

9 Tips for Finding the Right Speaker

Speaker selection is one of the most important elements in a successful meeting. Finding the right speaker can be a daunting task, as speakers are available in every fee range and specialty topic. These tips from the National Speakers Association (NSA) will 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? Does your group need more effective teamwork or better communication skills? 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 or more in advance, so 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 program, for example.)

Factor in the fee you are willing or able to pay a speaker. Your search for a speaker can be narrowed or broadened based on your budget.

3. Identify the Type of Speaker Who Will Best Match the Needs of Your Audience

A celebrity may be a big draw, but a well-known name does not guarantee a professional presentation. High prices don't always mean high quality. You might want to go with an expert within the company or field, but it's a good idea to give him or her a preview to make sure the speaker has the presentation skills necessary to communicate effectively. There are many areas of specialization within the speaking profession. Do you need a keynote speaker, a trainer, a facilitator, a consultant, a seminar leader, a humorist or all of these?

4. Review Your Options and Interview Your Speaker Candidates

Professional speakers will become real partners in this process. Often, they will ask questions about the needs of your audience and tell you what they can accomplish for you. Ask your candidate for references and, if they are speaking in your area, ask if you can attend the program and observe them in action.

Make sure that potential speakers have 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 her or his presentation to your group.

Ask the speakers if they belong to professional associations. Also ask what awards or certifications they have earned. The National Speakers Association confers the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation, earned for extensive documented speaking experience and client satisfaction.

5. 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.

6. Get It In Writing

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

7. 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 that 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.

8. 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 programs that you have created for them.

Speakers should also be able to provide you with a good introduction to themselves and their topic. The introduction should be short, energizing and create positive expectations.

9. Evaluate the Results

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