

Mahlon Thatcher died years ago,
But that tradition lives on today
In this bank.

Churchill, as I discuss in my book *Churchill: Speaker of the Century*, discovered this secret of changing the old typed article layout into a format approaching that of verse.

Students tell me that this way of laying out a talk into phrases is the most useful advice they have taken away from my Language of Leadership class. One student told me:

Professor Humes, it made me focus on the fact that it was an oral presentation that I was to deliver—that I couldn't just write an article and read it aloud.

Change your format to Churchill's. Lay out your lines like a leader, and you'll sound like one.

Power Line

These words like daggers enter in my ears.

—WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

In *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, more pages of quotations belong to Winston Churchill than any other author of the twentieth century.

John Kennedy once said: "Churchill mobilized the English language and sent it into his battle." His words steeled his countrymen's resolve. The historian, Arnold Toynbee wrote this of Churchill: "His speeches spelled the difference between survival and defeat." His wartime addresses contained many memorable lines, what I call Power Lines.

There is a secret to coining a Power Line. And I doubt it will surprise you that Winston Churchill reportedly came up with a formula that's easily remembered by its acronym: C-R-E-A-M, which stands for Contrast—Rhyme—Echo—Alliteration—Metaphor. Just as cream rises to the top in a bottle of unhomogenized milk, the lines created with these five elements will stay uppermost in a listener's mind.

Opposites Attract

For *Contrast*, note this Churchill quotation:

If the present quarrels with the past, surely the future will already have been lost.

Another Churchill use of contrast is his statement after the British victory in Egypt at Tobruk in 1942.

This is not the end, nay, not even the beginning of the end, but it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.

Churchill also minted this memorable line:

There is only one answer to defeat and that is victory.

If you want to coin your own Power Line, try pairing these antonyms. Take one word for the first part of the sentence and then its opposite for the second part.

Present	—	Past (or Future)
Beginning	—	End
Dark	—	Light
Mountain	—	Valley
Rich	—	Poor
Friend	—	Foe
Gain	—	Loss
Hope	—	Despair
Victory	—	Defeat
Day	—	Night
Win	—	Lose
Sunshine	—	Shadow
Truth	—	Lies
Plant	—	Reap
Triumph	—	Tragedy
Save	—	Spend
Laugh	—	Cry
War	—	Peace

The late Hubert Humphrey, one of the Democratic Party's finest orators in the last century, used this technique. At the party convention in Philadelphia in 1948, his civil rights speech caused a walkout of the Southern Democrats. His ringing oration carried this Power Line:

Let us move out of the shadow of states' rights into the sunshine of human rights.

Abraham Lincoln wielded contrasting words in this Power Line. He explained his political stance when he opposed the extension of slavery:

As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master.

Alexander Hamilton in his draft for Washington's Farewell Address in 1797 paired these antonyms for this aphorism:

The best means of insuring peace is to be prepared for war.

By the time of the American Revolution, Benjamin Franklin had spawned a large collection of quotations—punchy maxims that he used to liven up the pages on weather and crops in his *Almanac*. He called them "The Sayings of Poor Richard." (Richard Saunders was the fictional editor of Franklin's *Almanac*. Franklin posed only as the printer, for he didn't want to get blamed for inaccurate weather forecasts!) Contrast was a favorite technique of Franklin's. Here are several examples of "Poor Richard" adages using contrast:

Half the truth is often a great lie.

There never was a good war or bad peace.

If you would keep your secret from an enemy, tell it not to a friend.

Never leave that for tomorrow which you can do today.

THERE IS A SECRET TO
COINING A POWER LINE:
C-R-E-A-M, WHICH
STANDS FOR CONTRAST—
RHYME—ECHO—
ALLITERATION—
METAPHOR.

It is easy to craft an outstanding line with opposites. For example, I supplied this line for a CEO to include in an annual report for a stockholders' meeting:

If the fantastic growth statistics for the past year, 1987, are any guide, we have unbounded hopes for the future."

Rhyme Is the Prime Ploy

The second phrase technique Churchill sometimes exploited—*Rhyme*—is perhaps the most ancient of storyteller's tricks. Homer, the Hellenic blind poet, ensured that bards in future generations would tell his tales of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* by chanting rhymes with lyre accompaniment.

In what some would call Churchill's greatest speech, at Fulton, Missouri, on March 5, 1946, note how he sets up the phrase "Iron Curtain" with a rhyme of two seas.

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended upon the continent of Europe.

