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What to look for when hiring a Professional Speaker

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by Diane Goodman

Professional speakers often are the highlight of many meetings and conventions. People sometimes attend meetings for the sole purpose of hearing the featured speaker. Or, attendees will find the keynote speaker was the most meaningful or inspirational part of a meeting. However, sometimes a speaker can be completely inappropriate and can be a disappointment for a company or organization. How do you know if the speaker fits? How do you avoid embarrassing mismatches?

Finding that perfect speaker – one who fits your budget, is available, and is approved by your internal “clients” – can be a challenging task. However, the process does not need to be completely daunting and overwhelming. Following are a few suggestions to *surviving the search* for a professional speaker, and then making the most of your investment:

1. Start looking for your speaker as early as possible. This way you are guaranteed the best selection of available speakers. Additionally, after you have secured your speaker, you can use him or her to help market your event.
2. Know the complete details of the meeting before looking for a speaker. The size and scope of the meeting or event, and the make up of your audience, all play a factor in selecting the best speaker. Some speakers do better with smaller audiences, some can handle large groups. Speakers can be entertaining, motivational, inspirational or informational– one style might be more meaningful to your audience than another. And the culture of your company or organization is extremely important – you want to be sure the speaker understands that culture and can deliver an appropriate presentation at your meeting.
3. Simplify the search process by using a professional speakers bureau. Bureaus stay abreast of a large pool of speakers and should be able to recommend several who fit all of your needs. They also can provide easy access to videos, brochures, books and other materials to help you make your final selection. Additionally, they can coordinate communication between you and the speakers you hire. This is crucial for the speaker to best prepare for your event.
4. Take a hard look at your budget for the speaker, and make sure it is in line with your expectations. If you want a speaker on the caliber of Bob Costas or Dr. Phil, you will have to pay fees for that level of experience and ability. On the other hand, if you are not planning on

hiring a celebrity speaker, you want to be sure the fee is appropriate. A speakers bureau should help you judge that the fees are appropriate for your expectations. A bureau also can help set your initial budget before you begin the search process.

5. Keep in mind that there is a growing number of “industry expert” speakers – people who work in professions such as finance, insurance, law, etc. who are available to speak to others in their industry. They can provide meaningful insight into trends, issues, and developments in the profession, adding an in-depth element that other speakers cannot.

6. After you have selected the speaker, consider maximizing this investment by having the speaker serve as MC for the entire meeting as well as give the keynote speech. Or, ask the speaker to attend a special breakfast or dinner with a smaller group of attendees. Sometimes, the speaker may be willing to take part in a round of golf with the CEO, or attend some other special event during the meeting. Work with your bureau to see how amenable the speaker may be to these types of activities.

Diane Goodman is president of The Goodman Speakers Bureau based in Windsor, Connecticut. She is author of “Survive the Search: A Guide to Finding the Right Professional Speaker.”