

The
Wow

e-newsletter

by Ken and Dahlynn McKowen

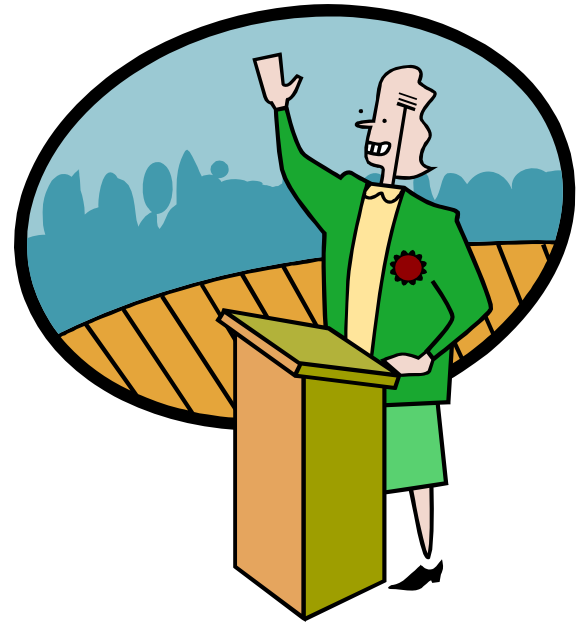
Principles

Volume 7 No. 2 February 2011

www.PublishingSyndicate.com

A Few Good Words

by Ken McKowen



Have you ever wondered who writes all those words politicians spew out as policy speeches, campaign speeches and feel-good-even-though-the-economy-sucks speeches? As a writer, I wonder about this whenever I hear a speech, but for most, the response might be, “Who cares?”

If you’re a writer, you may want to care because there is good money to be made writing speeches. But breaking into the speech writing business isn’t any easier than selling your novel to a publisher or your travel story to a magazine. Writing a speech is much different than writing features for a magazine and only vaguely resembles writing dialogue for your great American novel. Thus, I offer a few tips and thoughts based on my own speechwriting experiences.

First a little background: In a past life, I worked for California State Parks for thirty years. Spending many of those years as the head writer in the public relations office, I found myself being called into the director’s office, the agency secretary’s office (the director’s boss) or even occasionally into the governor’s office (the agency secretary’s boss). During these very short meetings, I was told to write a speech for an

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Published by *Publishing Syndicate*

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event or radio program that required words of wisdom regarding some aspect of the department's operations or management policies. Many times, the speech was to include a little history as it related to individuals or prominent historic sites. Needless to say, the list of topics I wrote about was endless.

Upon receiving a speech-writing assignment, I always asked the speech-giver three vitally important questions:

- 1) Who is your audience?
- 2) What message do you wish to convey?
- 3) How long do you need to speak?



You would think these would be easy questions to answer, but occasionally, especially with one particularly less-than-stellar department director (a political appointment made by an obviously unaware California governor), such was not always the case. I rarely got those questions answered and usually exited his office with him adding, “Just write something and I’ll know if it works when I see it.” This process required me to have an expansive knowledge base and to also be highly creative. More times than not, the director’s ever-changing mind would render my first and even second draft useless. But a word of encouragement: Most of the people I had an opportunity to write speeches for nearly always knew who they were speaking to and what messages they wanted to convey. That made my life much easier—as long as I was familiar with the subject matter.

Obviously, having a strong grasp of whatever subject you intend to write speeches about is requisite for being successful. Taking on an unfamiliar subject, especially without the benefit of time being on your side, too often leads to disaster. Many a subject—be it international banking regulations, the state of political turmoil in a foreign country or establishing new programs for protecting California’s rapidly dwindling coastal marshes—requires specific terminology and expertise that can’t possibly be discovered during a few hours reading Internet articles. The

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subject experts will not be kind to your speech-giver if he or she fumbles through a speech, spinning inappropriate use of subject-specific terminology or presenting outdated information based on incomplete research. That's why you should never take on a speech-writing project unless you are highly aware of the topic or have access to experts in that field to assist you.



One more thing that will help your speech writing efforts is being aware of your client's speaking voice. In essence, you are a ghostwriter, responsible for putting words into your client's mouth. Will your words sound like your client's words or the work of some paid speechwriter? There are many considerations to take into account, including knowing if she is very formal in her speaking manner or if there are special terms or colloquialisms commonly heard in her speeches. And if a client butchers your words because she doesn't take the time to review the speech or attempts to adlib and loses her place—thus sounding like a bumbling, babbling fool—it's best the rest of the world believes your client's words were written by her and not by you.

