

Momentum

Playbook 38

Speak Like a Boss

By Maria Ross

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Playbook 38:

Speak Like a Boss

The Rhinestone Cowboy Incident

When I was about six years old, my family rented out my Dad's American Legion hall in Queens, New York for my twin brothers' confirmation party.

It was a small event space, but large enough for several long tables. A permanent bar took up one end and a slightly raised platform graced the other, in front of an ornate credenza full of medals and memorabilia. The platform was meant for officers to sit and be seen at monthly meetings, but it also served as an ad hoc event stage.

While the family festooned the room with balloons, hauled in the alcohol and set up tables, my six year-old eyes locked on a standing microphone on the raised platform. I raced toward it in the set-up chaos, grabbed a chair to stand on so I could reach it, and cradled the microphone in my hand. With one last glance up to see if I'd get in trouble, I switched the mic on and, at the top of my lungs, belted out "I'm a Rhinestone Cowboy" by Glen Campbell, complete with full southern twang and I even sang the chorus' guitar riffs (wang, wang).

You can see I've never met a microphone I didn't like, but not because I like the sound of my own voice. It's because I love to entertain, inform and delight. That skill has come in very handy, from my theater and acting to the work I do today!

Some people are born performers but others can learn to love it as well. If you have an important message and valuable expertise the world needs, not many things can ignite your brand faster than sharing your story in front of a crowd. This playbook covers what you need to know to get started.

To Start? Just Start!

You don't need a license to be a professional speaker. You just need to start! I get this question all the time and, really, it's quite simple: Once you package up your big idea, as we discussed last time, into a neat little speaking abstract, you can start pitching a talk to organizations and conferences.

Daunting, I know. So start with your local community or metro area.

Research (or hire an intern or virtual assistant) to look up groups and local conferences where your topic would be a perfect fit. Which groups you target depend on your topic area and ideal audience.

Are you trying to reach business owners? Try the Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Administration or other business networking groups in your community or part of the world.

Are you trying to reach moms? Look up moms' groups which may have monthly events, or see if local preschools, play areas or parks and rec departments have events that need speakers.

Need to reach a niche audience, such as photographers or stamp collectors? Check out local Meetups. Many of them like to host speakers.

Dip your toe in the speaking pool by starting small and local.

It makes sense to start local and small for several reasons:

- You get to practice your talk in a low-risk situation.
- There's no major travel time or expense required.
- You get a free marketing opportunity right in your own backyard!
- It's easier and cheaper to gather video footage to use for your Speaker Reel—more on this later.

Your Speaker Marketing Kit

To effectively and credibly market yourself as a speaker, you need some basic marketing tools. These include:

- **Website speaker page:** Showcase your materials, establish credibility and help with SEO to be found by conference planners.
- **Speaker video reel:** Give people a taste of your presence in action. You can also use a nicely edited clip from one presentation if that's all you have.
- **Professional headshot:** Because...credibility and professionalism! No cropped vacation photos, or blurry images. Represent yourself well and spend a bit of money to get a proper headshot. *This is a brand must for your entire online presence.*
- **Still photos:** Include photos where you're up on stage or in action.
- **Official speaker bio:** Something they can use to introduce you or in their marketing.
- **Speaker sheet:** This one-sheet PDF contains your official headshot, bio and a list of your talk titles and presentation abstracts. You can do this as a separate downloadable PDF or simply list it out on the webpage itself, but you never know when someone may need to print something for a selection committee meeting, so it's good to have it just in case.
- **Testimonials:** Social proof that you rock as both a speaker and a professional. These should primarily be from the conference planners or people who hired you, not just attendees.

For inspiration and ideas, here are a few speaker page examples, with all the fixings:

[Mine! Maria Ross](#)

[Whitney Keyes](#)

[Michelle Tillis Lederman](#)

[Amy Schmittauer](#)

[Mike Veny](#)

[Denise Brousseau](#)

When you get to this level, here's a great example of an entire website devoted to speaking: [Jay Baer](#).

Remember To Whom You Are Marketing

Many new speakers make the mistake of thinking they are selling their speaking engagements to the attendees.

