

**SPEAKER COACHING:  
HOW TO CREATE MORE COMPELLING AND ENGAGING SPEECHES**

**SUMMARY**

Coaching is the most underused service by public speakers. Focusing on the words, the vast majority of speakers fail to practice at all, and even fewer turn to a professional for feedback on their performance. Here is an example of my work with a throat cancer survivor who had a compelling story and who faced issues with his voice quality. Only through coaching sessions did we discover the real challenges and limits of his voice.

I was able to take his notes and create an interesting speech that is organized and focused, using his personal story to connect with the audience to make a bigger point. I have included (a) the client's original speech input; (b) our agreed upon speech outline, for focus, and (c) the final product with speaker's input. This is an example of my ability to develop creative ways to address issues as they occur, while also showing the speaker compassion and offering options to address his fears and maintain his dignity. It also demonstrates my writing process.

As background, a friend put me in touch with this client who had a severe speech limitations stemming from throat cancer treatments. The client was to be honored by his alma mater in Louisiana for the donation of his vast collection of baskets woven by Native Americans. He wanted to talk 15-20 minutes, and had an estimated 10 minutes of notes.

During our coaching sessions, it became clear that his voice was unpredictable and could require him to cut short his talk. I worked with him to come up with options that would allow for him to react if during his speech his voice began to give away.

I suggested to the client that he arrange for the three baskets he referenced in the speech to be culled from the collection and placed on display in front of him. We asked the museum staff to create signage by the baskets so people could also understand which Native American tribe he was referencing with each basket, should his voice begin to slur. These signs also would help if, during that portion of his talk, he had to ask someone to take over for him.

To allay the speaker's fears that his throat would seize up mid-speech, **I highlighted in bold** the middle section that could be read verbatim by a surrogate, such as his partner or the museum director. I explained that he also had the option to skip the bolded part, by saying, "see me later to explain the detailed differences of these three methods of basket weaving you see here." With the three key basket types on display in front of him, both he and the museum staff could explain the baskets during the reception that would immediately followed the speech.

**RESULT**

In the end, I assured the speaker that people around him wanted him to succeed. His alma mater was flying him to Louisiana to honor him, not to judge him. I had a tough talk with him about not being too

proud to ask for help. I then reminded him that this talk was his own story – his journey from hippie to scholar and the collecting of amazing Native American baskets along the way – therefore, he could not tell it wrong. As a result, my client said he felt much more confident and relaxed going into his talk.

**The following is from my client after his speech delivery on Friday, Oct 20, 2017:**

“The opening night of the exhibit of my Native American basket collection occurred on Friday, October 20. The talk was well received. I provided the museum’s director with a copy, as you suggested. Your help made this measurably better. Thank you.”

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## ORIGINAL SPEECH VERSION PROVIDED BY CLIENT

### NEW OCTOBER TALK

thank you's to various people

In 1974, I graduated with a ba in social work from this very university, beginning my lifelong career as a psychotherapist. Graduating with honors was not my proud moment, however. My 15 minutes of fame was in 1973 and involved the creation of the anti-war group SPAN which in turn hosted Norhtwestern and Natchitoches only Vietnam war protest. I also looked very different then. My hair was down to here and i wore bellbottoms and an army fatigue jacket with the American flag sown upside down on the sleeve. I fashioned myself quite the big radical in a very small pond.

44 years later, here I stand very much a part of the establishment--at least in appearance. I still may have the heart of a rebel, but that's about it. I am too old now and too concerned about retirement to otherwise rebel.

Whether it is the social worker in me or the hippie radical in me, I am grieved at the way we have treated Native Americans in our country, the first people on our continent. If you are unsure what I mean, watch episode 4 if Ken Burns documentary on the West. Our murderous betrayal of Native Americans is well documented.

And yet, these are the people who created every one of the beautiful items on display here today. I, we, owe them a debt of gratitude.

Enough for politics, though.

Why did I collect all the baskets? I have been asked that question too many times to count.

The simple honest answer if, I really dont know. The more elegant thoughtful answer starts with family. Several academic disciplines include the concept of myth or mythology, anthropology and psychology being two in particular. Dr. Gregory, the Williamsons museum anthropologist curator, can speak to the meaning of mythology in his profession. In mine, family myth refers to beliefs and stories , part true and part fabricated, about families and its members. A favorite myth in my maternal family was that my maternal great grandmother, Emelia Pfannkuchen, Bruchhaus, taught Koasati women and children to read and write. She also employed their husbands and sons to work on her farm along with her sons. From early on I knew of Koasati baskets because I was close to my grandmother. In fact, my first basket belonged to her--supposedly first acquired when she was a child. It was considered nothing special. In fact, i actually first remember seeing it filled with bobby pins---remember those things--in my parents bathroom. I also remember the koasati hosting a booth at the jeff davis parish fair. Again, they were considered nothing special. They were inexpensive and considered more a trinket.

