

# CHAPTER 5

## Literally Speaking: Speeches with Commentary



### Coming Up!

Now that you've read what it takes to build a great speech, it's time to see the pieces come together. This chapter will take you through a few sample speeches, and the commentary will discuss what's going well and what could improve. Think about the style and tone you would use to deliver each speech.

## SPACE TOURISM: REALISTIC OR RIDICULOUS?

### Speech

For most of us, the idea of a dream vacation that's 'out of this world' could include an adventure in Disneyland, a week on a Caribbean beach, or a Mediterranean cruise. But in 2001, millionaire Dennis Tito took 'out of this world' a bit more literally. He became the first person to take a vacation in space. Some people believe that space tourism is just another fad—a waste of time and money. I couldn't disagree more. Space tourism is the next frontier in our quest to explore the universe. Today, I'm going to tell you why space tourism is good for our dream to discover, the birth of a new industry, and a vision of human civilization in space.

Human civilization has always dared to discover what we once thought would be impossible. Who would have dreamed of flying until the Wright brothers invented the airplane in the early 1900s? And who would have thought that a human being could walk on the moon before astronaut Neil Armstrong did just that in 1969? There's no question that past space missions have taught us a great deal about the universe, as well as creating more tangible benefits for science and technology. Space tourism is simply the next step in our dream to discover the world around us. It's time to encourage more people explore the universe, even if it's for no other reason than their own personal enjoyment.

So for those who have this dream, what will it take to get them there? Certainly, we could never expect governments to fund a person's desire for a very cool vacation. It's my view that the solution lies in the birth of a

### Commentary

*Good personalization of the issue to open the speech.*

*Effective parallelism.*

*Blunt, clear opinion statement.*

*A bit too abstract and general.*

*Good use of rhetorical questions.*

*Why would we care how these people spend their money?*

*Smooth transition.*

space tourism industry, working in cooperation with the world's space agencies. If there are wealthy people willing to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars, if not millions of dollars, to make their space travel dreams a reality, why prevent them from doing so? Let's allow investors and entrepreneurs to flourish in their quest to take advantage of this opportunity. We've already heard that companies like Virgin Airlines and Hilton International want to be part of this dream. Space tourism could be the birth of a new economic engine.

If we allow the dream to discover to come together with the potential for profit, we'll have completed the first step toward human civilization in space. We'll have laid the foundation for permanent establishments that will allow more and more people to take a holiday on, say, the moon, or perhaps a space hotel orbiting our planet. Surely, this vision may be decades away, but a space tourism industry is the first stage in making it come true. It will plant seeds of opportunity that will inspire a mission reaching far beyond just a few wealthy individuals.

My friends, we must always dare to dream, and we must always dream to discover. We must explore this new frontier made possible by advanced, modern technology. And we must embark on a mission to take tourism 'out of this world'.

*"Working in cooperation" how exactly?*

*How do they want to be "part of this dream?"*

*Did you explain how they would "come together?"*

*Making sweeping generalizations.*

*Good link back to the first point.*

*Effective flow from "dare [to] dream [to] discover."*

*Good connection to opening of speech.*

## COMMENTARY ON “SPACE TOURISM” SPEECH

This was a fairly creative speech likely meant for a light, informal occasion. The goal was to present a viewpoint on a concept rather than on specific ideas.

### What did the speech do well?

- *Use of vivid language.* It was clear that establishing an emotional connection with the audience was one of the speaker's main goals. The use of rich, descriptive language helped in this regard. Phrases like “dare to dream” and “birth of a new economic engine” illustrated some of the key ideas.
- *Closing linked to opening.* The “out of this world” expression used twice in the introduction was repeated in the conclusion. “Dream to discover” and “frontier” were also used again. The use of similar themes and phrases, as well as a personal connection, made for a good fit between the introduction and the conclusion.
- *Use of rhetorical questions.* Especially in the second paragraph, rhetorical questions encouraged the audience members to imagine the concepts for themselves. This aided the speaker in achieving his goal, which was to make an emotional connection.
- *Transitions between points.* The first sentence of the second and third paragraphs included a clear reference to the previous point. This allowed the speech to flow smoothly and helped the speaker guide the listener along a particular path.

