

010 – The Importance of Light and Sound – Part One

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: Hey there, this is Brian Scheer, your cohost 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.

Ken, today's subject really gets you fired up, doesn't it?

Ken: It does get me fired up. This is something that over forty years has come to the surface many, many times. Or if you use the words fired up, this is something that's been ignited many, many times.

I know that we've learned a lot over forty years, but this one has been solidified from almost the very beginning, and for all of you out there who are listening today who speak in public, I want to tell you, you can maximize the effectiveness and excellence of what you're doing by ensuring that you have these two essential things we're going to talk about today in place.

They have to be there or you can't do a good job doing what you're doing. Without these two essentials, Brian, you are handcuffed. And I'd like to start, if I can, by telling two stories that sort of lead us into this. And then we'll talk about them one at a time.

I was at an event. I will not name the place or the event. And I walked into the event and there were probably, I'm going to guess, about 1000 in a gymnasium. Most of them were young people. There were some families there. But it was mostly younger people. And I walked in and walked up to the stage and asked, where are the lights? And they said, these are the lights.

The stage was at one end of the gymnasium, the lights were usually used for a basketball game. They were halogen, fluorescent lights. But they didn't put any light on the stage. And as a result of that, sitting four seats back, you could not see the face of the person the stage.

Now Brian, I'm going to tell you something. Throughout my career, there's only been two times where I have thrown of hissy fit, so to speak. And this was one of them. I said, I cannot and will not attempt to do this program until you put some light on the stage. You cannot expect me to communicate, and you can't provide the program you want to have here unless there's light on the stage. And the man said, you're a prima donna. He was angry.

He said, you are a prima donna. I said, well, you can call me what you want, but I'm not going to do anything until you put lights on the stage. And so, he hunted around for a

little while, and very angry, and found an old super 8 camera that had a halogen light of its own on the camera. A very bright, harsh light. And he put it just a dozen feet in front of the stage and pointed it up. It was not good light at all, but it was light. And so now the people in the audience could see me.

I started to do my program, Brian. I got about ¼ of the way through. It was going okay. It was going well. When someone got up to go to the bathroom and kicked the plug out of the outlet.

Brian: Unplugged it.

Ken: Yeah. That's a much easier and better way to say it. They unplugged it. Immediately I began to lose that audience. And the host of the program hunted around. Couldn't figure out what happened, and finally figured out it had been unplugged. I could see him running around the auditorium to find out what was going on. Plugged it back in, and immediately I regained control of the audience.

In that case, he came to me and said, I am so sorry for what I said to you. He said, I had no idea how important light was. Isn't that interesting? I had no idea that people had to see you in order to listen to you.

Story number two, real quick.

Brian: You know, let me just add one thing. Something I tell my kids. You don't listen with your ears, you listen with your eyes. And when they can see you, they're actually comprehending what you're saying through their ears.

Ken: I've watched you do that, because you say to your kids, look at me. Look at me! I've heard you say that.

Second story. I was in New York at a school where there had been, evidently, not evidently, there were some disciplinary problems. Brian, they had guards, armed guards in the halls. Now, I don't remember if they were armed, but these were big people that stood around the room. About 1000 students were coming into this assembly program that I was going to do.

Before I had the assembly, I believe it was the principal came to me and he said, now we've had some trouble in this school. Assemblies are particularly difficult and so we have these guards here and there here just to make sure that we're able to keep control. He said, don't expect great things here. Isn't this interesting? He said, we had an astronaut here a couple of weeks ago and he was unable to finish the program because of the behavior of the students.

So I get ready to do the assembly. Brian, sitting on the stage was a table. 1000 students coming in to this thing. A table. On the table is an old tape recorder. It was a Wollensak tape recorder. Some of our older listeners may even understand what that means. It had a cord maybe four feet long with a little, tiny microphone on it. The speaker on the tape recorder was about maybe two or three inches around.

You're going to speak into this little cord. You're going to speak through a tiny, little three inch speaker to 1000 students. I said, I can't do this. Yes, he said you can. All you need to do is bend over when you talk into this mic. Because the mic wouldn't reach up to my face. I said, no, you bend over. I'm not going to do this.

That was the second time, only other time. I said, I cannot do this until you get a sound system in here. Are you telling me there's no sound systems in this building? He said, well there's one in the band room, but we haven't got time to get that over here. And I said, I will be so happy to do this program when you get that sound system over here. And he went and got the sound system. Our program only started about four minutes or five minutes late. And we got an unbelievable response from that audience.

