

AUGUST 18, 1988

Not too long ago I walked back to an empty hotel banquet room to retrieve the notes from a talk I'd made an hour before. The table cloths hadn't been pulled and the chairs were just like they were before the people had left to go home.

When I walked up on the stage and looked over this vacant hall, I tried to remember what had been said that night. Three long-winded spellbinders, counting myself, plus an hombre to call out the awards for the year, had held fourth after dinner.

I couldn't say who made the best speech or had the best slot. Once an audience has been through a convention, several cocktail parties and been fed banquet food, any response short of a dead slumber is considered a success from the podium.

I remember once riding off early one morning with a cowboy who that night was going to give a report at a 4-H banquet. He said, "Monte, I don't see how you are able to stand up in front of a bunch of people and talk without being scared to death."

After I'd had a little time to think, I told him that talking in public didn't bother me near as much as listening. The thing to hope for is that the major wind force of the evening will be stricken by stage fright. Pray, I told that cowboy, that he'll stutter and stammer in anguish instead of keeping you past your major anniversaries of this life.

A lady after church last Sunday was talking about learning other languages. She said that after 18 years of age our vocal chords start becoming brittle. She didn't say when the eardrums fail from disuse, but as you well know there's a lot of hombres around and about who can only tell what thunder sounds like by reading about it in the newspaper.

So standing up on that empty stage, with the lights still burning as bright as they were during the banquet and nothing left at the tables but dirty glasses and wadded-up programs, it occurred to me that to make these programs a success we need to bring in guest listeners.

And I thought right then the next time I'm program chairman I'm going to see whether some talent alone those lines can't be developed.

I guess brittle vocal chord are why I can't pronounced French and English words distinctly. In this presidential election year, plenty of the worthies will be trying to limber up their chords. Even if we give the guest listener wives corsages, I don't think it'll take many flowers to fill the order.