

Professional Speaking Business Tips and Cautions

Adapted from NSA National Academy Materials



Tips to Build a Professional Speaking Business:

1. Ask questions and get varied input before investing significant amounts of time, energy and money.

2. At the beginning, speak as much as possible. Consider arranging for 20 free engagements to collect endorsement statements and create word-of-mouth buzz. You want the endorsement statements to describe the difference you and your presentation made to the audience and/or the organization.

3. Invest in your professional development not only as a speaker but within your content area. Read the most recent and established books on your topic, and maintain your membership in associations that support your expertise. Take on leadership roles in your professional association(s).

4. Consider the additional option of Toastmasters, which provides a low-cost opportunity for practice and feedback.

5. For each new program you develop, present it in front of a practice audience three to four times to fine tune it before you present it at a paying event.

6. Be open to feedback and making changes based on trends. Don't be devastated by negative comments or character attacks such as "I couldn't stand the speaker." These comments are more about the audience member. Useful audience feedback is when three or more people make comments such as "The speaker spoke too fast and I didn't hear it all."

7. Arrange for experienced speakers to be in your audience to give you feedback and valuable suggestions for improvement.

8. Research local speakers to find one you admire. Offer to assist him or her at an upcoming event. You could take money for product sales or help with presentation setup. Watch, listen and ask questions following the presentation.

9. Add humor and fun to your presentations — in your stories, examples, props and/or images. An old joke in the speaking profession is "Do you use humor in your presentations?" Answer: "Only when I want to be paid." Learn the best way for you to add humor to your presentations. Sometimes stating a fun quotation is all that is needed. Don't force humor if it's not a good fit for you.

10. Record yourself and use as a continual improvement tool.

11. Collect video footage. If an organization videotapes you, be sure to request a copy. Wait until you are confident in your program and have the WOW factor on stage before editing and placing video footage on your website or creating a demo video. Make sure you get shots of an engaged audience. Collect video footage from media events. They can eventually be used on your website and/or your demo video.

12. Avoid both bad mouthing and worshiping other speakers. We all have our strengths, weaknesses and differences. Some speakers empower, some inspire, some train and focus on content, some recite eloquently, some amaze with juggling balls, magic or a guitar, and some agitate the audience into thinking or action. However, do bring forward to the NSA Ethics Committee any concerns you have about unethical behavior.

13. Never steal other speakers' material or core ideas. Develop your own content and memorable moments. If you do use a line from another speaker or author, give the appropriate credit. Adapt - don't adopt.

14. Learn to sell yourself before you ask or hire someone else to do it.

15. Be clear on your area of expertise and market before creating marketing materials or writing a book.

16. Set a fee you are comfortable stating out loud. Decide if your fee is firm or if you are willing to negotiate. If you decide to negotiate, have an exchange list of services you are willing to accept for a reduced fee. Exchange items can include videotaping your presentation, receiving an endorsement letter on organizational letterhead or other support services.

17. Learn how to stick out in the crowd of professional speakers.

18. Under-promise and over-deliver.



Tips for Running a Successful Professional Speaking Business:

1. Consider coaching. Join your local NSA Academy and consider paying for coaching after completion to hone skills. Ask many questions before paying any platform or business coaching. Often coaches who seek out newer speakers are not the best in the business. Ask well established professional speakers who they have used.

2. Delegate office work. Focus on your highest-value task. Do the tasks that create the best results, and leave the \$10/hour jobs for someone else. There are numerous online services available. Remember to ask questions and get varied input before investing your time, energy and money.

3. Decide if you will work with speakers bureaus or not. Before you converse with bureaus learn how they operate. Don't go directly to them; let them come to you. They will do that when you have something they want to offer their clients. Be ready when they come.

Professional Speaking Business Cautions

1. Be discerning with the advice you receive. Other than the NSA Code of Ethics, there are few right and wrong ways to do the business of speaking. Listen with the mindset of, "That works for this presenter. That is his or her philosophy, point of view or strategy. Is it a good fit for how I want to do business?"

2. Do your homework before investing money in any buy or shared project. Eager and beginning speakers have lost significant amounts of money by listening to lines such as "You deserve to invest in your unbelievable talent and bazillion-dollar future." Ask an established and in-the-know NSA member before investing significant amounts of money. Notice how often experienced speakers ask, "What do you know about this person? What has been your direct experience? Do you recommend this person and their offer?"

3. Don't quit your day job until professional speaking is earning enough to support your desired lifestyle.