That illustrates the use of the internal rhyme—more subtle than the hard-beat rhymes of the nursery. Here's another use of internal rhyme by Churchill:

Out of intense complexities, intense simplicities emerge.
Humanity, not legality, should be our guide.

Churchill also would mock his socialist foes with these rhyming nouns:

These professional intellectuals who revel in decimals and polysyllables . . .

Benjamin Franklin, with his Poor Richard sayings, preferred more obvious sing-song rhymes, such as these:

An apple a day keeps the doctor away.

Little strokes fell great oaks.

Or perhaps his most quoted maxim:

Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.

Franklin Roosevelt, in vetoing an act of Congress, also used rhyme when he declared:

This is not an act providing relief for the needy but for the greedy.

In modern times, Jesse Jackson has built a career as a civil rights activist by rousing audiences with rhymes such as this one:

There is no hope for those who use dope.

Ted Sorensen, a speechwriter for Kennedy, told me he kept on his desk, as Churchill did, a rhyming dictionary (a pocket edition that you can purchase for five dollars). For Kennedy to use in his inaugural address, Sorensen penned this feminine rhyme (a rhyme in which the strong syllable is the next to the last one):

Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belaboring those problems that divide us.

On another occasion Sorensen drafted this sentence for Kennedy:

In a world of mass extermination, nations must turn to the rule of self-determination.

Former president Richard Nixon wrote this subtle rhyme in 1984:

Faith may move mountains, but faith without might is futile and might without faith is sterile.

Dr. Martin Luther King, well known for his poetic speeches, wrote this from the Birmingham jail:

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

Rhyming Nine

Versifiers as well as speechwriters often turn to the Rhyming Nine—AME, AIR, ITE, AKE, OW, AY, ATE, EEM, AIN—for coining “zinger” lines.

Here are the nine, along with some examples:

1. AME: aim, blame, claim, fame, name, shame, same, game, reclaim proclaim, flame

I heard one executive say this to his board:

We cannot remain the same company unless we reclaim the market we once had.

2. AIR: bear, care, dare, fare, fair, share, aware, swear, pare, declare, where, scare, prayer, beware

3. ITE: bite, cite, fight, fright, height, light, night, right, quite, sight, write, delight foresight, ignite, tonight

At an annual meeting I attended, a CEO announced:

If we are going to make it work—to do it right—the only real and right course is to keep our goals in sight.

4. AKE: ache, break, fake, sake, shake, stake, take, make, awake, undertake, mistake

I heard an executive say this:

Make no mistake, much is at stake in this new venture.

5. OW: dough, flow, foe, glow, go, grow, know, low, show, slow, throw, ago

6. AY: day, pray, stay, say, way, pay, play, away, stray, they, array, display

7. ATE: ate, date, fate, great, late, state, slate, straight, wait, weight, abate, donate

8. EEM: beam, cream, dream, gleam, steam, scheme, seem, stream, team, theme, esteem, redeem

A CEO of a pharmaceutical company, in speaking to his researchers on their search for new cures, said this:

There is no dream beyond reach when we have in place here at Bristol-Myers the right team.

9. AIN: gain, pain, plain, reign, stain, strain, wane, vein, attain, retain, regain, explain, remain, sustain

Perhaps you can adopt this line of Adlai Stevenson's:

There are no gains without pains.

Play around with any of the sounds in the Rhyming Nine, and you can come up with your own ringing line. Remember you need only one for a talk. Make it one that defines the problem or reinforces the solution.

VERSIFIERS AS WELL AS
SPEECHWRITERS OFTEN
TURN TO THE "RHYMING
NINE"—AME, AIR, ITE,
AKE, OW, AY, ATE, EEM,
AIN—FOR COINING
"ZINGER" LINES.

The Echo Effect

Echo is the repetition of a word or a phrase. Kennedy's most quoted line is this one from his inaugural:

Ask not what your country can do for you, but rather what you can do for your country.

Franklin Roosevelt's most famous line also came from his first inaugural, and it, too, features the echo effect:

The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.

Lincoln's closing words of the Gettysburg Address also exploit the “echo” principle:

... that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth.

Two of President Reagan's most quoted statements were "echo" lines as well.

Government is not the solution to the problem; government is the problem.

and

The federal government did not create the states; the states created the federal government.

Some of Winston Churchill's most memorable lines employ the "echo" technique. Here are a few of them:

If you destroy a free market, you create a black market.

A fanatic is one who won't change his mind and won't change the subject.

