



Avoid the Duds!

Ten Strategies Needed to Book the Perfect Speaker Every Time

By Darlene Lyons

Today, more than ever, the success of your events relies heavily upon the strength of your program content and presentation. Nothing can spoil a meeting more quickly than hiring the wrong speaker. That's because speakers do more than just convey the overall meeting message. They impact your *entire* program. You count on them to provide insights, concepts and cutting-edge information in an energetic, motivational, entertaining and professional manner.

What more should you ask for from your speakers? Well...the right speaker must emphasize an important message, offer inspiration, help people cope with market shifts and lead the way towards change.

Selecting the right speaker for your event is one of the most important, yet most daunting, elements of creating a successful meeting. Your speaker has the power to "make or break" your event. If he or she bombs, your reputation not only takes a severe nose-dive, but you also have the misfortune of dealing with the barrage of complaints from a disappointed audience. However, if he or she does well, you can walk away with many of the accolades, compliments, and, of course, the rave reviews. By now, you probably realize that this massive responsibility is not to be taken lightly.

Raise Your Expectations

The key to selecting a great speaker lies in determining what combination of education, motivation and entertainment best fits your function. Once this is determined, you then set out to find a perfect match. Keep your expectations high! Remember, nothing spoils an event faster than booking the wrong speaker.

The following ten guidelines will help you maintain your focus and will also help you avoid "the duds."

1. Know Your Program Objectives: *Before you can start looking for the right speaker, you must be clear on your program objectives. Begin with the end in mind.* Ask yourself questions such as: What are you looking to achieve? Is this an annual convention, a training program, a sales rally, an awards celebration or some other type of event?

Knowing what outcome you'd like to achieve is important when making your selection.

2. Understand the Audience's Needs: *Along with your program objectives, consider the needs of your audience.*

Does your group need listing or selling techniques? Do they need a "nudge" embracing your new technology? Will a mix of motivation and entertainment serve your group's purpose?

Today's audiences are generally younger, more educated, more diverse and more sophisticated than the audiences of the past. *They want content.* They want to learn, but they also want to have fun. It is imperative that you consider the audience needs expectations. You may need to survey your audience beforehand. Ask them what they want or what skills would most help them in today's market. For example, sales people may ask for advanced selling skills, but managers may request accountability programs.

3. Check Reputation and Qualifications:

With countless speakers out there vying for your business, how can you possibly determine which one best meets your needs? Many speakers produce highly professional or glitzy marketing materials to help sell their services.

You must look deeper than simply scanning a few brochures. Be objective in your analysis. Ask questions such as:

What experience does this speaker have?
How familiar is this speaker with our industry?
Who else has used this person?
Are they recommended by a reliable source?

4. "Qualify" Your Prospects: *If you don't have the opportunity to preview a speaker in person, then the next best thing is to request a video or audio recording of a previous presentation. A session that was recorded before a live audience gives you a better sense of that person's real ability. Worst case scenario, get references and call them!*

5. Don't be Star-Struck: *If you are considering celebrity speakers, make sure they can speak!* T.V. personalities do a great job on the air, but sometimes have little *public speaking* expertise. You should be aware that the skills needed for being on T.V. and those for speaking live are *completely* different. However, many well-known personalities make excellent speakers and can add enormous value and clout to your event. Politicians, sports, media or entertainment celebrities often share life experiences, offer advice or have an inspirational message to impart.

Also, beware of great authors. They are sometimes mistaken for great speakers, only to seriously let down the audience and embarrass the event planner. Again, check references!

6. Be Wary of Grandiose Claims: *Speakers who claim to be "all things to all people" are probably too hungry for work. True professional speakers, on the other hand, usually have certain areas or topics of expertise. They would much rather refer potential business to a true expert than*

jeopardize their reputation by trying to do a program outside of their scope of knowledge.

7. Provide and Ask For Good Information:

Reputable speakers want to find out as much as possible about your meeting objectives, the audience, audience challenges, etc., in order to tailor their presentation to your specific group. Share information on your organization and audience to help the speaker design a program to fit your specific needs. Provide them with your event flyer, copies of newsletters, catalogues or any other publications that highlights industry trends, key people and insider news and views.

Also include as much information as possible about the attendees. Be sure to notify the speaker if your audience is mainly sales associates, title representatives, loan officers, managers or association executives.

8. Ask For an Outline: *Here at BASB, we ask prospective speakers for an outline of their presentation to make sure that they will be covering the material you discussed. This clearly lays what is expected. As you know, verbal communication can be misunderstood or misinterpreted. Therefore, seeing exactly what your speaker plans to cover in your session will help to ensure that the material is tailored to your specific needs.*

9. Maximize Opportunities: *Look for ways to maximize opportunities with your speakers. Discuss different ways they can add extra value and be a significant resource to help improve your meeting's success. Brainstorm ways that you feel your speaker can assist you (i.e. planning, preparing, promoting and presenting). Some suggestions include: serving as an emcee; delivering breakout sessions; submitting articles you can use in your promotional materials; conducting special sessions for select groups or roundtable discussions (such as company executives or the board of directors) about current issues; and participating in a spouse program.*

10. Trust Your Instincts: *Through your communication with the speaker or the speaker's representative, you will quickly form an opinion or have a feeling about their fit.*

First reactions or "gut feelings" count here. Have confidence in your instincts and trust that so-called "sixth sense." If you experience any kind of negative feeling, think about looking for someone else or get another recommendation from the bureau. You want to make sure that you can work with this speaker and their team and that both of you are "on the same page."

The true objective of hiring a professional speaker hinges on establishing a partnership where a mutually beneficial relationship grows and flourishes. When this happens, you know you've chosen well.

The Perfect Match

Overwhelmed with the plethora of speakers you have to choose from? You may want to turn to a speaker's bureau for advice and guidance. A good bureau should act as a consultant and partner to help your event succeed. Even though many hundreds of bureaus are out there, the numbers pale in comparison to the thousands of speakers.

A speaker's bureau's sole purpose is simply to make your job easier and provide you with solutions. They want to find the best possible match for your event within your price range. For a reliable real estate specific speaker's bureau, please visit us at www.BrokerAgentSpeakers.com or call us at 1-877-211-7462

A Final Note

Look for CSP (Certified Speaking Professional) or CPAE (Council of Peers Award for Excellence) designations. Both of these are conferred by the National Speaker's Association and are considered the speaking profession's international measure of professional platform skills (<http://www.nsaspeaker.org>).

Armed with these guidelines and resources, your search for the perfect speaker will be more fruitful and less risky. With a little effort and time, you will connect with a speaker who will meet your goals. Your audience will thank you.

~Written by Darlene Lyons. © 2004

Darlene is President of Broker Agent Speakers Bureau (BASB), the nation's leading real estate speakers' bureau. For more great information, visit www.BrokerAgentSpeakers.com.

Darlene also owns and operates EzEvents, the #1 real estate event management company in the country. Visit www.EzEvents.net.