

## ***TIPS ON HIRING THE BEST SPEAKER FOR YOUR MEETING***

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You may have attended a conference where there were keynote speakers or be responsible for hiring them to speak to your company or a professional association. In either case, we expect speakers to deliver an enlightening message with great passion. But sometimes this does not occur.

If you hire professional speakers, there are several things you can do to heighten the possibility of a successful experience for both you and the participants. First and foremost is knowing your audience's specific needs.

Determine what you want before contacting a speaker—the objectives of the talk as well as the goals and outcomes for the event. From there, pursue speakers who can deliver on them. Where do you go to find these speakers?

Terry Theissen, Conference Coordinator for North American Lake Management Society, prefers to use a credible speaker's bureau and recommends a reference check on the firm beforehand. "Get three names of previous clients and call them. Ask them how the bureau handled their request. Did they give ongoing assistance before the meeting and follow-up afterwards?"

If you've never used a speaker's bureau, Theissen suggests contacting a professional meeting planner for advice or Meeting Professionals International (MPI) with headquarters in Dallas (the Wisconsin chapter administrative office is based in Menomonee Falls, WI, 414.250.1255).

Other organizations have members develop a personal relationship with a potential speaker. Debra Coe-Bradish, Executive Director of MAQIN, encourages members to talk to the speaker afterwards if they hear someone that may fit the bill for an upcoming event and to exchange business cards. Afterwards, an information packet from the organization can be sent to the speaker explaining its uniqueness and the event itself. This contact can often help you work around a speaker's bureau, which may provide some negotiating leverage. Coe-Bradish also recommends contacting book publishers for potential speakers.

The National Speakers Association has approximately 4000 members online at its Web site—[www.nsaspeaker.org](http://www.nsaspeaker.org). You can search for speakers by topic, keyword, location, and other pertinent criteria. While this professional organization does not guarantee speakers, it does offer its members a "Certified Speaking Professional" designation that is only achieved by speakers after going through a rigorous five year certification process. On its Web site the association also publishes an article titled "10 Steps to Finding the Right Speaker."

Before hiring the speaker, Coe-Bradish recommends seeing a video of a full talk rather than a highlights tape, especially if no one you know has seen the speaker before. Sue Klepac, Division Manager of Cultural Transformation for Lucent Technologies, goes a step further. "On the videotape I look for audience footage to assess how they are reacting to the speaker."

Marlene Schmidt, CMP, Visiting Services Manager for World Dairy Expo, Inc. and the 1999-2000 President of the Wisconsin Chapter of MPI, obtains materials from the potential speaker. She looks at how the speaker packages him or herself and whether the person is willing to custom design a talk. Sometimes, the more well-known the speaker, the more likely the person may want to present a "canned" talk, even if printed materials state otherwise.

Once a speaker agrees to present, draft a contract or letter of agreement that, at a minimum, outlines the name, date, and length of the engagement; preparation fees; onsite speaking fees; billable expenses; an outline of the talk; video and audio releases (if you plan to tape the presentation); and your ability to contact the speaker directly if you are working through a speaker's bureau. All agree that prior to the event it is absolutely critical to converse several times directly with the speaker and review the proposed presentation outline.

Be prepared for the fees. Onsite fees for an hour talk, with no preparation or expense fees included, can run as high as \$50,000-\$75,000 for well-known marquis speakers. Past U.S. presidents and other officials or media celebrities may charge even more.

One way of handling this is to look for a partner or sponsor—an organization in the locale where the event will be held. When onsite fees are for a minimum time period, such as a half or full day, Klepac offer this advice. "I integrate speakers into the event as much as possible—and participants like this, too. They can ask questions on a break or follow-up with other comments." She also is sensitive to personal nuances such as the speaker's desire to travel by private rather than commercial aircraft or to staying in a specific room in a specific hotel—and negotiates these items before the agreement is finalized.

When working with a speaker's bureau, Theissen puts a clause into his contracts requesting a back-up speaker of equal or better caliber at no additional cost should the

originally named speaker suddenly cancel. Although he has experienced only one cancellation once an event has started, Theissen says that speakers can sometimes cancel just a couple of days before an event. To stay in front of the speaker, each week for 12 weeks prior to the engagement he sends the speaker a mailing that continues to educate them about the audience and the event itself.

While this advice may not guarantee 100% success when hiring a speaker, they will surely increase your odds. Keep in mind that their success is dependent on the work you do upfront when hiring them for an event. Good luck!

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