

10 Tips for Finding the Right Speaker

Your speaker selection is one of the most important elements in a successful meeting. Selecting the right speaker for your meeting can be a daunting task, as speakers are available in every fee range and specialty topic. The National Speakers Association, composed of more than 3,800 professional speakers, has compiled these tips to help make your meeting a success.

1. Determine the needs of your audience

Thorough knowledge of the needs of your group is essential in selecting the right speaker. Does your meeting require that the audience leave with specific or technical information? Do you need someone to motivate the group to sell? Are you looking for after-dinner entertainment with a message?

2. Establish your date, time and budget

- Start looking for a speaker as soon as the date for your meeting is set. Many speakers book engagements up to a year in advance and you will want to get on their calendar as soon as possible.
- Consider how much time you have to fill and where that time falls in your overall program. If your time slot is flexible, a professional speaker can often tell you the right amount of time for the job. A professional can also make recommendations about the order of topics/speakers if one presentation will follow another. (You may not want to follow a humorist with a detailed educational presentation.)
- Factor in the fee you are willing or able to pay for a speaker. Your search for a speaker can be narrowed or broadened based upon your budget.

3. Identify the type of speaker who will best match the needs of your audience

A speaker's expertise in a given field may be the big draw, but a well-known name does not guarantee a professional presentation. High prices don't always mean high quality. Will your audience and the overall program benefit most from a celebrity; an expert in the field; a popular sports personality; a best-selling author; or a professional speaker who has a thorough knowledge of the appropriate topic?

4. Locate your resources

- Personal referrals are a great way to narrow your search. Ask colleagues for recommendations.
- Speakers bureaus locate and book speakers according to your specifications and needs. A bureau can locate speakers and quote fees. Many bureaus specialize in particular speakers such as celebrities, authors or athletes. Speakers bureaus can often be found in your local phone directory under "Speakers Bureau" or "Agent." You can also use the internet to find bureaus.
- Click here to jump to The Canadian Association of Professional Speakers (CAPS) www.canadianspeakers.org. This directory contains information on more than 300 speakers and can be searched by topic, keyword, location, name and so on.

5. Review your options and interview your speaker candidates

- A professional speaker will be a real partner in this process. Often they will ask questions about the needs of your audience and what they can accomplish for you. Ask your candidates for references and, if they are speaking in your area, ask if you can attend the program and observe them in action.
- Assure that a potential speaker has addressed groups similar to yours. Talk with them about their experience. Ask for a biography, testimonials and videos of their presentations, preferably before a live audience.
 - Find a speaker who will tailor his or her presentation to your group.

6. Select your speaker

- Hire a professional and you'll hire an ally. Professional speakers understand that your reputation is riding on their performance. Their experience with hundreds of audiences can add to your peace of mind and to the success of the event.
- When selecting your speaker, consider that you are not only paying for the time the speaker is on the platform but also for the hours spent researching, preparing and customizing the presentation. Some speakers may negotiate their fees when they are doing more than one program for you or when they are allowed to sell their products. Ask about your options.

7. Get it in writing

You should have a letter of agreement or contract that clearly outlines the expectations of both you and your speaker. Consider:

- travel arrangements and transportation;
- accommodations and meals;
- fees, reimbursements and payment terms;
- whether you want the speaker to attend social events;
- if the speaker may sell products and if so, how this will be handled;
- an agreement on any audio- or videotaping of the presentation;
- cancellation policies;
- audio/visual requirements;
- and legal implications, if any, your contract may contain.

8. Work with your speaker

Share information about your group or company. This will help the speaker become familiar with your organization, while facilitating a customized presentation.

- Send your newsletter or anything which would include key people, buzz words or insider news and views.
- Give the speaker a clear outline of what you expect.
- Be specific about the size and demographics of your audience.
- Let the speaker know in advance about other speakers on the program. This gives the speaker the opportunity to build on (and not duplicate) what the other speakers say.

9. Set the stage

- Make sure the room is set up for optimum impact. Consider the number of chairs and how they are arranged. Also consider room temperature and lighting.
- Stay on schedule. Although a professional will be able to "make up" time or slow things down if needed, keeping your program on schedule will allow your audience to get the full impact of the program you have created for them.
- Your speaker should be able to provide you with a good introduction of themselves and their topic. The introduction should be short, energizing and create positive expectations.

10. Evaluate the results

- Have your audience complete evaluations on the speaker and his/her presentation. This will allow you to gauge your results and plan for future programs. Send copies of the evaluations to your speaker.