

Skills 360 – Making your Speech more Powerful with Metaphors (Part 1)

Discussion Questions

1. Do you find idioms and other special expressions easy to remember?
2. What are some ways to make complex ideas easier for people to understand?
3. How might you make an important idea stick in people's minds?

Vocabulary

Metaphor: a word or phrase for a thing that is used instead of another thing to show how the two things are similar; "A simple metaphor like 'a computer is a brain' can help people understand difficult ideas."

Head: chief or boss; "After ten years as an account manager, I was made head of sales for the Western region."

Fierce storm: very strong or severe bad weather; "When a fierce storm hit Frankfurt, many flights were cancelled and many passengers stranded."

To be tossed around: to be moved or thrown in many directions; "Looks like our container ship is being tossed around in some rough seas and might be delayed."

Balance sheet: a financial statement comparing a company's assets, liabilities and income over a period of time; "The increase in profits last month will help improve our balance sheet."

Economic uncertainty: general feeling of nervousness about the economy, or when the economy is difficult to predict; "With so much economic uncertainty, I'm really not sure where I should invest my money."

Perspective: a way of looking at or thinking about something; "The leadership seminar gave me a new perspective on how to motivate and inspire people."

To be reserved for something: to be saved for a purpose or only used in one type of situation; "The board room is normally reserved for large group meetings, but if you need a quiet place to make a phone call you can use it."

To attain: to achieve or reach; "Geraldo has attained record sales numbers for three straight quarters."

Evocative: producing a feeling that makes you think of something; "We want these new ads to be evocative of home, or a great sense of comfort."

Running on empty: very tired or having no more energy or resources; "I feel like I've been running on empty for the past month and need a holiday."

To be missing a piece of the puzzle: not having all necessary information to understand something or all the necessary parts; "Since Tammy left the team, I feel we've been missing an important piece of the marketing puzzle."

The ball is in someone else's court: someone else must take responsibility or make a decision; "Well, I sent them our latest purchase offer, and now the ball is in their court. Hopefully we'll hear back soon."

To harness the power of something: to use something's power for a purpose; "These new servers will really help us harness the power of the cloud for data management."

To simplify: to make something more simple or easier to understand; "I'm not sure I see what you're saying Rhett... could you simplify the whole process for us?"

Recession: a period when the economy is bad or trade and industry are reduced; "Yes, the economy has had a few bad months, but we're not calling it a full-blown recession yet."

To appeal to: to attract or be liked by; "Social media has really helped us appeal to a slightly younger crowd."

Sensory: relating to the senses, such as hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting and feeling; "Our new virtual reality goggles provide users with an amazing sensory experience."

To stink: to have a very bad smell, or to be of poor quality; "Sam is a great engineer, but unfortunately his writing skills really stink."

"Music to my ears:" if some information or news is "music to your ears," you are happy to hear it; "You're staying on with us for another year? Gee Wendy, that's sure music to my ears."

To stick in a place: to stay in a place and resist being moved; "I like the colors of this logo, but I'm not really sure it will stick in people's minds."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host Tim Simmons, and today I want to give you some tips for using **metaphors** to make your speech more powerful.

Have you ever heard of Alfred Sloan? He was the **head** of General Motors during the Great Depression. He once gave a speech where he talked about GM at the time as a "great ship in a **fierce storm**." From that description, you get a sense of danger, of a big boat getting **tossed around** in the unpredictable ocean waves. And you can imagine that everyone on that ship has to work hard to get through the storm which, like all storms, would one day end.

Alfred Sloan was using a metaphor. GM isn't really a ship. And the economy isn't really an ocean. He *could have* talked about how the company needed to improve its **balance sheet** during a time of **economic uncertainty**. But a ship in a storm is a much more memorable and impactful way of describing the situation. And if you read or listen to speeches by great leaders, you'll see they are full of interesting comparisons like this.

So what exactly is a metaphor? Well, a metaphor is when you compare something you're talking about to another idea, for example: "time is money." This comparison helps us understand, or see something from a new **perspective**. Just as "time is money" helps us see time as very valuable. Or, as Alfred Sloan said, GM is like a ship. And the Great Depression is a storm. And metaphors aren't **reserved** just for big speeches by famous people. Metaphors are everywhere in our language.

One of the most common kinds of metaphor we use are idioms. For example, we often say "climb the corporate ladder" to mean try to **attain** higher positions in a company. But saying "climb the corporate ladder" is more **evocative**. That is, it has more emotional power.

