KNOWING THE JUDGE: THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL DEBATE

Mary Gill
University of North Dakota

Regardless of the craft, skilled craftpersons begin a project with a recipient in mind. Debaters are no exception. Successful debaters prepare their message with their judge in mind. In 1983, Buckley argued that "judging continues to be the focal point of improving debate quality" (p. 868). The current practices within the Cross Examination Debate Association, however, seem to limit opportunities for debaters to select appropriate choices for their messages. As a result, changes are needed that will stimulate improvements in the relationship between debaters and their audiences.

This writer will examine the rhetorical theory, history and current practices within CEDA and offer suggestions on how changes can be made which, when practiced, will allow debaters to better utilize audience analysis skills to adapt to their audiences.

From Aristotle to Weaver, rhetorical scholars have suggested that a unique relationship exists between speakers and their audiences. Apparently, the relationship of speakers and their audiences is the core of any communication situation. Perhaps in no other world is this concept applied as readily as in the debate world.

The Need for Audience Adaptation

Numerous scholars have suggested that the audience is the key element in developing a message. To the extent that the sender of the message, the speaker, tries to influence an individual, that person becomes the audience for a speaker's message. Frequently, the success of speakers lies in their ability to predict and adapt their message to please their audience.

If the audience is composed of those individuals to be influenced, the next logical question is, what role does a speaker have as an adaptive agent? The preponderance of rhetoric suggests that the audience should become the main factor in message development. The nature of the audience determines the direction, the character, and the significance an argument will take (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, pp. 20-30).

During the current decade, scholars have suggested that debaters must adapt to their audience. Freeley (1986), Buckley (1983), Lucas (1986), Ulrich (1983), and others have offered frequent discussions about the specific adaptations debaters are expected to make.[1] Buckley concluded that "debaters must adjust to their judge audiences" (p. 868).

Specifically, Stephen Lucas (1986) has suggested that speakers must aim their remarks for the group that is most likely in need of being persuaded (p. 308). For example, a few semesters ago CEDA debated the resolution, "Resolved: that the method of conducting Presidential elections in the United States is detrimental to democracy."

A number of individuals felt that the only topical affirmative analysis was to debate the Electoral College. Judges who were predisposed to use this position likely did not listen to topicality arguments against an Electoral College affirmative analysis. If negative debaters had known their audience's predisposition toward an Electoral College affirmative case, they could have altered their arguments away from topicality issues and spent time arguing the specifics of the affirmative analysis. If the debaters had understood their audience before the round began and possessed the ability to modify their message, everyone involved in the debate would likely have been more satisfied with the outcome.

One of the leading faults of many speakers is that they simply overestimate what their audience already understands about their subject (Lucas, 1986 p. 273). This frequently occurs in debate rounds when debaters treat as equal "audiences" coaches, who work closely with the topic, Directors of Forensics, who are likely to be less involved with the topic, and lay judges, who frequently know very little about the topic. Buckley (1983) discovered that approximately 40% of CEDA judges actually judge on a regular basis (once a month or more) (p. 860). Given this statistic, debaters must certainly consider their audience's knowledge prior to the speaking occasion.

Within the debate environment, debaters must also consider the audience's predisposition toward them. While many styles of delivery and evidentiary standards exist, speakers must consider if there is something about themselves which may create a negative impression with their audience and whether it will alter the judge's decision in a round. After reading a ballot, many debaters have become discouraged to discover that the round was lost before it truly began.

Implications and Methods of Audience Analysis

The rhetoric about audience analysis specifically suggests that an accurate understanding of the audience must occur for any speaking occasion. A relationship exists between speakers and their audience. Currently, given the diversity of likes and dislikes among CEDA judges, the need for a more effective means of audience analysis becomes apparent. As a result, methods must be devised that allow speakers to make reasoned judgments about their audiences.

Among various regions of CEDA, disagreements occur regarding the amount of evidence used, the type and degree of analysis employed, and the rate and style of delivery. Even though some general conclusions may be stated about each region, within a given region disagreements about any of these issues can be found. As more former NDT programs also join CEDA, the philosophies are likely to change as well. CEDA currently has a unique mix of coaches who are former policy people as well as coaches who have only been exposed to CEDA. As a result, a great diversity exists between judges in CEDA.

