

12 RULES FOR FINDING THE RIGHT SPEAKER

The definitive guide for anyone looking for a speaker that will elevate their event, inspire an audience, and not be a jerk.

Marc Gordon

This guide is compliments of



Atlantic Speakers Bureau
(506)-465-0990
atlanticspeakersbureau.com

WHERE DO YOU START?

Finding the right speaker for your event or conference has never been easier – or harder. Just Google a topic and dozens, if not hundreds, of names appear. Each one claiming to be a thought leader, best-selling author, or industry expert. Add to that all the speaker bureaus that can present you with former Olympic athletes, politicians and newsmakers, and the choices can be overwhelming.

The problem is that you never know what you're going to get. Even if their video clips show them as being polished speakers, able to get the audience laughing and cheering or crying and hugging, they may not be the right fit for your conference.

The best way to start the search for any speaker is to ask three simple questions.

What is the theme of the event?

Some events have a theme such as team work or cyber security. Other events don't have a theme, but want to deliver presentations that accomplish specific objectives such as get the energy up, motivate, or educate. It's important to identify how the speaker's topic and style will fit in with the event.

What would the attendees want?

You may get requests asking for specific topics or speakers. These can range from celebrities and speakers that someone thought was "so funny", to popular topics of the day such as cryptocurrency or selling to millennials. The challenge is to balance what would be of interest to most of the attendees while being in sync with the goals of the event. But be open to topics that you may not have previously thought of. Keep in mind that many of today's most requested speakers cover topics that did not exist five years ago.

What mood will attendees be in at the time of the speaker's presentation?

This is crucial to finding the right speaker. The mood and attention span of attendees will change throughout the day and be impacted by everything from meals and breaks to entertainment and activities. Bringing in an expert on tax law at 3:00pm on the last day of the conference may not be the best choice. However a comedian or motivational speaker may be the perfect fit. When a speaker is booked can be just as important as the subject they cover.

Once you've created a speaker "profile" that encompasses subject, style, and content, you will have a clearer idea on the kind of person you want on stage. Then refer to the twelve rules on the following pages. Each one has been inspired and suggested by event planners, speakers, and audience members from across the country. Following these rules will help you find a speaker who adds value to your conference and delivers an exceptional experience for the attendees.

RULE #1

DECIDE IF YOU WANT THE SPEAKER AND THE TOPIC TO BE THE SAME THING.

As soon as he got on stage, he pointed to his head and asked if we were wondering about his man-bun. Then he went on about his work experience, his travelling schedule and his kids. Then he talked some more about his man-bun. I didn't know if this was his opening or the subject of the presentation.

Paul T., Century 21

Every speaker has something important to share. It's usually something that will educate, motivate, or empower your attendees. In some instances it may be just to entertain. But it should never be to let the audience know how lucky they are to be in the presence of the speaker.

Some speakers have been guilty of presenting the "about me" show, where they themselves are the subject of the presentation. They believe that the audience has a genuine interest in the various aspects of their lives. Just watch any audience during the presentation of a speaker talking about themselves to see how forgettable it can be.

Did the speaker write a best seller? Unless they're giving out the book, don't mention it. Did they do some ground breaking research? Save it for the book they'll hopefully give out. Were they bullied in school? Who hasn't been?

Just cut to the chase and tell the audience they can make more money, have less stress, get more done, keep their employees happy, and how to avoid making stupid Facebook posts.

There are exceptions, though. Celebrities, athletes, and those who have overcome great personal challenges are often hired to share their own stories. In these cases, the audience wants the presentation to be about the speaker. After all, does anyone really want to hear an Olympic gold medalist talk about managing workflow through interdepartmental teams? No! Just tell us how you finished the race with a broken ankle.

NOTES

RULE #2

KNOW THAT NOT ALL EXPERTS WHO SPEAK ARE EXPERTS AT SPEAKING.

