

The Lectern or Podium

Close your eyes and imagine yourself sitting in any audience. On stage there is a lectern and a speaker walking in with a sheaf of papers (a *large* sheaf of papers). He clears his/her throat and begins. Groan—you're bored already!

The stereotypical image of that device—the lectern—is so branded in our minds as a symbol of lengthy, tedious droners that we have to deal with it. Not only does it carry the negative images of preachers, teachers, and righteous folk who have talked at us, it carries another image as well.

Standing behind a lectern visibly separates you from your audience. It makes you look like you're hiding behind a shield, protecting yourself from them, not as open and vulnerable to them as they are to you.

It makes you look different, chosen, unique—if you're attempting to bond with your audience, that's not the right message. It also makes you look rigid, formal, unfeeling—a difficult place from which to become their leader, helpful teacher and guide.

If you're short, your audience may get an excellent view of your chin or your bald spot as you peer over the top, but not of you.

One more issue: Standing behind a lectern makes you stand still. This is not only a boring, immobile image, but it also paralyzes *you* and lowers your own energy level.

By now you've probably guessed that I think standing behind a lectern isn't such a great idea. Why does everyone do it?

1. It's a place to put your notes.
2. It's where the microphone is permanently installed.
3. Everybody does it.

Counterattack:

For #1: Put your notes there but come out from behind and stand to the side of the podium. You can look over at your notes and still be free and available.

For #2: Request, in advance, that they arrange a lavalier or lapel mike for you with a long cord, so you can move away from that arbitrary prison and, most of all, be free to move your head in any direction.

For #3: Don't be a sheep and follow the flock. Think through what effect that lectern has on your audience and what effect you *want* to have, and then decide for yourself based strictly on the merits, not habit. But know that I'll *haunt* you if you just automatically slide behind the lectern and thereby bring upon you all the negative images I've just described . . .