The diversity within CEDA poses an interesting coaching dilemma. While, in policy debate, a middle of the road approach may provide a safe strategy for inexperi-

enced debaters, no such safeguard exists for inexperienced CEDA debaters. Differences of opinions among the various judges whom any debater may encounter throughout the course of a semester create an environment in which frequent, if not constant, adaptations to the audience become necessary. Some judges want specific value criteria. Others prefer a very persuasive and non-structured delivery. Still others prefer a very heavily evidenced presentation. Some may allow for a "spread" analysis, while others may completely tune out debaters who mention more than a single statement in response to any point made by the opposition.

Given the diversity of opinion among CEDA coaches and judges, methods must be encouraged which better allow debaters to successfully persuade their audience, the judge. Most debate scholars have agreed that the key individual to be influenced in a debate round is the judge. The judge, however, does not exist within a vacuum. The judge must be willing to disclose information which will help debaters adapt to him or her. This disclosure should occur prior to a round as well as during the round of competition.

Numerous techniques exist for uncovering information about an audience prior to the speaking occasion. For a general audience, the person making arrangements with the speaker becomes an excellent resource. However, the debate environment is unique because it is largely a contrived and rigid setting.

Despite its contrived nature, however, techniques exist that aid debaters in analyzing their audience or judge prior to a round of competition. One of the most commonly used techniques in CEDA is the use of rumor. One debater hears from another what a judge likes or dislikes. This may be accurate or inaccurate information. It could certainly be argued that this information is better than no information. If skilled debaters are sharing the information, chances are it will be helpful. Perhaps the most beneficial element of rumor is that the debaters interact with one another and learn from one another—what they view to be important about the topic, what stylistic elements are important, and evidentiary standards. This information may be helpful with shared judges or when debaters encounter a judge from this team's school. This type of information is also important in reinforcing that differences exist among individuals. However, while rumors may provide some useful information, it leaves debaters at the mercy of another's understanding and memory. It also discriminates against those outside of the rumor mill.

Another frequently used technique for gathering audience information prior to a round of competition is the creation of judge files. Many competitive teams review ballots of past tournaments with their coaches. From these ballots, files are created which contain to judge information—their prejudices, preconceptions, and voting criteria. In many regions, this is a highly effective means of analyzing the debate audience. When extended to a national level, however, it becomes less effective, since the majority of teams never have an opportunity to be heard by many judges from another region until the national tournament. Caution must also be exercised in using these files from year to year. Because the predispositions of judges are frequently tied to the topic being

debated, what is learned from one national tournament may have little relevance in later tournaments. One way to increase the usefulness of judge files is to develop a "share system" among areas schools. By team members and coaches more openly sharing information on judges, judge files can be more complete, hopefully more accurate, and more useful in analyzing the debate audience.

An especially useful means of analyzing debate audiences prior to the competition includes the use of judge philosophy forms. National Debate Tournament (NDT) members have employed such forms for some time at their district tournaments as well as at their national tournament. Difficulties may arise if some judges do not complete a form, adhere to the philosophy as written, or state their philosophy clearly. However, even with these limitations, judge philosophies usually give a current reflection of their thinking about the present topic.

The Cross Examination Debate Association used judge philosophy statements for the first time at its national tournament in 1987. Approximately 160 judges were used. Of these judges, 68% (109) completed current CEDA philosophy statements.[2]

While it appears that CEDA will continue to use judge philosophy statements at its national tournament, a more widespread use of judge philosophy statements is warranted. Given the diversity of thinking among CEDA coaches and judges, more opportunities to present information relevant to judges should cause an increase in successful debate experiences for judges and debaters.

Two levels of usage should be considered. First, limited statements should be used at each invitational tournament across the nation. Second, a formalized booklet containing philosophy statements from every judge represented at the national tournament should be provided for each team entered.

Initially, judge philosophy statements should be employed at invitational tournaments. In their tournament mailing, host schools should provide space on the entry form for debate judges and/or coaches to identify the number of years that they have been involved with CEDA debate, the number of rounds judged on the current topic, one or two sentences of any special statements they wish to make about the topic, and one or two sentences indicating their stylistic likes and dislikes.

By limiting the information to a very basic statement, long and seemingly vague philosophy statements could be avoided. Relevant information could also be provided by the host schools without having to endure compilations of statements that are costly in terms of personnel hours, duplicating and supplies. The implementation of these statements on a regional basis would create an opportunity for debaters to develop a greater appreciation of audience analysis as well as providing them with necessary information which they may use to practice successful audience analysis.

The second aspect of judge philosophy statements involves the use of formalized philosophy statements at the national tournament. These should be solicited and compiled by the tournament director.

