

It takes practice to be a pause master.

## The Science of Silence



The effective use of pauses turns an average speech into a dynamite speech. Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan all used pauses with dramatic affect. Some of their speeches have become legendary. King's famous statement, "I have a dream" and Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you" both ended with well-timed and -executed pauses. Had President Kennedy or Rev. King blurred these words by rushing through them, they wouldn't have had the same impact. Enhanced with pauses, they are inked permanently into our minds. This is the science of silence. It worked for them; it can work for you. The most important part of your speech is when you say nothing.

There are three types of pauses, each used for a different situation.

- 1) The *change of phrase* pause
- 2) The *logical or emotional reaction* pause
- 3) The *conclusion* pause

Toastmasters are most familiar with the "*change of phrase*" pause. This is a one-second pause used to give the audience time to catch up to what you are saying. If you write out your speeches, this pause is normally placed wherever you would have a comma or a period. Without placing these pauses in your speech, your presentation will turn into one long run-on sentence. Failure to place one-second pauses in your speech will cause the sound of your voice to be tedious to the listener and you will be tuned out.

The second type is the *logical or emotional reaction* pause. This is the

amount of time people need to react to your last statement. It takes two full seconds to achieve the reaction. When you are first practicing this pause, count to yourself: one thousand one, one thousand two, before you speak again. At first, this may seem a little awkward. When you are on stage, two seconds can seem like a long time. To your audience, experiencing the reaction will seem like no time at all. Trust in the impact of your statement and you will begin to get subtle head nods from your audience letting you know they understood your point. I love head nods. Don't you?

Let's look at some sample points in your speech that could use a two-second reaction pause:

- "Would you like to save money on your taxes?"
- "... and then my aunt got very sick."
- "Our government spends two billion dollars a year on wasted forms."

At the end of each of these statements, you will elicit a reaction. Reactions take two full seconds to form. Give your audience the time to feel their emotions and grasp their thoughts.

The third type is the "*conclusion*" pause. It is used when you want your audience to form their own conclusion. Often, this pause will be used after a question. This is the toughest pause to execute. This pause takes a full three seconds. The three-second pause allows the listen-

er to absorb what you've said, the next second allows them to have a reaction and the third second gives them time to form a conclusion.

Let's look at some spots in your speech where this pause may be appropriate:

- "What is holding you back?"
- "What do you think happens to you when you die?"
- "The time has come for you to act."

Notice that the first two examples are questions, but the last one is not. The last example is a call to action as discussed in your *Communication and Leadership* manual. This is also a perfect place to use the three-second pause. But one or two of these pauses in a five- to seven-minute speech is plenty. Overuse of the conclusion pause will desensitize your audience to its effect.

So there you have it, the *science of silence*. Even though the pause can be broken down and analyzed scientifically, the use of pauses is more of an art. It takes practice to be a pause master. But hey, isn't that what Toastmaster meetings are for? ■

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