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## ORIGINAL SPEECH OUTLINE

WEAVING HISTORY:  
ONE MAN'S QUEST FOR NATURAL BEAUTY  
BY [CLIENT]  
~10 minutes (~1,350 words)

1. OPEN STORY, FORESHADOWING ENDING
  - a. FOUND FIRST BASKET IN CLOSET
  - b. G'MA, FAMILY & KOASATI
    - i. POINT TO THAT FIRST BASKET IN FRONT OF YOU
2. THANK YOU FOR COMING, INVITING YOU HERE
3. YOUR JOURNEY TO THIS POINT
  - a. SCHOOL BACKGROUND
    - i. HIPPIE
    - ii. MAJOR
  - b. UNLIKELY THAT YOU WOULD TURN TO BASKETS
    - i. BECAME OBSESSED, DECIDED TO COLLECT THEM ALL
    - ii. STARTED WITH K, MOVED TO C, H & C
      1. POINT TO EXAMPLES OF EACH IN FRONT OF YOU
    - iii. OVERALL LESSON LEARNED
  - c. OVER TIME, BUILT A COLLECTION AND A FAMILY
    - i. HUBBY TOOK 305 PICS SO, LIKE SONS AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS, WOULD ALWAYS HAVE THEM
    - ii. THANKS TO DON FOR LOVE, PATIENCES AND PHOTOGRAPHS
  - d. SEARCHED FOR A NEW HOME
    - i. FOUND IT AT NSU
    - ii. THANK PROF AND OTHERS AT NSU
4. CONCLUSION
  - a. WHAT I HAVE LEARNED FROM THIS PARTNERSHIP TODAY IS:
    - i. DON'T BE FOOLED BY THE RAW MATERIALS – WHETHER A HIPPIE TRYING TO STOP A WAR IN SE LOUISIANA OR THE RIVERCANE AND PINE NEEDLES YOU STEP ON – BECAUSE WITH A LITTLE TIME, A LITTLE PATIENCE, AND A LOT OF CREATIVITY, BEAUTIFUL THINGS WILL EMERGE.

## FINAL SPEECH DRAFT FOR DELIVERY

This little basket right here—this is the one that started it all [HOLD UP BASKET].

This very basket was kept in my parents' bathroom filled with bobby pins. I was probably about 10 at the time. It was the very first time I laid eyes on these amazing Koasati baskets.

It is likely the oldest Koasati basket in my collection, being made of wiregrass instead of pine needles and bound with the inner bark of the dogwood tree instead of raffia. Wiregrass is a clump grass that grows along long leaf pine forests in the Gulf Coast plane. These baskets were most commonly made prior to 1920 when pine needle and raffia for binding came into use. It supposedly belonged to my grandmother as a child making it more than 100 years old. But, in the 1950's and '60's, you could also pick up new Koasati baskets at the Jeff Davis Parish Fair. At that time they were very inexpensive.

[PUT BASKET DOWN]

They were considered trinkets. We didn't appreciate the time, effort and skill it took to create these works of art. That was even true for my grandmother's old basket. It sat on the bathroom shelf, not on the fireplace mantel.

[PAUSE]

I really appreciate Dr. Pete Gregory, director of the Williamson Museum, for recognizing and appreciating this amazing, and unfortunately dying, art of Native American basket weaving. I also appreciate everyone here tonight, because your presence honors the artistry of the weavers.

[PAUSE]

Like this first basket, I don't think my presence here at NSU was much appreciated the first time around when I was here from 1970 to 1974.

My 15 minutes of fame came in 1971 and involved the creation of the anti-war group, SPAN – Students for Peace in Asia Now. We hosted Northwestern and Natchitoches' only Vietnam War protest, which attracted about 100 people. In fact, a few are here tonight!

[POINT THEM OUT, WAVE]

We looked very different back then. My hair was down to here. I wore bellbottoms and an army fatigue jacket with the American flag sown upside down on the sleeve. I fashioned myself quite the big radical in a very small pond.

[PAUSE]

Hey, the war ended, so we were clearly very successful!

[PAUSE]

In 1974, I graduated with a BA in Social Work from this very university, beginning my lifelong career as a psychotherapist.

