

Grading the C.E.O. Speech

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When the Westchester County district attorney, Jeanine F. Pirro, recently stopped dead for 32 seconds during the speech that kicked off her United States Senate campaign against Hillary Rodham Clinton - before plaintively asking, "Where's Page 10?" - it resonated with Barbara Corcoran.

Ms. Corcoran, chief executive of the Corcoran Group, a [Manhattan](#) real estate firm owned by the [Cendant Corporation](#), says she still cringes at her own gaffe during a speech.

It was her first public speech, at a Citibank seminar in 1974 for about 800 home buyers, and she began with a joke, as books on public speaking often recommend. The problem was, she forgot the punch line, and could not find the index card she wrote it on. Struck dumb, she was unable to continue, and crawled back to her seat in utter misery as the next speaker was introduced.

"I was deathly afraid of public speaking and made up my mind never to do it again," she said in a call from [Australia](#), where she was giving a keynote speech at the Australasian Agency Principals Conference in Noosa, Queensland. "But by the time I woke up the next morning, I decided to force myself to speak in public often. So I signed up to teach a 10-class real estate course at New York University." Since then, she estimates that she has given 500 speeches all over the world.

Why does she do it? Mostly to drum up business, she says. With that motivation, the bigger the audience, the better. "Years ago I'd speak to groups of 30, 50 or 100," she said. "Now it's 500 or more and I'm much more comfortable with 1,000."

For business leaders, public speaking is part of the job. A survey of 100 Fortune 1,000 companies this year by the public relations agency Burson-Marsteller found that their chief executives received an average of 175 invitations a year to speak at conferences.

Business conferences are a \$102 billion pillar of the business-travel industry, with attendance in the millions every year. According to the 2005 National Business Travel Monitor, a survey by Yesawich, Pepperdine, Brown & Russell, a travel-marketing firm, 83 percent of all business travelers attend a corporate or association meeting on their trips.

Some executives love public speaking and some do not, but many have been cutting back on the number of speeches, and not out of fear of making headline-grabbing mistakes. Rather, with corporate America coming under increased scrutiny in the post-Enron era, they are purposely lowering their profile, said Ed Trissel, a principal in the Vistance

Group in New York, a communications advisory firm for business executives.

"There's definitely a slowdown in the past few years in participating as a speaker in conferences," Mr. Trissel said. "Since the spotlight is shining on C.E.O. behavior and compensation, it's less ego-driven and more content-driven."

Executives are being more selective about where they speak as well, experts say, generally preferring forums where they can bump into the highest number of powerful fellow executives. Their favorite, according to the Burson-Marsteller survey, is the star-studded weeklong World Economic Forum in Davos, [Switzerland](#).

John Chambers, the chief executive [Cisco Systems](#), is one regular. "John loves being at Davos," said Ron Ricci, a Cisco vice president and speech coach to Mr. Chambers. "It's a captivatingly productive experience where stuff gets done, and you can't say that about too many places."

Some chief executives keep their speaking engagements to a minimum. Tony L. White, chief executive of the [Applera Corporation](#), said he accepted only about a dozen engagements a year. "I generally don't go to boondoggles in exotic locations," he said. He often uses his own allergies - and his two-year search trying to find a medication that worked for him - to illustrate the role trial and error plays in drug research.

Steve Odland, the chief executive of [Office Depot](#), also rejects most invitations. "I don't like the 'celebrity C.E.O.' approach," he said. When he does accept speaking engagements, he often delves into a topic he champions: corporate ethics and his role as chairman of the corporate governance and ethics task force of the Business Roundtable, an organization for chief executives.

Experts are not shy about giving advice to executives on how to connect with listeners. "Most presenters read their slides," said Carmine Gallo, a communications coach in [San Francisco](#) and author of a book on corporate speech-giving. "Great communicators don't."

Herbert D. Kelleher, the former chief executive of [Southwest Airlines](#) and now executive chairman of the company's board, gathered his thoughts shortly before a speech, jotting notes on a legal pad or a napkin.

"People would ask after he spoke, 'Can I have a copy?' " said Edward Stewart, senior director of public relations at Southwest. "We'd say, 'Unfortunately, even Herb doesn't have a copy.' "

Veterans of the speaking circuit have their own pointers. Ms. Corcoran urges brevity. "A speech is a sales call," Ms. Corcoran said. "Give just enough, and then stop."

