

005 – Preparation vs Perfection

Announcer: Do you dream of living as a speaker, writer, or performer? Do you want to learn to communicate with clarity, focus, and power? In each episode you will learn the secrets of dynamic communication so you can make a living doing what you love.

Welcome to the Art and Business of Public Speaking with your host, who, for over 30 years has helped men and women build exciting careers, Ken Davis.

Brian: This is your cohost Brian Scheer, for the Art and Business of Public Speaking, where we peek behind the curtain to discover how to create, grow and maintain a successful career as a communicator.

What a great interview we had with Carol Kent.

Ken: She was amazing. And I was just behind the curtain again, and she's still there.

Brian: She is still there.

Ken: Isn't it interesting, Brian, in interviews, sometimes you have an interview and it's going well. The guest is great, but you kind of look at the clock and go well, our time is almost up now, and you wrap it up. Then you have interviews where you lose complete track of where you are in the time because of who you're interviewing.

Of course, when we were with Carol last time the interview was so great that it just kept going, and so we've made it into two podcasts, and this is the second part of that podcast.

As Carol joins us again, we are discussing what it is that makes a great speaker. What it is that causes an audience to embrace what the speaker is saying.

Ken: ...but there was a part of that that I want to talk about just a moment as we have listeners who are wondering what it is that makes a great speaker. What it is that causes an audience to embrace what a speaker is saying. You put it this way. People discovered you weren't perfect. I believe every speaker has to have a sense of vulnerability that takes them out of that arena of just delivering a canned speech.

Every speaker has to have a sense of vulnerability that helps people know that what they're saying isn't for perfect people. Because otherwise they dismiss it. I'm not perfect. This doesn't apply to me. I'm not Carol Kent. I'm not Ken Davis. I'm not Tony Robbins. Whoever it might be.

But if they understand that we are not perfect people, and that we're not so much experts giving them the instructions they need, but were fellow travelers, fellow strugglers who reach out and grab their hand and say, here's what I've found to be helpful.

Carol: Amen. That is right now. And I discovered that the more real I became by sharing honest stories that involved imperfection, whether it was a time I yelled at my husband, or a time when I was a bad mother, or a time I went through a crisis. Every one of those

types of illustrations endeared me to the audience and made them connect with me on a much deeper level than when I was only giving them great material, even told in a dynamic way. They connected with me when I was real with them about my less than perfect moments.

Ken: I have sat through presentations by people who talked about the sixteen steps to being a perfect parent. And it has been so hard for me not to just strip that person naked and drag him up and down the steps until they admit there are no sixteen steps that lead to perfection.

Carol, you're not perfect as a speaker, either. You sent us a little information that said that sometimes you tend to talk too long. And then you talked about the fact that you spend some time, that you deliberately – this is another quality or characteristic of a great speaker. They're never satisfied. That they're always seeking excellence.

And you talked about the fact that you go through a process to kind of trim out material that doesn't need to be there. To get rid of extra words. Can you tell us a little bit about how you do that?

Carol: Yes. And because I am a public speaker before I am a writer, a speaker who occasionally writes rather than a writer who occasionally speaks, I find that the speaking part of it comes together more easily for me and I can always make a good story better by putting in more words.

So I will sit at the keyboard of my computer and I will write out my signature stories, and then I try to figure out, how can I take a sentence out, or a phrase out, or some words out that will make it shorter but equally powerful. Because you and I both know, in different venues, and if we are on a radio interview, some of those interviews are five minutes long, some are an hour long. And if I can tell the story in a short, three minute fashion rather than an eight minute version, I can make it just as important and poignant to the audience if I use the right words.

So actually, disciplining myself to type it out in a shortened version with some well-spoken words, and ones that really get to the heart of the story works very well for me. And then I rehearse it when I'm in the car. I sometimes will be talking out loud, rehearsing it, trying to get the vocal inflection right until it becomes as natural as breathing.

Ken: There is so much great content in there, so many wonderful ideas in what you just said. People think that perhaps great speakers just stand up and deliver. The greatest speakers do what you're talking about. They put in the work ahead of time that makes for that performance that is so remarkable.

