

The Elevator Speech



Chacey Schoepel

Ag Policy

Fairview FFA

The Elevator Speech

All of us need to be preparing our elevator speech. Surely, you know what an elevator speech is. Nearly every FFA member wearing official dress has experienced stepping into an elevator with someone who doesn't recognize the blue and gold. The moment they ask you, "What does your jacket mean?", you now have four floors and a few seconds to explain nearly one hundred years of tradition, career opportunities, activities, conferences, and the crucial fact that the organization your jacket represents is constantly developing the leaders of tomorrow. This is your elevator speech. With so much to say and so little time to say it, you must choose your words carefully to impress upon this person the importance of the FFA before the doors open.

As agriculturists, we need to have our own elevator speech ready. Agriculture is under attack. The average American, being three generations removed from the farm, has lost touch with how and where their food is produced. They only care what it cost and how it tasted. Various groups are campaigning nationwide against plant production, livestock production and the agricultural industry as a whole. It is now time for us to get our elevator speeches ready to defend agriculture.

In order to be prepared for our elevator moment, we need to understand our opponents. People for Ethical Treatment of Animals, or PETA, is a well-funded organization and understands how to manipulate the media. PETA constantly uses celebrities to spread their message. Pamela Anderson is a spokesperson for PETA. Another outspoken celebrity is Carrie Underwood. This one hits close to home, as she is from rural Oklahoma. She has been very vocal against numerous agricultural topics. She should know better. Why should anybody listen to these women? They are celebrities

using their money for PETA's cause. This is a group that should not exist, but we have allowed them to enter the public consciousness.

Another wealthy person that is using her money to champion a cause even though she may be misinformed is Madeleine Pickens. Madeleine Pickens is the wife of multi-billionaire T. Boone Pickens. She is petitioning the U.S. government to "Save America's Mustangs". She is not an expert on what it takes to raise a horse or how to manage wild horses, but she has an agenda, unlimited funds to promote her cause, and she is smart. She has a team to help get the attention of the public and the government.

When I say a team, I mean literally, a team. Mrs. Pickens has assembled a team of football stars to address the problem. She has been quoted as saying, "Instead of going to Washington as a little blonde animal lover, now I've got America's testosterone behind us. People listen to football. Football matters in this country."

Football does matter. I love watching football and I certainly enjoy the stadium that her husband's money has built for the Oklahoma State University Cowboys. But why should we listen to her or a star football player as to how to manage the wild mustangs in the western U.S.? How does football apply to this topic? It doesn't.

While this viewpoint appeared in the High Plains Journal, an agricultural publication, Mrs. Pickens managed to air her side of the story on "Good Morning America". She was speaking to the general public. Trent Loos, the author of the article in the High Plains Journal addressing Mrs. Picken's plan, was speaking the truth. Mr. Loos understands the problem that the agricultural industry is facing, and he is addressing the problem and the solution; however, he is preaching to the proverbial choir. What is

the difference between Mrs. Picken's and Mr. Loos' advertisement of their cause?

Simply put, money.

Here is my solution. It is a fact that we cannot live without agriculture; it is a fact that agriculture is our nation's and the world's largest industry, but it is also a fact that bad publicity can cost ag producers billions of dollars overnight. Therefore, it only makes sense for ag producers to use money to promote ourselves. Fight them dollar for dollar.

America has changed. Our founding fathers were farmers and military heroes. We used to be about substance. Now, our leaders are a product of wealth and the media. Technology and information overload have changed the way Americans think and function in their day to day life. As our leaders have changed, so have our policies. We, as agriculturalists, have the money, technology and the ability to promote positive agriculture policy. Therefore, we must take advantage of our greatest asset: our young people.

This generation, my generation, has the opportunity to change America's perception of agriculture by utilizing the technology of our time. Television, radio, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and texting are all opportunities to meet Americans half-way. In a nation where the vast majority of agricultural television broadcasts are before 7 AM, we must take the initiative to change the way we educate the public so they don't lapse into believing the mainstream, primetime partial truths produced by the agriculture-bashing organizations.

Why are we not advertising using publications that the general public uses, like Newsweek, Sports Illustrated, and People Magazine? Americans are constantly exposed

to advertising messages designed to make them believe that they can't live without a certain product. Even though the average person knows it is advertising and the truth is most likely distorted or stretched, they are still affected by the charm of the appealing presentation. The agricultural industry is actually something that people cannot live without. Why do we not implement these advertising tactics to reinforce the fact that the world cannot live without the American farmer?

Basically, agriculture needs a publicist. I want the job. I live it, I understand it. I know what it takes to represent agriculture in the public eye. I have been trained for this job. There are many other young people out there just like me that desire the opportunity to promote agriculture in a positive light. However, desire is not enough. The agricultural industry must take the initiative to organize our resources and not put off any longer preparing our elevator speech. The doors are closing and the American public is on the elevator. I have my elevator speech ready. Do you?

Thank You.

Bibliography

- "About Madeleine." *Help Save America's Wild Horses*. Madeleine Pickens. Web. 8 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.madeleinepickens.com/about/>>.
- About PETA*. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Web. 3 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.peta.org/about/index.asp>>.
- About Us: Overview*. Humane Society of United States. Web. 10 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.humanesociety.org/about/overview/>>.
- Americans Are Three Generations Removed from the Farm*. East Arizona Courier, 3 Mar. 2009. Web. 5 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.eacourier.com/articles/2010/03/03/opinion/doc4b8dc08feb1cd104223803.txt>>.
- "Carrie Underwood: Star with a Heart." Sharks. Web. 9 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.sharkonline.org/?P=0000000483>>.
- Loos, Trent. "Uncle Sam's Horses Need a Big Truck." Ag Weekly, 9 Feb. 2010. 21 Feb. 2010.
- Madeleine Pickens' National Wild Horse Foundation To Host Salute To The Mustangs." SMU Mustangs, 30 Sept. 2009. Web. 4 Feb. 2010. <<http://smumustangs.cst.com/sports/m-footbl/spec-rel/093009aaa.html>>.
- Maggin, Alice. "Person of the Week: Madeleine Pickens." *World News with Diane Sawyer*. ABC News, 21 Nov. 2008. 2 Feb. 2010.
- Schinke, Amanda. "British Columbia Native Appears With PETA 'Seal' Outside Fisheries Office to Mail Anti-Sealing Petitions to Prime Minister." *Pamela Anderson Cites Lack of Ice, Seals in Appeal to Harper to Halt This Year's East Coast Slaughter*. PETA Media Center, 26 Feb. 2010. Web. 28 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.peta.org/mc/NewsItem.asp?id=14368>>.
- "Twenty Questions with Carrie Underwood." CMT. Get Country. Web. 3 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.cmt.com/news/20-questions/1520422/20-questions-with-carrie-underwood.jhtml>>.