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FINDING A SPEAKER THAT FITS

by Diane Goodman

Speakers bureaus do more than just send out glossy catalogs. A good one will learn as much as possible about your company, your meeting, your audience, and your budget in order to help you find a professional speaker who fits your needs. The aim of this guide is to prepare you for discussions with a bureau, and to get you thinking about all the factors that affect your speaker choice.

The Basics

Your meeting time and place. As with everything else, the earlier you contact the speakers bureau, the better. And certainly mention if either the time or the dates are flexible. A star speaker might not be available to kick off your meeting, but perhaps she could provide something close to the program. The bureau also needs to know your budget parameters.

The Audience

Details to share with the bureau: your audience's size, the positions attendees hold in the company and what divisions they represent, their average educational background, age range, and the male/female ratio.

The Meeting Objective

- Which department is hosting the meeting?
- What is the overall purpose of the meeting?
- What is the strategic message you're trying to get across in this meeting?
- How will the meeting be structured to communicate this message?

The Speaker's Role

- Do you envision outside speakers as part of your agenda?
- If so, for what purpose (e.g., to lighten the mood, act as an emcee controlling session flow, pump up a sales force, or some other objective or combination of objectives)?
- How important do you feel the outside speaker is to the success of the meeting?
- Is there a particular type of speaker you believe will help you meet your objective (celebrity, sports figure, industry expert, etc.)?
- Where on the agenda do you think the speaker would be most effective?
- What would be the ideal "takeaway" for attendees from the speaker's presentation?

Use Your Experience

- Who stands out as the best speaker you ever had? Why?
- Who stands out as the worst speaker you've had? Why?
- How would it affect your meeting if your speaker of choice was not available?

Don't Stop Now!

Shortly after the meeting, take the time to sit down with other executives and review the impact on the meeting of the speaker you chose. Answer these questions:

- Did the speaker meet all of your expectations?
- Did the speaker add value to the meeting?
- Did the speaker further the meeting theme?
- How did attendees respond to the presentation?

Write down additional thoughts about the speaker and share them with your speaker's bureau representative. This will help the bureau next time you speak together.