Now you might wonder how a radical-war-protesting-hippie-wannabe-turned-psychotherapist would become interested in Native American basket weaving.

In a sense I have been collecting almost all my life. As I was growing up, we had the Koasati basket in our home that belonged to my grandmother. I felt great affinity for that basket because I was close to my grandmother.

Also, from early on, my family had a connection to Native Americans, starting with my maternal great grandmother Emalia Pfannkuchen Bruchhaus who reportedly taught Koasati women and children to read in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The Bruchhaus relatives that lived, and still live, within proximity of the Koasati people also employed many of them to work on their farms.

Whether it is the social worker in me or the hippie radical in me, I am grieved at the way we have treated Native Americans in our country, the first people on our continent. And yet, these are the people who created every one of the beautiful items on display here today. I – we – owe them a debt of gratitude.

While I have been actively collecting baskets since the mid-1970s, I don't remember the exact moment I actually decided to collect these baskets, and others from my native Louisiana, but I distinctly remember the feeling once the decision was made.

I was determined to collect as many as possible. I wanted both those that were most representative of the art form, as well as those that were most unique. Honestly, I wanted them all!

For many years, my collection consisted solely of Koasati baskets like this [POINT TO IT] with its tightly woven coils of pine needles, some decorated with pinecones as well. Later, I began adding Koasati river cane baskets to my collection. Here [HOLD UP BASKET] is one woven by Ronald Langley, a member of a family highly respected among Koasati weavers. Some of his Mother's works are at the Smithsonian in Washington—and here today at the Hanchy Gallery in Natchitoches.

**[HOLD UP EXAMPLE] Soon, I was longing for baskets made by the Chitimacha – a tribe located not far from Lafayette near the town of Charendon. Their baskets are made solely of river cane and use timeless design patterns. I believe only 3 or 4 Chitimacha weavers are alive today. Similar to the Koasati, they are members of a prominent Chitimacha weaving family. This tribe is located near Avery Island, home of Tabasco Sauce, known and used worldwide. The McIlhenny family, owners still today, have donated major collections of Chitimacha baskets to both LSU and The Smithsonian.**

**[HOLD UP EXAMPLE] Next, I had to have Houmas baskets made from the yucca plant and Houmas dolls made from Spanish moss. Houmas weavers, as well as Koasati and Chitimacha weavers are fast disappearing. I am fearful that one day there will be no one to weave these treasures.**

**[HOLD UP EXAMPLE] Finally, I had to have at least one Louisiana Choctaw basket. The rarest in my collection, as there are no living Louisiana Choctaw weavers. There are several Mississippi Choctaw weavers and some in Oklahoma as well. Sadly, all Louisiana Choctaw weavers have moved on to the next world. This one and another, both dating to the mid to late 1800's round out this collection. One of these I found at an estate sale in Dallas, TX, and paid the princely sum of \$10. That was probably only 10 years ago or so.**

Ultimately, my collecting took on a life of its own, and grew to the 305 you see around you today. I know it is 305 because my husband, Skip, or Don as he is known to some, who photographed them all, reminded me more than once!

Through his excellent photographic eye and a patient effort to catalog them all, the results of my obsession to collect will always be with me in these photographs.

[PAUSE]

I am getting older, as are all of us. In wanting to downsize and de-clutter, I began to look for a new home for the collection.

I explored a variety of options, including selling them. Ultimately, I found that my first home away from home – Northwestern State University – was the perfect place.

Dr. Gregory, who was a former anthropology professor of mine and a co-author of a book I had collected on Southeastern Indian split cane basketry, was now director of NSU's Williamson Museum – the only museum I found with the space and the dedication to display the full collection.

I was sure of my decision after I spoke with Dr. Gregory the first time. He not only had the capacity to store them properly, he also was able to make them available to academics involved in research. In addition, he already enjoyed a cooperative, friendly relationship with many of the weavers and various tribal elders and wanted to make these baskets accessible to them as well. All that excited me.

Never in my wildest dreams could I have ever imagined that these baskets would have such a bright, secure, and varied future.

[PAUSE]

What I have learned from all my years of collecting and this partnership today is:

Don't be fooled by the wild, raw materials – whether it's a young student hippie trying to stop a war in Asia or the river cane, yucca, and pine needles growing in the wild or crunching under your feet, or whatever is wild and raw and unformed in your own life – with a little time, a little patience, a lot of hopes and a lot of dreams, as well as a lot of creativity, beautiful things can emerge.

Thank you all for being here today.

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