



WHAT SHE SAID

THE ART OF INSPIRING
ACTION THROUGH SPEECH

MONICA LUNIN

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Introduction

Words have the power to change the world. A speech that is masterfully delivered, well timed and beautifully constructed can change someone's mind, open their heart and inspire them to act. Women and men have been making speeches and making a difference in the world around them for as long as civilisation has existed. It is time to hold up the speeches made by women, so often overlooked, to examine their power, extract their wisdom and spread them as examples for other women and girls.

Why I wrote this book

I have chosen each of the forty speeches included in this book for the lessons it contains. All of the women featured here used their voice, and their will, to bring about change in some way. I believe we should celebrate their commitment and their decision to speak up, without needing to interrogate the significance of their historic contribution.

My purpose is not to criticise either the content or delivery, and nor is it to suggest how the speech might have been done better. I don't provide any analysis of the opinions, ideology or beliefs of any of those whose words I have selected.

If you were to pull down from the bookshelf any anthology of famous speeches you would likely find the content overwhelmingly skewed towards men. I have found such speeches to be sources of inspiration and instruction throughout my life, but I have come to wonder if the gender imbalance is justified. Of course, we know that women, historically, have not enjoyed equality when it comes to positions of power or platforms for speechmaking, so perhaps that is our default explanation. Do you

accept, however, that because women did not have a platform, they did not have a voice?

I have come to the realisation that, in my mind, I lived in a post-feminist world. I believed my teachers and my parents when they told me I could do whatever I wanted to do. The men in my life—my dad, husband business partner and close friends—have never dissuaded me of this belief. I have surrounded myself with empowered and intelligent women who have carved out their place in the world. But when you look at the facts—the number of women in leadership roles in business and politics, for example, or the pay gap and rates of violence against women—I recognised that I have been deluding myself.

So what can I do to close the gap? Well, speaking has always been my thing. I am particularly interested in the intersection of communication and leadership and in my professional practice I work with people to help them find their mojo. We can all learn from the great speakers who have gone before us, no matter their gender. It is my hope that this collection will help other women develop their communication confidence and skill through seeing examples they might be better able to relate to.

At first glance, you may think some of the speakers identified in the pages of this book are too different from you to provide any useful advice. What could Queen Elizabeth I, who reigned in the sixteenth century, possibly have to teach a young woman working hard to be noticed in her job? How could a business leader extract any meaningful insight from the stories shared by a Russian novelist? Could a lawyer or an engineer learn from the early suffragettes? When you dig a bit deeper, however, you realise we can all learn something from each of these speeches. And these lessons can be found when we examine each speech according to its persuasive intent.

How to use this book

This book is more than a celebration of the speeches given by women. It is also a practical toolkit that you can use to help you inspire, motivate or educate others. We never just speak for the sake of it. When making a speech to any number of people, large or small, you want them to feel something. Similarly, your presentations are delivered to achieve

something. Whatever your purpose, you will find guidance from those who have gone before you.

The ten chapters in this book, each including four speeches, have been created to organise the collection into categories of purpose, rather than a simple chronological order. For example, in the following chapters you can find:

- speeches that bestow guidance, advice and wisdom
- expert speeches that show creative ways to share complex ideas, concepts and theories sparking interest from new audiences
- inspiring speeches that honour all the women who have lent their voice to the advancement of other women in the waves of feminism
- fiery speeches that are delivered when you need to draw the line or demand respect, and those that instead use humour to pave the way to understanding.

The lessons provided from each of the speeches can be applied to your own practice of communication. Sometimes you will need to present in a way that encourages people to do something, to act in some way, or to change their behaviour. Plenty of trailblazers are included here for you to follow. At other times, of course, a softer touch is what you need, to open a closed mind — just a crack — so that you might sow the seeds of change, and examples of these speeches are also included here.

Among the women featured in this book, you will find a wide variation in style. Some are confident, some are shy. Some are fighters and some are thinkers. Some have built up their public-speaking skills over a lifetime and some are uncomfortable in the limelight. All are worthy of listening to and learning from.

We tend to think rational arguments are formed purely based on fact. However, eloquence — and guidance — can also be found in unexpected places. Many speeches through this book can help you learn how to animate your technical or logical presentations to make other people see things your way.

