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Book Chapter: After Dinner Speaking

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CHAPTER 6: AFTER DINNER SPEAKING

Kevin Jones

Understanding the Event

The American Forensics Association provides the following “official” definition for After Dinner Speaking:

An original humorous speech by the student, designed to exhibit sound speech composition, thematic coherence, direct communicative public speaking skills, and good taste. The speech should not resemble a nightclub act, an impersonation, or comic dialogue. Audio-visual aids may or may not be used to supplement and reinforce the message. Speech should be memorized but minimal notes are permitted. Maximum time limit is 10 minutes.¹

For the beginning speaker, this definition provides a good starting point from which you can begin preparing your speech, but there is much more to a good after dinner speech than the A.F.A. definition provides. A good after dinner speech is not a stand-up comic routine or a run of one-liners. The speech is a formal speech focused around a relevant topic that generally attempts to communicate an important issue or concern. By the end of the speech you want to do more than just entertain the audience. You will want to make a point or communicate an ideology about your topic. Often, good after dinner speakers will take a serious topic and treat it lightly. For example, you could select a topic such as anxiety disorders, a disease that cripples and affects many people. The speech could be very humorous and the topic would lend itself to some great jokes. But anxiety disorders are very serious for those who experience them and you would not want to make fun of the disease or people who suffer from it. You would want to make humorous comments “about” the topic but never make fun of the people afflicted by these disorders. But by the end of the speech, your goal should be to inform the audience about anxiety disorders and encourage them to be more understanding, sympathetic, and/or tolerant.

Not all after dinner speech topics have to be as serious as anxiety disorders, but the example provides you with some options that you could use. Virtually anything could make a good after dinner speech topic as long as it is in good taste and appropriate for an intercollegiate competition. You will want to check with your coach to make sure your topic is not offensive, inappropriate, or overdone. For example, a topic such as domestic violence might fit the profile of an ADS topic by being a serious topic that you could treat lightly and have a serious point at the end. However, chances are most judges would find domestic violence to be inappropriate and offensive (and they would be right!).

Topic Selection

To begin preparing an after dinner speech you will want to do some audience analysis. You will need to consider who the majority of your audience members will be—college students and coaches—and select a topic that would be humorous to all. You will also want to avoid a topic that would have predictable humor where the audience can figure out the jokes before you say them or predict where you are headed with your speech.

One approach to an after dinner speech that many coaches use is to instruct the student to think in terms of writing a short four to six minute mini informative or persuasive speech and then adding humor to fill the time requirement. This approach allows you unlimited topic possibilities.

The better after dinner topics tend to reflect contemporary trends or pop culture such as information in the news that most people are aware of. This allows the audience to connect to the speech more quickly and be familiar with what you are speaking about. However, you are not limited to a contemporary topic. The ideas are endless. Whatever topic you select, remember that you need to appeal to a specific audience, you must be appropriate for the occasion, and your topic needs to have significance and merit to really do well.

Resources/Research

A competitive after dinner speech must be well researched and include an appropriate number of source citations in the speech. While you will not need as many sources in your ADS as a persuasive or informative speech, you will still need to support your speech very well. While there is no set number of required source citations, between 4 and 7 seems a safe number. You may use more than 7 if the speech justifies or needs more, but you would be in danger of criticism from the judges if you used less than 4.

A good ADS topic with significance needs to be well researched and supported. The type of research you can use is wide open. While you will want to use some qualified sources such as major periodicals, books, or journals, in ADS you can get away with using sources that might be considered inappropriate in other platform speeches. It is not unusual to hear periodicals such as the National Inquirer, USA Today, or Seventeen Magazine cited for the humorous effect in an ADS. However, remember that these types of references should be used just for humor and be used sparingly. If you have too many of these types of sources and depend on them for the core of your research, it could adversely effect your score.

If you use a current event or pop culture topic for your speech, it should be easy to find good sources to use in your speech. Major periodicals such as Psychology Today, Time, or Scientific American can provide a wealth of ideas for ADS topics. Newspapers are also good resources as are news programs such as CNN or even 20/20.

Writing the Speech

Begin writing your ADS as you would any other platform speech. If you have not already read the material in Chapter 2 on how to write a platform speech, then you need to do that before reading any further. You will want to research your speech and outline your main points before you begin. Then, it is a good idea to write the body of the speech first before writing the introduction and the conclusion. The structure and format for the ADS is the same as for all platform speeches. You will want an introduction with an attention getter that introduces the topic, a qualifier to establish the significance of the topic, a clear thesis statement followed by a preview of your main points. The body of the speech should consist of several main points. While not required by any rules, remember that 3 main points tends to be the accepted norm. You may deviate from that norm if the topic allows or justifies it, but 3 is usually the right number of main points to use because of the time limits.

