

Oscar night! But brace yourself; they let them speak



By [Douglas Kruger](#)

2 Mar 2011

Who are the worst speakers on the planet? No, politicians come in a close second. The answer, curiously, is: the best actors on the planet. That's right, Oscar night has rolled around again, and although there is no denying their consummate mastery of the thespian's craft - the emotional complexity required for *Inception*, the simple yet elegant storytelling of *The King's Speech* - their public speaking skills leave, well... public speaking skills to be desired.

There's something profoundly disappointing about seeing your heroes botch the most important moment of their lives. And it's not like they haven't had time to prepare. Granted, some of the more dim-witted among them do espouse that it's bad luck, because that will apparently anger the little gods of the Golden Globe, the imps of the Oscars, the dark angels of the Emmy's, who will, in turn, withhold glory from their superstitious clutches.

But for grown-ups who believe in professionalism, higher standards are attainable. That said, here are my guidelines for future Oscar acceptance speeches. (Keep 'em in your pocket just in case you win one, one day):

Rule number one: Say something! ...or say nothing at all

Flustering about how surprised you are, and how you just can't believe it, and how amazing and unexpected this all is, is galactically boring. Plus, by the time the third speaker does it, it's starting to look a little silly. A good speech doesn't have to be a long speech - in fact Oscar speeches are very limited in duration - but it must have content. Say something profound. Say something meaningful. Just one thing. And once you've done that, sit down again. Job done!

Rule number two: Keep it clean

Did you notice the meteorite strike in the middle of the civility? It happened when *The Fighter's* Melissa Leo dropped the f-bomb. The elegant but rather surprised hostess, Anne Hathaway, did a superb job of recovering the tone of the evening. But why should she have to? There is no right moment in public speaking for that level of obscenity. It wasn't charming, playful or quirky. Frankly, it was just ugly. Never, never, never do it!

But what about special circumstances?

Ah! Well, in that case, here is the rule: never, never, never do it!

Rule number three: Don't ever speak from the heart

The heart is surprisingly slippery and inaccessible when flooded with adrenaline. Don't trust it. Instead, access the heart in the quiet moments beforehand; in your study as you write your speech, when your heart is under your control. That way you will be able to deliver its contents faithfully and competently under the bright lights, in the face of the deafening applause, when your heart has been reduced to a frothy, gibbering mass of emotion, cowering behind your rib-cage.

Interestingly, the best speakers are writers. Turn of phrase is a beautiful thing. The right line, at the right time, can make our imaginations sit up and take notice. It can even cause us to catch our breath and well with tears. It was interesting to see that, without exception, the best acceptance speeches on the night came not from the actors, but from the writers. It goes to show: a fabulous spontaneous line takes hours to prepare.

Great speaking, like great acting, takes preparation and practice. Fortunately, there is an oratory equivalent to the Oscars in the form of the World Championships for Public Speaking. Now, if only we could get Melissa Leo to sign up for a course!

ABOUT DOUGLAS KRUGER

Douglas Kruger is the bestselling author of nine business books with Penguin, including the global release: *Virus-Proof Your Small Business*. Meet him at www.douglaskruger.com or email info@douglaskrugerspeaker.com

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