

is trying to achieve is the right one: To warm up the audience, get their attention, and start on a friendly, pleasant, informal note.

What's wrong with the "story" technique is that not only does the story commonly not apply to the rest of the speech, but ninety-nine **times out** of a hundred, that's the last bit of laughter, warmth, or informality you'll get for the duration of the speech! Funny-story openings promise something they never deliver. They create a visible **space** between "that's **the** fun part" and "this is the real speech."

### *What Openings Should Do*

Your opening must establish your theme and why it is valuable for the audience to listen. But the first thing your audience wants to know is who you are and how they will relate to you, even before they want to know the essence of what you're going to talk about. Remember—we're **still** basically as suspicious of strangers as we ever were. Therefore, your opening needs to let your audience in on a quick personal portrait of who's telling—without ever telling them that's what you're doing.

**Sounds** difficult? Actually, it's instinctive. Watch what you do when you just get introduced to someone at a party:

- You smile ("See—I'm a friend").
- Shake hands (a short-cut physical contact to experience each other more closely).
- You circle, subject-wise, looking for a common interest, or
- Make a joke to show your personality and charm, or
- Comment on the party, weather, etc.

Why? Just to get the ball, and the get-acquainted process rolling.

In every instance you're looking for a common meeting ground, **a** way of identifying with that other person to show who you are and to get **a** little closer. What you're really saying is:

"This is me. Different from you, but not really. Let's draw a little closer. Look what we have in common. See how much I know about you, us, work, life, etc., and how I'll use that in the rest of my speech." Now you've satisfied the "Who's Telling?" question and can go on.

The best approach is an informal, personal one, bridging the space that separates you from the audience, not only physically but symbolically.

*Example:* "You know, preparing for this speech, I sat and imagined all of you. You'd be sitting there thinking, 'Now, what's this gonna be **about?** **How long will** it take and when's lunch. . . ?' "