

## ***AFTER DINNER SPEECHES***

Speaking after a dinner deserves special mention. Almost anybody may at some time be called upon to “make a little speech” whether it be at a formal dinner with a large audience, or a small informal or family event. Whatever the event, preparation is vital, in terms of understanding just what you are being asked to do, the audience to whom you are speaking and for how long. In many situations an after dinner speech is an occasion to entertain. However, too short a speech and people will feel like they have been short-changed, too long a speech and you will find your audience lose interest.

So, how long should an after dinner speech be? If you are speaking as a guest speaker whom the audience have come specifically to hear a 20 minutes speech would be appropriate (about 2000 words as the average speaker talks at about 100 words a minute). If you do not fall into the category of being a guest speaker and are part of a programme of other speeches then a speaking time of 5 to 7 minutes will be more appropriate. Your audience could be well wined and dined, they may have listened to several speeches before yours and their attention span will be limited.

An after dinner speaker wouldn't generally use presentation tools. Without these the content of what you are saying and how you are saying it, is very important. A strong opening or beginning is vital – get it right, and you'll have grabbed the audience from the very beginning; get it wrong and you'll lose the audience before you even start. To get your “opening” right, think about your audience and what will ‘hold’ or ‘grab’ their attention.

Don't try and cover the whole length & breadth of your subject matter. Use anecdotes to illustrate your points. Keep your speech simple. When using humor, do not use anything offensive (racist, sexist, etc.). Don't bring up anything controversial or complex. If you stick to these tips, your audience will remain interested, but not riled up.

To help keep you, the speaker, on track, index cards can be very helpful. Prepare your index cards so that they are numbered in order, and tagged together in the right order. There is nothing worse than a speaker who doesn't use index cards and goes completely off piste for a metaphorical ramble! Following these simple guidelines will help establish a connection between you and the audience, keep them engaged and help you succeed as an after dinner speaker. Below is a sample programme of the main after dinner speeches with a brief description of their content

### **The Salutation**

It is easy to get tied up in the etiquette of opening remarks but here are some simple guidelines. You must mention the Chair or the host of the event first, followed by dignitaries in descending order even with royalty present (unless it is the Queen!).

### **The Toast to the Organisation**

As first speaker you have to warm up the audience, and you will benefit from humour, but don't go on too long – remember other speakers have to follow you. Study the organisation, and any special or humorous events from the past year. Pick out the "characters" whom you can aim a story at, but link them to a recognisable theme. It is important to get the Toast right – check the title of the organisation, anyone you wish to mention by name. Make clear to the audience what you want them to do and who should Toast whom. As you reach the end of the speech invite them to charge their glasses and stand – then wait for the noise to subside before calling out the Toast itself.

### **Reply on behalf of the Organisation**

Pick up the points from the previous speech – leave gaps in your notes to help with this. This speech often includes a review of the year, perhaps congratulations or a pep talk, and thanks to those stalwart workers. Don't steal the thunder of those following you for example by talking too much about the guests.

### **Propose the Toast to the Guests**

Identify who are the principal guests who must be given the main attention in this speech. Other guests can be mentioned but it is generally a mistake to try to mention all the guests. Check the background of the principal guests. Identify the guests by sight before the dinner and check where they are sitting on the seating plan so that you are looking in the right direction when you refer to them. Ensure you end with a clearly delivered toast to the guests

### **Reply on behalf the guests**

Find an interesting theme but be sure that it can link to the previous speeches. Try to avoid much reference to the organisation itself as it will probably have been fully covered already. Prepare twice as much material as you need – half maybe pre-empted by the speakers before you! Pick up on what has already been said. Lastly be prepared to cut short if the previous speakers have gone on too long.