

Everything the Professional Needs to Know About Giving a Winning Speech : *First in a Series*

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As originally posted in

BW Price's Marketing U

A blog offering "how to" marketing tips for professional service firms and the professionals in them from Barbara Walters Price

BW Price's Marketing U
www.bwprice.blogs.com

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After 20+ years of professional service firm marketing experience, I know something about securing, prepping, and delivering a speech. Not to mention the appropriate follow up because without it, you're not maximizing your business development efforts.

I've had numerous requests to share this knowledge and will do so in these series of articles. I'll break up the information into sections and use a few top-ten-or-so lists to help boil down the information into something you, the reader, can remember.

First, we have to understand why speaking is important to a professional. Speaking is important because it identifies you as an expert, or a "celebrated expert," as Larry Bodine of PM Forum says. Every speech you, as an expert, deliver builds your brand and the brand of your firm. It is a win-win scenario as long as you properly prepare.

As an aside, some people have no fear of public speaking and some people do. If you're in the latter category, get some training - join Toast Masters, practice in front of your colleagues at internal training sessions/meetings, or in front of your family. Do whatever it takes to get over the hurdle. You won't regret it.

Step One: Securing the Speaking Engagement

Our topic today is securing the speaking engagement. You cannot deliver a dynamite speech without an open podium. Here's my top 10.5 list for the professional:

- 1) **Develop expertise.** In other words, define your niche. You can't be all things to all people. Defining a niche doesn't mean you're pigeon-holed as some have suggested to me. Defining a niche means you have particular expertise that an identifiable group of people want. You can still do other things; however, working your niche is the best way for you, as a professional, to get traction in the marketplace which propels your career forward at an ever faster rate.
- 2) **Leverage your expertise.** You have defined a niche. Now, start to publish articles about topics in that niche in appropriate journals/magazines. Also consider starting your own blog or participating in one of your firm's practice area blogs. If starting your own blog, make sure that the powers that be at your firm are aware of it and approve of your efforts.
- 3) **Become active in association(s) in your niche.** Do not just join, become an active participant. Get to know the leaders and influencers in these organizations.
- 4) **Become active in your credentialing professional association(s).** It is important to give back to your profession. You are not an island. Many have come before you and graciously shared their knowledge with you. Do the same. It is not only personally rewarding, it is professionally savvy because you are seen as an expert's expert if you are educating your peers. This creates an aura of "safety" about you in your clients' and/or referral sources' eyes.
- 5) **Partner with a Senior in your Firm.** If you are a young professional yet really want to jump-start your speaking calendar, consider partnering with a senior at your firm. This means that you will most likely do all or most of the work putting the speech together, but so what? It doesn't matter if you are speaking solo or with a co-presenter. You both get the same benefit and it becomes easier to secure the second speaking engagement.

- 6) **Identify Groups That Would Be Interested in Your Content.** Research groups in your niche as well as local groups that would be interested in what you have to say. Keep a list of the association's name, contact information, name of the director or other internal staff, a schedule of when their meetings usually take place, and when they begin to fill their calendar. The more you speak, the greater number of speaking engagements will come to you. However, at the beginning, you've got to search them out and do a little legwork to make them happen.
- 7) **Develop a List of Potential Topics and the General Points Covered under each Topic.** Have this list at the ready. It is a great resource to send to meeting planners and other organizers. It demonstrates that you are serious and prepared.
- 8) **Contact and Offer to Speak.** If you do not ask, you do not get. Some groups will turn you down, some will put you off, some will say yes. You will obviously have more luck if you have developed your niche and positioned yourself as an expert in that niche. However, do not wait until you believe that level of expertise has been attained because that may delay unnecessarily delay your efforts.
- 9) **Ask for Input and Advice from the Seniors (and even your Peers) in Your Firm.** Ask not only for input as to potential topics, but ask who they know who might be able to help. Most seniors will be incredibly helpful because your success means success for them as well. Once a speaking engagement is attained, ask them for input into the information provided. If possible, give the speech to them before giving it to the association or group.
- 10) **Just Do It.** Do what? Do all of the above in whatever order is pertinent to your situation.
- 10.5) Once you have secured a speaking engagement, remember "**the 5 P's**": **publicize, prepare, practice, produce, and profit.** Publicize: Don't hide this important marketing tool under a bushel! Prepare: Your content is important so don't wait until the last minute to prepare. Practice: Even Zig Ziglar practices. Produce: Once at the podium, deliver a winning presentation. Profit: Follow up to take advantage of this terrific opportunity.