



# The Raphel Report

**Observations on marketing,  
advertising, sales and  
promotions  
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## Speaking of Business

Here's an excerpt from a new book I'm writing on speaking (Speaking Rules, which will be published by Raphel Marketing this summer). I've also included a few of my favorite speaking stories (if you have any good speaking stories you'd like to share, please send them to me).

### Have A Great Opening

Your audience remembers what they heard first . . . and last.

It is important to say some words that put the audience at ease at the start of your speech.

You can:

- Talk about some people in the audience or about the group that invited you.
- Give an example that provokes curiosity or promises them a benefit.
- Tell a story that makes fun of you.

I like to do the third sometimes. For example, when working in a foreign country I begin this way: "It's always amazing to me that everyone here not only speaks your native language but also English. They say someone who speaks three languages is trilingual. And someone who speaks two languages is bilingual. And someone who can speak one language is (pause) an American. And here I am."

Do not begin with an apology ("Well, I'm really not a speaker...") The audience immediately wonders: what are you doing standing there?

You can start with a provocative sentence. Here's an example of one I heard from a speaker talking to a group of senior executives on the subject of good health:

"If you are 50 years old, you have about 1,500 Saturdays left to live. How are you going to spend them?"

Here's a good opening: "How many in the audience remember where they were when..." (and refer to a pivotal moment in history such as when President Kennedy died or the 9/11 tragedy).

A friend once asked me for a funny story to begin his presentation. I gave him one and asked him to repeat it to me. I corrected his timing, phrasing and delivery. Then I said,

“Now, promise me you won’t tell this story to an audience until you have repeated that story twenty times to twenty different people.”

Here’s why: Every time you repeat the story there is a slight change: A half-second in timing, a change in volume at a certain point. Finally, you arrive at the proper beat and rhythm. I listen to stories I told 30 years ago and am amazed that the timing, pattern, emphasis is the exactly the same when I tell the story today as it was three decades earlier.

Here are a few of my favorite stories:

### **Troubles? We got troubles right here in our business!**

*(The business mentioned in this true story is a supermarket. But you can change the name of the business to relate to your audience and it works just as well.)*

I was talking to a supermarket owner the other day and asked, “How’s business?”

“Not bad,” he said, “But it would be great if it wasn’t for all the government rules and regulations.”

“Really? Like what?” I asked.

“Well,” he said, “I had an inspector come in the other day from the State Labor Department. He said, “I understand you’re paying less than minimum wage to your employees.”

I replied, “Not me. You’ve got the wrong store. There’s the butcher. Pay him \$800 a week. Can’t be him. There’s my secretary Frances. Pay her \$500 a week. Can’t be her. (Pause) Oh, I’ve got the fool that works here. Pay him ten dollars a week and all the whiskey he can drink...”

“Aha!” said the inspector. “That’s the guy I want to talk to.”

“Aha!” said the owner. “You’re talking to him.”

### **Pessimist vs. Optimist**

I went for a haircut. My barber knew I did a lot of traveling and asked, “Where’s your next trip?”

“I’m going to Rome,” I replied.

“Really?” he said. “What airline are you taking?”

“Alitalia.”

“Bad decision,” he said. “It’s a terrible airline. They take off late. The flight attendants are miserable. The food is horrible. Where are you staying?”

“The Excelsior.”

“Bad choice,” he said. “Everyone thinks it’s a great hotel but it isn’t. They won’t have the room you reserved. You’ll have to wait till mid-afternoon to check in. The food is horribly expensive. Are you doing any sightseeing?”

“Yes,” I said. “We’re going to St. Peter’s Square to see the Pope.”

The barber shook his head in disgust. “Are you kidding? You’ll be in this huge square with thousands of people. The Pope will appear in a tiny window and you’ll barely see him.”

A few weeks later I returned. I went to the barber for another haircut.

“So, how was your trip to Italy?” asked the barber.

“Great!” I said.

“What airline did you take?”

“Alitalia. And it was a wonderful trip. Took off on time. Arrived on time. The flight attendants keep bringing us food and snacks. Even wine – as much as we wanted.”

“Really,” said the barber. “OK. Where did you stay?”

“The Excelsior,” I told him, “And it was fantastic. Huge room. Giant bed. Fresh fruit every day. Overlooking the river. Marvelous.”

“Uh,” said the barber, now getting a little annoyed. “And what did you see when you were there?”

“Well, remember I told you we were going to see the Pope? We went to Saint Peter's Square and the Pope came out on his balcony, waved to the crowd and suddenly he stopped and pointed to me! He motioned to the Bishop next to him who quickly came down to the Square, pushed through the crowd and brought me back to the Pope.”

“Really? What happened?”

“Well, I walked into the room and the Pope greeted me and I kneeled down in front of him and the Pope put his hand on my head.”

“Wow!” said my barber. “And what did he say?”

“He said... ‘Where did you get such a lousy haircut?’”

### **How’s Business?**

*(This story is best told with a “Down East” Maine accent. Otherwise it does work. But not as well...)*

I was vacationing in Maine and saw a lobster fisherman working on his boat. I approached him and asked, “How’s business?”

He said, “Well, let’s see. Monday, I sold two lobster. Tuesday I didn’t sell nothing. Wednesday, the man that bought the two lobster brought them back for a refund. I guess you’d have to say that Tuesday was my best day.”