We shape our dwellings and afterward our dwellings shape us.

All wisdom is not new wisdom.

Life is sensation; sensation is life.

The further backward we can look, the further forward we can see.

When France fell, Churchill manifested his defiance in the Dunkirk address, using this famous "echo" line:

We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the streets, we shall fight in the hills, we shall never surrender.

Richard Nixon etched this echoing epigram in his last book:

Always be prepared to negotiate, but never negotiate without being prepared.

In an 1890 speech to a convention of women in San Francisco, Susan B. Anthony warned her audience with this echoing statement:

Women must not depend on the protection of a man, but must be taught to protect herself.

CEOs as well as politicians create memorable lines through the echo technique. During World War II, Henry Ford told his employees at Dearborn:

It's not the employer who pays wages; he only handles the money; it's the product that pays the wages.

William F. Buckley Jr., the conservative columnist, used the "echo" technique to coin this aphorism:

The trouble with socialism is socialism—the trouble with capitalism is capitalists.

In minting your own "zinger," you have three ways to work the echo ploy:

1. Repeat a word in the second phrase that you used in the first.

Benjamin Franklin, for example, wrote these echo lines in his *Almanac*:

God helps those that help themselves.

One woman top executive in a cosmetic line company told her people this:

There is no future in any job. The future lies in you who have the job.

CEOs AS WELL AS
POLITICIANS CREATE
MEMORABLE LINES
THROUGH THE ECHO
TECHNIQUE.

2. Repeat the noun.

Note how Churchill repeats victory in his first speech as prime minister.

What is our aim? I answer in one word. Victory—victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be, for without victory there is no survival.

Churchill also used a repetitive preposition for the echo effect before a joint session of the U.S. Congress in 1941 when he proclaimed:

We have not journeyed across the oceans, across the prairies, across the mountains because we are made of sugar candy.

A head of a pharmaceuticals firm in a speech to his stockholders borrowed from Churchill when he said this:

You ask what is our plan. I'd answer in one word. Research for cures to control diabetes, research for formulas that do cut high blood pressure, research for medicine to reduce cholesterol.

3. Repeat the verb.

A soft drink executive borrowed from Churchill's Dunkirk address when he told his company what they were going to do to defeat their biggest competitor:

We will outsell them in Detroit. We will outsell them in Chicago, we will outsell them in Milwaukee, we will outsell them in Minneapolis [and he paused] and we won't take no for an answer.

The echo line that etches deepest in the memory is also the hardest to craft. That is the "phrase reversal." In his *Almanac*, Benjamin Franklin coined this aphorism:

Eat to live, don't live to eat.

At a conference I heard a hotel executive compare the decline of Howard Johnson in the 1960s with the rise

of Marriott. Howard Johnson had not adapted to the changing needs of the travel inn industry. The executive summed it up this way:

It's not that they planned to fail, but that they failed to plan.

Attorney General Robert Kennedy used to repeat to his staff this advice that his father, Joe Kennedy, used to drum into his sons:

When the going gets tough, the tough get going.

At a staff meeting, the top executive of a resort chain told staff members this:

A job is not just something you hold down. It does not serve to work if you don't work to serve.

A head of a sales force told his manufacturers' representatives this:

All you need to know is to know his needs.

Alliterate and Activate

The fourth letter of C-R-E-A-M represents *Alliteration*, another old practiced verbal trick. By the way, consonants are better for alliteration than vowels. And the best of the consonants is "P." (Remember the nursery verse "Peter Piper Picked a Peck of Pickled Peppers"?)

Churchill once framed his secret of speaking in a series of P's.

Vary the pose and vary the pitch and don't forget the pause.

Also using P's, Oregon governor Mark Hatfield, in his nomination speech of Richard Nixon in 1960, proclaimed:

From Caracas to the Kremlin, he has been a pilgrim for peace and a pioneer for progress.

Listen to these words of John Kennedy's inaugural, featuring B's as well as P's:

That we shall pay any price, bear any burden . . .

Read again Martin Luther King's most quoted sentence in his 1963 address at the Lincoln Memorial, and note the alliteration of C's:

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

In a similar appeal for tolerance, White House speech-writer Dick Goodwin coined this catchy line for President Johnson:

The world has narrowed into a neighborhood before it has broadened into a brotherhood.

I once heard a CEO explain his role at a company meeting in this way:

Do you know the role of a CEO? The executive exists to make exceptions to the general rules.

