

# FORWARD

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## Meet the Speech Doctor to the Rich and Famous

For \$3,000 a Day, Eve Epstein Will Help You Pontificate and Persuade

By MARTIN BRAUN

Communications guru Eve Epstein is meeting with United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan in his wood-paneled library overlooking the East River. It's Spring of 1997, and Ms. Epstein, "speech doctor to the rich and famous," had been brought in to help recast the image of the United Nations and advise Mr. Annan during his first 100 days on the job. What the United Nations and Mr. Annan needed, Ms. Epstein explained, were concrete stories to bring the romanticism and optimism of the United

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Nations back to life.

"I pulled out some documents of my father, a Holocaust survivor," says Ms. Epstein. One of those documents was from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, an agency that had helped Ms. Epstein's father study medicine in Munich after his liberation from Buchenwald.

Ms. Epstein recalls that Mr. Annan looked at the documents, tears welling up in his eyes, and he said that this was precisely the kind of message the public needed to hear.

Ms. Epstein knows that the right words can speak as loud as any action. A former academic, Ms. Epstein formed Manhattan-based Epstein & Associates four and a half years ago. Taking control of public appearances, from speeches to interviews to sales calls, is the skill Ms. Epstein teaches her tony roster of clients, including business bigs such as Arthur Sulzberger Jr., and corporate clients such as Viacom Inc., Estee Lauder Group and Kraft Foods, Inc.

While her training is not cheap—\$3,000 a day plus travel expenses—

for those in the glare of the public light, the skills Ms. Epstein teaches are priceless.

"The study of persuasion is as old as the Bible," Ms. Epstein told the Forward. "It you want to have some control of your environment, personally or professionally you need to get your point across clearly, credibly and convincingly."

Assistant secretary general

for public information at the United Nations, Sam Sanbar, says that Ms. Epstein's work with Mr. Annan was invaluable. "Ms. Epstein was brought in to help in two areas. She gave suggestions to U.N. officials on how to handle the media, and she provided advice to Mr. Annan on how to present his reform proposals to the press. Any additional angle, particularly from a professional, is valuable," Mr. Sanbar says.

For Ms. Epstein, communications is as much a science as it is an art. She tells clients that 55% of the impact of



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any message comes from body language and vocal qualities, while only 7% of the impact comes from the message itself. Before a client's media appearance, she will drill him with potential questions and use video playbacks so he can see how the audience will see him. And she helps rewrite speeches, reminding executives that their oratory should be easily understood, audience spe-



LESSON IN DIPLOMACY: Eve Epstein, center, counseled U.N. Secretary Kofi Annan, left, here with Charlie Rose. Below left, one-on-one with Gerry Adams, and below, right, with another famous communicator.

cific and repetitive. "Martin Luther King repeated 'I have a Dream' 16 times," Ms. Epstein points out.

The key to successful public relations is "controlling the dialogue with the media," Ms. Epstein says. She advises clients to respond to hostile questions, even if there's some truth to them, by "bridging," or bypassing the questions and making a transition to the message they want to tell. If that sounds like manipulating the press, Ms. Epstein disagrees.

"The question is not manipulating the media, it's a question of not letting the media manipulate you," she says.

"People in the media—diplomats, politicians, managers, authors must be extremely careful and aware of the impact of what they're saying," Ms. Epstein says. "And they have to be able to speak in sound bites and speak so that they have a better chance of being quoted accurately."

The president of a New York group called the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, George Schwab, says he appointed Ms. Epstein to her post as a vice president of the organization because he "came to rely on her expertise regarding communication skills and promotional activities." Mr. Schwab added that the work Ms. Epstein does for the his organization, which was responsible for bringing Gerry Adams to visit this country from Northern Ireland, is free.

While Epstein & Associates is on y

four and a half years old, Ms. Epstein is no novice at this game. At 21, she was already a faculty member in the Communications Department of Queens College. Three years later she earned her Ph.D. in communications and worked as a research associate with the Speech Communication Association of America. She continued working in the communications field, as a visiting professor of homiletics at the Jewish Theological Seminary, even as she assisted her physician husband as full-time business manager and public relations agent. And then, after a divorce at age 38, Ms. Epstein founded the communications company.

Ms. Epstein is convinced a public leader's success or failure rests on public perception. Mr. Annan's success in recasting the image of the United Nations, she says, has come from his effective use of public speeches and interviews. In her opinion, Mr. Annan has presented the United Nations' case to the American public more directly and compellingly than his predecessor, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, making the odds of achieving his goals more favorable.

As for national politics, Ms. Epstein, a life-long Democrat, believes Vice President Gore's presidential candidacy can only succeed if he changes his public persona from wooden to warm in the next two



years.

"One-on-one, he's charismatic and compelling," Ms. Epstein says. "He has potential."

And then, for a moment, the expert in communications falls silent.