Beginning ADS speechwriters often struggle over how to make the speech funny. Sometimes the material you select is very conducive to humor and the jokes just roll. More often than not, however, the humor has to be cultivated. There are several ways to create humor. One way is to brain storm how to use facts as humor. For example, if your speech topic was anxiety disorders and you discovered in your research that over 4 million Americans suffer from an anxiety disorder, you could build off of that fact by creating a joke such as “over 4 million Americans suffer from an anxiety disorder, and close to 1 million of those were due to the recent invention of plus-sized spandex.” You may feel uncomfortable doing something like this as it may feel as if you are lying. If the joke you wrote is clearly a fabricated attempt at humor based upon a serious fact, then it will be viewed as such by the audience and the judges. ADS caters to this type of speech writing.

Another form of humor development involves either making fun of yourself or a member of the audience. This can be risky and you will not want to overdo it, but it is an option. When you are doing your research watch for stories, examples, and illustrations that can be turned into humorous jokes, situations, or statements in your speech. One approach is to tell a story that really happened and toss in a sarcastic comment or self-deprecating line after the story. As you read through the sample ADS speech in this chapter, watch for how the author *created* humor from the material used. Developing humor from the material makes for a stronger after dinner speech. The body of the speech should use appropriate transition statements and correct source citations. Chapter 2 provides in-depth details about developing these important speech-writing tools.

When preparing your after dinner speech, structure the speech to build up to the conclusion. The conclusion is where you interject your serious point or your point of significance by briefly summarizing what we have learned from your speech. Avoid using a token tag line or randomly tossing out a sentence or two that attempts to justify why your speech is significant. Rather, you want to make sure that as you write the speech, you work toward this end goal and create the speech to build to the conclusion.

Writing the Introduction

You will recall from Chapter 2 that the introduction to the speech should capture the attention of the audience, draw them into the topic, and make them want to listen to the speech. The introduction to your after dinner speech needs to do all of this PLUS be memorable. Great after dinner speeches often build a reputation on the circuit because they have a great attention getter that sets the tone for the entire speech. Remember, this is supposed to be a funny speech so the audience members and the judges are going to enter the round expecting to be entertained! You can capitalize on this expectation by developing a catchy attention getter that gets the audience laughing right away. Try to avoid gimmicks or audience participation activities as they can fall flat and set a very stressful tone for the rest of your speech! Humorous text and a great, confident delivery are often the best tools you can use. The following sections of this chapter will demonstrate how to write an after dinner speech using the topic of anxiety disorders.

Attention Getters

The attention getter is designed to grab the attention of the audience and slowly reveal the speech topic. Never begin your speech with “Today I am going to talk about...” because this introductory statement does little to grab the attention of the audience. Begin with a story, a quotation, or a hypothetical situation that is directly related to the topic. Once you have grabbed the attention of the audience you should reveal the speech topic. This is NOT your thesis statement, just the revealing of the speech topic. Remember, you capture or lose your audience in the first few minutes of your speech.

The sample attention getter below begins by presenting the audience with a series of letters. As the speaker presented each letter, she held up a small piece of cardboard with the letter on the sign. This allowed her to be more entertaining, make some humorous gestures with the signs, and really grab the audience’s attention as they watched her beginning lines. The audience thus gets caught up in the speech right away.

SAMPLE ATTENTION GETTER:

A is for a pop quiz you didn’t study for, N is for not being ready when your date arrives. X is for xylophone the little kid plays upstairs 24 hours a day – I know that one was lame, but X is really hard, okay?!! I is for the icky feeling you get in your stomach when he says he loves you but he’s not in love with you. E is for Elise, the girl he is in love with. T is for the terrible fear of heights, and Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen movies, and Y is for... ummmmm... your momma. What does that spell? ANXIETY. Now, while the word alone brings panic to the minds of many, causes heart palpitations for thousands of women (and Brad Pitt isn’t even in the room), and butterflies in the stomachs of forensics competitors everywhere (and it’s not from all those wonderful early morning tournament bagels).

Qualifier

The purpose of the qualifier is to provide a brief explanation of the significance of the speech topic. It is generally a good idea to cite an expert or provide some sort of source citation in the qualifier. This not only builds your credibility as a speaker but also adds enormous credibility to your topic. The qualifier addresses the question roaming around in the judge's mind of "why is this topic important to do an after dinner speech about?" By addressing those questions early in the introduction you have a much better chance of winning over the judge and receiving the ballot.