We've talked a lot about understanding your audience and their specific pain points. When you sell your speaking services, you are selling to a different audience than your normal target client or customers.

While it's important that attendees love you and value your content, you are actually marketing to the event planners. Whether that is the conference organizer, events chair, speaker coordinator or executive in charge of pulling the team offsite together, you need to speak to what *they* care about.

Focus your testimonials and benefits on how you help these people do their jobs. They care about things like your professionalism, punctuality, preparedness and experience. They look for someone who will engage, help and delight their audience with great content so that their attendees gush to them, "Wow! You did a great job by hiring her as our keynote speaker. She was amazing and her content rocked. Thanks!"

Your marketing materials must answer these questions for the event planner hiring you: Will you make my life as an event organizer easy and will you make me look good for hiring you?

Should You Speak for Free?

Pricing is such a difficult thing. Here's the deal: You can make a lot of money as a professional speaker. Just check out some of speaker rates on National Speakers' Association. We're talking five (and six) figures for some people.

But you can't start out that way.

In the beginning, you may want to speak for free to get practice, build up your reputation and secure video and photos for marketing. This is again why speaking locally is such a good idea.

Think about your goals. Why are you speaking? If you're doing so to build your brand awareness, then it's a marketing activity. Think of it as an investment. When I started my business, I always spoke for free for the exposure. That was enough of a "payment" back then. This may be true for you, too. Many people also gain new lucrative clients from speaking, so you can get a huge ROI for your time.

Here's my little rant about speaking for free: I think it's wrong to expect someone to make time, drive to an event, give their valuable expertise and essentially ignore paying clients for an afternoon (or their family in the evening) without offering them *something* in return. It also burns me up when event planners are charging big bucks to attendees and expect that the very content they are using to lure those people (i.e., the expert speakers) make nothing. They are using you to advertise their event and can't compensate you for that?

We've created an expectation in the market that ALL good content is free, and it kind of drives me crazy. Yes, content marketing is something you provide for free, but you also expect it to lead somewhere in the end.

On the flip side, I have spoken at a few major events for free and the marketing benefits and new paid clients made it well worth it. But these were carefully selected events. I have (nicely) turned down more than I have accepted.

As your business evolves and you build a solid reputation as a strong presenter, you may find, as I did, that your goals have changed. "You'll get great exposure" may not be as sweet a selling point as it once was.

You may now want to make speaking a revenue stream. When I went this route, I did a few things:

1. I thought back to when I used to hire speakers for marketing events and what they charged for rates.
2. I spoke to colleagues who speak on similar topics and asked them what they charge. Yes, really. This is why networking is so important!
3. I reviewed price ranges at sites like National Speakers Association and eSpeakers to see what some of the rates were for people at my level.
4. I wrote a book! Writing a book can help you secure more speaking engagements. This is not *why* I wrote it, but it greatly helped.

As we talked about in a previous Playbook: **Pricing is a brand decision.** While you don't want to charge too high if you are a completely unknown speaker, you don't want to charge so low that people think you're not going to deliver value. Asking for \$50,000 when no one knows who the heck you are is outrageous. But if, over time, you never raise your rate above \$2500, people are going to wonder why you are so cheap compared to your peers.

Ladies, listen up. Here's a fact. Female speakers charge less than male speakers. They also expect less and are offered less than male speakers. Do with that info what you will. Please read [this](#) and [this](#) so you are prepared and fight for what you're worth.

My published rate is my conversation-starter. I then ask what their budget is and use my rate to negotiate, depending on the event. If I speak for free or at a discount, *I let the organizer know* and reflect this in the invoice, so I don't create an unintentional market perception. Event planners talk to each other!

A personal aside: I speak because I like teaching. I don't care if I get a client from it or not. That's why being paid to speak is more attractive to me. However, I do accept free gigs if they are local, the group is a worthy one (or a non-profit), I have time and don't need to travel. Again, just depends on my goals at that moment.

