

BECOME A SPEAKER

Five Steps for Launching a Speaking Side-Hustle or Even a New Career

Speaking is a natural side-hustle for many working professionals. Whether you realize it or not, you're already a professional speaker if you've led a talk on your project of passion or facilitated a meeting for your organization. Seriously, you can call yourself a speaker because you've chosen a topic, you've prepared your talking points, you've guided your audience along a journey and, yes, may have even been compensated for your efforts (if your presentation was on company time). So, congratulations—you're a speaker! Start calling yourself one and update your LinkedIn profile accordingly. Now that the speaking bug has bitten you, you'll probably want to take your work to the next (and more public) level. Here are five steps to help you launch your side-hustle or start crafting an entirely new career as a speaker.

STEP ONE: PICK A TOPIC (OR TWO)

Start Simple: Every speaker typically begins presenting on a topic that they're passionate about. This makes it simple because they're already familiar with the topic and also very motivated to share this passion with others. So start simple. Think about something you're passionate about or that you're an "expert" on and want to share with others. Perhaps you've led talks at your club about helping those in need or taught a group of new employees how to excel at accounting. Don't feel that you have to have many presentations prepared to start. Instead, choose one topic to launch your speaking business. While you may eventually have multiple presentations in your professional repertoire, you want to begin with one topic and your portfolio will continue to grow from there.

Set Some Goals: There are multiple things to consider when creating your presentation, beginning with deciding on what outcomes you want for your audience. The best speakers begin with this goal in mind. For example, what is the "Call to Action" that you want your audience to act on upon hearing your presentation? This action can come in many forms, including educating the audience on what they need to do in order to successfully build a nest egg or inspiring them to become a top producer in their field. What is the goal of your presentation, or rather, what type of presentation do you want to give? Do you want to educate, persuade, entertain or motivate your audience? Would you like your audience to buy something you're selling, donate to a cause or vote for a public official? The type of presentation you give will vary with the outcomes you want, the type of speaking career that you're trying to build and how you go about preparing your presentations. Certainly, you can have a variety of goals or outcomes, but keep these all in mind as you experiment with some of your beginning presentations to see what works best for you. Once you have some goals for your first presentation, then work backwards with your outline determining what particular points need to be made in order to lead up to the "Call to Action."

Keep It Fresh: Remember, quotes, statistics, stories and personal anecdotes are ideal ways to keep the program fresh and engaging. The most successful presentations reveal ideas that the audience may have never considered and one that is fresh and novel. While more often than not the topic that you choose has probably been presented on before, you will be able to make it unique and fresh by bringing your own style, stories and perspective to the state.

STEP TWO: GET READY

Learn from the Experts: There are so many wonderful books written by expert communicators and professional speakers. When these are coupled with all the YouTube videos and Ted Talks you can view online, you have plenty of resources at your fingertips that can provide you with strong education on how to craft and deliver a stellar presentation. Attending programs and viewing other speakers and presenters is another great way to continuously hone your craft, too. While there are probably many courses in your area to learn how to prepare and launch a speaking career, the Dale Carnegie “Art of Public Speaking” is a top tier course offered around the globe for anyone interested in learning the art of public speaking. Remember, everyone is looking to you for something new, so while learning from other’s expertise is important, you want to always bring your own personality, style and humor to the stage.

Dress the Part: This doesn’t mean you have to show up in a three-piece suit, but it does mean you have to exude your brand. Take Steve Jobs in his black t-shirt and jeans, or Iyanla Vanzant in her brightly colored designs or Brian Tracy in his tailored suit and tie. It doesn’t matter what you wear as long as it’s respectable and it reflects your brand. But dress isn’t limited to the clothes. It should also include your presentation materials and handouts or workbooks. Everything should reflect your brand whether that’s casual and fun, highly polished or technically savvy.

Practice Your Presentation: Do the old “in front of a mirror” trick and employ a few friends and family members to be your guinea pigs until you’ve worked out all the kinks. Try out different paces or speeds in which you speak, and adjust your volume, pitch and tone until you find something that is comfortable, authentic and keeps the audience engaged and on the edge of their seats. Remember, pauses are just as important, especially to punctuate your key points. Timing, interaction and room for questions, answers and feedback are also important elements to prepare for, depending on the type of presentation you plan to give. Always be sure your presentation style has plenty of professional variety and impact yet is still true to who you are.

STEP THREE: PLAN YOUR PITCH

Know Your Audience: While this is important to know prior to actually preparing your speech, you really need to be clear and specific about who is your target audience so you not only know how to reach them but also so that you can effectively market to them. When you define your target market, make sure that you not only look at demographics but also psychographics—emotional, professional and personal needs, wants and expectations that you will answer and/or fulfill. Conducting a survey or focus group reflective of your target audience is a great way to ensure that you will meet your audience’s expectations. It will help you anticipate potential challenges and questions and hone your presentation outline.

Grab Their Attention: Every presentation needs to have an intriguing title and a snappy description that attracts your target audience. You want to be sure that, while brief, the title and description also clearly articulate the expectations and outcomes of your talk. Use language that gets your audience excited about what they can achieve, learn or gain from your program while ensuring your title and brief description is professional, memorable and to the point.