### What could have improved?

- *Length of introduction compared to body paragraphs.* Normally, an introduction of this length would be appropriate. But in this case, it was the same length, if not longer, than each of the main points. A shorter introduction or longer body paragraphs would have made the proportions more suitable.
- *Too abstract and general.* Granted, making an emotional connection was an important goal of this speech. However, more concrete, factual

information and details would have been useful. The speech came across as ‘dreamy’ more than practical or realistic.

- *Extends the case too far.* The main thrust of the speech was clearly space tourism. Discussing space civilization as well appeared rather fanciful and unfocused.

## MERCK, MECTIZAN, AND RIVER BLINDNESS

### Speech

Unbearable itching. Skin disfigurement. Permanent blindness.

Welcome to the world of one of the 18 million people in the poorest of countries who suffer from river blindness. Welcome, also, to one of the most daunting dilemmas faced by a corporation in modern times. Today, I want to tell you about the story of an American pharmaceutical firm mandated by its shareholders to maximize profits, but motivated by its heart to help humanity. I want to tell you about the story of Merck, its drug Mectizan, and the millions of people who needed it but couldn’t afford to pay for it. To start, I will explore Merck’s dilemma in the 1980s. Then, I will tell you about what they did. And finally, I will discuss what this means for the future of drug development and distribution.

Merck faced a tough dilemma in the 1980s, having to decide whether to spend millions of dollars on a drug that would never earn a dime. The disease was river blindness, known scientifically as “Onchocerciasis.” I’ll spare you the pronunciation and call it “river blindness” from here on in. Spread by an infected blackfly’s bite, it results in a parasitic worm infesting the body. The intense itching, skin disfigurement, and permanent blindness that would occur affected millions of people.

### Commentary

*Effective imagery.*

*Good use of parallelism here.*

*Overview of theme.*

*Is this an advertisement for Merck?*

*“Tell them what you’re going to tell them” introduction.*

*Clear statement of the key point.*

*Wasn’t it called “river blindness” already?*

*Reinforcement of imagery.*

Merck, though, had stumbled upon research that could cure this terrible disease. The problem was that nobody was willing to pay for it. There was little commitment from governments, and the end users certainly weren't in any position to afford it. To make matters worse, there was no distribution system, as the people afflicted by river blindness lived primarily in isolated rural areas throughout many African countries. Should Merck spend millions of dollars to develop its drug Mectizan? If so, should it give it away for free? And if it gives it away for free, should it take care of distributing the drug? And if it did all of these things, would it set a dangerous precedent for future drug development? Merck faced all of these daunting challenges, and it was a 'go' or 'no go' decision. There was no halfway solution. They would either go full steam ahead, or abandon the project.

So how did Merck resolve this dilemma? Simply put, it decided that it would do away with profits and sink millions of dollars into solving this problem, even though it knew the company would never recover more than a fraction of its investment. In 1987, Merck announced that it would give away Mectizan for free to all those who were afflicted by river blindness. Merck's campaign, particularly the Merck Mectizan Donation Program, eventually engaged many other groups. These included pharmaceutical companies, governments, non-profit organizations, and the World Bank. In 1994, the World Bank approved a special program to raise \$130 million toward treating river blindness in developing countries. Millions of doses later, the lives of so many had been changed for the better. What started as an uncertain venture by one company turned into

*Statement of the overall challenge.*

*Good use of questions to describe the dilemma.*

*Three questions is okay, four pushes it.*

*Repetition of the same point three times, perhaps too many.*

*Good link back to first point of the speech.*

*A clear description of what actually ended up happening.*

*How many doses exactly?*

a global operation engaging partners and affected communities alike.

