

4.9.8: Putting It Together- Public Speaking

Becoming a public speaker is a rite of passage, an event that marks one's emergence as a business or civic leader. Unlike a title that generally requires an external award decision, the accompanying change in status is a role you assume. Of course, being an effective oral communicator entails having something to say—that is, a compelling point of view, a truism captured in this simile: “A good speech is like a pencil; it has to have a point.”

As with any leadership role, oral communication also involves responsibilities. While we all have the right to free expression, we also have the responsibility to exercise that right thoughtfully. This means applying critical thinking and conducting credible research in order to develop both our position and supporting arguments. As an orator, you also have the responsibility to use your communication skills ethically.

Public speaking isn't all upside and addressing feel-good topics. Taking a stand involves risk and requires courage. Of course, there's risk in any decision, and sometimes inaction is riskier because it allows others or current circumstances to decide for you. We also have the opportunity to use our platform to inspire change and to be the change. As Eivor Taylor put it: “There is no ‘they.’ We are the only ones who can make [the] change.”



Figure 1. Parkland students at a political rally. Protect Kids Not Guns, Students participating in National Walkout Day at the Capitol, Washington DC. **Authored by:** Lorie Shaull. **Provided by:** flickr. **Located at:** <https://www.flickr.com/photos/number7cloud/38999219860>. **License:** CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike

For perspective, consider the #NeverAgain gun control movement started by some survivors of the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. As Atlantic contributing editor Michelle Cottle noted in her “[How Parkland Students Changed the Gun Debate](#)” article, these teens have the training to express themselves and the confidence that they will be heard. At a rally, Stoneman Douglas senior Emma Gonzalez stated, “Every single person up here today, all these people should be home grieving. But instead we are up here standing together, because if all our government and president can do is send thoughts and prayers, then it’s time for victims to be the change that we need to see.” For perspective on the people behind the movement, read the *New Yorker* article “[How the Survivors of Parkland Began the Never Again movement](#).”

Becoming an effective public speaker can be transformational—for you personally, for your audience, for the cause or brand you represent, and for society. Reflect on the stories that have shaped your personal and career development as well as your understanding of the world and your place in it. What if you had a superpower that gave you that type of influence, the power to shape business practices, public policy, or “the way things work” in any number of areas of human endeavor? Public speaking can be that superpower.

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