Dahlynn also has spent years writing speeches and op-ed articles for government officials and has spent considerable time ghostwriting for some of the most popular CEOs and entrepreneurs in the country—even a former President. Whenever we hear a speech, we find ourselves commenting on the writer behind the person. Consistency for any speech-giver is the key; if he or she finds a great speech writer, it's in their best interest to keep that writer close. If you are interested in this form of writing, and can ingrain yourself into a position of trust with an elected official or company CEO, it's a safe bet that you'll have work for some time.

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To prove this point, read about Peter Robinson, a 30-year-old speechwriter for President Ronald Reagan. His story about coming up with the infamous line “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall” delivered by the President in his 1987 Berlin Wall address can be found at the link below. It’s a fascinating story on how one person—a young, ambitious speech writer—can have such a profound impact on world history. And who knows, your words—albeit repeated by another—could become the stuff of legend, too.

<http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2007/summer/berlin.html>



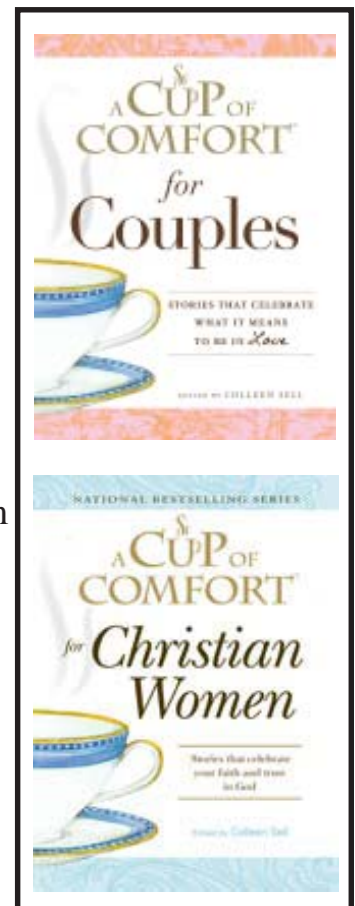
A note to you from *Cup of Comfort's* Colleen Sell

All good things must come to an end. As cliché as that adage may be, it holds some truth, and the end has come for the Cup of Comfort book series, which has been a great venue for personal essays and my “pet project” for more than a decade. The Cup of Comfort website, blog, story critiques, and online writing workshops have also been retired, effective January 2011. *A Cup of Comfort for Couples*, published in December 2010, and *A Cup of Comfort for Christian Women*, published in January 2011, are the last two books in the series. Those two anthologies as well as more than twenty previously published Cup of Comfort books will continue to be sold through booksellers and through the publisher, Adams Media. I am so grateful for this meaningful and enjoyable work, and I thank Dahlynn, Ken, and all of you from the bottom of my heart for your contributions to and your interest in the Cup of Comfort book series. May the months and years ahead bring you other great writing, reading, and publishing opportunities...and may we meet again on this wonderful journey of storytelling.

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HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF! HOT STUFF!

As of February 21, 2011:

Chicken Soup for the Soul

www.ChickenSoup.com

Canada: Deadline: February 28, 2011 **HURRY!**

Devotional Stories for Times of Trouble: Deadline: Feb. 28, 2011 **HURRY!**

Brides and Weddings: Deadline: April 30, 2011

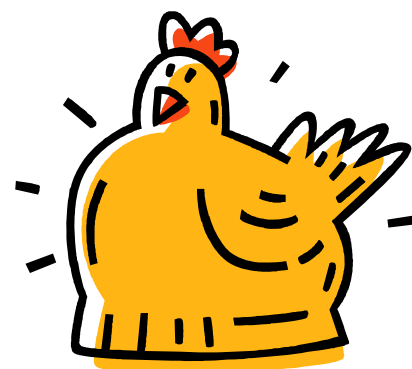
Marriage and Married Life: Deadline: May 30, 2011

Find Your Happiness: Deadline: May 15, 2011

Christmas Stories: Deadline: June 30, 2011

Home Sweet Home: Deadline: August 30, 2011

Think Positive for Kids: Deadline: December 31, 2011



Dream of Things

www.DreamofThings.com

(Find story information under the “Workshop” tab.)

Coffee Shop Stories

Great Customer Service Stories

Stories of Forgiveness

Internet Dating Stories

Stories that Exemplify Teamwork

Stories about Great Teachers

Humorous Travel Stories

Advice You’d Like to Pass On to Others

Cubicle Stories: Life in the Modern Workplace

It’s Only a Game: Lessons Learned from Playing/Coaching Sports

Making Waves: Stories about Role Models and People Who Inspire and Motivate Us

Stories that Exemplify Leadership

Awe-inspiring Travel Stories

Holiday Stories

All *Dream of Things* anthology call-outs are open until there are enough stories to fill a book.

Go for it! Get published!