Now in this case, the principal of that school never apologized. Not sure he caught on to what was going. But no wonder the students didn't want to come to an assembly. No wonder they didn't respect the speaker. So here's what I'm saying are the two essentials. And I'm going to talk about them today.

In order for a speaker to do his job right, in order for the host to provide for his people the best program they can, you must have light. It's in the Bible. Let there be light. You must have good light, and you must have good sound.

I've asked one of our team to join – did you want to say something, Brian?

Brian: I was going to say, it's so important, and you've driven this point home to us here in our company, in our group, that we actually have a specific task that somebody from our team who is doing the advancing of it, is not calling about anything else about those two essential elements. You're just mentioning you've asked one of our team members to come on board with us, and I'll have you introduce him, but he is responsible to making sure those two essential elements are taken care of.

Ken: Without those it's like trying to run a race with your feet shackled and your hands behind your back. I've asked Matt Brady to be with us. Matt is my road manager. He's more than that. He's amazing. Give us a little of your background, Matt. Matt travels with me everywhere I go. He's my brain. He leads me through airports. He points in the direction we're supposed to go. He makes sure I get on planes.

Brian: We actually call him MacGyver around here. He can figure anything out just with a piece of tape. That's it.

Ken: Piece of tape, a little bit of wire and a toothpick, and Matt can fix it. Matt, give is a little bit about your background.

Matt: Well, specifically if you're talking about production, I was really kind of grew up doing production. An AV guy in school. And then went on to work with a production company based in Philadelphia where we did hundreds of events locally, throughout the nation. And then went with that production company to go work with a touring artist.

Toured with a lighting tech for a number of years with a national artist. And now, even with what we do with you, we do production of conferences and all the production that is entailed there with lighting and video and sound.

Ken: Right. And Brian, I want you to feel free to stay in this conversation. I mean, I know you're the cohost and sometimes you do the introduction and then sort of sit in the background, but you held this role with me at one time. And now Matt is here in this role. I want to start by talking about light and the importance of light. And I want you to jump right in whenever you have a comment, Matt, and I certainly want some of your wisdom and information on how you handle these.

So if you're out there speaking, let me tell you, light is important. And here are the two essentials of the essential. You say, what is good lighting? Good lighting is where they can see your face. And even better lighting is where they can see your eyes. Talk about that a little bit, Matt.

Matt: I think the thing that always amazes me, you go into events and people expect a communicator like you said in your story in the gymnasium. They expect a speaker to be effective in the communication and they're in the dark. They're in shadows. It's particularly true, and I know you're going to touch on this in a minute, but in corporate settings, in ballrooms of hotels, people just stand underneath the chandelier and expect that light to be sufficient.

Ken: Oh yeah. It might be that people can see that there's somebody up there, and they see a general outline, but they can't see expressions. It might even be that the light is enough to just show you, but it's dim and dark. That affects people's attitude. It affects their ability to hold their attention on the stage.

You know what used to be the worst places in the world for lighting?

Brian: Churches.

Ken: Absolutely. And that's where I started. I did nothing but churches. They used to have those lights that were straight above you. Made you look like a skeleton. But they caught on somewhere.

Matt: Churches are some of the best now. And it's kind of flipped. The corporations that are putting on these big events for their staff. And maybe they're not the big, big events they do, but the events for 150 of their leaders. They do it in a room. They have the most money to spend, probably way more than a church in some cases, and they fail to see the importance of good sound, good lighting.

Ken: I've seen big events. I have performed at big events where I had to address the lighting problem before I got on stage. Thankfully I went to the ballroom beforehand, and some guy's doing an hour and a half presentation showing a bunch of slides, and he's in the dark. He's absolutely in the dark. So I'll just make this statement and I'd like you to just tell me if I'm right, Matt. If you're going to be in a hotel ballroom, you're going to need, in 99.9% of the cases, you're going to need additional lighting of some kind.

Matt: Oh, for sure. The thing that's interesting, too, as Brian said, when we advance these events, we're calling and asking them about the lighting and sound. Many times, and this has actually happened just recently with you and I Ken. You and I were at event, I won't say where and I won't say with whom, but we were doing an event and I called and of course, did the advancing as we normally do. Tell me about what your set up is like. Tell me about what the room looks like. Oh, we're in the great, historic room and we have lighting. Okay, tell me what the lighting is. There are stage lights washing the stage. Okay. What type of lights?