The case of Merck's success raises interesting issues for the future of drug development and distribution to those who can't afford to pay for medicine. Today, this issue comes up repeatedly in the mission to treat HIV/AIDS throughout the developing world, because the drugs are too expensive for most people to afford. It's my view that the model developed by Merck is a useful one for other health programs. The key is that the burden not be placed squarely on the shoulders of one company. Merck took the risk that it wouldn't have significant support, but the support eventually came. Other drug companies need to be assured that they'll have willing partners to shoulder part of the responsibility should they want to engage in such a humanitarian effort. I certainly hope that this problem can be solved. Surely, Mectizan did set a precedent. But I would argue that it was a good precedent to set.

Today, I've shared with you Merck's dilemma, what it did to resolve this dilemma in favor of human health, and what this means for future medical endeavors in developing countries. In 1987, a group of people decided that unbearable itching, skin disfigurement, and permanent blindness didn't have to be a reality. The world didn't have to accept that nothing could be done about it. Something was done about it, and it sent a ray of hope to millions of people around the world.

No detail of "affected communities" link.

"Interesting?" Use a different word.

Why it's relevant today.

Who specifically should carry the burden? Governments? Other companies?

Good opinion statement.

Nice lead into the conclusion.

Once again, reinforcement of opening imagery.

Isn't the main point what it means for the future?

## COMMENTARY ON “MERCK AND MECTIZAN” SPEECH

Although the speaker spent two points describing what happened in the past, the purpose was clearly to show that what Merck did should be a model for present and future situations. It was both a speech to inform and a speech to persuade, with the informative parts laying the foundation for the persuasive remarks.

### What did the speech do well?

- *Use of imagery.* It was important for the audience to picture the effects of river blindness. The opening phrase, “Unbearable itching. Skin disfigurement. Permanent blindness,” was one instance where imagery was used effectively.
- *Insight into the primary actor.* The speaker was effective at explaining Merck’s dilemma, discussing its conflicting objectives and specific challenges concerning Mectizan. This allowed an audience member to think, “What would I do if I had to make that decision?”
- *Providing relevance to the issue.* Without describing the future implications of Merck’s endeavor, many audience members would have been left asking, “So what? It’s all fine and well to *know* about this dilemma, but why does it *matter*?” The discussion of related situations provided present-day context to the speech.
- *Relevant factual information.* The speaker gave the audience members key facts about the disease, the dilemma, and the solution to help them understand the situation. If more facts had been stated, it would have been harder for the listeners to grasp the most important ones.

### What could have improved?

- *Less promotion of Merck.* There’s no question that the speaker intended to paint Merck in a positive light for its role in this situation. At times, though, the tone seemed overly gushing in its praise of Merck, almost making it seem like the speaker was trying to impress someone who worked at the company.



- *Different focus in the conclusion.* If a key objective of the speech was to explain to the listeners how Merck's model should apply to present and future disease outbreaks, the conclusion shouldn't have focused so much on what happened in the past. Saying, for example, "Let's extend this ray of hope to millions more," could have been one line of a more effective closing.
- *More discussion of the present-day solution.* Granted, it wouldn't be wise to overburden the audience with too much factual information. That being said, it would have been helpful to characterize in more depth what a model for solving current situations would look like.

## Chapter 5: Keys to Success



✓ **Notice the importance of having a clear objective.** You could be forgiven for wondering what the key goal was in the “Space Tourism” speech, as the speech seemed to lack focus. The “Merck and Mectizan” speech did a more effective job of moving toward a relevant, important, and practical message.

✓ **Pay attention to the type of language.** The “Space Tourism” speech used vivid, colorful language in order to make an emotional connection. The “Merck and Mectizan” speech combined richly descriptive and factual language, reflecting both the human dimension of the situation and the practical aspect of the dilemma, respectively.