

# Chapter

## Five Steps to a Winning Speech

*Be sincere; be brief; be seated.*

—FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT,  
ADVICE ON SPEECHMAKING<sup>1</sup>

Whether it's leading a seminar or delivering a keynote address, speaking presents unique long-term marketing opportunities for consultants. A speech places you face to face with a roomful of prospective clients who have signaled their interest in you and your topic by showing up. You have the rare chance to meet and address people who want to learn about you and what you have to say. And you don't have to find them—they come to you. As a marketing opportunity, what could be better?

As a bonus, speaking expands your network of contacts, positions you as an expert, and generates leads for new business. And your speech material will add to your store of intellectual assets and can be marketed in other formats, including audio and video offerings, CDs, slide presentations, and articles. Your material might even form the basis of a book.

Speaking, after all, is the perfect marketing tactic for consultants, who communicate for a living. And as Nick Morgan, author of *Working the Room*, puts it, "There is something essential about the intellectual, emotional and physical connections a good speaker can make with an audience that . . . no other medium can reproduce."<sup>2</sup>

Remarkably, most consultants fail to capitalize on the marketing potential of speeches because they narrowly define a speech as a single, isolated event. They go to an event, present their speech, and then disappear. To realize the full benefits of speaking, the guerrilla manages a speech, not as an event, but as a marketing process.

Before you begin, honestly assess your speaking skills. Most consultants haven't focused enough time or energy on the craft of public speaking and are uninspiring speakers. The best advice on speaking for consultants is that if you can't do it well, don't do it. Instead, use your marketing resources on other tactics. Recognize proficiency as an entry barrier to the speaking arena.

## ■ TRAINING AND PRACTICE

If you are going to pursue public speaking, find out about training programs for speakers. Join the National Speakers Association, where you can take courses, practice, and make great contacts. Consider taking a few lessons with a speech coach who can tape your practices and give you tips and constructive criticism. Watch great speakers, in person or on video. Some consultants hone their speaking skills by teaching at local colleges and universities.

Look for a training program that will teach you speaking platform skills, methods for turning the natural fear of speaking into positive energy for your speeches, and effective rehearsal techniques, especially video feedback. Find a systematic way to develop speeches. The Decker Grid System, created by communications expert, Bert Decker, is an example of an effective approach.<sup>3</sup>

Lack of rehearsal is a noticeable problem with most consultants' speeches. When asked in an interview about his thoughts on rehearsing, Nick Morgan said, "... the vast majority of business speakers under rehearse woefully. Typically, they don't rehearse at all. . . . That is a disaster."<sup>4</sup> Practice may not make your presentation perfect, but it can make the difference between excellence and disaster.

## ■ A SPEECH IS NOT A SPEECH

Proficiency in speaking is essential, but it's not enough. To ensure that a speech is an effective tool that will draw clients to your practice, think of it as a five-step process:

1. Develop compelling content.
2. Get a speaking engagement.

3. Prepare your presentation.
4. Attend the big event.
5. Participate in postevent activities.

Keep in mind that you are marketing your practice in each step of the process. A speech is not just a speech—it's a marketing continuum.

#### GUERRILLA ALERT: DON'T BE A BORE

Audiences have heard it all, so you must stretch to keep them from scurrying for the exits. You're not putting on a Broadway musical, but the audience members won't find out what you can do for them if you don't command their attention:

- *Avoid fact-intensive presentations.* Consultants tend to give audiences more statistics than they can absorb. Limit statistics to a few facts and figures that directly support your major points.
- *Best practices are passé.* For many clients, best practices mean warmed-over tactics others have tried. And, what's best for one client may be a disaster for others. Listeners want to hear about novel approaches, innovative ideas, and techniques they haven't tried. When explaining a new solution, point out potential risks you can anticipate, but encourage your audiences to think creatively.
- *Stay on course—keep to your main route.* If you do wander, get back on track fast. Like most experts, consultants can ramble endlessly on subtleties that are of little interest to anyone else.
- *Your speech is not a commercial.* Sell your ideas and know-how, not your firm's services. You can present one slide of your qualifications, but that's it. Let the person who introduces you blow your horn.
- *Don't be a book report speaker.* Reading a book or two does not qualify you as an expert, and summarizing the content of books, no matter how great they are, is boring. Only speak on what you expertly know; that is what will interest your audience.
- *Learn to be an engrossing speaker.* Tape your speeches and analyze them later. An audiotape or CD can be a great tool to help you become a better speaker and avoid being dull.