Alliteration Isn't Arduous

Alliteration isn't arduous. All you need is a \$5.95 *Oxford Essential Thesaurus*.

Suppose you want to stress the idea that if you don't anticipate a customer's needs you're not going to sell your product.

Well you look up "anticipate" and find "sense" listed as a synonym. So you might rephrase your line this way:

If you don't sense a customer's needs, you won't sell your product.

Let's say you want to underscore the importance of driving down costs. To cut costs is to increase profits. You

look up synonyms and try them out. "To cut costs is to swell sales"? No, that doesn't work. Then you hit on "produce" and write this:

The secret to producing profits is cutting costs.

A department store executive wanted to come up with a snappy punch line for her women's line buyers about really examining the goods closely instead of taking at face value the words in the wholesaler's pitch.

I worked with her and we played with the words "examine" and "look." Under "look" we found "eye." Immediately the word "ear" jumped into my mind as its comparison. Finally we devised this line.

When you go to buy, rely not on your ear but on your eye!

ALLITERATION ISN'T
ARDUOUS. ALL YOU NEED
IS A \$5.95 OXFORD
ESSENTIAL THESAURUS.

The Metaphor Method

The last letter of the C-R-E-A-M acronym represents *Metaphor*. Aristotle once wrote:

The highest line of the poet is sometimes the hardest to imagine.

That's what imagery is—the fruit of your imagination.

Churchill had a method for jumpstarting his search for the right metaphor. He would say to himself, "Let's take a hike." And, like the psalmist-shepherd David, he would conjure up in his mind all the images of nature: rock, tree, stream, grass, pasture, path, hill, bush, mountain, flower.

Possibly that is how he coined the phrase "parley at the summit" (that is, summit conference), a phrase that, like "iron curtain," embedded itself permanently in the language of diplomacy.

Or Churchill would jumpstart his imagination by mentally going to the zoo, where he would picture the

CHURCHILL'S PHRASE
"PARLEY AT THE SUMMIT,"
LIKE "IRON CURTAIN,"
EMBEDDED ITSELF
PERMANENTLY IN
THE LANGUAGE OF
DIPLOMACY.

different beasts and birds. For Churchill the reptiles were the Nazis. This technique led to results such as this one:

An appeaser is one who feeds the crocodile, hoping it will eat him last.

And to this one about Nazi propaganda:

Like the boa constrictor, they first befoul their prey with their venom before engorging it.

Britain, on the other hand, was Churchill's "lion." Here's one of his lines using this metaphor:

We have no assurance that anyone else is going to keep the British Lion as a pet.

"Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat"

Other metaphors draw from body fluids: witness Churchill's "blood, toil, tears, and sweat."

General George Patton once used this line that seemed to borrow Churchill's imagery:

A pint of sweat will save a gallon of blood.

Let's turn again from politics to business. I read in the *Wall Street Journal* these words of a furniture manufacturer relating how they had overcome their wood supply problem:

What was a rivulet is now a river.

An auto industry head, in referring to the flaws of its competitors in the mid-size sedan market, said this:

The Bible asks, "Can the leopard change his spots?" Well, that particular car has not removed its spots or flaws.

A company head told his sales force:

Selling is simple—headwork plus legwork.

House and Home

Sometimes the familiar, everyday routines—household chores, shopping trips, or gardening tasks—suggest apt analogies. For example, President Roosevelt, in supporting the Lend Lease Act in 1940, made this statement:

Who would not lend a hose to a neighbor whose house is burning down?

I used the following analogy of lawn mowing to explain the art of negotiation for President Nixon:

It is like mowing a lawn. You first start at the outer edges and move to the center. With the Soviets, we will work out agreements on fishing rights in the Bering Sea before we get to the central core issue of missiles.

It is as easy as pie to cook up a Power Line. First, ask yourself: What is the gist of the "central" idea I want to get across? Write it out and play with it. Like Churchill, "go to the zoo" or "take a hike." Or, like Roosevelt, think of everyday things and tasks around the house. Or, like JFK, look at the Rhyming Nine. Find a synonym for alliteration as Ted Sorensen did for Kennedy.

Remember, though, you only need one Power Line for your talk or presentation—your audience is unlikely to remember more than one line from your talk. Don't overuse these techniques, or they'll lose their effectiveness.

SOMETIMES THE
FAMILIAR, EVERYDAY
ROUTINES—HOUSEHOLD
CHORES, SHOPPING
TRIPS, OR GARDENING
TASKS—SUGGEST APT
ANALOGIES.