

Think Like a Lawyer



Episode #8

Episode #8 - Authenticity

This is ***Think Like a Lawyer on Substack***. My name is John Hollander. In this episode, we'll be discussing the secret of persuasion, and that is authenticity. Lawyers write and speak to persuade their audience, whether it's readers, a trial judge, a jury, or even the board of directors of a corporation, maybe a condominium membership. They try to persuade them of either the best course of action or even something as simple as the expertise of the lawyer.

How do they do this? Well, they don't shout. They don't speak forcefully. They don't wave their hands around. They persuade by offering up the real version of themselves. Because when you are authentic, you can persuade people that what you are saying is what you genuinely believe. And as long as your logic and your sources are bang on, then you should be successful.

Fake doesn't sell. When you think about advertising on television or radio, think about the tone of voice that's being used. If the salesperson speaks rapidly in a sales voice, you won't be persuaded. On the other hand, consider a testimonial from a celebrity who you are not sure knows what they're talking about. If that celebrity is speaking sincerely, in a measured tone that fits the product and the personality of the celebrity, well, you might go along with it. You might give it a try. You might be persuaded.

So let's look at some of the elements of authenticity and how you can maintain who you are in your public speaking and in your writing. Let's start with the language. You should use language which is suitable to both yourself and the subject. Typically, that's not the language of the stuffed shirt. That's

not big words, using passive voice with long sentences. Typically, it's simple language, short sentences, and a pace that the audience can follow.

They, the audience, should be able to understand the language. If you use big words, or acronyms or Latin, then there's a good chance that you'll lose your audience because there'll be worrying about what you mean or why you use that particular language and not paying attention to what you're trying to communicate - what you're trying to sell or persuade them of. If you put these things together, you speak in a natural way with eye contact with your audience. That means you don't read your speech. You don't read your remarks. It means you glance at your written remarks but look at your audience. If you're addressing a large body of people, look left, right. And try to look people in the eye. Maybe you're not comfortable doing this. Maybe you have to look an inch or two above their eyes. The idea is that you look at the people that you're addressing as much as you possibly can.

You will slip up, and the less time you spend reading and the more time you spend looking at your audience, the more likely you're going to throw in a 'like' or an 'umm' or 'ahh'. Don't worry about it. Forgive yourself. People speak naturally, using slip-ups all the time. Don't worry about it, don't let it faze you. In fact, it can be an endearing quality if you stumble every once in a while. There was a former Canadian Justice Minister, who went on to become prime minister briefly, John Turner, who made a specialty of always appearing to speak off the cuff. He wasn't. He prepared. He had his elevator speech and his prepared lines and one-liners and zingers, but he always came across as being spontaneous. Another former Canadian Prime Minister who was excellent at that was Jean Chretien, who never seemed like he was giving a prepared speech and always seemed like he was speaking from the heart. Not a blessed speaker naturally, he was very persuasive because it always seemed like he was giving you the real Jean Chretien.

So that's what I would commend to you. Be authentic, be who you are, and keep your message as genuine as possible.

If there is something negative, something that works against you or your position, deal with it. Your audience may think of it themselves, and they're going to have an answer. Give them your honest answer, as opposed to letting them fill in the blanks.

This is equally true when there is another side of the story. Always deal with the defects as well as the strengths. If you can maintain eye contact, use simple language and be yourself, then you'll be as persuasive as you can. And that is how lawyers think.

This is ***Think Like a Lawyer on Substack***. My name is John Hollander. Thanks for listening