In the sample qualifier below the author does not attempt to provide a qualifier that claims some large, life changing significance from this topic. Instead, the author chooses to merely explain that anxiety disorders are devastating to those who experience them and the large number of people who suffer from this disorder justifies a further look at this topic. As with every speech, always check with your coach for the type of qualifier needed in the region where you compete.

SAMPLE QUALIFIER:

Truth be told, anxiety is an emotion experienced by just about everyone – yes, even men have had to acknowledge they possess at least this one emotion from time to time. But while for some, anxiety just means sticking up on a little more Pepto-Bismal, for thousands of others unfortunately, anxiety can cause debilitating panic disorders that inhibit simply day-to-day living. In fact, according to a report published in August 2000 by the National Institute for Mental Health, over 4 million Americans suffer from an anxiety disorder, and close to 1 million of those were due to the recent invention of plus-sized spandex.

Furthermore, as my opening card show indicated, besides why I wasn't a High School cheerleader (among other reasons), was that there are many common causes of anxiety. While these causes can be devastating to those involved, it can also be quite amusing. With an emotion like this so out of control in over 4 million Americans, it certainly warrants further attention.

Thesis Statement

The thesis statement is a single, declarative statement that clearly tells the audience exactly what the speech is going to be about. The thesis statement is a single idea and does not try to present too much information. The thesis statement usually includes some sort of reference to the current moment such as "Today..."

SAMPLE THESIS STATEMENT:

So today, before you start diagnosing yourself, or me, join me for a few minutes as we explore the wonderful world of anxiety.

Preview of Main Points

Before beginning the speech the speaker needs to provide a brief overview of the main points. This allows for better audience retention as well as allowing the judge to write down the main points so she or he may better follow along while you are speaking. The previewed main points need to parallel the same main points in the body of the speech.

SAMPLE PREVIEW OF MAIN POINTS:

Let's first discover what true clinical view of anxiety is, second how a real disorder can affect someone's life, and finally some of the treatments that can be used to get a person back on track.

SAMPLE INTRODUCTION:

A is for a pop quiz you didn't study for, N is for not being ready when your date arrives. X is for xylophone the little kid plays upstairs 24 hours a day – I know that one was lame, but X is really hard, okay?!! I is for the icky feeling you get in your stomach when he says he loves you but he's not in love with you. E is for Elise, the girl he is in love with. T is for the terrible fear of heights, and Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen movies, and Y is for... ummmmm... your momma. What does that spell? ANXIETY. Now, while the word alone brings panic to the minds of many, causes heart palpitations for thousands of women (and Brad Pitt isn't even in the room), and butterflies in the stomachs of forensics competitors everywhere (and it's not from all those wonderful early morning tournament bagels).

Truth be told, anxiety is an emotion experienced by just about everyone – yes, even men have had to acknowledge they possess at least this one emotion from time to time. But while for some, anxiety just means sticking up on a little more Pepto-Bismal, for thousands of others unfortunately, anxiety can cause debilitating panic disorders that inhibit simply day-to-day living. In fact, according to a report published in August 2000 by the National Institute for Mental Health, over 4 million Americans suffer from an anxiety disorder, and close to 1 million of those were due to the recent invention of plus-sized spandex.

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emotion like this so out of control in over 4 million Americans, it certainly warrants further attention.

So today, before you start diagnosing yourself, or me, join me for a few minutes as we explore the wonderful world of anxiety. Let's first discover what true clinical view of anxiety is, second how a real disorder can affect someone's life, and finally some of the treatments that can be used to get a person back on track.

Writing the Body of the ADS

Unlike other platform speeches, such as persuasion, the after dinner speech does not have a set format for the body of the speech. Similar to the informative speech where the topic of the speech can dictate the main points of the body, the ADS topic will dictate how the speech should be written. The topic may lend itself easily to a problem-cause-solution persuasion-based format. The topic may also follow some familiar informative speech formats such as past-present-future, chronological, or spatial.

After doing some initial research on your topic, the information you gather should give you an idea of the direction the speech should go. As always, check with your coach about regional preferences in after dinner speech formats. Some regions of the country may prefer one style to another. Also, if you're initial research does not give you a clear direction, check with your coach to see if she or he can help.

Transitions

Good, solid transitions are essential in a platform speech. Remember from the material on transitions in Chapter 2 that transitions serve as a roadmap for the audience by helping to guide them through the speech. You will want to include transition statements when beginning the body of the speech and between each main point. Also, if you use several sub-points within a main point, you may wish to use transitions between the sub-points as well. Within each main point, an internal transition may help guide the audience through specific areas of the speech. If, for example, one of the main points in the speech were divided into three separate areas, the speaker should guide the audience through the three areas by using simple internal transition statements between each one.