**► Step 1: Develop Compelling Content***The Yawn Factor*

Every day, thousands of speeches are given. Most fail to move their audiences to do anything other than yawn. Most consultants excel at addressing clients across a desk, but when they speak publicly, they often register new highs on the yawn meter.

Speeches must provide first-rate content and engage listeners' attention. According to a survey by the National Speakers Association,<sup>5</sup> what audiences want most is education and skill building. More than 75 percent of speakers are hired because they provide education and training. The most sought-after topic is performance improvement. Industry trends, by the way, are at the bottom of the list.

Audiences appreciate hearing about tools, processes, or systems that will help them solve their problems. Try to give them solutions that they can apply right away. Explain how others have solved similar dilemmas and provide innovative answers to complex problems. Solutions should be a prominent feature of your presentations. Once again, delivering value is the key. Translate your knowledge, experience, and synthesis of issues into understandable and actionable steps for the audience.

Once you identify three topics, call your network contacts, your clients, academics, and industry experts and ask for their thoughts

**GUERRILLA TACTIC: WHAT TO TALK ABOUT**

Pick topics according to the following rules:

- The subject must be relevant for your clients.
- It has generated buzz.
- It has captured your deep interest.
- It is in your area of expertise.
- You can explore new angles that will interest your audiences.

Identify hot topics by reviewing magazines, newspapers, radio and television programs, academic journals, industry newsletters, and issues discussed at industry events. Look for subjects on the Web sites of trade associations, businesses, and other consultants. Use your client experience to develop ideas for topics.

on the subjects. Design a few informal survey questions. Asking survey questions is a good way to expand your network, so include people you don't know. Plan to use the results in your speech, along with information from more formal surveys (with proper permission, of course).

### *Follow Your Expertise*

Talk about what you do and know best; it's your competitive edge over rivals with less experience. Audiences will recognize that you are knowledgeable and credible. Plus, it's easier to prepare talks on subjects you know and easier to concentrate during your presentations.

All businesses share seven fundamental characteristics that you can build speeches around, as suggested here:

1. *A plan for the business*: how strategy and tactics improve profits
2. *An organization*: seven ways to streamline your organization
3. *People*: improving productivity while forcing employee turnover
4. *A planned outcome*: six ways to stretch your distributed network
5. *Activities to make the plan work*: management techniques for large-scale projects
6. *Performance measures*: building reporting measures that work
7. *Future or emerging trends*: five trends that will shape consumers' shopping experiences

If you're a business process expert, you can examine any process for ways to enhance performance, consolidate activities, or compare and contrast performance or organizational models. You can compare the activities of leading organizations to identify breakthrough strategies. Or you can talk about the future of a process.

A change management consultant might fashion a speech on how change will impact an organization's people or its organizational structure. Or, you might focus on change to the organization's long-range plans.

### *Turn Your Back on the Sunset*

The most creative photographers say that when everyone else is capturing the image of the sunset, you should turn around and shoot behind you for an entirely different, but stunning view. As you think

about your point of view for your topic, try to look at it in a new way. Your speech will be much more interesting to meeting planners and audiences if you zig where everyone else zags. Take a stand. Stimulate audiences to think.

### *What the Heck Are You Saying?*

Once you have selected a topic and decided on a point of view, isolate the core message of your presentation. What do you want to stick in the minds of your listeners when they leave? Try to summarize your core message in one or two sentences. Build the rest of your presentation around that theme.

### *Once upon a Time*

So much has been written about including stories and humor in speeches that you'd think we'd all be master storytellers by now. Sadly, we are not. Yet stories are critical to connecting with your audience. Mark Victor Hansen, coauthor of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, points out, "Storytelling helps speakers make a lasting impression on their listeners." He says that's because we ". . . understand *everything* through the context provided by story."<sup>6</sup>

Grady Jim Robinson, premier storyteller and author of *Did I Ever Tell You about the Time*, says, ". . . story, with its potential for symbolism and use of innate universal archetypes, is a powerful way to deliver your message, whatever that message may be."<sup>7</sup> Robinson advises speakers to use personal stories that ". . . contain just enough self-revelation that your audience will begin to feel comfortable with you, understand a bit of your past history, and sense where you are coming from."<sup>8</sup>

Like public speaking in general, effective storytelling is a skill that doesn't come easily. But both can be learned with training and practice. And if you can effectively weave a story and humor around your core message, it will resonate with audiences and stick in their memories.