If you do it, speaking for free requires an exchange. You give them your valuable time and expertise. If they have a strong brand, this is a huge benefit for you, something you can tout with pride and feature on your website. But if you're going to speak for free, you should ask:

- **How are you marketing this?** Find out what extra exposure you're getting leading up to the event and the full audience who will be exposed to you.
- **Will travel and expenses be covered?** They should be. Period. Especially if you are expected to leave town. Locally, it's up to you whether you want to get nit-picky that they cover mileage. It depends on how far you're driving.
- **Can I set out an email sign-up list or collect business cards?** Better yet, can you provide me with an attendee list?
- **May I sell my products or services on-site?** Will they set up a table for you afterwards so people can come find out more about you? Can you make a special offer from the stage? TIP: Never "pitch" during your talk. It's classless. Make your presentation valuable and if you dazzle them enough, they will want to work with you! But you can ask if you can mention any special offers or deal at the very end. This is completely appropriate.
- **May I bring my assistant or an honored guest for free?** This is key, especially if you are going to set up your presentation, staff a table or sign books. You need help. They should allow this or provide someone for you. If they don't, that's not cool.
- **Can you provide video footage or photographs?** Build your marketing materials. If they don't provide this, ask if you can bring your own person.

Practice Makes Perfect

If you abhor public speaking, I'm not asking you to do something you hate. Remember, find your marketing passion!

But sometimes we are just scared to go outside of our comfort zone. I encourage you to try on different events and venues for size. Maybe smaller evening classroom workshops of ten to twenty people is more your jam than 1,000 person ballrooms. Or maybe you might like being a luncheon speaker or being hosted at a private salon in someone's living room.

There are so many groups of varying sizes, formality, etc. waiting to be explored. **If it helps, don't think of it as "public speaking," think of it as "teaching"!**

If you are not comfortable speaking, I highly recommend you work with a speaker coach. Such folks can help you with both the tactical and mental aspect of getting up and sharing your message in public. They can help you improve your voice, gestures, posture, use of visual aids and even your presentation format itself. Most of them will also work with you to overcome any fears and insecurities so you can dazzle the crowd – and yourself!

Your Assignment: Speak Out!

Identify three local groups that may have the perfect audience for your presentation:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Gather your materials you do have together and post them to your website, on a Speaker page.

Include photos, videos, testimonials *if you have them*. If you don't, simply create a page that lists out your speaking topic, a short bio, your headshot and a contact form. You have to start somewhere!

Craft your pitch email. Write an email to pitch the speaker chairperson of that organization on your topic, why their audience would love it, and why you're the perfect person to deliver this message. Use the Topic Abstract you created in the last Playbook as a foundation.

But wait, you're not quite done....

Please post your speaking ideas, action plans and questions on the Facebook page by Friday.

Remember, we are here to encourage you and provide any feedback. If you're like me, often it's fellow collaborators that help me polish my ideas to a glossy sheen.

Again, I'm going to reward you all year long, so don't lose your MOMENTUM: Post it now and keep that train moving!

One Last Thing...

Jumping into the speaking game can be scary...but it can also be so much fun!

Seeing an audience light up, right in front of you, when you share your knowledge is a high unlike any other. Speaking may not be “your thing” but if it is, please make sure you present your “speaker brand” in a professional, engaging manner. Have your ducks in a row. Don’t be “that speaker” that makes an event planner’s life more difficult.

If you are prepared, easy to work with and make them happy, they will hire you back and refer you to others. That’s how it works.

You don’t have to spend millions of dollars to set yourself up for speaking success. But you have to start somewhere. **So get the basics covered and just start!**

Here’s your mic. Now let us hear what you have to say!

Maria

Goodies and Inspiration

[Four Ways to Get Started as a Professional Speaker](#) by one of my absolute favorite people (and authentic speaker!) Dorie Clark.

You can check out the [National Speakers Association](#) for resources – or to become a member.

I really like [eSpeakers](#) as a platform for enabling event planners to find YOU more easily. Here's my [speaker profile](#) on their site, and I know for sure I've gotten some corporate workshops with this listing!

Whether you are the event organizer or the speaker, this is great advice from networking expert Sandy Jones-Kaminski on [how to gracefully treat speakers if you ask them to speak to free](#).

While I adore Gwen Stefani, please don't follow [this advice](#). The world needs to hear your message!