Long or short, avoid at all costs "the dreaded data dump," said Mr. Gallo, the speech coach. He lauded John S. Chen, the chief executive of [Sybase](#), for keeping to a dozen slides in an hourlong talk, and Jeff Taylor, the founder of Monster.com, for limiting the information on his slides to about seven words each. But he reserved his highest praise for Mr. Chambers of Cisco, whom he called "the most electrifying speaker in corporate America today."

Fond of strolling the stage and into the audience, Mr. Chambers asks a question or rests a hand on a person's

shoulder in the style of an evangelist or television talk-show host. Speaking without notes, he merely glances at PowerPoint slides that he has memorized, and he maintains constant eye contact with his audience.

It was not always so. Cisco measures the effectiveness of its executives' speeches from quality of content to quality of delivery, and often obtains audience feedback by passing out forms or asking audience members to post anonymous comments on its Web site. As a result of these comments, Mr. Chambers learned to be "more linear in his storytelling," said Mr. Ricci, the Cisco vice president. "He was good at the plot but needed to be better at the flow of the chapters."

Hasta el jefe puede temer hablar en público

[www.elpais.es](#) 13/10/05 Por SHARON McDONNELL

Barbara Corcoran, directora general de Corcoran Group, una inmobiliaria de Manhattan, dice que todavía se avergüenza de su primer discurso público. Fue en un seminario de Citibank de 1974, ante unos 800 compradores de inmuebles, y comenzó con un chiste, tal y como recomiendan los manuales sobre cómo hablar en público. El problema fue que se le olvidó el final y no encontró la tarjeta donde lo había apuntado. Se quedó muda, fue incapaz de seguir. Volvió a su sitio sintiéndose fatal mientras presentaban al siguiente orador.

"Me daba pavor hablar en público y opté por no volver a hacerlo jamás", explica. "Pero cuando me desperté la mañana siguiente, decidí obligarme a mí misma a hablar en público a menudo". Desde entonces, calcula que ha pronunciado 500 discursos por todo el mundo.

Hablar en público forma parte del trabajo de los directivos empresariales. Un estudio de 100 empresas de *Fortune* 1000, realizado por la agencia de relaciones públicas Burson-Marsteller, descubrió que los consejeros delegados recibían una media de 175 invitaciones anuales para dar conferencias. A algunos de ellos les encanta hablar en público y a otros no, pero en la era posEnron, intentan no llamar demasiado la atención, según Ed Trissel, de Vistance Group, asesoría neoyorquina de comunicación para ejecutivos. "Debido a que el foco de atención recae en el comportamiento de los consejeros delegados y en la compensación que reciben, todo se mueve menos por los *egos* y más por los contenidos", afirma Trissel.

Los expertos no se privan de dar consejos a los ejecutivos sobre cómo interesar a la audiencia. "La mayoría de los conferenciantes leen diapositivas", dice Carmine Gallo, preparadora de comunicaciones de San Francisco. "Los grandes comunicadores no lo hacen".

Dure poco o mucho, eviten a toda costa "la temida descarga de datos" al aportar demasiada información, afirma Gallo. Alaba a John S. Chen, director general de Sybase, por limitarse a una docena de diapositivas en una charla de una hora, y a Jeff Taylor, fundador de Monster.com, por acotar la información de sus diapositivas a siete palabras cada una.

Reserva sus mayores elogios para John Chambers, director general de Cisco Systems, a quien define como "el orador más electrificante de la industria estadounidense actual".

Chaxnbers, a quien le gusta pasearse por el escenario y entre el público, formula una pregunta o posa su mano en el hombro de alguien al estilo de un evangelista o un presentador de un programa de entrevistas. Habla sin apuntes, y se limita a mirar las diapositivas en PowerPoint que ha memorizado, a la vez que mantiene un contacto visual permanente con su público.

Luego está el legendario Herbert D. Kelleher, ex director general de Southwest Airlines y actual consejero delegado de la empresa. Ordenaba sus ideas justo antes del discurso, anotándolas en un cuaderno o en una servilleta. Después de la conferencia, la gente preguntaba:

‘Puedo llevarme una copia?’, cuenta Edward Stewart, director general de relaciones públicas de Southwest. "Respondíamos: 'Lamentablemente, ni siquiera Herb tiene una'".