SAMPLE TRANSITION FROM INTRODUCTION TO FIRST POINT:

Let's begin our adventure today by understanding what anxiety really is.

SAMPLE TRANSITION FROM FIRST POINT TO SECOND POINT:

So now that we know exactly what type of anxiety we are talking about, and a few of my personal worries that I probably should not have shared, let's turn our attention to how generalized anxiety can affect one's lifestyle and potential.

SAMPLE TRANSITION FROM SECOND POINT TO THIRD POINT:

Okay, now that we understand what defines a clinically anxious person and why I celebrate Valentine's Day as Single Awareness Day, and how this disorder can adversely affect one's life, let's look at some of the ways to deal with this problem.

Source Citations

Earlier in this chapter you were instructed to use ample source citations in the body of the speech. Remember that you do not have to have an excessive amount of citations such as 10-12, but you will need to have some. Also, since this is an after dinner speech, you may use some source citations that might not be considered credible in other platform speeches. Often in ADS you can use the source citation to introduce a fact into the speech that you can develop into a humorous story or illustration.

Good research will produce a well-written speech. A well-written speech will need to include source citations to identify where the information in the speech was discovered. Remember to use your citations to your advantage so they do not bog the speech down in heavy details, but rather set the stage for your humor. Below is a sample body of an after dinner speech on the topic of anxiety disorders. Watch for how the author develops the humor, uses source citations, uses transitions, and concludes the speech by addressing the true severity of the topic.

SAMPLE AFTER DINNER SPEECH BODY:

Let's begin our adventure today by understanding what anxiety really is. According to the October 2000 issue of Heath Magazine, anxiety is the biggest mental health issue facing women today. But what exactly is a clinical view of anxiety? Let's take me for example, I mean what do I really have to worry about? Okay, so maybe I worry because I can't exactly fit into the suit I bought my freshman year of high school, whether I will really get the four-carat diamond engagement ring on page 56 of Martha Stewart's wedding magazine, and whether Keanu Reeves really has three new movies coming out in the next two years! And while I may have a few issues to get over, each of these individual worries do not diagnose me with an anxiety disorder. The previously sighted Health Magazine states that generalized anxiety is "worrying that last at least six months with symptoms such as restlessness, irritability, muscle tension and insomnia." Though I may temporarily freak out about the prospects of the star of Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure, worry is not something that rules my life.

Dr. Howard Liebold, chairman of Phobias at Kaiser Permanente Hospitals notes seven habits of truly highly anxious people: 1) Jumping to conclusions – such as Al Gore's deluded belief that he has invented among other things, the Internet, the microwave oven, and the nose flute 2) believing you must be perfect – for example Michael Jackson's recent 43rd

plastic surgery 3) seeing the world in black and white – John Ashcroft, need I say more? 4) taking things personally – the Reverend Jesse Jackson, he’s been taking things really personally lately if you know what I mean 5) keeping secrets – how the Clinton marriage survives 6) winging it – how the Clinton marriage survives 7) suppressing your feelings – how the Clinton marriage survives.

In an article in the December 2000 edition of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Dr. Jean M. Twenge writes that “Americans have shifted toward substantially higher levels of both anxiety and neuroticism during recent decades.” And unfortunately this increase in generalized anxiety can lead to the increase of many more serious forms of mental health disorders such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, panic disorder, and Brittany Spears fan-club membership. For our purposes today, we will stick with the discussion of anxiety, because my other personalities would be insulted if I try to make light of their reality.

So now that we know exactly what type of anxiety we are talking about, and a few of my personal worries that I probably should not have shared, let’s turn our attention to how generalized anxiety can affect one’s lifestyle and potential.

Jane Meredith Adams, writer and recovering panic disorder sufferer, jokes about those who suffer from anxiety disorders by noting in the October 2000 edition of Health Magazine that “being a skittish introvert used to be an option for women. But if Emily Dickinson were around today, she’d be popping Paxil to get pumped for Oprah’s Book Club.” The reality is that in today’s world, especially the business one, there is no room or time for those with anxiety disorders. A boss doesn’t want to hear five minutes before a meeting that you can’t do your presentation because all the toupees in the room creep you out.