And there's another thing you said. We have a friend, Craig McNair Wilson. I don't know if you've ever met Craig McNair Wilson. Craig worked with Disney. He was in the Imagineering team at Disney. And he said, we all need to be "oyfol" speakers. And what that means is something you brought up. That before it is said on the playform, it is spoken on your feet out loud.

And as you know, and I want you to speak to this, you know I have written out what I want to say sometimes, and then discovered that those words are impossible to say next to each other.

Carol: Yes. That's true. And something else that happens. When we go into a venue well-prepared, where we've honed those illustrations, we know those bullet points, we know what comes next. Then, because we know the materials so well, we can spontaneously react to what's happening in the room, whether it's something humorous, or maybe a waiter drops a whole trail full of dishes and we can spend some fun off of that. But then we can get back on track. But when you know that material well, it doesn't throw you off when you get an interruption.

Ken: That is amazing. We're going to have to team together.

Carol: I would like that.

Ken: I am telling you, I cannot believe how closely we think alike on some of these things. I want to take one step back again to the writing part. And you mentioned again that you do write. It might not be the favorite thing you do, but you do it. You mentioned that speaking and writing work hand in hand for growing your success as a speaker. For growing your career. Tell me a little bit about that.

Carol: Well, I think writing and speaking are very similar in the developmental process, so I want to start by saying, it's not a lot of extra work to write if you're already a disciplined speaker who outlines well and puts material together well. However, as you grow as a public speaker, you need national visibility. We all call it platform, which is one of your favorite words, Ken.

So, in order to be able to be known, we have to write these days. And if I have a meeting planner call my home and say, Carol, we had you last year, but we want somebody with national visibility who is just as good a communicator as you are. And by the way, we want their books to be known, because otherwise our women won't have known of them. Can you help us?

There you go. There's why we do it. First, we have something to say. We're passionate about a topic we want to write about. We want to put into people's hands something they have to buy because that increases our income and helps them personally and spiritually when we write a book.

But I think even beyond that, success grows success. Once you've written a book, once I wrote the book on the journey with our son, *When I Laid My Isaac Down*, it instantly got interviews all over the country, and Dateline NBC wanted it and MSNBC and CNN. And so even though it was not about a subject I ever would have chosen to write on, there was momentum because there was a book, and that, indeed, led to people hearing interviews who then would ask me to speak in larger and larger venues until it became women of faith, and extraordinary women, and women of joy, and large university platforms.

And so the book would garner the publicity that would then get the listener to say hey, let's bring her in to our event. She's really good.

Ken: I'm going to ask you a question now, what an interviewer, television personality would say is a hard question. May I ask you a hard question?

Carol: Absolutely.

Ken: This is about criticism. Because I have said to all of our students, anyone who speaks will be criticized. And my question to you is, have you ever been criticized, and anyone ever said, well you are taking advantage of a very bad situation for your own profit, a very bad thing that happened to your son, and the people that surround that situation for your own profit?

Number one, how do you handle that? And what would you say to speakers out there who are beaten down sometimes by unfair criticism. And maybe as an addition to that, how do you tell unfair criticism from great critique that you should listen to.

Carol: All right, that's several questions in a row, Ken.

Ken: I know. I want it in a nutshell!

Carol: Well, first of all, I welcome criticism. I don't like it, but I welcome it because it makes me a better communicator. So the first thing I say is, is it true? Is the point valid, and is there something I can learn from this criticism that will help me to be a better communicator in the future? And usually there is, even it is a criticism that feels so wrongly presented and not very truthful at all, there's usually a kernel of truth in it that will help me to take something good away from it.

So I ask myself those questions and try to learn from it. If it is somebody who is saying in the light of me having taken advantage of a very sad situation to make money, I would just say to that person, thank you for sharing your thoughts. I appreciate the fact that you have voiced your question. I want you to know that this is a tough journey, and I hope not to waste my suffering. I want to use it as a platform upon which I can give other people hope, and I'm very sorry if that has offended you, but I have received enough feedback from listeners and from the readers of my books to know that what I'm doing is helping people. But thank you for sharing your thoughts.

Ken: Oh, you are so gracious. I think my words would be, do you want me to call an ambulance?

