

Speak out for a livelihood

Key to becoming a professional speaker is name recognition

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CALGARY HERALD

So deep was David Saxby's dread of public speaking that he used to be one of those people who would rather be in the coffin than giving the eulogy.

But realizing that "every time I got in front of a group of two people, I couldn't put my thoughts together," Saxby joined the Jaycee speaking program and ultimately became a trainer for them.

These days, he's president of the 90-member Calgary chapter of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers and makes his living speaking, consulting, and working with speakers to develop their marketing materials and multi-media presentations.

Breaking into the speaking industry isn't easy, says Saxby, who compares it to the entertainment business as a career.

"There's probably one in a hundred who succeed in making a large fortune in the speaking business," he says.

Thirty per cent of speakers earn their income from a combination of speaking, training and consulting. "Between 50 and 75 people in Calgary make a full-time living at speaking and training," says Saxby.

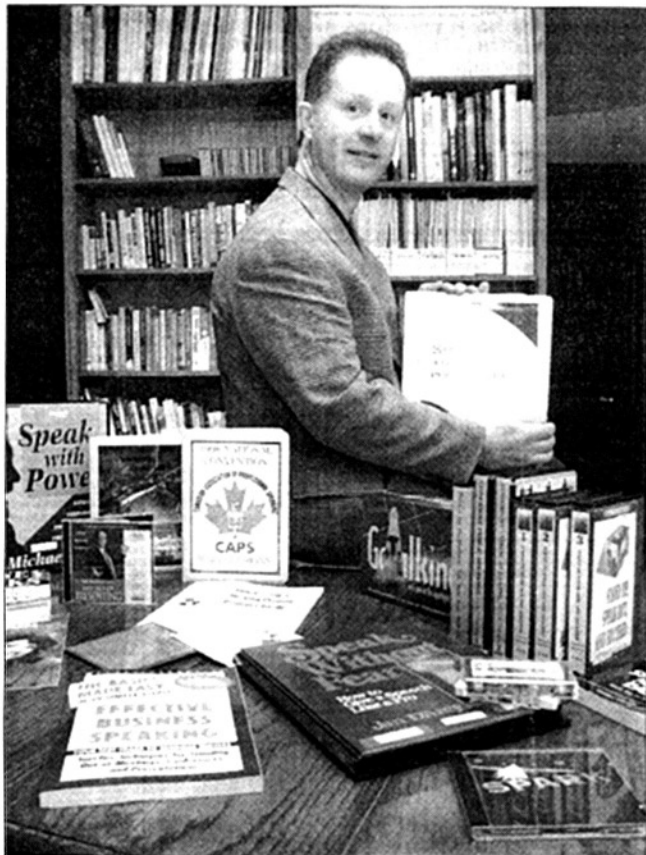
Despite the relatively small number who reach the top, professional speaking is a booming business, says Saxby.

As businesses and other organizations struggle to keep up with rapid change, "they're looking for speakers, trainers and facilitators to create instant learning. It's all driven by the need to learn while you work."

There is help for aspiring speakers, Saxby says.

The purpose of CAPS is to provide a stepping stone for speakers wanting to move to the next level of their business. "That could mean turning speaking into a part-time or full-time business, or speaking and consulting," says Saxby, who gives speeches on powerful presentations, creative thinking and marketing communications.

Recently the Calgary group brought in speaking guru Alan Weiss, author of *Money Talks, How to Make a Million as a Speaker*. Weiss, of Greenwich, Rhode



David Olecko, Calgary Herald/Southern Newspapers

David Saxby is surrounded with speaking paraphernalia he uses

Island, once gave speeches for free, but now makes more than \$1 million a year spinning verbal gold.

In his book, Weiss says, "the modern fees of top-flight speakers are due to a combination of superb material, captivating delivery and shrewd marketing. You need all three in this business, make no mistake. I call the combination 'steak, sizzle and savvy.'"

There are a variety of speaking resources in most cities. At Redstone

Productions Inc., Ross Gilchrist and Janet Alford coach people trying to break into the speaking business, as well as professional speakers wanting to develop their skills and materials. And Positive Concepts bookstore has an audio-video lending library where, for an annual fee, individuals and corporations can borrow tapes and videos on effective presentations.

Saxby says "if you have a unique area of expertise, an unusual topic or

story, your chances of breaking into and succeeding in the speaking business are far greater."

Among numerous home-grown examples he cites are Toben Anderson, a breast-cancer survivor from Canmore who climbed a mountain in Antarctica, and Martin Lesperance, a Calgary firefighter and paramedic who speaks on workplace safety.

Among current hot topics that Saxby identifies are leadership, change management, customer service and customer retention, communications, technology, wellness and health, and creative thinking. There's also a Web site for aspiring and professional speakers, www.canadian-speakers.org.

A lot of people are interested in getting into the business, Saxby says.

"It has a sex appeal. There's a perception it's a glamour industry."

In Canada, there's an enormous range of fees depending on the speaker's name recognition and area of expertise, as well as market demand. For a keynote speech, a speaker might receive anywhere from \$1,500 to \$15,000. A two-to-three-hour training program for a non-profit group pays from \$400 to \$5,000, while the charge for a corporate training program would be \$1,500 to \$10,000.

When a speaker also sells products such as books, tapes and training guides, the fee might be negotiated to cover the speech and related materials.

For those wanting to break into the business, Saxby suggests one route is to join a group such as Toastmasters for basic training and then work for a volunteer organization. Volunteer groups often put people through programs that allow them to train others.

The biggest challenge for speakers, Saxby says, is to gain recognition.

"It's like the music business was 10 years ago. It was difficult to find Canadian musicians because nobody promoted them. We've got local speaking talent, but people here aren't aware of it."

Canadians, he says, face a special disability: "There's a lot of knowledge and skill here, but we're humble, whereas the Americans are self-promoters." Southern Newspapers