This is what you get a lot, particularly in hotel ballrooms. Well, yeah, there's lighting on the stage. Great. You can stop there and say, wonderful. But I always press a little bit further to say, well, what is that light. And a lot of times in ballrooms it's a bunch of track lights. 75 watt bulbs up there pointed in the direction of a stage, which is grossly inadequate for communication. And so you've got to press a little bit further to figure out what type of lighting. And as you said, most cases in a hotel ballroom, particularly because the hotel's employ the work of an outside AV company, they're not going to have sufficient lighting in there unless you bring it in and request it.

So it's very important to make sure what type of lighting exists in the room ahead of time. And you're absolutely right. 99% of the time it is not sufficient for communication.

Ken: Now, if the requirement for good lighting is that they can see your face, and the requirement for great lighting is that they can see your eyes. And by the way, the eyes, that is so important. I came to realize not long ago that if a photographer takes your picture, and that little light, that pinpoint of reflection in your eyes that brings life to your face is not there, they will digitally add that so that it makes your face have light.

It's interesting, isn't it, that a lot of speakers don't even like to have that light in their eyes.

Matt: Yeah. Well, I think you might say this, but it's so frustrating, because since I've been around you for so long, and I know the importance and the qualities of an effective and great communicator. When I'm at events with you or I'm at an event elsewhere, all I can do is sit there and critique what is going on when they have these obstacles in the way of good communication.

When a speaker gets up on the stage and goes, oh, these lights are too bright, and puts their hands in front of their face and says, turn these lights down, and you say this so often, we've said this a number of times with the guests you've had on, it's not about you, it's about the audience. If the audience cannot see you it doesn't matter if you can't see the audience. Part of what we teach, as you know, in SCORRE is being able to speak blind. But the point is that the audience sees you, not that you have to deal with some bright lights in your face. That's the point. The lights are meant to be bright in your face.

And it's even more interesting that the production companies, particular when you're talking with hotels, they will set up the lights, and I'll go in and say, hey, let me see what the lights look like on stage. And they'll turn it up to 50% and they'll say, let's turn that up all the way. I want it to be bright so people can see Ken. And they say, are you sure you want it that bright? Most speakers don't like bright lights in their face. And I just think to myself, well, that's the point. The lights are meant to be bright.

Ken: That's right. The lights are in my eyes. Good. That's the way it's supposed to be. So if the essential then, Matt, is that the light at least show you face, and if at all possible, bring some brightness to your eyes, then what about that whole thing – I've been in situations where, I'll give you a couple of situations.

In a small room you've got 50 people. Generally you can use the lighting in the room for that. It's good to have a little platform to get you up a little ways. But I've been in those situations where there wasn't really light needed where they had a light, which was distracting. Have you ever been in that kind of a situation?

Matt: Yeah, we did an event not too long ago where you were in a room, but they dimmed it. So it made it a little less harsh. Sometimes, if it's you and 25 people having a breakfast and you're just giving a short presentation, you don't need to bring in a full theater lighting kit in the room.

Ken: And sometimes I have watched presentations where the lighting seemed harsh. I guess you guys call it, it blew out the person on stage. They were just white. How do you handle that?

Matt: Well, we had an event we did not too long ago. We walked in and they said, oh yeah, we have lighting, and come in, and one of the things I don't think you mentioned, but the role of 45s and the positioning of the lights so that you're out in the room coming on at 45 degree angles from above and from the side. You get the best light on your face from all sides, top, and you're not getting those crazy shadows.

Ken: I remember times when I would come in and they would have a spotlight on the side. So one side of the audience got fairly good lighting. The middle of the audience got half and half, and the other side of the audience got nothing.

Matt: So in that situation, they said, oh yeah, we have lighting, but it was above. So it would have been straight down. And we said, that's just not going to work. And we brought in a couple follow spots and we put them out in the back of the room about 45 degree angle off the stage. And those lights, particularly with those type of follow spots, they're a very, very cold white light. It's a very, very cold white light. Looks great on video. Doesn't necessarily look great if I'm looking at it in person.

But most cases those kind of lights have a colored gel you can put in that helps soften up the light.

Ken: Well, I'd like to give a tip to the speakers who are out there. If you are in a situation where you're on a stage and there is a light. For heaven's sakes, stay in the light. Don't

wonder out of it. I guess I've done this for so many years that I have a feel for it. When I have glare in my eyes, I'm in the light. If I can still see the light, I'm in the light but I'm not in the center of the light. When it gets cold and dark, I'm not in the light anymore. And so it's your responsibility to stay in the light.

Brian: I would even say this, Ken. When you feel comfortable because you can see your audience again, that's when you know you're out of the light. You have to have that glare in your eyes in order for them to see you better. But if you start getting out of that light and you are actually starting to see the audience, then you need to get back into that spotlight, wherever it is.

Ken: Right. I want to warn our podcast listeners that we're getting close enough to this. We might not get to sound today. We're going to try to get to sound today but I want to talk about something else.

Many of our shows today, many of the places we go use video enhancement. iMag. Talk a little bit about that and when it is valuable and when it becomes a distraction, Matt.

Matt: I think the value in that is found, and you asked me before the show, a number of people in the room. And really, I think the big determining factor with iMag is the ability of the people using it to use it well. We go into some events and they don't know how to use iMag. They don't know how to properly operate cameras. They don't know what good camera shots are. They leave way too much room above you and you're like a tiny little stick figure in the middle of a huge screen.

And in those situations, even if there's 2000 people in the room, the iMag becomes more of a distraction than it becomes a benefit. And I think, because I kind of have a technical background, I can kind of develop a rapport with the folks in the technical side of things. Hey, you know what, let's just stay with the slides. Let's turn that off for now, and we'll come back to it if we need it.

Then other times when they can use it well, there's really no size audience...maybe if you had 20 people, it wouldn't make sense... but if you go in a room and you have 500 people but they know how to use iMag well, then it's a great benefit, particular in humor, as you know. Sometimes they go for artistic shots over keeping a shot through the delivery of a punchline or through delivery of a line that makes sense. And they're trying to be real creative. That's probably more in video production of creating a DVD.

Ken: I've seen just about everything. I've seen camera people who have some kind of tripod that does not pan well. It just makes little jerky movements everywhere. You and I both have seen times when the lighting and the white balance was such that literally there were no facial features.

Matt: Yeah, we had an event where they didn't know how to operate the cameras. They had iMag. They said, oh yeah, we're going to use iMag. They turn it on and it wasn't white balance, so you were as white as a ghost. I mean, you looked like a sheet. And it didn't work. It was so distracting. I said hey guys, you know what, Ken has some slides he's

going to show. Let's turn that off. We'll come back to it if we need it. They weren't offended and we went on with the show and it was much more effective. People looking at the stage even though that room we were in was about 2000 seats. Much more effective people looking you on the stage and looking at a screen that was blown out and horrible.

Ken: Right. You know, there's another aspect of lighting that I'd like to talk about. And this may be a personal issue with each speaker, but I feed off the audience. And so, you know this. When you go into an auditorium, and this drives some of the lighting people crazy. They want to shut the lights out in the audience so that I can't see the audience. Well, that does away with a good portion of my program because I interact with people. If I see someone laughing, that can become a ten minute bit in my show. You know, someone who can't stop laughing.

And so, I like to have the audience lit bright enough so that it overcomes the light that's in my eyes. I want to be able to glance down, see the people at least four or five rows back, and maybe even everybody in the audience.

Brian: When you say the audience, you're talking about the house lights, not the spot lights on you. You're talking about the house lights that are lighting up where they're sitting.

Ken: That's right. I want to see the audience. But sometimes we bring spotlights up on the stage and point them toward the audience so that I can see, too. Is that what you were talking about Brian?

Matt: Yeah, that's absolutely right. Because we had an event not too long ago where the room was dark, and you can't interact with them. I think a speaker that's not as comfortable speaking with lights in their face, having some audience light really does help, because then you don't feel like you're speaking to a big abyss of blackness. You can actually see people, make eye contact and know the people in the room are responding.

The other thing for a speaker like you that feeds off the audience, if you can't see the audience, you're not getting the response. If they're not laughing, if you're delivering more of a content that's serious and that doesn't have humor to it, you can't look at people and see them nodding and understanding what you're saying.

