

LOSING THE ARROGANCE

Audiences love to root against a bully. Media coach Barbara Gibson reports that “from the hundreds of conversations I’ve had with PR people, it’s clear to me that arrogance is the greatest weakness of most of the corporate spokespeople out there.” I can report that arrogance is also a major problem for debaters. Judges will reward you when you show respect for your opponent and a requisite amount of courtesy.

FOR EXAMPLE

Some repetitive phrases should be avoided, but this one should be cultivated. If your opponent asks a question during crossfire, consider starting your answer with this phrase: Let me give you an example Examples aid understanding, and it will seem unreasonable for your opponent to insist on a yes or no answer when you are doing your best to explain.

As you prepare for a debate, try to think of examples for every key message you want to communicate. The examples can be real, fictional, or hypothetical (although you should always let your listener know whether the example is real or imaginary).

TELLING A STORY

Storytelling is an important skill in the media age. The goal should be to draw the listener into the story by making sure that it has descriptive detail and a clear moral. As you do research on the current public forum topic, you will probably encounter numerous human interest stories illustrating the importance of each point of view. This is actually a method of support that journalists cultivate; they do so because they know readers want human interest stories. You can make use of this same characteristic of the media as you prepare for your debate rounds.

The policy debater might ignore these human interest stories and record only the statistic or statement of authoritative support. In public forum debate, however, you should pay special attention to the supporting stories.

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Media messages are all about *framing*, meaning the context from which to view an issue. Tony Palmieri, professor of communication at the University of Wisconsin,