The two most serious side effects are depression and failed relationships—two problems that usually go hand in hand. Many people suffering from an anxiety disorder try to minimize their panic attacks by staying home and sticking to only the most mundane and routine of tasks. This causes a depressing rut, and the failure of many neglected relationships. Many of us have seen the Academy award winning movie “As Good As It Gets” in which Jack Nicholson plays a man plagued with an obsessive-compulsive disorder. Although in his spare time Jack has been known to smash in the windows of cars that cut him off in traffic, his performance shows the difficulties of someone with an anxiety disorder. He cannot walk down the street normally because his brain tells him to jump over all of the cracks in the sidewalk and only walk on the white

tiled squares in his apartment. Although often amusing, his life is lonely, painful and meaningless – just like Brittany Spears.

Okay, now that we understand what defines a clinically anxious person and why I celebrate Valentine’s Day as Single Awareness Day, and how this disorder can adversely affect one’s life, let’s look at some of the ways to deal with this problem.

As noted in the February 2001 edition of The American Journal of Psychiatry, there have been many offered solutions to the problems of anxiety, some more outrageous than others. The first and most obvious would be that of medication, or drugs. Lots and lots of drugs. From Ambien to Zolpidem, Chlorodiazepoxide to Valium, Doral to Tranxene, there is a medication for every form of anxiety disorder. And while these drugs may temporarily allow a sufferer to enjoy an entire episode of Temptation Island, it will not be a long-term solution.

The Internet as well offers many forms of treatment. For example, Dr. Barrie Kornicov advertises in the Internet that he can heal many different anxiety-causing agents with a hypnotic audiotape. On his website, Dr. Kornicov claims that by listening to his tapes as you go to sleep, you can have freedom from acne, remove warts, housekeep with love, attract love, control jetlag, get natural bust enlargement, and have healthy teeth and gums. I don’t know if you can tell. But I don’t think they worked. Many other Internet sites such as Mycybershrink.com, Anxiety Coach, and Brightlife.com are also willing to help for a fee. And while many of these programs sound beneficial, their prices and promises may suggest otherwise.

Then there is my personal favorite treatment: 100% pure Kava Kava. In its many forms of powders, pills and extracts, it is all Piper Methysticum and comes from the island of Hawaii. Kava is advertised to make your mouth tingle. Perfect for stressed out college students, overwrought grandparents, and judges stuck with three straight rounds of Novice poetry. Kava gives people the ability to gather and relax. It is said to be a mild narcotic creating a “euphoric, clear minded state in which the drinker cannot be annoyed.”

But seriously, with few exceptions therapists and psychologists all agree that counseling and support groups are the only true way to the road of recovery. It is only with one on one discussion, encouragement, and accountability that deeper issues can be revealed and true recovery achieved.

The Conclusion

The conclusion to the after dinner speech is designed to wrap up the speech and tie everything together. Avoid providing important information or compelling arguments in the conclusion. Humor of course is always appropriate and ending your speech with a good laugh is just as important as beginning the speech with a good laugh. You will remember from Chapter 2 that there are three distinct parts to the conclusion: summary or restatement of the thesis, a review of the main points, and a closing statement or thought.

Review of Thesis

Upon completing the body of your speech you need to move into the conclusion section of your speech. This transition is generally accomplished by giving a simple review of your thesis statement. Your goal is to briefly remind the audience of what the speech topic was. You do not need to engage in a lengthy explanation. Generally a one-sentence statement will suffice. You should speak in the past tense since the speech is over and you can modify the thesis slightly to adapt to the information you have presented in the speech. However, remember to keep the thesis review brief and simple. In our sample ADS on anxiety disorders, the author briefly refers to the speech topic.

SAMPLE REVIEW OF THESIS:

Today we've spent a few minutes exploring anxiety.

Review of Main Points

At this point in the speech your goal is to provide a brief review of the main concepts in the body of the speech. Whereas the **preview** of the main points in the introduction gave the audience a sense of direction as to where the speech was headed, the **review** of main points is designed to quickly remind the audience of what they just heard. The review also serves to aid the retention of information. Generally the review should mirror the preview since both parts address the main points of the speech. However, the review does not have to present the exact same wording. Since you have provided the audience with a great deal of information regarding your topic in the body of the speech, the review can reflect the information presented. Often due to the time constraints of competition, the review may be reduced to serving merely a functional form rather than providing any lengthy dialogue.

SAMPLE REVIEW OF MAIN POINTS:

We discovered what true clinical anxiety is, second how a real disorder can affect someone's life, and finally reviewed some of the treatments that can be used to get a person back on track.

Closing Statement

Your speech is not complete until you have provided a solid closing statement or comment that leaves the audience with a good closing/summary of your entire speech. Some speakers may make a brief statement, provide a short story, or tie the attention getter back into the speech. Whatever you chose to use to close your speech the closing should be brief, not contain any really important information, and should not consume too much time. Remember, in tournament competition your time is limited and you want to avoid going overtime. Often a speech is rapidly approaching the ten-minute mark and the closing statement needs to be quick and brief yet appropriate to get the job done.

