



## INTRO CHAPTER

*If It Ain't Broke, Break It.* That's the title of Robert Kreigel's book describing the need for constant change in corporate America. It's also the thesis for this book. Kreigel's contention is that through electronics and computers the world is moving so fast that corporations must keep reinventing themselves. Kreigel asserts that managers must constantly assess what they do, why they do it, whether it's effective. This continual assessment mandates change.

Reading his book, scenes from recent speech coaching work with clients flashed upon my mental screen; I was stunned by the validity of Kreigel's message. Corporate presentations and speeches have definitely not kept pace. Nowhere in the world of business have fewer changes been made. Products change, marketing materials change, software changes, but messages have not changed.

Corporate messages are still in the 1970's. Old-fashioned "me-oriented" and "us-oriented" presentations are lingering in the files and floating around the board room. Presidents and CEOs still read manuscripts describing the history of the company in boring detail. CFO's have access to exciting electronics packages which create state-of-the-art graphics, yet they continue to flash up slides of deadly balance sheets crammed with numbers depicting last quarter's financial results. Marketing managers have exciting new promotional

materials, yet in presentations they persist in relating feature by feature every nuance of each new product.

Speeches and presentations matter. Companies credit excellence in communicating as a key to their success. The ability to communicate ranks high in skills sought in job interviews. Promotion depends on the ability to communicate. A person's idea can be no stronger than his ability to get it across. Despite all this awareness, communicating in presentations lag behind.

Audiences have changed too. They are less willing to just listen; they want to be included, involved. If your goal is to get a result — not just deliver a message — you need to find ways to include them.

Though my usual advice is to present the positive side whenever possible, I determined that this book was not one of those times. The material for this attack on the old way of preparing presentations comes primarily from experiences with my clients, in coaching, in training, and in assistance to speechwriters. Thanks to each of you for being an example, whether good and awful. Since industry and company names are changed, no one will recognize you; if you recognize yourself, congratulations that you're already changing!

Each of the fourteen reasons is written to stand alone, as a reference. The inevitable overlap exists. One way to emphasize the importance of an idea — in a book as well as in a presentation — is to repeat it. So I have.

Corporate presentations and speeches are broken, and they need to be fixed. Find your weak spots and correct them.

Make your corporate presentations are as fine as your product or service. You owe your company no less.

### **REASON # 1**

“That’s the way we’ve always done it.”

### **THE PROBLEM:**

Corporate America is developing ‘90’s corporate presentations using ‘70’s models.

### **THE SOLUTION:**

Make your corporate message timely: make sure it’s as new as your product or service. Bring your visual aids up to date with new technology.

### **What’s Wrong With the Way You’ve Always Done It?**

You know. How successful would your company be if your product hadn’t changed in 20 years? Would you still be in business? Not likely. How many repeat customers would you have if your customer service practices hadn’t kept pace with changing needs? Not many. Yet corporate message development and delivery haven’t keep pace. Too often, a new manager comes in, looks at the files, examines how the last speaker handled this subject, substitutes new numbers and figures, and gives the same old presentation. Or a new speechwriter is hired, looks at the files, examines what’s been done, and prepares the next speech for the president in the same old way.

Imagine what happens in a company when suggestions to upgrade product development or customer service are met with the objection, But that’s the way we’ve always done it.

Yet questions about speech approaches are often met with that response.

## **REASON # 2**

**“It doesn’t matter who’s in the audience, this is our story.”**

### **THE PROBLEM:**

It’s not what you want to say that matters; it’s what the audience wants to hear — or needs to hear, is ready for, or will sit still for — that matters.

### **THE SOLUTION:**

The presentation is for the audience, not the speaker.

### **Why Is Talking Mostly about Yourself a Problem?**

When you present the same corporate message, with the same details about the product or service no matter who’s in the audience, you indulge the speaker, leaving the audience behind. Members of the audience want you to answer their question, What’s in it for me? If the audience is potential buyers, they want to hear how the product will benefit them, not just what its features are. If a presentation for the staff is about new goals in customer service or better selling methods, what the audience needs to hear is how they can make the change, not just company rhetoric about its importance. If the material is new technical knowledge about an update in the company-wide computer system, the message must be what the audience is ready to understand, which may not be the technical level you’re comfortable with. When presenting a proposal to the Board of Directors, the message must be the amount of information the audience will sit still for, not everything you’d like to say.

### REASON # 3

“What do you mean, ‘What’s our purpose?’”

#### THE PROBLEM:

Two basic problems exist when considering the purpose of a presentation:

- **no purpose**
- **too many purposes.**

Both problems create equally unsuccessful presentations. How can a speech or presentation be successful if you aren’t certain what you want it to accomplish? or if it has so many purposes the audience can’t sort them out?

#### THE SOLUTION:

Know why you’re speaking. Decide what part of the larger message will be appropriate for this audience at this time.

#### Why Is Lack of Clear Purpose a Problem?

An alternate response I often hear is *We’re going to introduce our new product, describe its outstanding features and explain how they work. Then we’ll be taking orders for it.* That approach will be equally unsuccessful, because it has too many purposes; people don’t move that fast.

A presentation needs a purpose — but only one. A strong positive statement in answer to the question, *what’s your purpose?* reaffirms your specific purpose for the presentation. You know what the purpose is. You have a sense of the situation and the audience, and your presentation gets the job done by making sure that the presentation is appropriate. Remember the presentation as a journey: the **purpose** is the vehicle, the transportation you use to get the audience to the desired destination.