



## A TITAN OF TALK

### Public speaker Peter Legge has made a career out his gift for gab

BY GRANIA LITWIN  
*Times Colonist staff*

**P**eter Legge is a communicator above all else. Not only is he president and CEO of the largest, independently owned magazine publishing company in Western Canada — Canada Wide Magazines & Communications — but he is also acclaimed as the top public speaker in North America.

The best-selling author and past chair of the Vancouver Board of Trade will be demonstrating his talent when he speaks at The Salvation Army's Annual Luncheon May 4. It is at the Princess Mary Restaurant, from noon to 1:30 p.m.

"Lots of people are afraid of public speaking," says the expert, who's at the podium about 100 times a year. "At a funeral most people would rather be in the casket than giving the eulogy. But fortunately for us professional speakers, it isn't nearly as scary or difficult as most people think."

He says the secret is a combination of natural ability and lifelong learning. "I've achieved a level of competency on the platform because I've really worked at it, and I go into every speech with a mindset that I'm going to change the world."

The technique is obviously working. He was voted Toastmasters International's top speaker in 1993, and both the National Speakers Association and the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers have inducted him into the Speakers Hall of Fame. Simon Fraser University recently gave him an Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree.

Legge believes part of his success is due to the fact he tells lots of personal stories, "highlights and lowlights," that people can relate to. "I have the same trials and tribulations, the same struggles with the bank, my staff, my marriage, that everyone else has."

He also has a confident and smart



Peter Legge is at the podium more than 100 times a year as a public speaker.

appearance.

"People make decisions about you in the first four seconds, based on the way you look, dress, do your hair... So when you walk out on stage you need to look sharp. I always dress just a little better than the audience."

And he never wastes time with small talk. No generic thank-yous or "so nice to be here..." are heard when he's around.

"I immediately do something differ-

ent, because you have to captivate people right away," says the English-born Legge, who moved to Vancouver with his parents at age 12. Jokes are good, because they settle people down and help him get comfortable, too. "It's a unifying element, but I only tell jokes on myself."

Does he think that public speaking can pave the way to success?

"Absolutely," says the 62-year-old. "If you can get up and speak well, formulate your words and thoughts — whether to

staff, bankers, shareholders or clients — you are held in a different kind of esteem. The doors of opportunity open."

At the Victoria luncheon Legge will talk about "The runway of life," which refers to how much time we all have left. He figures he'll live to about 85, which means "just 23 more birthdays. I can't wait until I'm 80 to get in shape, to be good at what I'm doing, to live my passion. I have to do it now."

He urges people to take control of their lives — "We are all in charge of everything we do: our attitudes, manners, thoughts" — and says when we blame, we give away the right to our own life.

"I wish I'd heard me speak when I was 20," he says with a chuckle. "Because we all need to be positive, to live our passions, read a book a week, be kind and gentle, and walk hand in hand with people who know more than we do. There are universal principles that work in our life."

Legge declined to mention his own speaking fee but notes a "good journeyman speaker" (not a star like Rick Hansen or Silken Laumann) makes \$7,500 to \$10,000 in Canada, plus expenses, and double that in the States. He is speaking for free at the Salvation Army luncheon, because he supports its work.

And does he ever worry about stage fright?

"I get apprehensive when I don't think the lighting, or sound system, or audience seating is set up right. But that's why I always go down a couple of hours ahead — to check the sound, move chairs closer to the platform, make sure they suspend service like pouring wine during my talk, and that the doors are closed. They're picky details but essential."

An audience doesn't care about a speaker's problems, he stresses. "The audience just wants it right."

*Tickets cost \$25 and are available only in advance by calling 386-3366, ext. 2.*