

11-1947

Presidents Page...Speech Education in Business and Industry

E. C. Buehler
University of Kansas

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/gavel>



Part of the [Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Buehler, E. C. (1947). President's Page...Speech Education in Business and Industry. *The Gavel of Delta Sigma Rho*, 30(1), 3-4.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. It has been accepted for inclusion in *The Gavel of Delta Sigma Rho* by an authorized editor of Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.

President's Page . . .

"Speech Education in Business and Industry"

The present growth and expansion of speech education in the field of business and industry are outrunning the increased speech activities which we are now experiencing in our college classrooms. In fact, much of our present day emphasis upon speech in the academic field probably springs from the demands originating in the outside world. Many of us who work in sheltered halls are unaware of what is going on in the non-academic circles of the business world. There are reasons for this. We are surrounded by all kinds of barometers and fact-finding sources which supply us with the vital statistics of our profession. The facts are constantly poured out to us. We are told about the increase in enrollment, the number of students in each class, the new courses offered, the number and qualifications of teachers available etc.; but when it comes to getting a true picture of speech education in business and industry, we fall back on personal opinion and guess work. There are no bureaus or commissions or census takers to supply us here with the reliable data.

I do not claim to know all the facts; but after organizing and teaching sixty-two speech clubs and classes among business groups in the Mid-West during the last twenty-six years, and after giving some hundred lectures on the subject of speech making to private firms and business organizations and having followed the developments of speech training among adults generally, I have made some observations which I propose to discuss hoping they will be of some interest to our GAVEL readers.

The interest and activity in speech education in the business world are much more extensive than most college teachers realize. For instance, in a near-by city of 400,000, one single organization conducts annually a speech improvement program with a regular staff of paid instructors and boasts a regular annual enrollment of 350 students. In this same city there are at least a dozen other speech teachers who offer classes privately for pay. The Dale Carnegie Institute is now starting its 26th class. Several colleges and universities are offering night classes through Extension Centers. Many of the civic clubs, literary clubs, and fraternal organizations of the city are carrying on some form of speech training along with their regular activities. Recently there were organized several new Toastmasters' Clubs, Parliamentary Law Clubs, and Current Topics Clubs. These latter groups operate without a regular teacher.

We see the trend on a national scale.

National institutions and big corporations offer speech training programs, among them: Westinghouse, General Electric, International Harvester, Bituminous Coal Institute of America, The American Bankers' Institute, and many similar national organizations.

Speech work in the business world differs widely from that in our own college classes. First, one is impressed with the diversification in both the student personnel and the content of the courses. Business speech courses are usually open to anyone who has the price of admission regardless of age, professional standing, or previous education. In one class of 18 students, a few summers ago which I conducted, the age range was from 15 to 66, the educational level was from the fourth grade to Ph.D. and beyond. In this class there was a fifteen year old school girl, a butcher, a coon trapper, a prominent corporation attorney, a Dean of The School of Engineering of a State University, a farmer, an insurance salesman, a banker, a movie actor, a copy writer, a merchant, a truck driver, a sales manager, a bookkeeper, two housewives, and two stenographers. And this, by the way, I consider to be one of my most successful classes.

For the most part, students enter these courses of their own free will and accord. The average age is about 35, more than ten years above the average age of the college student. This added maturity brings with it a certain mental perspective, a seasoned judgment, and a realistic approach which flavors the content of the speeches. Some of the class members have had unusual experiences. For instance, I had one student who had spent more than thirty hours at the conference tables with John L. Lewis. Another student was the private airplane pilot of the late F. D. Roosevelt on his tours to the international conferences at Casablanca and Teheran. He dined with Churchill, Stalin, and Roosevelt. Among these more mature men and women with a wealth of personal experiences, the character and personality of the speaker highlights the speech-making process. It is easy to see, therefore, that these classes are more realistic than are most college speech classes. Many of these student speakers feel that they have earned the right to speak.

The enrollees may be classified into four main groups. In Group I are those who are excessively timid and shy. They feel insecure and are personally ambitious to get on in the world. They feel a lack of education and suffer from inadequacy and inferiority. In the second

group are those who feel that they would like to give a better account of themselves before committee meetings, at sales conferences, and in audience situations in general. In this group may be found a number of college graduates who welcome an opportunity for further self-improvement. In the third group are those who seek more poise and self confidence. They would like to be more articulate in business and social situations in general. They have no definite reason for taking the course except to keep mentally alert. In the fourth group are those who crave attention and want to be heard. These people want to be saved from loneliness, and a speech class gives them a wider circle of friends and acquaintances. It is this longing to be saved that has stimulated the interest of some adults who have lived ten or twenty years beyond the formal academic ventures of college.

One word should be offered about the practical benefits of these courses. On the whole the results are most gratifying. This probably is the real reason why these classes are so popular. Frankly, I think the results are more gratifying than in the college classroom. There are certain inherent advantages which makes these results possible. These students know what they want. They are motivated by the desire for self-improvement. The speech-making laboratory is more ideal in its character than that of a typical college class. The audience is more akin to the rank and file of listeners of most public meetings. The emphasis is upon speaking skills, not theo-

ry. The laboratory method is used almost altogether. Usually there are no textbooks, no examinations, no shot-gun quizzes, no bells or whistles to stop the class. The audience is less artificial and I dare say less critical. The teacher is not pre-occupied with giving grades or making out reports.

One further advantage which probably outweighs all others lies in the fact that the instructor is free to fit the course to meet the needs of the group. He is not tied to a two-hour credit course in basic speech, or a three-hour course in extempore speaking, or a two-hour course in debate, etc. Here he is free to shake down from his experiences and his knowledge of speech training the pertinent principles which will help a specific group the most. From his personal resources he is free to make up one single custom-built program. This is something he cannot do for the college student.

In closing, I should say that I am not sure that our work in our hallowed halls is half as good as we think it is or that the teaching in speech making in the field of business and industry is half as bad as most of us believe it to be. I am inclined to believe that some of the best public speaking in America today, and some of the best teaching that is done in our field, may be found miles away from the ivy-clad walls among the prosaic public speaking class rooms filled with men and women from ranks of business and industry.

E. C. BUEHLER
UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

REQUEST FOR THE GAVEL

To the Editor:

School of Speech, Northwestern University
Evanston, Illinois

Please send me all issues of the GAVEL each year (November, January, March, May).

Name:

Address: (Street)

(City)

(State)

Chapter: Year:

Present Occupation: