“Birth Order: So What?” by Jon Friberg



This is an Original Oratory performed for the 2009-2010 NCFCA Season. It received 4th place at the National Championship, 3rd at the Colorado National Open.

An Original Oratory is a memorized speech on any topic one chooses.

# Introduction to the Platform

I am sure that some of you find Original Oratory as entertaining as static on TV.  Maybe you've been lulled to sleep with speeches on cellular biology or perhaps someone's intriguing personal brush with gingivitis.  This speech was not like that.  This speech had an audience almost every time.  And that is why it gets to be in the Platinum Book; this speech was a blast to perform and to watch.  In case I wasn't clear, my speech that took fourth place at the National Tournament was an Original Oratory platform speech.  It was on Birth Order.  Now, that's an appealing subject to everyone since, drum-roll..., everyone has been born!  Even the judges.

Now, when looking at a platform speech, there is a certain structure that it must follow, or you get lots of notes from the judges on how your structure was lame.  Actually, I've never had a judge say "your structure was lame", it was more "your structure lacked a quantifying backbone."  No, that was not a comment from an alumni.  So here are a few notes on what I loved about the speech, why I think it worked and a few comments (for free) on delivery as well as tips on how to make a speech keep the judges attention really well.

To begin, you have to have that great intro that totally throws people off what you're actually going to talk about.  The one that makes the judges cross out what they originally put for you title.  In my Original Oratory I make it seem like the subject is "Nature vs. Nurture" as being the main influence on the growing child.  Then I reveal what the real subject of the Original Oratory is; Birth Order.  Well, that was after my allusion to hairstyles from the 1970's affecting the lives of those walking among us today.  You must appeal to your judges' era and most of them still remember the 1970's with a shudder.  And since you've touched a nerve, they're on your side.

Now you've got their attention you have to let them know a bit where you're going, but don't let them get too comfortable in their road-map.  Throw another curve ball in - like switching the sequence of points, but have a good, personal, touching reason for doing so.  I'm sure when you read my Original Oratory you will see what I did.  Actually, that one move alone is probably responsible for over half of my "First" rankings.  Judges repeatedly wrote how they loved the "curve ball" and how many of them could relate.

If we're honest, though, no speech, no matter if James Humes himself wrote it, can make it if it's not delivered well.  This is really where I enjoy platform speeches - writing it isn't nearly as fun as performing it.  Especially if you get the timing right and you can really connect to your piece. I thoroughly enjoyed performing my Original Oratory because I am a quirky guy who enjoys facts and sarcasm.  Mix those together with some research, throw in talking about your siblings in any way to support your research (and not get in trouble for it), and you have a speech that has judges laughing and one almost falling out of their chair.  Just ask Mrs. Miller - she was sitting by him.  I will say that the timing didn't just come, I had feedback from everyone around me.  But it seemed more natural than any other part of the speech.  I also got repeated positive feedback from the judges about my timing and how conversational I sounded.  And a note on that element; I wrote the speech just like I talk - I didn't talk like I was reading a speech.  That's why it was so natural (and had a few instances of poor grammar).

Initially when I read my ballots, some judges felt the piece was too "light".  There was an alternate ending discussed when the judges commented on how "frivolous" the topic seemed compared to the gut-wrenching competition it was up against.  The alternate ending was: "Now maybe understanding Birth Order Theory won't bring about world peace; but maybe understanding the birth-order of those around you - your spouse, your kids, your boss - might bring a little more peace to your world."However, I really liked the ending I had, so I did a bit more cutting and re-writing and added a sobering but brief glance at the affects of my cousin's death on his sibling, noting that not all birth order positions are fixed from birth.  The judges seemed to appreciate this nod towards the "real" side of life and so I kept that part.

But what I did at the end was one of my favorite elements.  Woven throughout the speech itself were a few references to my "aha" moment at the end of the speech.  In my Original Oratory you will find statistics about last born children rarely being president and other clues about my "gotcha" that if I tell you now, will ruin the surprise when you read my speech.  Judges repeatedly wrote notes about what they thought was an inconsistency in my speech only to scratch them out when I got to the end.  You see, once again, keeping the judges guessing worked.  It was the "gotcha" at the end of a very fun speech that tied it all together.

So, the next thing for you to do is read my Original Oratory on Birth Order and enjoy it.  Maybe you'll even figure out a way to make what worked for me work for you too.  But before you do any of that, remember to find a topic with wide appeal.    Like I said before, everyone can relate to Birth Order since everyone has been born.  And since I included both good and bad traits of each birth position, everyone got talked about.  And everyone got laughed at and everyone can enjoy that.  So enjoy laughing at yourself in the next speech.  Actually, I know you'll be laughing at your siblings!

# Into the Platform

Have you ever wondered why you are the way you are?  Was it because your great grandmother was a little eccentric?  Or did it have to do with the small house that you grew up in that only had 5 windows instead of the recommended 10?  We have all heard the arguments about children and how they turn out…. Is it nature or nurture that has the final say?  Is it Genes or jungle gyms; DNA or discipline; heredity or hairstyles?  Now it would not surprise me if some of the hairstyles of the 1970’s did, in fact, shape the lives of those walking among us today, but there’s no way I can spend 10 minutes talking about that.  But what if the debate about nature versus nurture having the greatest impact on a child is only the tip of the personality iceberg?  What if there is an even stronger influence at work on the unformed psyche?  I am talking about the real culprit for why you choose what you choose, and what makes you, in fact, YOU: your birth order.  That’s right, I said birth order:  The place that you hold in the order of the children that were in your family. “Depending on birth position, there are special roles within families, leading to different adaptation patterns and different personalities”, says Ben Dattner, a New York City-based psychologist (CNN.com).  Now, because this is only a ten minute speech and not a full lecture, I will only be addressing the four main birth order rolls; oldest chile, middle child, youngest child and only child. But before we do that, there is something key we need to be keeping in mind throughout this speech; having children is hereditary.  You see, if your parents didn’t have any, you can’t either. That being cleared up; let’s explain birth order a bit more.

Now, I bet you think that I am going to begin with the oldest born child.  Why wouldn’t I?  Why wouldn’t you start with the one who began it all?  I’ll tell you why: You see, when I was growing up and as a matter of fact throughout my whole life, when we got the new Wii and were lining up to play, or whenever we were lining up to get food we had one of two options, we could either go oldest to youngest, or youngest to oldest. I am a middle child and never in my life have I gone first.  And since I am in charge, and because this is my speech, I am going to begin with middle born children.

 Research has found that a middle child is quite often referred to as "Mysterious Middle Child” (birthorderandpersonality.com).  Middle born children are quite difficult to pin down when looking at birth order as there is more than one kind; however, they tend to be the opposite of their older sibling which can be good or bad.  They tend to be mediators, risks takers, and get along well with others, are independent, competitive, and imaginative. On the negative side they are generally stubborn, cynical, and rebellious. They also love to stand out (birthorderandpersonality.com)*.*  In my family, there are technically three “middle” children and we all share some characteristics of middle children in our own way.  My older brother Torren rarely followed Lego directions, choosing instead to create his own masterpieces.  My younger brother Spencer is a peace-maker who hates confrontation and feels overlooked at times.  As for me, I have chosen to stand out by being the tallest in my family and independent by being the only one to weigh 12 pounds when I was born.  As you can see, I haven’t gained any since…..  Actually, it’s truer to say that I stand out in my family as the only child to participate in NCFCA, having displayed a great ability to debate my parents, they wanted me to go debate others instead of them.  A quick list of middle children who have made a name for themselves include:  Donald Trump, John F. Kennedy, Barbara Walters, Bob Hope, Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt (birthorderandpersonality.com).

Now I’m going to get back on track and address the oldest child – the one you thought I was going to talk about first.  If I asked you to think about the children you know to be the first born in their family, what characteristics would you list?  Think of your own family; what is the oldest like?  Maybe you are the oldest in your family, how have people described you?  Studies indicate that there are significant strengths most first born children have, which include: a greater level of confidence, they are taken seriously, patient, organized, they possess strong powers of concentration, confidence to dream and plan.  However, the eldest child also may have an innate fear of being de-throned, they tend to be perfectionists, overachievers, and tend to be selfish with possessions and attention (birthorderandpersonality.com).  A quick side note, according to Kevin Lehman, in *The Birth Order Book*, a child who may arrive later in the birth order but is the first of their particular sex is considered a first born child (Leman, 21).   In my family, Zachary is the oldest child and fits this description fairly well.  He is the Awana Games leader at our Awana club, the one who alphabetizes all the DVDs at home, doesn’t like to do anything without a plan; he is a people pleaser and perfectionist and he will admit it.  He also has Legos that were assembled exactly as the directions said for them to be that have been on his shelf for years, untouched by any of the other Lego enthusiasts in the house.  Here is a list of some famous first born children: Winston Churchill, Saddam Hussein, John Wayne, Mussolini, Martin Luther King Jr. and Bill Gates, both of whom qualify as an oldest since both were an eldest son.  More than half of the U.S. Presidents were first born children and a large portion of the second half are made up of eldest sons (birthorderandpersonality.com).  “21 of the 23 first astronauts were first born children” (Leman, 12) and interestingly, my research has found that even a majority of tournament directors for my NCFCA region, including my state representative are first born children.