So when we go and do an event I say hey, during the show we'll leave the house lights about 50%. That way Ken can see the audience, interact with the audience, and it's a big part of how he communicates.

Ken: I want to make this perfectly clear. Matt here, and Brian, both who worked for a time as my road manager, whose responsibility it was to not only set this up in advance, but also to follow up, which I think is important. You don't just talk about this once. You keep checking. Who's coming in with the lights? What kind of lights do they have? And so on. And making sure that – I don't know how to say this – You have to make sure that the person understands that our desire is to do the best program we can for them. This is one of the essentials.

Now, I will say this. I started with these two stories. And it's so obvious that we're not going to get to sound this time. We're going to have to save that for the next podcast, but when I told those two stories, I talked about a situation where I didn't have the advantage of setting up ahead of time and I got there and the situation was not set up the way it should be.

I will tell you this. Even before I had road managers, when I got to somewhere and they did everything they could do to make sound and lights and whatever right, and then something went wrong. A bulb blew, or something went wrong. When the host is on your side and wants to do a great program and something goes wrong, then you do everything you can with whatever you've got to make that program right.

I want you to talk a little bit about, just a little bit as we kind of close this down, and then I want to make one final statement, but talk a little bit about how you handle this in a gracious manner. How you handle this so they are still part of your team and go away believing, boy, it was great to have Ken here.

Matt: Like you said, the point that we stress is not, we want Ken to be seen. The point that we stress is, we want Ken to be effective as a component of your program. Whether you are delivering a comedy presentation or you're at a presentation where you're doing fundraising.

And if we come into an event where we – I mentioned one early where we came in and they said they had stage lighting. I walk in and it's a bunch of track lights on a stage. I go to whoever's doing the production in the room and say, hey guys, these lights are not quite adequate. And I work out a solution with them. I say, here's what we need to do, and I think in that case it was \$50 to get some more lights brought in.

And then when the sponsor comes in and says, oh, you guys brought in lights. Say yeah, we got it taken care of. We knew this was going to be more effective in the overall element of the presentation, and we did it. And we do what's required. I don't freak the sponsor out with going, oh my goodness. This is going to be terrible. What are we going to do? We do it. We figure out a solution. We had it when we need to bring in follow spots a few weeks ago.

When we did is we said, okay, the lighting in here is just not going to work. And in that event they were doing iMag, so you would have been in the dark, and the cameras can't see in the dark. And I just said, don't worry, we'll figure out a solution, and we did. We found a solution and we got the program done.

Ken: How different that is than me walking in, stomping in going, I'm not doing this program until you get this right. You get it right or I'm walking.

Matt: Well I had locked you in your room at that point.

Ken: Hey listen, this is my final tip for the day. Men and women out there, your speakers, listen to me. When you handle this ahead of time, whether it's you doing it or you have a team member or someone who is part of what you do doing it. When you handle it

ahead of time, when you take care of this from day one, when someone calls and asks you to come to speak and you tell them that this is what you're going to need, do you know what they think of you? They go, whoa. That person is so thorough. You would not believe the compliments I get on Matt and Brian and the people who do all the work to forward these events. But they talk about them as being thorough.

But if you don't do this ahead of time and you get to the event and then you start saying, what about the lighting? And what about the sound? Then they call you a prima donna, like I got called in the beginning of this podcast in one of those stories.

We're going to have to come back and do sound at another time, and that's going to be fun as well. So, Brian.

Brian: Well, there is a lot of great information there, and I know if you're listening in your car or on your iPhone out on a jog or something, you're not going to be able to take notes. But we have done that work for you. We have the Show Notes available at dynamiccommunicators.com. And you know what else I'm going to provide there? Matt and I have put together an advance checklist that we're going to post there that you can download, so that when you are calling the sponsor ahead of time, you just simply go through that checklist and it'll give you all the questions you need to verify with them and so you can ensure that you have a great setup for your event.

Also, there's much more here that you can learn about by going and attending our SCORRE conference live event. This October in Beaver Creek, Colorado. October 26th through the 29th. We'd love to see you there. We go through the importance of sound and lights, and I know you would enjoy it.

Thanks for joining us today. It was a fascinating talk, and thank you Matt Brady for being with us and sharing your insight on that. And I can't wait until we come back again next week and talk a little more about sound.

Ken: I never finish what I start, do I?

Brian: It goes on and on.

Ken: See you next week.