And along with the beauty in the speeches that serves to bring people closer together, lessons can be found here too. If you have ever faced the challenge of fostering inclusion, you will no doubt be moved by the speeches in this book that enhance existing bonds and create new connections among seemingly disparate groups. And finally you have the treat of looking to the words of some master storytellers to encourage you in the ongoing journey of developing your own voice.

But this book is more than a collection of inspiring and powerful speeches. I also provide some context as an introduction for each speech. And after the inclusion of each speech (either the whole speech or a substantial extract from it), I then break down three observations that make the speech so powerful. So you not only have ‘what she said’ but also ‘how she did that’.

This book is intended as a celebration of diversity. Once you start to look you will find gems of oratory in every pocket of humanity. No limits based on ethnicity, background, education, race, age or even gender exist when it comes to the power of the spoken word. Once I set my intention these speeches were not hard to find. We have only to look a little further than the prevailing popular orations, no matter how good these might be. It is time to cast the net wider.

In the words of Margaret Atwood, ‘a word, after a word, after a word is power’. So let’s learn how to harness and leverage the power we all have.



**Providing
guidance, advice
and wisdom**

Appreciating the nature of the relationship between speaker and audience is important in crafting and delivering a speech that bestows guidance, advice and wisdom.

This relationship is usually somewhat unequal. This is not to say that the speaker is in any way better but, in the context of the advice, they have the upper hand. Their expertise, achievement, seniority (or some other distinguishing factor) creates in the minds of the audience a desire to listen and to extract meaning.

Think about all the scenarios in which this might happen — a classroom where the teacher is naturally in charge, for example, a church where parishioners settle in for the insight of a sermon, or a graduation ceremony where a keynote speaker is scheduled to punctuate the formalities.

The same relationship might arise in a professional context. You might have a manager inducting a group of new recruits, for example, an outgoing executive sharing the lessons learned during their tenure, or an experienced professional speaking at an industry conference.

If you find yourself in any of these scenarios, you can assume a certain amount of receptivity in the crowd before you begin. Unlike a political speech, you probably won't need to worry about hecklers or even anyone directly challenging your opinion. For the most part, your audience will be ready and willing to listen to you. This is a warm room.

Of course, that doesn't mean this type of speech is easy. Mastering a few fundamentals will make sure you build on the credibility that has already been bestowed upon you.

You will need to rise to the occasion. A hierarchy exists here, no matter how slight, and you are the senior. You need to assume the role. Be yourself, but the confident, assured, professional and accomplished version of yourself. Avoid apologising, demurring or otherwise giving away your power. Stand your ground, feel secure in yourself, open strongly and the rest will follow.

When providing guidance, giving advice or sharing wisdom, you have a fair amount of latitude when it comes to content — so get creative. You might want to choose a structure like ‘my top ten tips’ to give shape to your thoughts, share a personal story or even set the whole talk in the future. Organising your content into some sort of structure will help your audience stay with you as you work through your speech.

These types of speeches also allow for ‘big picture’ thinking. Concepts that might sound esoteric or idealistic can find a perfect home in this talk. A great example is Michelle Obama’s claiming of the moral high ground in her speech at the Democratic National Convention supporting Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign.

You can also draw from your own experiences in formulating content in these types of speeches, sharing stories and lessons learned. Put yourself in the message as much as possible. You are there to speak because of your personal experience or track record. People want to connect with you. So sharing a little bit of yourself can be helpful — as you can see with Nora Ephron’s speech at Wellesley College. Avoid disembodied advice in favour of wisdom that you earned from your own wins and losses.

This might even be an opportunity for you to set the bar a little higher. Consider Florence Nightingale, reaching out to us from a very different time. She was clear about the principles she considered vital for a nurse to adopt and nurture for a successful career, and she created an aspirational target for young women. In your world, this approach could have the added benefit of serving as a yardstick for future conversations.

The wisdom you share might be closely linked to your own area of expertise. You might begin by considering why you have been asked to speak, and what it is about your unique set of experiences that means others will want to listen. In the case of Virginia Woolf speaking about ‘women in fiction’ at Cambridge University in 1928, the skills of the novelist are leveraged to create a beautifully enigmatic piece, ‘Shakespeare’s sister’.

