

On successfully dealing with a professional speaker

By Milo Shapiro, CEO of IMPROVentures.com

Part 2 - "Interviewing and Selecting a Speaker"

(article 2 of 3 – 970 Words)

(Note: If you missed part (a) of this series, it is posted at www.improventures.com/articles/hiringspeaker)

In our last issue, we looked at how one might find good speakers for an event on the topic of your interest. In step (a), we covered the pros and cons of using a speakers bureau. You can find speakers yourself through the National Speakers Association (www.NSAspeaker.org), through speaker alliance groups (like www.SouthernCaliforniaSpeakers.com), or by just searching the net for keywords like "professional speaker", your topic, and perhaps your city of interest.

Once you have a few candidates on a list, it's time to interview for selection and coordination with your choice.

b) INTERVIEWING AND SELECTING A SPEAKER



Once you have looked at a few sites and think you have found either the right speaker or a short list of candidates, it's time to pick up the phone.

If you get their voicemail or a staff person, be sure to leave *more* than your contact information. Also leave:

- ▶ the city of the event. This can greatly affect our availability depending where we are the day before and after. If it's a lesser known city, it's nice to hear facts like "That's about two hours north of Seattle" or "By the way, Evansville does have its own airport."
- ▶ the date of the event and the approximate time. I almost said no to a company because I'd already booked that morning and then found out their business meeting wasn't until 7pm in the same city. That was doable!
- ▶ the type of service you are looking for. Many speakers are also consultants, trainers, coaches, teambuilders, performers, etc. so if you just say "event", we don't know what we're calling you back about doing.
- ▶ your time zone. It's easy to forget which zone a middle state is in. And if you're calling from Arizona, with your own unique take on Daylight Savings, always include this! (No one can remember what time it is in Arizona.)

Supplied with this information, we'll be much more fully prepared when we call you back so we're not fumbling to get you the right information while you hold on.

Once you are live on the phone with a speaker, simply ask him to tell you a little about the program you are interested in. Though you are bound to have specific questions, some may be answered in his response and it's your chance to hear the energy and personality of the speaker as he describes what he does. This may be far more valuable in giving you a good or bad feeling than the actual answer to specific questions. Demo tapes become dated the day after they are produced; this phone call may be your best example of what you will get from this person on stage. You're potentially hiring *this* speaker; not how good his videographer or video editor is. Is he upbeat? Does he make you feel interested in what he's saying? Does he sound interested in you?

Now he has described the program and you are still interested in this speaker. Here are a few good questions to include to determine if this person is a good fit or not. Some you may already know from their website.

Regarding the body of the speech and their qualifications, consider asking these questions:

1. Is this program purely lecture, a little bit participatory, or highly interactive?
The answer may please or turn off an event planner, depending on the group type.
2. What percentage is story versus data?
(The more speakers I hear, the more convinced I am that stories hold interest stronger, convey a point better, and affect an audience far longer than data can)
3. How will this program be different from those this group has heard in the past (particularly helpful if you can find out beforehand who has been used or, at least, what topics have been done before).
4. What types of audiences do they find they are most effective with? This can be an interesting qualifier.
5. Is the person a member of the National Speakers Association? If not, why not? You don't want to hear that they don't qualify yet! If they say they used to be, some people may have legitimate personal reasons for having left, but at least you'll know they once met the standards.

Regarding the speaker's specific needs in running the event, find out...

6. Will he be needing PowerPoint? If so, who will be providing the laptop and other AV?
(Typically, the speaker provides the laptop and the client provides the A/V, but I like to request, if possible, that the client provide the laptop. That way, it can be set up before I arrive, putting everyone's mind at ease, and my laptop becomes the emergency backup, which has paid off twice already).
7. Will handouts be involved? If so, as reference tools or will writing be involved?
8. Would a lavalier microphone (the hands-free clip-on type) greatly enhance the performance or is a handheld sufficient?
9. Does the speaker expect or appreciate the ability to sell books, tapes, etc. at the back of the room afterward? While this is a courtesy that usually costs the clients nothing, some clients strongly object and this is something you'll want to clarify immediately if that's the case.

With these questions answered, you can feel more confident trusting your gut reaction to whether you liked this speaker's style enough to choose him or her...*if* the budget is a match.

I recommend finding out a few things about the speech before getting into price (in particular, numbers 1-5 above). There might be options around what packages he will offer and if you don't know what he does yet, the options won't make much sense. Plus, even if the price is not a match this time, you've shown the speaker the respect of finding out about his material, in case it's ever a fit in the future. Once you know the basics of what he can do for you, though, it's worthwhile to discuss fee before delving into the *specifics* of the speaker's needs in case the if the price is out of the question for this event.

In the next and final part, we'll look at how to successfully coordinate the event with him/her.

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