Carol: One of my questions in my head, not out of my mouth, would be, would you like to pay my legal expenses?

Ken: That is exactly right. And I want to encourage those that are just starting in speaking, some of you that may have been beaten down. There are folks out there who find some kind of, I'm going to just say it, obscene pleasure in telling you what they think. And sometimes they think they're spiritual but they're miserable and they just really want to share. I don't know how else to say it.

And you have to protect your soul against those people. Now, I'm going to tell you that Carol's response is the more gracious, wonderful response. Unfortunately, and this is me being honest and imperfect. One of my gifts is my tongue. And I don't actually make people go to the hospital. I would never hit a person. But I know how to slice with my tongue. And what you've said today just helps me realize that there's a better way. So you've helped me a little bit today.

And the other thing is, I have to have confidence that what I'm doing I have been called to do, and I do it well, never with the intent of hurting people. Now, this has gone longer than we usually go, but I'm excited about being with you, and this is a great interview. So I want to ask you what you think about this. I have said recently that we live in an increasingly humorless society. That people are offended by everything. Do you find that to be true, and does that affect your speaking at all?

Carol: Well, I have discovered that we lived in a pain-filled world, and maybe that's part of why it's a humorless world. And every audience I address has people who are going through financial struggles, challenges with their kids, they're struggling with a health issue and so I know that we live in this world where bad things are happening to good people. And so I try to recognize that, and even if they don't know they need humor, Ken, they desperately need humor.

So if I can address them on a felt-need issue, and then if I can bring humor into it, and surprise them, because if they know anything about our journey with our son, they're expecting me to be serious, and they're expecting me to be heavy with my advice. And I surprise them by being funny, and letting them know that it is so important to bring splashes of joy into the middle of a difficult situation. And pretty soon I'll find that person who's out there with their arms crossed, like, I dare you to be worth me giving up my day to be here. Opening up in terms of open body language, laughing with me and by the end, coming up and saying thank you. You didn't waste one word. And so that makes my day when I hear something like that.

Ken: That is absolutely amazing. Tell me, Carol, I'm sorry I have not kept up real closely with this, but is your audience and the people that come to you for help primarily women?

Carol: I would say more than half, but once again, because of our situation with our son and the books that followed, *When I Laid My Isaac Down*, *A New Kind of Normal*, *Between a Rock and a Grace Place*, and *Unquenchable* addressing topics that are heavier and topics that hit men and women, I am having more and more gender-mixed audiences. And sometimes men are even sneaking into the women's events.

So this is a change for me in the last decade that I have a greater number of those gender-mixed audiences even though my primary speaking audience is women.

Ken: I'm going to tell you something right now. I don't know if this falls into the confession area or a weakness. I don't think it does, but I'm going to reveal something right now. My favorite audience in the whole world is an arena packed with women.

Carol: They're fabulous. Electric.

Ken: I just did Hearts and Home – a women’s conference. They had several thousand women in this audience, and when they laugh, they don’t hold back. They’re spitting each other, they’re clapping each other on the back. And their laughter reminds me of, as a teenager, I remember staying in an expensive hotel and running down the hallway and running my fingers through the glass chandeliers. It’s deafening. It’s wonderful.

And then what I love about women is they bring their wallets and they open their wallets and they buy!

Carol: And they buy your books!

Ken: That is so true.

Carol: Statistically speaking, it’s tougher to get men to laugh in an audience than it is women. And so that might be part of the reason why you’re having so much fun.

Ken: Now, I want to ask this question. We’re going to tell people how they can find out about your conference and everything, but I’d like to know specifically, right now. Where can people find your books, the books that you’ve talked about here?

Carol: Well, they can find any of my books on Amazon.com. Just put in Carol Kent and you will find them there. Or they can go to carolkent.org and there will be a store there and you will see all of them listed right there.

Ken: Now, at the end of every podcast that we do, we try to give at least one tip. And it doesn’t matter if it kind of relates back to something that we have talked about. But I would ask you this today. If I had just brought you on this show and I had said, Carol Kent, you’re a dear friend, I value what you do. You are one of the best communicators in the country. What one tip can you give and once you gave that tip I would say, well thank you for being with us. What would that tip be?