These statements should be compiled into an easily usable booklet which is available one week prior to the national tournament. Because the organization is large

and the number of judges possible at the national tournament is great, it is unlikely that debaters could become familiar with all of the information within a few short hours after registration or in a few minutes prior to each round of competition.

With the increased use of judge philosophy statements, an added benefit may arise. Simply knowing that a judge has not provided a statement should send a message to debaters. For example, this individual may not be open to judging questions and criteria. Likewise, knowing that an individual has not judged any rounds prior to the immediate experience should be useful information to a debater.

Debaters can also learn a great deal about a judge from drawing conclusions about that judge's teams. When a team encounters a team, a record should be kept of basic stylistic items, evidentiary standards, and structure designs. These items may provide valuable insight about a judge from the same school. While a number of teams may have several coaches, and teams certainly do not do only what a coach would have them do, files kept on teams provide a basis from which to begin understanding a judge.

In addition to a number of techniques usable prior to a round of competition, opportunities for more useful feedback during a round must be considered. Many scholars have discussed the educational value of a debate ballot. Most would agree that judges have responsibilities to debaters to clearly state their reasons for decision.[3] Frequently, these decisions also reveal likes and dislikes of individual judges. Unfortunately, this information remains information "after the fact." As Ulrich (1983) discussed, the educational value of a debate ballot refers to past happenings (pp. 939-947).

The ballot as the primary means of judge feedback allows for no immediate adjustments by debaters. While ballots are necessary devices to reveal judges' thoughts, judges can do more during a round to aid debaters. If one has accepted that debaters, like all speakers, must adapt to their audiences, then means must be made available which allow debaters to modify their message as it is being delivered.

Perhaps judges need to reconsider basic communication principles. Communication scholars have claimed that one cannot not commmunicate. Everything about the person sends a message. When judges remain expressionless, however, it is extremely difficult for debaters to understand that adaptation is needed. Certainly, the direction of adaptation remains a mystery with the expressionless judge. Such basic items as signals for speaking too rapidly, unclearly or softly are easily expressed nonverbally. Likewise, judges can easily indicate that they do not accept an argument by using non-offensive nonverbals. For example, a judge may indicate that a topicality argument is a waste of time by simply shaking his or her head when the negative speaker identifies the argument. This not only sends a specific message for feedback and adaptation but also creates an environment where debaters, indeed, are more strongly placed in an environment where adaptation becomes necessary.

Conclusions

There are many reasons why audience analysis skills must be used to train debaters and improve the chances of a successful speaking occasion. CEDA debate occasions are no exception. In order to create a better speaking occasion, wherein we provide a useful laboratory for debaters to use the audience analysis skills they have been taught, CEDA must encourage the use of a number of pre-round data gathering techniques.

Debate is a world involved with audience analysis of the key individual within a round of competition. Debaters are responsible for understanding the likes and dislikes of the judge and modifying their messages accordingly. This does not mean, however, that the judge has no responsibility to debaters. A major part of audience adaptation involves immediate modifications based on direct feedback. A relationship exists between debaters (speakers) and judges (audiences). Unfortunately, judges too frequently provide no immediate feedback only to criticize debaters later for not adapting. The judge must fulfill his or her burden by being responsive to debaters and providing clear, readable, and usable nonverbal responses during a debate round. With an increased emphasis on knowing the judge and giving responsible feedback, CEDA debate can become a more successful communication occasion.

Notes

[1] The most often cited works indicate that debaters must adapt to their judge. See works such as: Austin Freeley. "Judging Paradigms: The Impact of the Critic on Argument." In G. Ziegelmueller, & J. Rhodes (Eds.), *Dimensions of argument: Proceedings of the Second Summer Conference on Argumentation* (pp. 433-447). Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1981; Marvin Kleinau and Richard Hunsaker. *A Guide to Coaching and Judging Contemporary Debate.* St. Louis: Springboards, 1981; J.W. Patterson and David Zarefsky. *Contemporary Debate.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983; Walter Ulrich. *Judging Academic Debate.* Lincolnwood: National Textbook, 1986; Stephen Wood and John Midgley. *Prima Facie: A Guide to Value Debate.* Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt, 1986.

[2] This information was provided by an analysis of the judging statements at the 1987 CEDA National Tournament and information gained from the Tournament Director. April, 1987.

[3] The sources identified in footnote 1 also mention responsibilities that judges have in providing feedback to debaters. Debate is a shared communication experience between debaters and judges.

References

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