to have fun writing speeches. Most executives will respond positively when they see the variety of unique ways to deliver their key message. Just remember to keep it short, know what your executive wants from you, and end strong. Other than that, get creative. It makes writing the speech much more fun, and it helps to stretch your writing skills. And, if you take a risk or two, you might just write a speech that your audience will remember for a long time.

Dr. Justin Pettigrew is an assistant professor at Kennesaw State University in the School of Communication and Media.