## ► **Step 2: Get a Speaking Engagement**

The word is out. The advantages of public speaking are no longer secret, and the competition is fierce. Thousands of want-to-be speakers are now vying for a limited number of slots, and many are accomplished performers who put on highly entertaining shows. Industry events need great speakers. Many events are built around the quality of the speakers they present, and without them, their attendance would dwindle. That demand sustains an industry

of professional speakers who have impressive credentials and decades of experience.

A research report by the National Speakers Association found that 35 percent of respondents had been speaking for 11 to 20 years and 28 percent for 6 to 11 years. That's some stiff competition. The good news is that consultants have qualities that audiences and event planners crave:<sup>9</sup>

- *Expertise:* Audiences want to hear from the best. That's why more than 75 percent of all event speakers are industry experts.<sup>10</sup>
- *Value orientation:* Consultants understand what constitutes value to the clients and industries they serve and can frame their presentations accordingly.
- *Up-to-date information:* Consultants can provide audiences with the latest information. They can also provide current data within the historical context of their specialty areas.
- *Insider's perspective:* Consultants speak the language of the industry and know the players.

### *Referrals and Other Resources*

Referrals remain the best way for you to get speaking engagements, especially recommendations from people who have heard you speak. Therefore, it's vital to build a network of people who will recommend you as a speaker to their contacts.

Industry associations, corporations, and nonprofit organizations regularly need speakers. Check Web sites for events and look for directories with information on groups. The Directory of Associations, which is published by the Concept Marketing Group, provides information on over 35,000 organizations.

Organizations frequently issue requests on their Web sites for proposals (RFPs) from speakers. They state that they're looking for speakers on various subjects and ask you to submit your biography with a brief summary of your speech. While you're looking for RFPs, also check schedules of upcoming events for other opportunities.

Many sponsoring organizations require potential speakers to furnish an audio or videotape of past presentations. If you expect to be paid, you will need to submit a videotape to even receive consideration. Keep in mind, however, that a professionally made video showing you in the best light can be a substantial investment and a questionable use of your resources if you don't plan on becoming a professional speaker.

### GUERRILLA INTELLIGENCE: WILL YOU GET PAID?

The National Speakers Association survey found that meeting planners were somewhat more likely to use unpaid industry experts (59 percent) than paid ones. Of those speakers who did get paid, almost 75 percent of them received less than \$5,000 per speech. The big paydays—\$15,000 and up—went to just 5 percent of speakers.\*

The goal you have for a speech will help you decide what level of compensation, if any, you want. You may be willing to do it for free for the right audience.

---

\*"Speaker Usage Monitor: Wave 1," National Speakers Association (June 2003), p. 10.

Ask meeting planners if they plan to videotape your speech. If so, negotiate to obtain a copy of the videotape for your future use.

#### *Speakers' Bureaus*

Speakers' bureaus or agencies book engagements for speakers. They are like bank loan departments: If you don't need the money, the bank will be happy to lend it to you. Similarly, when you are an established, popular speaker, bureaus will want to represent you. Celebrities are an exception, but unless you are well known or you have an impressive speaking track record, they won't be dying to represent you.

Bureaus charge commissions, which can be as high as 30 percent of the speaking fee. And keep in mind that they don't work for speakers, but for event sponsors. Bureaus have stables of speakers, some of whom may compete with you for the same engagements. Bureau agents are like commissioned salespeople.

Many bureaus require you, at your expense, to supply them with marketing materials, which can include a professionally prepared color brochure describing you and your credits, your photo, and videotapes of recent presentations. They then send those materials to event planners. Bureaus screen speakers and try to plug them into appropriate venues. Many bureaus also require that you have a "bureau friendly" Web site, which means that the speech and contact information links to the bureau, not the consultant.

Using a speaker's bureau is cost effective for well-paid speakers who are in high demand and have established speaking reputations. Unless you fit this profile, bypass these services.

### ► **Step 3: Prepare Your Presentation**

This step in the process can last for many months. Use the time to solidify your presentation and build relationships that will make your speech a worthwhile marketing investment.

#### *Reconnoiter*

After you've been hired to speak, arrange to meet with the event planners, including the host organization's executives and the event staff. They are usually well informed about both logistics and the makeup of the audience. Test your ideas on them and ask for their insights on how to customize your presentation. This is a chance to meet executives and staff when they are most receptive. After all, it's in their best interests to help you deliver a great speech. Think of event planners as clients, which they are.

Continue to network as you polish your speech. Some speakers send canned questionnaires to event sponsors in an effort to customize their speeches. Most of the information you'll need is available on the Web, and it's better to gather the rest by meeting with your clients and others who plan to attend the event.