And now for the baby of the family; the one who is doted on, the out-going and spoiled one.  If you are the baby, doesn’t it drive you crazy to be described that way?  I mean, don’t people know that it isn’t your fault that your mom keeps helping you?  Typically youngest children have never met a stranger, are sociable, affectionate, caring, creative, empathetic, and confident (birthorderandpersonality.com).  They are the ones who cheer for the underdogs as they know what it is like to be lowest on the Totem Pole.   On the flip side, they can be described as spoiled, immature, self-centered and manipulative (birthorderandpersonality.com).  Kevin Leman, author of many books on birth order and a youngest himself says that it’s unlikely that a last born child will end up president (Leman, 92).  In my family my brother Wyatt is the baby.  If you were to meet him, you would know it right away.  He is comfortable with anyone because he has had people at his beck and call his entire life.  He is very affectionate and loves attention.  It’s also interesting to note that he just began doing dishes at the age of ten … ten!  I began when I was 4.  You may ask if that is because he’s just done a good job of pretending to be incapable, or if my mom just wanted the job done better by an older kid, i.e. Me.  Personally I think it’s his last born tendency to manipulate his way out of a job, and I must admit he does it well.  Last born children tend to be entertainers whether in their families or as a career.  After all, they have been the center of attention for years.  See if this short list of famous last born people surprises you: Steve Martin, Billy Crystal and Jim Carey (cbsnews.com).  That is not to say that youngest never grow up to be anything but entertainers, in fact, here are a few famous non-entertainer last borns: Copernicus, Harriet Tubman and Ronald Reagan (cbs.com).

Now, we reach the subject of the only child.  This child is called by most researchers as a “Super Firstborn” (Leman, 50) and is assumed to automatically be a problem. When asked to describe personality characteristics of an only child, many people will respond negatively, showing the assumption that only children are spoiled brats. In China, couples are encouraged to have only one child in order to help with population growth. These children, or "little emperors," as they have been called, are generally seen as little spoiled monsters. However, research conducted by Falbo (Brophy), a psychologist known for work in the area of birth order, doesn’t agree. Falbo found that Chinese only children did no worse in personality or accomplishments than children with siblings. Only children are also often seen as: high-achieving, motivated, and successful (Brophy, p.56). There are however some negatives that seem to be common in only born children such as being self-centered, fearful of trying new things, they worry too much, and tend to be inflexible (birthorderandpersonality.com).  In my family, you may be surprised to hear that there is an only child; remember that if you are the only one of your sex in a family, you are, according to Kevin Leman, an only child (Leman, 21).  That would be my sister, Ripleigh.  My parents named her that because, as they say, “It’s Ripleigh - believe it or not, we had a girl”.  Ripleigh’s technical birth order is fifth in the family, but she is definitely an only child – or princess as my dad would say?  She is the one who can run the house with or without my mom, but she does tend to be inflexible.  She and my mother have a bedtime routine that, come tornado or high water, cannot be altered without there being a problem.  I’m sure you have heard of some of the famous only children in this list: Nancy Reagan, Carol Burnett, Hans Christian Anderson and Lance Armstrong (birthorderandpersonality.com).

As I said in my introduction, I was only able to cover four of the main areas of birth order due to the timed element of this speech which is probably a good thing as there are literally dozens of variables (like step-families and twins) and different influences on a young child that may change their role as they go on in life; take my cousin Derek who, after the sudden death of his two year old brother, became an only child at the age of six - profoundly changing both him and his role.

So in an attempt to make some order to the pieces of this puzzle that I did talk about, I’m wondering if you noticed something…. I’m wondering if in the description of last born children, you heard me reference Kevin Leman and his opinion about how unlikely it is for a baby in the family to become president (Leman, 92).  Did you pay attention to the famous people I used as examples of last borns?  Do you remember the name Ronald Reagan?  Here’s where we see that those fascinating creatures called humans, can’t be defined in a cookie-cutter way.  It’s interesting, it’s quirky and it’s obvious that the Birth Order theory can be seen in our culture, but it doesn’t stop there.  You see, you don’t have to be what some theory says you are.  And because you demonstrate some of the characteristics of your birth order -like Ronald Regan did in being an entertainer - doesn’t mean you are doomed to it.  As e.e. cummings said “It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.” (http://www.goodreads.com)   So you decide.  You choose.

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