

**Burn After Reading**

**Key takeaways from select sessions at the Speechwriting & Public Affairs Virtual Conference.**

11–11:35 a.m.

**Storytelling 3.0: How to Strengthen the Use of Stories in Your Organization to Make a Lasting Impact**

* Most great speakers are memorable due to their storytelling skills
* Storytelling is a way for any communicator to “connect the dots” and reach a much wider audience
* Storytelling as a discipline within organizations is fairly new but growing quickly. Here are a few good examples:
  + Microsoft established their “Story labs” to make complex technical topics easier to grasp
  + Starbuck has mastered using eye catching visuals to capture the work of employees
  + The Toy Association just launched a member storytelling initiative
* You don’t need to have a storytelling title to establish a storytelling culture at your organization
* “Make stories, not anecdotes” by using Freytag’s pyramid to establish the right structure. Anecdotes are just a description of an event; stories have a meaning and purpose.
* Get to know your principal on a personal level—ask probing questions about their life and goals
* Be the cheerleader for doing things differently at your organization:
  + Showcase creative examples from other orgs
  + Find allies in your organization who will push and elevate your efforts

11:40 a.m.–12:20 p.m.

FIRESIDE CHAT

**Advancing Your Speechwriting and Public Affairs Skills—and Finding Humor in a Challenging Time**

* Getting a principal to take chances is all about first building trust, and getting them out of their comfort zone
* 30% of your job is writing really good speeches and 70% is making your principal happy
* Your major priority will differ based on who you’re working for and what they want
* Suggest almost anything once, but rarely anything twice
* What do all white house speechwriters have in common—they’re voracious readers of anything. You never know where inspiration will come from.
* Comedy, when its done well, is all about telling us that we’re not alone—which is a way to rally people in a time of crisis
* Moderating your tone is crucial during crises. You can use humor to grab attention, then pivot to a more serious message.
* Its genuinely better to skip humor during a crisis—the possible downsides are much higher than the possible payoff.
* Comedy is a good way to reach audiences you aren’t already speaking to and wouldn’t be drawn to your platforms normally.
* Your jokes should have a strategic purpose and help bring audiences to your cause
* You can get your message across more effectively by including it as a nugget within a larger comedic speech. 90% should be fun, so the important 10% gets through.
  + The New Jersey Government Twitter feed does an excellent job of getting accurate information about COVID-19 out using comedy and fun.
* Tips for turning in-person speeches into virtual ones:
  + Make them shorter
  + Acknowledge the strangeness and novelty of it
  + It’s a shared experience that can bring people together
* How do you keep acknowledgements to a minimum in a speech? Try to work them into the content instead of doing everything up front or at the end.
* If your executive is very busy, find someone close in their network who can be a source of intel.
* If a speaker is struggling to land a joke, sometimes its better to just lose it and try something else.
* Book recommendations for speechwriters:
  + *Made to Stick* by Chip and Dan Heath
  + *The Political Speechwriter’s Companion* by Bob Lehrman
  + *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser

12:45–1:25 p.m.

PANEL

**Earning Trust in a Time of Crisis and Misinformation**

* During a crisis, alignment between departments is crucial. Have multiple people vet your statements to ensure you’re presenting one united front.
* A mix of information and inspiration is crucial in crisis speeches.
* Crises aren’t always about the crisis itself—reputations can be built and destroyed in what happens afterwards.
* The most important thing you can do beforehand is build credibility with your audience.
* A speech isn’t about the speaker—its about the audience and if you put them first, you’ll come off well.
* Tip for crisis speechwriting: Find people in your department or organization who can give you quick information in a pinch.
* Don’t get stuck in a cycle of email edits—ask the person directly what the purpose behind it is.
* Reassuring people during a crisis isn’t always about being upbeat and confident, its often about acknowledging hardship and uncertainties
* It’s ok to say “I don’t know” if you don’t have all the answers.
* Leaders need to be willing to be humble and turn the mic over to experts who do have the answers at the moment. Humility is crucial to building trust.
* Book recommendations:
  + Short Cut by John Pollack
  + *Made to Stick* by Chip and Dan Heath
  + *The Political Speechwriter’s Companion* by Bob Lehrman
  + *On Speaking Well* by Peggy Noonan
  + Read books that your executive is reading to get ideas and inspiration
* Preparation doesn’t detract from authenticity in a speech—it shows the audience that you cared enough to devote time to it.

2:50-3:25 p.m.

**Advocating for Your Organization in the Face of Financial and Reputational Threats**

* Look to your brand’s history to find great stories to tell audiences
* Tap into your customer’s experiences with your brand—social listening on Twitter and Instagram can be a great place to find these stories
* When dealing with a crisis, break down your audience into different groups to understand their specific priorities
* Get leadership involved with crisis communications early on—and keep them front and center as a spokesperson
* Try new methods to reach audiences—videos can be a powerful way to unite a remote workforce.
* Finding ways to give your audience much-needed lightheartedness and entertainment can also go a long way in keeping their trust and attention
* Speak with confidence about the decisions your organization makes—and explain why
* Surveys are a great tool to gauge trust and showcase your reputation to outside audiences.
* When facing backlash to your advocacy effort, rely on the facts.