Your success in delivering an impactful and inspirational speech of guidance, advice or wisdom will depend on your own self-belief and your commitment to connect with and truly help each person in your audience. Be generous of spirit, remember they want to hear what you have to say, and you will make a difference.

... I wake up every morning in a house that was built by slaves. And I watch my daughters, two beautiful, intelligent, Black young women, playing with their dogs on the White House lawn. And because of Hillary Clinton, my daughters, and all our sons and daughters, now take for granted that a woman can be president of the United States.

Michelle Obama

Michelle Obama

*Former First Lady of the United States,
author and speaker*

B: 17 January 1964, Chicago, IL, United States

When they go low, we go high

When: 26 July 2016

*Where: Democratic National Convention (DNC)
in Philadelphia*

Audience: 50 000 people

On 26 July 2016, the First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama, spoke in support of Hillary Clinton in front of approximately 50 000 people at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Philadelphia. This convention confirmed Hillary Clinton as the Democratic nominee for president in the upcoming election, opposing Donald Trump as the Republican nominee.

Leading up to this speech, the world had witnessed the maturation of Obama's public-speaking ability and presence as she was thrust into the spotlight in correlation with the political career of her husband, Barack Obama. At times, we had seen her unsure of herself and rather guarded; at other times, she had been forthright and direct. Over time, she developed a style that was all her own.

Obama's speech at the DNC preceding the 2016 election was one of her finest moments at the microphone. A beautiful combination of emotion, conviction and technique, this speech provoked an overwhelming response from the assembled audience—including a standing ovation that appeared to be a genuine spontaneous response.

Obama's degree of influence in the United States and across the globe grew throughout and beyond her husband's presidency. With the publication of her book *Becoming* and the associated lecture tour, she has emerged as a role model in her own right.

Her signature speaking style is down to earth, and her language typically includes notes of colloquialism and candour. We often hear references to family, Black history and patriotism. On this occasion, Obama's speech was well crafted and expertly delivered, as the extracts included here show. She doesn't mention Trump at any point. Instead, her speech is imbued with values, triumph and optimism.

WHAT SHE SAID



Thank you all. Thank you so much. You know, it's hard to believe that it has been eight years since I first came to this convention to talk with you about why I thought my husband should be president.

Remember how I told you about his character and convictions, his decency and his grace, the traits that we've seen every day that he's served our country in the White House?

I also told you about our daughters, how they are the heart of our hearts, the centre of our world. And during our time in the White House, we've had the joy of watching them grow from bubbly little girls into poised young women, a journey that started soon after we arrived in Washington.

When they set off for their first day at their new school, I will never forget that winter morning as I watched our girls, just seven and ten years old, pile into those black SUVs with all those big men with guns.

And I saw their little faces pressed up against the window, and the only thing I could think was, what have we done?

See, because at that moment I realised that our time in the White House would form the foundation for who they would become. And how well we managed this experience could truly make or break them. That is what Barack and I think about every day as we try to guide and protect our girls through the challenges of this unusual life in the spotlight, how we urge them to ignore those who question their father's citizenship or faith.

How we insist that the hateful language they hear from public figures on TV does not represent the true spirit of this country.

How we explain that when someone is cruel or acts like a bully, you don't stoop to their level. No, our motto is when they go low, we go high.

With every word we utter, with every action we take, we know our kids are watching us. We as parents are their most important role models. And let me tell you, Barack and I take that same approach to our jobs as President and First Lady because we know that our words and actions matter, not just to our girls, but the children across this country, kids who tell us 'I saw you on TV', 'I wrote a report on you for school'.

Kids like the little Black boy who looked up at my husband, his eyes wide with hope and he wondered, *Is my hair like yours?*

... And I am here tonight because I know that that is the kind of president that Hillary Clinton will be. And that's why in this election I'm with her.

You see, Hillary understands that the president is about one thing and one thing only: it's about leaving something better for our kids. That's how we've always moved this country forward, by all of us coming together on behalf of our children, folks who volunteer to coach that team, to teach that Sunday school class, because they know it takes a village.