Interview other experts in the field, including academics. Also try to meet with your client's customers. Discuss their problems and elicit their opinions. That will produce richer and more perceptive information, including first-hand experiences, on-point stories, and real-life solutions.

Obtaining such input will forge new relationships and strengthen existing ones because you are giving those you talk to a stake in, or even partial authorship of, your presentation. Their involvement can increase your support, visibility, and client referrals, and can lead to tips about future speaking possibilities. Be sure to mention that you'll tell the audience how the experts or clients helped with the speech, which will give them a return for their effort.

#### *Add to Your Ammunition*

As you polish your speech, look for additional ammunition to support your points. Find out what your fellow speakers plan to cover during the event so you can coordinate or differentiate your presentation. You may want to build on the themes of previous speakers; it's

### GUERRILLA TACTIC: PRESPEECH CHECKLIST

Gather the following intelligence before your speech:

- What are the deadlines for submitting a summary or draft of your speech, photos, and other materials?
- Who is to be your main contact person leading up to your speech?
- What are the audience demographics?
- What is the theme(s) of the event?
- What are the key issues facing the host organization?
- Who spoke and who attended in the past?
- Who else is on the program and who will present before and after you?
- When will you appear on the program?
- How long are you expected to speak?
- Can you invite guests and how many?
- What will be your compensation—pay, access to the event, guest passes, hotel and airfare, master copies of audio and videotapes of your presentation?
- Who will own the rights to play and reproduce recordings or derivative works?
- What items, if any, will you be permitted to sell at the event?

highly effective and flattering to those speakers and can forge supportive relationships. On the other hand, you don't want to be repetitious. Speech titles can be deceiving so find out as much as you can, preferably directly from your fellow presenters.

#### *Spread the Word*

Publicize your appearance by alerting your clients, inviting peers, potential clients, and the media. Request passes for your guests from the event sponsors. Highlight your speech on your Web site and in your zine. Publish excerpts of your presentation or place announcements in other publications.

### ► **Step 4: The Big Event**

Many events run for several days. Plan your schedule so you can spend time at the event, not just to deliver your speech, but to participate in other activities.

#### *Testing, Testing*

Check out the room where you'll speak. Test all the equipment: lights, microphones, speakers, and projectors. Consult with the event staff and decide where to place handouts, article reprints, copies of your books, and other material. Explain to staff members how they can help. Speakers can be a pain for event planners. Don't be—be a pleasure to work with.

#### *Check Out the Event*

Attend as much of the event as you can: the host organization's receptions, dinners, exhibits, and other presentations. Find out what issues concern attendees, your peers, and the other speakers. Ask their opinions and discuss possible solutions. Listen and learn. Network, network, network.

#### *Mingle before You Speak*

In whatever time you have just before your presentation, be visible and meet people. Give them the chance to ask you questions and engage you in discussion. Make it a point to talk to event staff, especially those who coordinated the publicity. Staff can be extremely helpful, so treat them well.

It can be difficult to focus on getting to know people when you're mentally getting ready to speak, especially if you're not good at small talk. But it will pay dividends in the long run. You might even be able to mine bits you can use to personalize your speech. And being able to spot friendly faces in a roomful of strangers can ease your nerves.

#### *Deliver a Great Presentation*

Finally, the time has come to get up there and speak. This is when your research, planning, and rehearsal will pay off. If you have confidence in your content and know it well, you will be able to relax and enjoy your time in the spotlight.

Make eye contact with your audience. Don't rush. Gesture and move naturally. Pause silently when you need to, but avoid awkward, overly dramatic, or insincere movements or vocal inflections. Listen to and read nonverbal cues from the audience. Involve your listeners in your presentation.

**GUERRILLA TACTIC: PROVIDE EXTRAS**

Plan to give your audience extras: survey results, white papers, recommended reading lists, how-to articles, and Web addresses that are relevant to your topic. Don't give attendees souvenirs or trinkets—give them something useful. Include your contact information, but don't hold the materials hostage by requiring recipients to give you their business cards or other information to obtain them. Don't push; simply mention what additional items are available at no cost.

