

Ten Tips To Hire The Perfect Speaker For Your Next Event

You have the dates scheduled, the conference center reserved, and the agenda outlined; but now you need to book the speakers to make the event a success. Perhaps last year the speaker was hard to work with, too expensive, or just plain boring. You want to make sure that the same thing doesn't happen this year. Here's ten tips that can help:

1. ***Start with the end in mind.*** As Stephen Covey says, look at the results you want. What is the purpose of the conference? What type of information are attendees looking for? Ask yourself the question, "If everyone got exactly what they need, what would that be?" Be cautious of looking for "motivation." If motivation and energy aren't tied with content and a plan, the attendees will lose their enthusiasm shortly after arriving back at work.
2. ***Talk to speakers from previous years.*** Speakers are happy to give recommendations and advice on future speakers. They know that if you like who they recommend, they further build a relationship with you. While the professional speaker will not talk negatively about another speaker, they certainly will be happy to steer you the best person who can meet your needs.
3. ***Contact other meeting planners.*** Talk with other meeting planners about speakers who have been exceptional. You may want to create a "preferred" list that can be used in your industry.
4. ***Check credentials.*** Look at the background for the speaker. Do they have the credentials to speak on their chosen topics? Also look for membership in professional organizations like the National Speakers Association and the American Society for Training and Development. While there are good speakers who do not belong and poor speakers who do, most speakers serious about their own growth belong to one or both of these organizations. Also consider whether the speaker is a Certified Professional Speaker or CSP. This is the highest earned designation of NSA and indicates that the speaker has worked with at least 100 clients, given 250 presentations and has received great reviews.
5. ***Ask for testimonials.*** This can include letters from satisfied clients or a reference list that you can call. Look what others have said about their style, approach and delivery.
6. ***Preview the speaker in action.*** If possible, do this in person. Great speakers are busy speakers and have many local and national bookings. While the presentation or subject may not be what you had in mind, you can evaluate their platform skills and the response of a live audience. A demo video can be used, if necessary; but they often don't represent the "best" the speaker has to offer.

7. ***Arrange a meeting.*** While this may not always be possible, quality speakers know that face-to-face meetings are a great opportunity. This is your chance to see whether the person is a good fit; for the conference, for the participants and for working with you.
8. ***Evaluate the attitude.*** Beware of the speaker who is egotistical and/or cocky. In the speaking business we call this “believing your own press kit.” It is often the sign of someone who is actually unsure of their talent, preparation, and delivery. The best speakers I know are actually very modest and are focused on the audience not themselves.
9. ***Give them information.*** The more background the speaker receives on the event, the participants, the goals and objectives, the better able she will be to customize the presentation. Great speakers also do their own research by reading annual reports, checking on-line, and reading up in the industry. Some speakers use pre-program questionnaires to gather information. Others prefer a face to face meeting with key players or a telephone conference call with the leadership. Regardless of the approach, the more information the better.
10. ***Partner with the speaker.*** Great speakers are eager to be a part of the entire event. Feel free to contact them to discuss details other than just their presentation. They often have valuable input into layout, AV options, and marketing. Many speakers now have e-mail newsletters and other regular communication with past participants. If appropriate, see if they will publicize and promote the event electronically. Consider a book signing or other opportunity for participants to have access to the speaker. Most speakers are gracious about talking with attendees knowing that this can make the event very special and memorable.

Barbara Bartlein, CSP, is the People Pro. She offers keynotes, seminars and consultation to help you build your business and balance your life. She is Past-President of the National Speakers Association-WI Chapter. She can be reached at 888-747-9953 or visit www.ThePeoplePro.com