Carol: I want to tell your listeners today, when they communicate, look with eye contact at the people out there. Meaningful, sustained eye contact for two or three seconds, and let people feel warmly loved and connected with. And then move to another side of the stage and pick out another set of eye and speak to that person, which then represents that whole part of the auditorium. Speak directly to them and personally to them and then move slowly to the center and begin addressing the general audience and use wide gestures, meaning the upper arm is moved away from your body so that it is a gesture that looks warm instead of stilted, and you will find that people will warm up to you twice as fast.

Ken: Wow. I don’t know how to thank you for being there on that day when my boys came in a box. That wonderful stack of books. I don’t know how to thank you for you and your husband, even though, being far away, have consistently remained friends throughout the year. And the fact that you have joined us and have given some amazing content for our listeners on the Art and Business of Public Speaking. I guess I’d just say, thank you. And I definitely would like to have you back to speak specifically about speaking from a

point where crisis has come into your life, and encouraging others. Thank you for being with us today, Carol.

Carol: You're so welcome, Ken. God bless you, and thank you for being a great model for all of us.

Ken: Hey Brian, I want to know in just a second, what you're take away on that was, on that interview. But I had something again that just stuck out to me, especially as you're preparing to be a good speaker. She talked about part of her preparation that we don't talk about a lot. But I think all of the members of our production team know that it is something that I obsess about. And I think it's true of writers, it's true of presenters, it's true of any person who is dispensing information of any kind. And that is, she works hard to make that presentation as concise as possible to get rid of words that don't need to be there. To shorten stories that can be told in a shorter manner so that the essence of what she's trying to communicate comes through.

I read a book years ago, it was entitled *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser. It's become a classic. In fact, it's celebrating its 30 year anniversary, maybe even this year. But anyway, the essence of that book was that great writing, just like great speaking, comes in the ability to trim the fat. To get it down to the essential words. And as great as her story is, and as great a speaker as she is, I think that all of it is the effectiveness is what she does is increased exponentially, because she takes the time to do that.

Brian: She takes the time to do that, and it also allows her to react to the audience in those moments when she needs to kind of act on her feet, at times. Because she knows her content so well. She's so prepared, but she can react to the audience.

One of the things that I love about you on stage is to sense the audience. When things are not going well, I see you tweak your talk a little bit to get them going again, and your presentation becomes much more effective because you are interacting with the audience rather than being a monologue, and it's wonderful to see.

You know, my takeaway on this reminded me a quote. Aristotle said, "To avoid criticism, say nothing, do nothing, be nothing." And I just have that on my monitor on my desk where I have to remember, if I'm going to avoid criticism, I will be nothing. I'm going to be criticized. You, as a speaker, as a communicator of any kind, you're going to get criticism.

Ken: So, I would just add this one final thing to this, and you might want to remind people about our conferences. Because one of the things we do at our conferences is provide a safe place where you're critiqued in a spirit of enthusiasm. A spirit of encouragement to help you be a better communicator. Because you are going to be critiqued. The difference between what we do and what happens in real life is we do it to your face in love.

Brian: That is very true. Hey, if you want more information about Carol and how you can contact her, go to our dynamiccommunicators.com website. That will have all of the Show Notes. It'll have Show Notes not only from this podcast, but our previous

podcasts as well. And we have some special offers there that you can take advantage of.

Ken: And they can learn about where our conferences is are.

Brian: You can learn about our conferences and you can even learn about Carol's conference. And she has been so kind to offer a \$50 discount for all of our listeners. I can't encourage you enough to check out her conference and be a part of it in July.

Before you go, I also wanted to encourage you to check out our dynamiccommunicators.com website for a 20% discount on all of our resources. And the one I want you to check out, and it all deals with preparation, making sure that your talk and presentation is prepared and ready to be delivered – *Secrets of Dynamic Communications* book. It's been around and we just revised it and updated it, and I'm telling you, there are colleges around the country that are using this as curriculum. They have designed courses around this book.

This book will take you through the process of the SCORRE method, and I can't encourage you enough to go get it, check it out, read through it. It'll be your guide book on preparing well.

Thanks for joining us. We'll see you next week.