

CHAPTER 17

THE MEDIA MODEL IN PUBLIC FORUM DEBATE

We live in a media age where the fifteen-second sound bite rules. The media orientation of audiences has redefined the practice of persuasion for politicians, public relations specialists, and marketing executives, as well as for educators. Public forum debate was designed specifically for the purpose of helping students become more media savvy. The event's media focus arises from the following elements:

- The format is designed to mirror the one-half hour current events journalistic exchange.
- The topics are ripped from the headlines.
- Participants are encouraged to engage other panel members in a free-flowing exchange.
- Judges are encouraged to value persuasive speaking skills above the sheer number of arguments or the volume of supporting evidence.

So what skills are involved in becoming media savvy? To answer that question, I have consulted the work of Barbara Gibson, an accredited business communicator, who is the founder and president of SpokesComm. The advice in this chapter adapts the recommendations for media spokespersons to the procedures of public forum debate.

IT ALL STARTS WITH CHARISMA

Audiences are more likely to be persuaded by speakers who make a personal connection with them. Aristotle simply referred to this quality as *ethos*. Many people mistakenly assume that charisma is something you are just born with (or without). But with work and practice, you can improve your believability and likeability. Receiving and adjusting to feedback is an important part of this process. Work at focusing attention on your listener and making your subject matter interesting and accessible. Find some angle on the topic about which you can be passionate—perhaps it is a story of some outrageous wrong you discovered in the course of your research. Passion makes you more dynamic and interesting.

TAKING CHARGE