



BLOG



## Getting The Right Speaker For Your Event



Nadine Dereza Posted on July 10 2014

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Why does your speakers agent ask you so very many questions? To organise an event is to marshal a million elements from waiters to WiFi: 'Look,' the frustrated client could be forgiven for saying, 'we want someone to tell a few jokes after dinner. What's it to you how we've set the room up?'

We've been through this from every angle: we've booked talent for our own events through using speaker agencies, and we've been the talent booked for events. Getting the right speaker into the right event can be a complicated process, requiring knowledge of the talent, the industry, and the mechanics of what works for different audiences. Whether you are the talent or the client, a good relationship with a good agent is worth nurturing, because they can bring a lot to the table, not least the avoidance of incidents we know of with speakers that were never going to go well:

-The after dinner speaker who got big laughs at the regional British events he spoke at, but who came a cropper when 80% of the audience at the last event of the series didn't speak English;

-The climate change denier who addressed a conference hall of environmentalists;

-The comedian who followed an announcement that the company was facing swingeing budget cuts and mass redundancies.

Every performer has a nails-on-the-blackboard memory of an event gone horribly wrong, and while you can never guard against a black swan dropping out of the sky, a good agent can mitigate your risks. We think the two most important questions are:

'Who is in the audience?'

'What do you want to get out of the speaker?'

Certainly when we get a booking, we need to know the client's answers to these questions from the get go. In collaboration with the agency, speakers with integrity can (and do) take themselves out of the running at this stage if they don't think they're right for the job.

All audiences are different, and corporate audiences are different from regular public audiences, because they can be made up of a very specific section of people. 'What do you do for a living?' asked the comedian of the smart woman in the front row. 'I'm a dentist,' she replied, 'and so is everyone else at this dental conference.'

If you build a relationship with your agent, you can avoid booking a bull for the china shop dinner dance. If you know (or can find out) who XYZ Enterprises had presenting their awards last year - and how they got on, what worked and so forth - you'll learn a lot about their corporate identity, what they like, and what they don't.

Knowing what you want people to take away from a speech is also crucial.

If you're investing in a speaker, the benefits of doing so should not be short-lived. Whether you want the audience to be emotionally inspired, or learn tips to become better at their jobs, or be entertained for half an hour, this will affect who you should book.

If you can't answer all of your agent's questions, perhaps you haven't thought enough about the event yourself, and you might find that digging deeper reveals elements of the event that need addressing. While you're making a decision on a speaker, when it comes to background information, more is usually more. One question the talent often asks the agent is, 'Why do they want me?' and it's good to have a convincing answer.

Think of the agent in terms of outsourcing: you can take advantage of their specialist knowledge and experience to ensure you get the most out of a crucial part of your live event. Cross the gap from customer to client and if you think they're asking a lot of questions, you've got yourself a keeper. There are a lot of speaker agents about, and that's because it's an easy job to do - but very difficult to do well.

Nadine Dereza is a business presenter, broadcast journalist, chair & moderator of live events, and founder of Presentation Skills Programmes.

Ian Hawkins is an award winning speaker, writer, and presenter.

Their book, *'Insider Secrets of Public Speaking: Answers to the 50 biggest questions on how to deliver brilliant speeches and presentations'* is due out in September 2014.

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