

## Sheryl Sandberg Leans Into a Standout Commencement Address

Early summer yields a bumper crop of noteworthy college commencement addresses. These speeches by cultural luminaries and business leaders often exhibit strategies to benefit the rest of us in our own talks at work. Like the most memorable TED talks, commencement speakers often invest significant time crafting and rehearsing talks beforehand and merit analysis. Here we spotlight Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg's recent address to graduates at University of California, Berkeley. Sandberg's powerful and moving address embodies useful tips to make your own presentations at work more impactful.

### Audience Analysis

Whether a conference keynoter, a seasoned executive presenting to their organization, or a commencement speaker, the best of the bunch take time to analyze their audience. Before lifting a pen or cracking open a computer to draft the presentation, they reflect on who will be there. What will the audience expect or want to hear from *you*? What are *their* needs and how can you meet them? For those newly minted grads, Sandberg infused her talk with advice, humor, and thoughtful acknowledgement of where they are in their life's journey, with career and other adventures ahead.

How can your content convey a thoughtful consideration for those in your audiences (yes, even colleagues you speak to regularly)? Do so as a matter of course, and you'll better influence and engage.

### Authenticity...or The Power of Story

In her speech, Sandberg didn't shy away from sharing a seminal moment in her own life, the unexpected death of her husband last year. Conveying her belief in the resilience of the graduates, she related the story of her grief and the powerful learning lessons she experienced. She spoke of "...lessons about hope, about strength, and about the light within us that will not be extinguished." She referenced quotes by her rabbi and close friends. She relayed anecdotes from her personal and family life, as well as a specific story of her very first meeting back to work at Facebook after her loss. She had a theme, or what we at PowerSpeaking, Inc. call a core message, that was communicated throughout her talk: "It's the hard days — the days that challenge you to your very core — that determine who you are."

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Such varieties of anecdotes, however brief, add color and vivid detail. They help lock your content, and your message, into people's memories. Dry material and data-dense talks particularly benefit from such strategic additions. How can you weave in a personal anecdote related to the material, the process, or project in focus? If linking a personal story to your business content seems difficult to do, you might enliven data with an analogy, linking to universals from every day life or a current event.

## Behind the Polish...The Relentless Preparation

Sandberg's fine address showed poise, confidence, and ease before her audience. Because this was the first time Sheryl spoke publicly about the death of her husband, we can only guess that rehearsal was necessary to get through such an emotional talk.

Rehearsal is a lesson for all of us. In readying for an important talk event, the best presenters don't stop at assembling slides or writing speaking notes. Standout presenters get the content in the can—and then carve out time to practice. They stand and deliver, rehearsing content aloud and timing it. They solicit colleagues' feedback on content as well as style. The more muscle memory you gain with practice, the more you dissipate the nerves.

What's the pay off for you with these tips? You'll come across, as Sandberg does, with the presence of a powerful and compelling presenter. Test these strategies to lean into stronger presentation skills, conveying a powerful life message...and your career success.

*Enjoy Sheryl Sandberg's talk (in video or transcript form) at the following link:*  
<http://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-sheryl-sandberg-commencement-address-transcript-20160514-story.html>

*Another powerful commencement address we highly recommend: Lin Manuel Miranda, writer and star of the hit Broadway musical "Hamilton," at University of Pennsylvania:*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xo7rJ5JRn7E&feature=youtu.be&t=2h23m58s>