



Speaking - From FREE to FEE

by

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Many people often ask me what it takes to get people to "pay" you to speak. Before an organization is willing to pay a speaker they need to feel there is value in what the speaker has to say. Keep in mind speaking for free does NOT mean that you do not offer something of value.

The goal of speaking before a group should not always be motivated by money. I can remember situations during my career where I would have been willing to pay for the opportunity to speak to a group. One thing that always occurs when you are speaking before a group, whether being paid or not, is that you are making impressions to everyone in that group. The more people that hear you speak, the more people there are who can refer you to others who CAN pay you.

Organizations such as Rotary, Elks, Lions, Moose, Chamber Of Commerce need speakers all the time. Several non profit organizations and associations have meetings every month and often have trouble looking for speakers. Contact all your local associations and introduce yourself. Many of the members of these associations have businesses of their own and often have the ability and authority to "hire" speakers to speak within their own organizations.

The speaking business, and I emphasize the word "business" is a heavily referral based business. Most people prefer to have a friend or colleague refer a speaker to them that they have actually heard speak. The more people that hear you speak and are familiar with your abilities and message the more people there are who can refer you to paying clients. Whether you get paid to speak or speak for free you should focus on delivering your message to each audience.

Most audiences have people who do have the ability to hire you or know someone else who can. I can honestly trace paid speaking business to many of the free speaking engagements I have performed. Over the years I have learned various methods and techniques that help me to maximize these free speaking engagements.

Often these same organizations that do not have budgets for the speaker can offer other "in kind" services that are worth more than your actual speaking fee. For example, I have spoken for an organization who did not have a budget to pay speakers but did have the resources (people & equipment) to professionally videotape my presentation. In the end they provided me with an original recording along with several copies of the video of my presentation. Had I hired someone to professionally videotape my presentation, it would have cost me much more than my regular speaking fee.

Many speaking bureaus will not hire you until they have seen and heard you speak. They may hire you if someone they know refers you but typically will still ask for a demo tape (audio or video). Whenever I am speaking at an association meeting in a new city, I try to contact the local speakers bureaus and let them know I will be speaking in the area. After getting permission from the client who hired me, I offer the speakers bureau the opportunity to come and hear me speak.

When you do speak to any organization, bring plenty of business cards. Have your name, address and telephone number on all your handout materials. I also include my web address and e-mail address as well. It still amazes me the people who have attended keynotes I have delivered 3 or 4 years ago contact me because they saved my handout. I have had people who have attended one of my sessions give copies of my handouts to other people they know because they felt the materials I provided were worth sharing. These people, just based on the handout, called me and hired me to speak to their group.

Speaking to associations is a key part of my marketing efforts. Let me explain. The bulk of my speaking services (about 60%) is providing "in house" workshops and seminars to the corporate market. Another 25% is "keynote" speaking to associations and organizations. Providing "one-on-one" coaching to executives and individuals accounts for 10% and the remaining 5% is providing local continuing education seminars. These four types of speaking provide a constant source of referral based leads for my business. The percentages do vary from year to year. Some years I may spend 40% of my time delivering keynotes, 20% coaching individuals and the balance of 40% is providing "in-house" corporate programs. A lot will depend on associations. Most

associations will not hire the same speakers as they hired last year. If they do hire you again it may not be until 3 years later because they like to have different speakers each year. On the other hand there are associations that I have spoken to each year for the last 4 years, but I will usually provide a different program.

Not all speakers can provide "in house" seminars and also provide keynote speeches. The speaking skills involved for delivering a keynote and not the same as those skills required to provide a "hands-on" workshop. The keynote speaker is usually hired to entertain a group at some special function. That is not to say, that the keynote speaker does not offer substance and education value, but the speaking delivery and approach of a keynoter requires some different skill sets. This is important to understand from a marketing perspective since the people you may be marketing to are different.

Corporations typically hire trainers and workshop leaders. They generally do not hire keynote speakers for "in house" programs. They are looking for people who can provide some type of training for their staff.

Associations generally hire keynote speakers, lunch time speakers and after dinner speakers for one of their regular meetings or special annual meetings. Some associations will also offer some special training seminars to their membership in conjunction with their event. The speaker who can provide both a keynote and training session will often be hired because they can meet the needs of the client for both speaking situations. For example, in October of this year I will be providing three half day seminars for a client as part of their annual conference. On the last day of their conference, I will also be providing the lunch time keynote. Because I was already being paid my full fee for these three seminars and needed to be there during lunch, I offered to provide the lunch time keynote at no additional fee. This is a "win-win" situation for both of us

Keep in mind, many of these association members also work for corporations who need "in house" programs. Speaking at association meetings continues to generate leads and actual work for me as an "in-house" trainer. I have even provided many FREE lunch-time 45 minute programs that have lead to multiple "in house" seminars. The condition of providing the program FREE was to require that key decision makers attend these lunch time programs and hear me speak, especially those people who have the authority to hire me. I also make sure I am introduced to these people during the lunch time event and follow up with them afterwards. This was the way I "broke into" the corporate market and established some credibility as a corporate trainer. These corporate

executives then referred my name to other corporate executives, which in some case were either their next door neighbor or a member of the same church they attended. As I mentioned earlier in this article, this is a referral based business. I can trace many of my best paying clients back to some "pro bono" speaking I provided either that year or a few years earlier.

Many of these associations will often provide you with the names & addresses of their entire membership list. I also ask the person who hires me to provide me the names and contacts of other people they know who they think may be interested in hiring me. I also ask that they make the initial contact with these people. When I do call them, it is not a "cold call" but a follow up call to the one initially made by the people who hired me. I add the names of these people to my mailing list, especially the members who attended my session and heard me speak. If you do offer to speak for free, ask that the person who hired you provide some kind of press coverage and place an article in the local newspaper announcing your speaking engagement. Always try to have them include a photograph of you as part of the article. An article with a photograph always draws more attention. It also helps you establish a "celebrity" status, at least in the local newspaper. Other executives, both corporate and associations will read this article and may contact you just based on the article. This article will be more effective in attracting other business, than a classified ad you would have paid a lot of money for.

You can even call the local newspapers and mention that you will be speaking in the area and offer to write a short article about your topic that they could publish in the local newspaper. The article should not be too promotional but offer some sound advice to the typical client you would like to attract. Have them include your name, address and telephone at the end of the article so people will be able to contact you. This also lets the newspaper know that you would be available as a good contact for future articles and believe me they will contact you.

Another effective method is to become an active member of key associations who have the types of business contacts that may be good for your business. Becoming an officer in the association affords you the opportunity to become first known as a member of this association and get to know the members personally. Through this professional association, the other members become more familiar with your speaking services and what you have to offer. They are then in a better position to either refer you to someone they know or even hire you for their own company.

The moral of the story is to speak every where, even if for free. It works. The more people who know about you the more people there are who can tell others. Continually build your network of business contacts and soon you will be asked to speak for your full fee. The key is to learn how to "leverage" these FREE speaking engagements into generating PAID speaking engagements.

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