... Leaders like Hillary Clinton, who has the guts and the grace to keep coming back and putting those cracks in that highest and hardest glass ceiling until she finally breaks through, lifting all of us along with her.

That is the story of this country, the story that has brought me to this stage tonight, the story of generations of people who felt the lash of bondage, the shame of servitude, the sting of segregation, but who kept on striving and hoping and doing what needed to be done so that today I wake up every morning in a house that was built by slaves.

And I watch my daughters, two beautiful, intelligent, Black young women, playing with their dogs on the White House lawn.

And because of Hillary Clinton, my daughters, and all our sons and daughters, now take for granted that a woman can be president of the United States.

So, look, so don't let anyone ever tell you that this country isn't great, that somehow we need to make it great again. Because this right now is the greatest country on Earth!

And as my daughters prepare to set out into the world, I want a leader who is worthy of that truth, a leader who is worthy of my girls' promise and all our kids' promise, a leader who will be guided every day by the love and hope and impossibly big dreams that we all have for our children.

So in this election, we cannot sit back and hope that everything works out for the best. We cannot afford to be tired or frustrated or cynical. No, hear me. Between now and November, we need to do what we did eight years ago and four years ago.

We need to knock on every door, we need to get out every vote, we need to pour every last ounce of our passion and our strength and our love for this country into electing Hillary Clinton as president of the United States of America!

So let's get to work.

Thank you all and God bless.



HOW SHE DID THAT

Connect the personal to the universal

Long after we have forgotten the context of this speech or the fact that it was delivered at the Democratic National Convention in 2016, we will remember the claim of the moral imperative — ‘when they go low, we go high’. This is the lesson Michelle Obama imparts through her words. By examining how she gets there, we can extract some meaningful lessons for aspiring speakers. Obama begins, as she often does, with reference to her family. We are invited to view her as a mother first. We are there with her when her two young girls, then only seven and ten, first took up residence in the White House.

Just like all parents, the Obamas were concerned with how to instil ethical practice and some sort of moral compass in the minds of their children. What were these two girls to do when faced with the inevitable attacks on both their parents from the opposition and from the media? Just like every other parent, Obama mused, ‘How we explain that when someone is cruel or acts like a bully, you don’t stoop to their level.’ For Obama, the answer was clear: ‘No, our motto is when they go low, we go high.’ Unlike every other parent, Obama ushered her two girls through adolescence under the constant gaze of the public and the scrutiny of the media. Her approach for dealing with this, however, is universally accessible.

What might otherwise have sounded preachy, suddenly becomes the admirable and approachable insight from a ‘mom’.

Apply rhetorical flourishes

It is well known that Michelle Obama worked closely with a professional speechwriter for this and many of her other addresses. Perhaps that is why we see several classical rhetorical devices at work in this particular speech. They are all cleverly applied, and fade into the background as they should, but it can be useful for those looking to polish their craft to identify a few examples.

Repetition of a word or phrase — in this case, ‘kids’ — is used several times. In the full speech (available online — see the Sources section at the end of this book), she also uses the lead-in statement ‘I want’ four times, followed by ‘someone’, ‘a president’ (twice) and ‘a leader’. (You can see her final use of this lead-in statement in the extract provided.) This establishes a rhythm and builds towards a crescendo. Using these three variants of what Obama wants is one of several examples of *tricolon* — that satisfying rule of three first identified by Aristotle. (See Emmeline Pankhurst’s speech in chapter 4 for more on this concept.)

Embody the delivery

Rhetoric and metaphor are useful in producing a speech as powerful as this one, but there is much more is going on here. The carefully crafted words must be artfully delivered. A great script is nothing without an equally powerful performance. What Michelle Obama achieved on this occasion was nothing short of masterful.

Her pace was perfect—a little bit fast with the slightest touch of breathlessness. This served to amplify the importance of the occasion and the gravity of the message. She achieved the often-elusive emotional

resonance. We could see and hear how she felt about her content. When she picks up the personal story and returns to her daughters playing on the White House lawn, she is visibly choked up. This is the moment the audience rises to their feet and the cheering intensifies. This is oratorical alchemy.