In the sample ADS speech, the author selected to tie in her attention getting devise of showing cards with the letters spelling “anxiety” as she summarized her speech. She used the letters to summarize different aspects of information reviewed in the speech.

SAMPLE CLOSING STATEMENT:

We’ve seen that though **A**ll people have worries, **N**ot all have a clinical problem. We discovered that an anxiety disorder such as **X**enophobia can **I**nstigate moods of depression and the failure of close relationships. Finally we looked at treatments and got an **E**arful on hypnosis, and thought about **T**rippin’ out on Kava Kava. And when we get to the last letter, the only thing to say is **Y**es, I’m done now.

SAMPLE CONCLUSION:

Today we’ve spent a few minutes exploring anxiety. We discovered what true clinical anxiety is, second how a real disorder can affect someone’s life, and finally reviewed some of the treatments that can be used to get a person back on track. We’ve seen that though **A**ll people have worries, **N**ot all have a clinical problem. We discovered that an anxiety disorder such as **X**enophobia can **I**nstigate moods of depression and the failure of close relationships. Finally we looked at treatments and got an **E**arful on hypnosis, and thought about **T**rippin’ out on Kava Kava. And when we get to the last letter, the only thing to say is **Y**es, I’m done now.

Sample After Dinner Speech

The following manuscript is a sample after dinner speech complete with all of the required structure and organization components. All of the sample components presented in this chapter has been combined to create a single complete manuscript. Use this manuscript as a guideline when preparing your own after dinner speech. As always, check with your coach for regional preferences for after dinner speaking.

SAMPLE AFTER DINNER SPEECH:

A is for a pop quiz you didn't study for, N is for not being ready when your date arrives. X is for xylophone the little kid plays upstairs 24 hours a day – I know that one was lame, but X is really hard, okay?!! I is for the icky feeling you get in your stomach when he says he loves you but he's not in love with you. E is for Elise, the girl he is in love with. T is for the terrible fear of heights, and Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen movies, and Y is for... ummmmm... your momma. What does that spell? ANXIETY. Now, while the word alone brings panic to the minds of many, causes heart palpitations for thousands of women (and Brad Pitt isn't even in the room), and butterflies in the stomachs of forensics competitors everywhere (and it's not from all those wonderful early morning tournament bagels). Truth be told, anxiety is an emotion experienced by just about everyone – yes, even men have had to acknowledge they possess at least this one emotion from time to time. But while for some, anxiety just means sticking up on a little more Pepto-Bismal, for thousands of others unfortunately, anxiety can cause debilitating panic disorders that inhibit simply day-to-day living. In fact, according to a report published in August 2000 by the National Institute for Mental Health, over 4 million Americans suffer from an anxiety disorder, and close to 1 million of those were due to the recent invention of plus-sized spandex. Furthermore, as my opening card show indicated, besides why I wasn't a High School cheerleader (among other reasons), was that there are many common causes of anxiety. While these causes can be devastating to those involved, it can also be quite amusing. With an emotion like this so out of control in over 4 million Americans, it certainly warrants further attention. So today, before you start diagnosing yourself, or me, join me for a few minutes as we explore the wonderful world of anxiety. Let's first discover what true clinical view of anxiety is, second how a real disorder can affect someone's life, and finally some of the treatments that can be used to get a person back on track.

Let's begin our adventure today by understanding what anxiety really is. According to the October 2000 issue of Heath Magazine, anxiety is the biggest mental health issue facing women today. But what exactly is a clinical view of anxiety? Let's take me for example, I mean what do I really have to worry about? Okay, so maybe I worry because I can't exactly fit into the suit I bought my freshman year of high school, whether