Reach Your Market: Marketing can often become the biggest part of your work when it comes to getting gigs, but once you’ve found a way to establish your presence, the momentum will build through your successful reputation, expertise and referrals. Of course social media and websites are a must when it comes to launching a speaking career and showcasing yourself and your programs to the public. As a client of mine, you know well

the importance of networking. When you authentically and proactively build your network of organization representatives, event planners, presenters, staff development directors and conference professionals, you will have all the word-of-mouth marketing you could ask for.

STEP FOUR: GIVE A SPEECH

Book a Gig: The best way to start is with a small audience and often times a free one. I read somewhere that a very highly paid and in demand speaker started by giving over 200 free presentations at small Jaycee's and Chamber events before going pro. While it certainly worked, please don't have to wait until your 200th presentation to get compensated (see Step Five)—though it is certainly a good idea to start with some smaller gigs until your polish and confidence build. Look within your own organization or associations for opportunities to speak. Many of my clients launched their speaking careers by asking their human resources and events management teams for an opportunity to present at an upcoming leadership program, team function, retreat or conference. You should also ask those in your network if they—or someone they know—will need a speaker for an upcoming event or club meeting. You can conduct a search online for upcoming local events for which you can pitch a speaking proposal or talk with local schools, universities and spiritual organizations if your program would be applicable to their audience.

Make it Happen: When it comes down to the moment you walk onto the stage, or into the room, know that every speaker is nervous. While this will dissipate over time as your confidence grows, nerves will never completely diminish, otherwise you wouldn't have the adrenaline and enthusiasm required to be your best.

Acknowledge Your Wins: While you're hard at work re-tooling and building your speaking career, don't forget to celebrate your wins. This is vitally important because, as a speaker, you are vulnerable and negative feedback can make an unwelcome impact. It's easy to focus on what didn't work rather than on what is working, but that will only serve to diminish your confidence. The reality is you are in the public eye now and will be receiving critiques at every turn, some fair and some not so fair. You will find that over time your sensitivity to negative feedback will diminish. Of course you don't want to ignore constructive criticism, but you need to learn from your mistakes and quickly move on in bettering yourself and booking more gigs. Now is the time to continue to build your confidence with each presentation you give. Remember, you ARE in demand or you wouldn't be getting out there, so don't focus on the setbacks or your career will be short-lived. Instead, focus on your wins and draw your positive energy from those in the audience who are eager to learn from your expertise.

Conduct a Self-Evaluation: Immediately upon leaving your presentation find a quiet place to sit down and reflect on how you feel that you did. Take time to review in your own mind what you would do differently the next time and capture those notes down in your speaker's binder. Look at your content, presentation points, handouts, communication style and how you felt overall. Was there a high-level of interaction? Was the audience engaged? Did you feel you were giving your best? Make note of things you'd do differently next time and what worked well so you can continue to build your success.

STEP FIVE: GO PRO

Join an Association: There are many professional speakers' associations out there that cannot only help you hone your craft but can also help you get noticed. Before you join any group do your research and speak with several members to get an idea of how they've benefitted from their membership fees. There are also many organizations that will help promote you and provide you with a mentor if you so choose. While some, like [The](#)

[National Speaker's Association](#), charge a premium fee to join, they set the highest standards for the industry, cultivate the top speakers as members and diligently promote their members throughout the globe.

Be Adequately Compensated: You're in demand so now it's also time to start elevating your expectations of who, what, where and when you present. If you're willing to do any gig, it may dilute your professional reputation and eventually your fee level. While this may be the case when you first begin your speaking career, you need to grow more selective with your audience, depending on the type of speaking career you want to cultivate. This is also true for your fee level. You may have several different fees based on presentation, location, group size or the length of the presentation. Some speakers charge by head count while others charge a flat rate based on time involved in creation plus preparation and time on the stage. Remember, you need to make sure you're adequately compensated to cover cost of travel, materials, technology, assistance and time away from other profit-generating activities. Compare what other speakers charge by doing research and tapping into your network. This is a great way to discern what is best for you now and what your target fee will be. Remember, many organizations are willing and able to compensate competitively, so don't be afraid to ask for what you deserve.

Re-Evaluate Your Fees: This is also a great time to re-evaluate your fee. If you haven't been charging for your speaking gigs, this is the time to do so. While stipends count, they are not speaking fees. If you are serious about growing this side-hustle and/or career, you need to be compensated for your efforts. This is not the time to be modest or feel that you are asking for something that you don't deserve. This also doesn't mean that you shouldn't be willing to charge less (or nothing at all) for a shorter version of your work at a not-for-profit organization if you should choose to do so, but this does mean you need to be fairly compensated. By not charging for your presentation efforts you are not only doing yourself a disservice but one to other professional speakers. Imagine if there was someone willing to do your day job for free? Soon, you'd be out on the streets and the industry would come to believe that it's probably not work worthy of compensation. While that example may seem a little extreme, it's an honest example of the importance of being compensated fairly.

Invest in Help: After you have several "pro-level" presentations under your belt, it may be time to get help. This may come in the form of a publicist, coach, assistant, agent, accountant and attorney. You certainly don't need a full time staff, yet, you will find yourself requiring freelance or contract assistance from a team of professionals who can help you navigate the road of the pros. Ask other speakers where they've found their help or what services and vendors provide them with support. This will take a little time to try out new support, but eventually all your administrative and marketing efforts should be attended to by a team so you can focus on building your career as a professional speaker.