When you're tired, you can say you're "**running on empty**," like a car with no fuel. When you don't have all the right information, you can say you're "**missing a piece of the puzzle**." And when you're waiting for someone else to make a decision, you can say "**the ball in his court**." You may have learned some of these idioms, but you may not have known they're all a kind of metaphor.

To **harness the power of** metaphors, you don't have to just learn some idioms. You can create your own metaphors to make what you say more impactful. You might be making a speech, or giving a presentation. Or you might be negotiating, selling something, or trying to convince your colleagues to support your idea. In all these situations, metaphors can be effective.

What exactly do I mean by "effective?" Well, for starters, metaphors can help to **simplify** a complex idea. Think again of the idea of a ship in a fierce storm. There are a lot of complex ideas behind the situation of a large company in an economic **recession**. But the metaphor helps people understand quickly and simply.

Metaphors can also [appeal to](#) our emotions and imagination. Consider Tropicana, the company that makes orange juice. They could have described the health benefits of their juice and hope that people make a logical decision to buy their product. But instead, they called their orange juice “your daily ray of sunshine.” That has emotional power. Who *wouldn't* want a ray of sunshine in the morning?

The Tropicana example is a good one, because it is [sensory](#). I mean, it makes you feel something. And anytime you can use a metaphor that helps people see, feel, smell, taste, or hear, it will be more impactful. Think of the difference between saying “your idea is not very good” and “your idea [stinks](#).” Or the difference between “I was glad to hear about Jan’s decision” and “Jan’s decision is [music to my ears](#).”

Metaphors also help people *remember* what you say. Albert Einstein once said “Life is like riding a bicycle; to keep your balance, you must keep moving.” I’ll never forget that idea. But without the metaphor of riding a bicycle, it wouldn’t [stick in](#) my brain. And just think: the first metaphor I mentioned was from almost 100 years ago, and people are still talking about it!

Okay, so today I’ve talked about the power of metaphor. We’ve looked at some examples of common idioms that help create impact. We’ve also talked about how metaphor can help simplify complex ideas and appeal to people’s emotions. And as I’ve discussed, good metaphors are sensory and memorable. In our next lesson, we’ll look at some common types of metaphors and one special type called an “analogy.”

That’s all for today. If you’d like to test yourself on what we’ve just covered, have a look at the [BusinessEnglishPod.com](#) website. There you’ll find a quiz about today’s show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. What are metaphors?
 - A Words that have more than one meaning.
 - B Comparisons between two ideas.
 - C Expressions that are difficult to learn.
 - D Expressions that are famous or well-known.

2. Which of the following sentences includes an idiom? [Choose 2]
 - A I'm so tired, I feel like I'm running on empty.
 - B I really hope I can attain a higher position sometime soon.
 - C I think I'm ready for my big speech, but I'm not totally sure.
 - D If you're missing a piece of the puzzle, you can ask me for help.

3. Which of the following are mentioned as examples of situations where metaphor might be useful? [Select all that apply]
 - A Writing a technical report.
 - B Giving a presentation.
 - C Asking for permission.
 - D Making a speech.
 - E Complaining.
 - F Negotiating.

4. The example of selling orange juice by calling it "your daily ray of sunshine" is effective because it is...
 - A ... complex.
 - B ... sensory.
 - C ... logical.
 - D ... common.

5. Which of the following are reasons why metaphors are effective? [Select all that apply]
 - A They are a sign of good education.
 - B They are difficult to learn.
 - C They are memorable.
 - D They can help to simplify ideas.
 - E They are used by famous people.
 - F They have emotional power.
 - G They are uncommon.

6. All of the following are metaphors EXCEPT:
 - A Time is money.
 - B Our team is a well-oiled machine.
 - C We need to beat the competition in this race.
 - D Henry is clearly the best employee we've got.

Review Answers

1. What are metaphors?

B Comparisons between two ideas.

2. Which of the following sentences includes an idiom? [Choose 2]

A I'm so tired, I feel like I'm running on empty.

D If you're missing a piece of the puzzle, you can ask me for help.

3. Which of the following are mentioned as examples of situations where metaphor might be useful? [Select all that apply]

B Giving a presentation.

D Making a speech.

F Negotiating.

4. The example of selling orange juice by calling it "your daily ray of sunshine" is effective because it is...

B ... sensory.

5. Which of the following are reasons why metaphors are effective? [Select all that apply]

C They are memorable.

D They can help to simplify ideas.

F They have emotional power.

6. All of the following are metaphors EXCEPT:

D Henry is clearly the best employee we've got.