I will really get the four-carat diamond engagement ring on page 56 of Martha Stewart's wedding magazine, and whether Keanu Reeves really has three new movies coming out in the next two years! And while I may have a few issues to get over, each of these individual worries do not diagnose me with an anxiety disorder. The previously sighted Health Magazine states that generalized anxiety is "worrying that last at least six months with symptoms such as restlessness, irritability, muscle tension and insomnia." Though I may temporarily freak out about the prospects of the star of Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure, worry is not something that rules my life. Dr. Howard Liebold, chairman of Phobias at Kaiser Permanente Hospitals notes seven habits of truly highly anxious people: 1) Jumping to conclusions – such as Al Gore's deluded belief that he has invented among other things, the Internet, the microwave oven, and the nose flute 2) believing you must be perfect – for example Michael Jackson's recent 43rd plastic surgery 3) seeing the world in black and white – John Ashcroft, need I say more? 4) taking things personally – the Reverend Jesse Jackson, he's been taking things really personally lately if you know what I mean 5) keeping secrets – how the Clinton marriage survives 6) winging it – how the Clinton marriage survives 7) suppressing your feelings – how the Clinton marriage survives. In an article in the December 2000 edition of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Dr. Jean M. Twenge writes that "Americans have shifted toward substantially higher levels of both anxiety and neuroticism during recent decades." And unfortunately this increase in generalized anxiety can lead to the increase of many more serious forms of mental health disorders such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, schizophrenia, panic disorder, and Brittany Spears fan club membership. For our purposes today, we will stick with the discussion of anxiety, because my other personalities would be insulted if I try to make light of their reality.

So now that we know exactly what type of anxiety we are talking about, and a few of my personal worries that I probably should not have shared, let's turn our attention to how generalized anxiety can affect one's lifestyle and potential. Jane Meredith Adams, writer and recovering panic disorder sufferer, jokes about those who suffer from anxiety disorders by noting in the October 2000 edition of Health Magazine that "being a skittish introvert used to be an option for women. But if Emily Dickinson were around today, she'd be popping Paxil to get pumped for Oprah's Book Club." The reality is that in today's world, especially the business one, there is no room or time for those with anxiety disorders. A boss doesn't want to hear five minutes before a meeting that you can't do your presentation because all the toupees in the room creep you out. The two most serious side effects are depression and failed relationships – two problems that usually go hand in hand. Many people suffering from an anxiety disorder try to minimize their panic attacks by staying home and sticking to only the most mundane and routine of tasks. This causes a

depressing rut, and the failure of many neglected relationships. Many of us have seen the Academy award-winning movie “As Good As It Gets” in which Jack Nicholson plays a man plagued with an obsessive-compulsive disorder. Although in his spare time Jack has been known to smash in the windows of cars that cut him off in traffic, his performance shows the difficulties of someone with an anxiety disorder. He cannot walk down the street normally because his brain tells him to jump over all of the cracks in the sidewalk and only walk on the white tiled squares in his apartment. Although often amusing, his life is lonely, painful and meaningless – just like Brittany Spears.

Okay, now that we understand what defines a clinically anxious person and why I celebrate Valentine’s Day as Single Awareness Day, and how this disorder can adversely affect one’s life, let’s look at some of the ways to deal with this problem. As noted in the February 2001 edition of The American Journal of Psychiatry, there have been many offered solutions to the problems of anxiety, some more outrageous than others. The first and most obvious would be that of medication, or drugs. Lots and lots of drugs. From Ambien to Zolpidem, Chlorodiazepoxide to Valium, Doral to Tranxene, there is a medication for every form of anxiety disorder. And while these drugs may temporarily allow a sufferer to enjoy an entire episode of Temptation Island, it will not be a long-term solution. The Internet as well offers many forms of treatment. For example, Dr. Barrie Kornicov advertises in the Internet that he can heal many different anxiety causing agents with a hypnotic audio tape. On his website, Dr. Kornicov claims that by listening to his tapes as you go to sleep, you can have freedom from acne, remove warts, housekeep with love, attract love, control jetlag, get natural bust enlargement, and have healthy teeth and gums. I don’t know if you can tell. But I don’t think they worked. Many other Internet sites such as Mycybershrink.com, Anxiety Coach, and Brightlife.com are also willing to help for a fee. And while many of these programs sound beneficial, their prices and promises may suggest otherwise. Then there is my personal favorite treatment: 100% pure Kava Kava. In its many forms of powders, pills and extracts, it is all Piper Methysticum and comes from the island of Hawaii. Kava is advertised to make your mouth tingle. Perfect for stressed out college students, overwrought grandparents, and judges stuck with three straight rounds of Novice poetry. Kava gives people the ability to gather and relax. It is said to be a mild narcotic creating a “euphoric, clear minded state in which the drinker cannot be annoyed.” But seriously, with few exceptions therapists and psychologists all agree that counseling and support groups are the only true way to the road of recovery. It is only with one on one discussion, encouragement, and accountability that deeper issues can be revealed and true recovery achieved.

Today we've spent a few minutes exploring anxiety. We discovered what true clinical anxiety is, second how a real disorder can affect someone's life, and finally reviewed some of the treatments that can be used to get a person back on track. We've seen that though **A**ll people have worries, **N**ot all have a clinical problem. We discovered that an anxiety disorder such as **X**enophobia can **I**nstigate moods of depression and the failure of close relationships. Finally we looked at treatments and got an **E**arful on hypnosis, and thought about **T**rippin' out on Kava Kava. And when we get to the last letter, the only thing to say is **Y**es, I'm done now.