One person in the audience, and their reaction, stands out—former President Bill Clinton. At this crucial moment, he mouths the word ‘wow’ and stands to applaud. He is clearly affected by the statement and the emotion with which Mrs Obama says, ‘And because of Hillary Clinton, my daughters, and all our sons and daughters, now take for granted that a woman can be president of the United States.’ Now, Bill Clinton is one of the most adept practitioners of pathos I have ever observed—he has that power to inspire deep emotion. His response makes the moment significant.

If you are making a point—indeed, if you are overtly claiming the high ground—your audience needs to believe you are fully committed. Otherwise, you may be met with the scepticism of a naughty teenager getting a lecture. Michelle Obama’s speech at the DNC in 2016 is a fine example of a great speech expertly delivered.

**What I'm saying
is don't delude
yourself that the
powerful cultural
values that
wrecked the lives
of so many of my
classmates have
vanished from
the Earth.**

Nora Ephron

Nora Ephron

Writer and filmmaker

B: 19 May 1941, New York City, NY, United States

D: 26 June 2012, New York City, NY, United States

Be the heroine of your life

When: 03 June 1996

Where: Wellesley College

Audience: Class of 1996

Nora Ephron is the American writer and filmmaker that brought us such classics as *Silkwood*, *When Harry Met Sally*, *Sleepless in Seattle* and *Julie and Julia*. So, you would no doubt expect sharp wit combined with humour from her — and this speech delivers both. It is imbued with her trademark insight and personality. Ephron goes further than this, however, delivering a compelling feminist message and a warning to the graduating class of Wellesley College in 1996.

Throughout her career, Ephron took risks. At times, her films sailed close to the wind. She often surprised her audiences and made us laugh. She also took a stand when she knew it was the right thing to do. Early in her career she applied for a journalist position at *Newsweek* magazine, but had to accept a role as a mail girl because at that time women were not permitted to write for the publication. Later she quit, brought a sexual discrimination case against *Newsweek* and wrote the book *Good Girls Revolt* based on her experiences, which was later made into a movie.

Years after her experiences at *Newsweek*, she was invited to address the graduating class of her alma mater, the prestigious Wellesley College in Massachusetts, United States, delivering what's known as the 'commencement' speech. Here she addressed the 'class of 1996' — the

women graduating from Wellesley College — and their friends, family and various college dignitaries. She warned these young graduating women against complacency. Reminding them to use their talents to become the heroines of their life, she argued they should avoid being trapped in a mere supporting role.

Commencement speeches are usually well crafted and delivered to receptive audiences that are pre-disposed to respond favourably. This one is no exception. The gravity of Ephron's advice is further amplified because she herself is a Wellesley graduate. The assembled crowd would be well aware of Ephron's work, her professional accomplishments and her ability to capture and celebrate human interactions.

Ephron has left behind an impressive legacy in the realm of popular culture. In the extracts of this speech included here, she offers the wisdom of her experience tempered by her trademark insights. To paraphrase the famous line from *When Harry Met Sally*, 'We'll have what she's having ...'

WHAT SHE SAID



President Walsh, trustees, faculty, friends, noble parents ... and dear class of 1996, I am so proud of you. Thank you for asking me to speak to you today. I had a wonderful time trying to imagine who had been ahead of me on the list and had said no; I was positive you'd have to have gone to Martha Stewart first. And I meant to call her to see what she would have said, but I forgot. She would probably be up here telling you how to turn your lovely black robes into tents. I will try to be at least as helpful, if not quite as specific as that.

I'm very conscious of how easy it is to let people down on a day like this, because I remember my own graduation from Wellesley very, very well, I am sorry to say. The speaker was Santha Rama Rau, who was a woman writer, and I was going to be a woman writer. And, in fact, I had spent four years at Wellesley going to lectures by women writers hoping that I would be the beneficiary of some terrific secret — which I never was. And now here I was at graduation, under these very trees, absolutely terrified. Something was over. Something safe and protected. And something else was about to begin. I was heading off to New York and I was sure that I would live there forever and never meet anyone and end up dying one of those New York deaths where no one even notices you're missing until the smell drifts into the hallway weeks later. And I sat here thinking, *OK, Santha, this is my last chance for a really terrific secret, lay it on me*, and she spoke about the need to place friendship over love of country, which I must tell you had never crossed my mind one way or the other.