***Visual Nonaids***

Speakers are often tempted to use visual aids like slides and pointers. Used correctly, they can make the difference between a good and a great speech; in the wrong hands, they can be a disaster. PowerPoint is a helpful, but misused tool. Slides can be effective, but they can

**GUERRILLA INTELLIGENCE: POWERPOINT RULES**

- If the audience can't read every word on a slide, turn off the computer.
- Aim for no more than three words or a single image per slide.
- If a slide is too dense, apply the 50 percent rule twice: Remove half of the slide's content, then look at it again and remove another half.
- Every slide must be clear, readable, and coordinated with your presentation.
- An effective PowerPoint presentation takes practice and rehearsal, especially the transitions. Just because it worked like a charm last week doesn't mean it will again. Before subjecting audiences to needless distractions, rehearse with your slides.
- Include your Web site address on each slide (that doesn't count in your three words).
- Avoid animation—it detracts from the point you are making.

also be a crutch and a distraction. Don't use slides as speaker notes or as an outline for your speech. Nothing is more boring than a speaker reading bullet points from slides for an hour. Use them sparingly. They are most useful for visually enhancing your main points.

### *What's the Question?*

Decide in advance whether you will answer audience questions during your speech or at the end, and let the audience know the plan. Taking questions as you go along can inject insightful observations and spontaneity into your presentation.

On the other hand, some questions can be distractions and a waste of everyone's time. It takes practice to make judgment calls on the fly about how long to spend on a question and how to get back on track. Be prepared for questioners who try to hijack the floor by posing endless questions. Skillful speakers know how to bypass long-winded questions.

Questions are an ideal way to get feedback about your clarity, find out what's on listeners' minds, and gauge the level of their knowledge. Questions also provide you with great examples that you can use in future presentations. Answering questions is important for the audience, but is often more valuable for the speaker.

Some speakers prefer to set aside a designated part of their presentations for questions and answers. A separate Q&A period avoids interruptions, and you usually get better questions when your audience has heard your entire presentation. It's a personal preference.

If you opt to take questions in a separate period, hold your conclusion until after the Q&A. When you've finished answering questions, deliver a strong closing. In that way, you won't leave the audience hanging; you remain in control of the finale and can finish your presentation on a high note. Also, having the last word gives you the opportunity to incorporate an issue that was raised during Q&A into your concluding comments.

### *Stick Around*

Many speakers leave events as soon as they've given their speeches. In doing so, they lose valuable marketing opportunities. Occasionally, a scheduled speaker cancels unexpectedly. If you're still around, the sponsors might ask you to step in, which will win their gratitude and give you more visibility.

After your presentation, answer any further questions and swap contact information with attendees. Be generous with your time. If you don't have the time or the information to answer a question, make arrangements to do so later.

However long you stay at the event, thank the staff and the sponsoring organization's brass before you leave. If possible, and it's not too awkward, say good-bye to important attendee contacts.

### ► **Step 5: Postevent Activities**

Within two or three days after your speech, send handwritten notes to event planners and key members of the host organization thanking them for their hospitality and the opportunity to speak. Try to personalize each note.

Call the people who asked you to contact them about their business or to answer deferred questions. Strike quickly, while memories of the event are still fresh. People tend to forget as time goes by.

#### *Organize for Future Reference*

Organize the business cards and contact information you collected at the event. Make notes of any special information that may help you remember conversations. Keep a copy of your speech or your presentation notes in a file with the contact information. Add a copy of the event agenda or brochure to your file.

Maintain a master list of all your speaking engagements and include the name of each organization, the primary contact person, date and place of the speech, and your topic. Update the list after each speech.

Organize this information not only to remind yourself what took place, but also to facilitate transfer of important aspects of the event to your Web site and other promotional materials.

#### *Stay in Touch*

Plan how to regularly keep in touch with both the attendees and those who hired you to speak. Send e-mails with articles, information that might interest them, or a copy of the book you just wrote. Put entries on your calendar or planner to contact key individuals and make notes on what you might say.

Keep current on the subject of your speech and update or supplement it when appropriate. Send new information with a brief note to the contacts you made at the event. Occasionally, pick up the telephone simply to say hello. Stay on your contacts' radar.

#### *Breaking It Down*

Viewed as a process instead of a one-hour torture session, speaking provides excellent opportunities to market your practice. And most

**GUERRILLA TACTIC: WRITE ALL ABOUT IT**

Draft an article based on your speech. Distribute it after your presentation as a marketing aid. Include the piece on your Web site, in your zine, and on your clients' sites or intranets. Also send it to the media, industry association publications, and the host organization's publication. If you wrote an article publicizing your speech before you delivered it, revise it for additional publications.

consultants are well equipped to break that process down and master its elements.

The demands of speaking are substantial, but so are the potential rewards. Research<sup>11</sup> shows that, in selling, a demonstration is 50 percent more effective than the most glowing testimonial. A speech demonstrates what you know and what you can do. It also shows how you think and how you work. If you have trained, practiced, and performed well, it will show.