Practice Tips

Often, one of the biggest challenges in writing an after dinner speech is making the speech funny. Beginning speechwriters often feel they are not funny or are not able to develop humor from the research material. That is normal and everyone experiences those frustrations. The best way to overcome that problem is to not work alone. Do not feel as if you have to develop all of your material on your own. This does not mean that you can let someone else write your speech for you, but that you should have organized brainstorming sessions with your friends, fellow teammates, or your coach.

After you research and write the basic outline for your speech, schedule a get-together with some people you trust who will be honest with you. Take copies of your speech to the meeting and have your friends read through the script with you. When you come to a section that could use some humor (for example, in the sample speech in the introduction where the author made a reference to 4 million Americans who experience anxiety disorder) and brainstorm how to make a joke out of that (such as the 1 million due to plus-size spandex joke). If you are lucky enough to be on a team where several of you are writing after dinner speeches, then try to plan a team ADS brainstorming session—maybe have dinner together and just sit around and go over each person's speech and work together to develop the humor. You never know what you can come up with as a group. Great comedians and all situation comedies on television have teams of writers that work together to develop the humor. Your speech is no different. Ask your family, roommates, friends, anyone who you can get to look at your script. The same brainstorming drill can work even if you are still in the topic development stage. Bounce your topic ideas off of each other and work to develop different directions the speech could go. A group brainstorming session may help you develop the main points to the body of the speech.

Visual Aids and Props

It is not uncommon to see visual aids and props used in after dinner speaking. However, remember that visual aids are NOT required and are optional. Visual aids and props should only be used when they highlight, enhance, or add to the speech. You should never rely on the visual aid to be your humor. Since this is a speech competition, judges tend to look more closely at the content of the speech, the material you have

written, as the basis for their decision. If you stood there and held up very funny props or had visual aids that were hilarious, but that was all your speech was really about, then judges will tend to mark you down. The content of the speech should carry the humor, *not* your delivery or your props.

However, if in the course of your speech you can use a visual aid to support or complement your humor, you will find the judges more tolerant of those types of visual aids. For example, in the sample after dinner speech in this chapter, the speaker began her speech by spelling out the word “anxiety” and using each letter to represent an anxiety-provoking situation. As she said each letter (A . . .N . . .X, etc.) she held up a small piece of cardboard that had the letter on it she was saying at that moment. These visual aids complemented the presentation and highlighted what the speaker was doing—spelling a word.

Your delivery should also complement the speech. You might be a very gifted impersonator and able to make people laugh with your great impersonations. However, your speech should not be dependent upon your clever delivery in order to create the humor. That does not mean that you cannot do a quick face and/or voice impersonation here and there. But remember, judges want to see the content carry the speech and create the humor, not the delivery.

Delivery

The after dinner speech should be delivered with a great deal of energy and confidence. Your speech should always be memorized. There is nothing more un-funny than a person reading a manuscript in an ADS round. Reading a manuscript kills your timing and prevents you from developing a relationship with your audience. Of all the platform events, ADS tends to be the one speech that really requires the speaker to develop a rapport with the audience. The audience needs to connect with you in order to be entertained and laugh at your material. If you are nervous, cold, and stoic in your delivery, then you risk alienating your audience and your speech could flop.

Delivering an after dinner speech also requires you to learn to hold your speech for laughter. If you practice your speech by yourself without an audience and the speech is timed at 9:50, then chances are you are going to go overtime in the round. When audience members begin laughing you will need to wait until the laughter has subsided before continuing. This can eat up your time more than you realize. Once you get to a final round and have a large audience, your 9:50 speech can quickly run 13:00 or 14:00 minutes! Many tournaments allow for this and instruct the judges to not time the final rounds of ADS and penalize students for prolonged laughter. But be careful; do not assume that is the case. Not every tournament does this and not every judge grants dispensation for final round laughter. It is safer to prepare a shorter speech, around 8:30, to allow for laughter in the round.

Conclusion

You are now ready to prepare an after dinner speech. Remember to look for a topic that is current and possibly reflects pop culture. Work with your teammates to brainstorm the humor. Memorize your speech and work on an energetic, captivating delivery. And work to learn how to develop your timing so you can work the audience. Have fun!!

¹ Southern Utah University Forensics Event Descriptions, 8 June 2000, Dept. of SpeechCommunication, 29 Jul. 2003 <<http://www.suu.edu/hss/comm/forensics/event.html#ies>>.