... My class went to college in the era when you got a master's degrees in teaching because it was 'something to fall back on' in the worst-case scenario, the worst-case scenario being that no-one married you and you actually had to go to work. As this same classmate said at our reunion, 'Our education was a dress rehearsal for a life we never led.' Isn't that the saddest line? We

weren't meant to have futures, we were meant to marry them. We weren't meant to have politics, or careers that mattered, or opinions, or lives; we were meant to marry them. If you wanted to be an architect, you married an architect. *Non Ministrare sed Ministrari*—you know the old joke, not to be ministers but to be ministers' wives.

... What I'm saying is don't delude yourself that the powerful cultural values that wrecked the lives of so many of my classmates have vanished from the Earth. Don't let the *New York Times* article about the brilliant success of Wellesley graduates in the business world fool you—there's still a glass ceiling. Don't let the number of women in the work force trick you—there are still lots of magazines devoted almost exclusively to making perfect casseroles and turning various things into tents.

Don't underestimate how much antagonism there is toward women and how many people wish we could turn the clock back. One of the things people always say to you if you get upset is don't take it personally, but listen hard to what's going on and, please, I beg you, take it personally. Understand: every attack on Hillary Clinton for not knowing her place is an attack on you. Underneath almost all those attacks are the words: get back, get back to where you once belonged. When Elizabeth Dole pretends that she isn't serious about her career, that is an attack on you. The acquittal of OJ Simpson is an attack on you. Any move to limit abortion rights is an attack on you—whether or not you believe in abortion. The fact that Clarence Thomas is sitting on the Supreme Court today is an attack on you.

Above all, be the heroine of your life, not the victim. Because you don't have the alibi my class had—this is one of the great achievements and mixed blessings you inherit: unlike us, you can't say nobody told you there were other options. Your education is a dress rehearsal for a life that is yours to lead. Twenty-five years from now, you won't have as easy a time making excuses as my class did. You won't be able to blame the deans, or the culture, or anyone else: you will have no one to blame but yourselves. Whoa.

So what are you going to do? This is the season when a clutch of successful women — who have it all — give speeches to women like you and say, to be perfectly honest, you can't have it all. Maybe young women don't wonder whether they can have it all any longer, but in case any of you are wondering, of course you can have it all. What are you going to do? Everything, is my guess. It will be a little messy, but embrace the mess. It will be complicated, but rejoice in the complications. It will not be anything like what you think it will be like, but surprises are good for you. And don't be frightened: you can always change your mind. I know: I've had four careers and three husbands. And this is something else I want to tell you, one of the hundreds of things I didn't know when I was sitting here so many years ago: you are not going to be you, fixed and immutable you, forever. We have a game we play when we're waiting for tables in restaurants, where you have to write the five things that describe yourself on a piece of paper. When I was your age, I would have put: ambitious, Wellesley graduate, daughter, Democrat, single. Ten years later not one of those five things turned up on my list. I was: journalist, feminist, New Yorker, divorced, funny. Today not one of those five things turns up in my list: writer, director, mother, sister, happy. Whatever those five things are for you today, they won't make the list in ten years — not that you still won't be some of those things, but they won't be the five most important things about you. Which is one of the most delicious things available to women, and more particularly to women than to men. I think. It's slightly easier for us to shift, to change our minds, to take another path. Yogi Berra, the former New York Yankee who made a specialty of saying things that were famously *maladroit*, quoted himself at a recent commencement speech he gave.

'When you see a fork in the road,' he said, 'take it.' Yes, it's supposed to be a joke, but as someone said in a movie I made, don't laugh this is my life, this is the life many women lead: two paths diverge in a wood, and we get to take them both. It's another of the nicest things about being women; we can do that. Did I say it was hard? Yes, but let me say it again so that none

of you can ever say the words, nobody said it was so hard. But it's also incredibly interesting. You are so lucky to have that life as an option.

... Whatever you choose, however many roads you travel, I hope that you choose not to be a lady. I hope you will find some way to break the rules and make a little trouble out there. And I also hope that you will choose to make some of that trouble on behalf of women. Thank you. Good luck. The first act of your life is over. Welcome to the best years of your lives.

