

## Seven More Deadly Sins or: How to Speak Like a Leader

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The world is a deadly place. The headline in a recent news magazine read, “Death by Texting,” about the increasing number of driving fatalities due to drivers taking their eyes off the road to text someone or read a text. While indulging in my favorite Zin, I found an article on “The Seven Deadly Speaking Sins.” The author’s main message applies to each and every reader who seeks promotion to a management position or is already in one!

“The ability to speak effectively has always been a big indicator of leadership. If you want to be a leader, you need to speak like one.”<sup>1</sup>

Because managers and supervisors often talk to their staffs and sometimes present at professional meetings, avoiding these seven speaking sins will definitely improve your quality of communication, leading to improving the quality of your laboratory’s leadership.

### 1. Not being prepared

A presentation can be compared to a relationship because the most respect is gained or lost in the tough times, not the good times. So, it’s essential to: a) know your material; b) know your audience, and c) be ready for any impediment. A listener could openly disagree with you, someone could challenge you, or your allotted time could be abruptly shortened. Leaders respond with confidence and poise and without irritation because they know they’re being watched and evaluated.

### 2. Not being certain

Staff—and certainly audiences—are demanding and critical. Speakers who give the appearance of self-doubt, ambiguity, or equivocation quickly lose credibility and influence. Audiences want presenters who are confident in their material and staff wants supervisors who know the facts, because, if *you’re* not sure about what you’re trying to communicate, why should they be?

### 3. Not being authentic

Become memorable through authenticity. In this world of incessant hype and spin (think politics, celebrities, “reality” shows, and sports), staff and audiences want and need leaders and speakers who are sincere, reveal themselves, acknowledge failures, and are open to others’ ideas. Openness enhances credibility because the more power you relinquish, the more power you acquire.

### 4. Not being passionate

Technology provides for fancy PowerPoint presentations these days. However, when the message has no heart or heft, staff and audiences find the cute things on the screen exceedingly annoying. For speakers to really connect, they have to exhibit interest and passion in the topic. Think of someone you heard speak who really got you fired up about the subject, whether it was a supervisor asking for volunteers or a speaker

trying to change your point of view. Passion is often voted high on the list of what makes for a great speech.

### 5. Not being in the moment

Staff and audiences can quickly tell when a speaker is not engaged with them. Not being present in that moment with listeners sends the message that they aren’t an important consideration. Leaders take the time to build a relationship with their audiences. They savor their message and do not fear the silence of pauses. Real leaders speak as if there’s no other place they’d rather be.

### 6. Not being brief

It’s well known that meetings and presentations expand to fill the time allotted, often with unnecessary time wasters and useless repetition. Thus engaged, it’s difficult to get the real point of the event, not to mention getting any real work done. Staff value leaders who value staff time. Likewise, audiences value presenters who respect program timelines. Real leaders demonstrate the discipline to speak briefly and to the point.

### 7. Not being committed to improvement

We’re all aware of so-called leaders who got there by some means other than demonstrated competence in management and communications. Just as supervisors and managers should be committed to staying on top of advances in their respective technical areas, they should be equally committed to mastering speaking and presentation skills. Speaking with excellence consistently is rarely inborn; one needs to want to be better and make the time to get there.

The world is full of many other deadly sins. I’m starting my own list; texting or talking on the phone while driving is my big No. 1. The likelihood of any one of us dying from this idiocy is thousands of times greater than, say, my parachute not opening up. I’d rather take my chances skydiving!

1. Gray J. Seven Deadly Speaking Sins. *The Globe and Mail*, November 3, 2006: C.1.

*For more information regarding quality in the lab, please check out the October 2009 issue of Critical Values.*

#### **This Month’s Quality Quote:**

“Be skillful in speech that you may be strong ....”

— *The Teaching for Merikare*,  
c. 2135-2040 BC (author name lost  
to time)

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