She was really well known in the industry. She held top positions and introduced many procedures that have become industry standards. The only problem was that she couldn't speak well. Lots of "uums", she kept repeating herself, and was very bland. It was a very long thirty minutes.

Gilles C., Sherweb IT Conference attendee

Event planners love experts and industry insiders, those who have built established careers and acquired vast knowledge specific to their industry. And why not? If attendees want knowledge, who better to deliver it?

The problem is that when it comes to speaking, it's all in the delivery. Especially when it comes to conferences. While many industry experts might be great in a classroom or workshop setting, as a keynote, they can bore the audience to tears.

If you're looking to start or end your conference on a high note, a professional speaker is your best choice.

Professional speakers understand that content is second to delivery. Keeping audiences engaged and entertained is the first priority. They also bring a level of expertise that is often not found with non-professional speakers, such as being able to work the stage, create impactful PowerPoint slides, and tell relevant and interesting stories.

And since most professional speakers are from outside your industry, they can bring a refreshing perspective and new solutions to common challenges.

However, if you really need that industry expert, remember to place them in a time slot where the audience will be attentive and alert.

NOTES

RULE #3

MAKE SURE THE SPEAKER ACTUALLY WANTS TO BE THERE.

The speaker didn't show up until 10 minutes before his start time. And he was on his phone almost until they announced him. His suitcase was right outside the conference room. When he was done, he grabbed his suitcase and was gone. That's not right.

Sonja R., Event Planner

Great speakers understand they have the ability to contribute to the success of a conference beyond the stage. They see it as a professional responsibility to make themselves available to both the event organizers and the attendees.

Attendees love meeting and chatting with the speakers. Questions get asked, business cards are shared, and selfies are taken. All part of the fun of being at the conference.

Before booking your speaker, ask how they work. When will they arrive and leave? Are they open to being interviewed for an event video? Will they attend the dinner event?

While the expectations placed on a speaker may differ from one event to another, it's nice to know the speaker you want to hire wants to be there just as much as you.

NOTES

RULE #4

THE SPEAKER SHOULD BE PROFESSIONAL BOTH ON AND OFF THE STAGE.

I think the speaker was drunk. She ran up on stage with the band and started taking selfies. It was ridiculous.

Ron K., restaurant conference attendee

From the time the speaker shows up to the time they leave, it's not just them they are representing. It is also you, your organization, and your industry. How they dress, act, and interact with other attendees can impact the entire conference experience.

And since you were the one who hired them, it may be you who has to answer for their behaviour.

Speakers that understand and appreciate the impact they can have on an event are conscious of what they say and do both on and off the stage. On stage they should entertain, educate, motivate, get people thinking differently. Off stage they should be welcoming, polite, and approachable. And most importantly, they should realize they are working for you.

NOTES

RULE #5

THE SPEAKER NEEDS TO BE ACCOMMODATING.

We were running about 15 minutes behind schedule. Although we still gave the speaker his full presentation time, he was clearly pissed off. But then he went on stage and talked about the importance of staying organized and keeping things on schedule. Needless to say it will be his last presentation for us.

Amanda F., financial planners event staff

The best-laid plans of mice and men... It takes a lot of things to pull off a conference. And all it takes is just one to add a bump in the road. A professional speaker will understand this. They will know their time slot may change, presentation time may be shortened, or the AV crew never wired their PowerPoint for sound.

How they handle these changes not only says something about them as individuals, but can add unnecessary stress for the organizer.

As far as the audience should be concerned, everything is fine. The speaker is on stage when he should be, he's happy to be there, knows his stuff, and is done on time. And most importantly, when you ask him if these changes can be made, he smiles and says "no problem."

NOTES

RULE #6

TOO MUCH INFORMATION IS NOT A GOOD THING.

It was like university. She just kept showing us charts and graphs, referring to studies, and throwing about statistics. For the first ten minutes, it was very enlightening. For the next half hour it was painful. We had people walking out.

Steve A., TD Bank

Industry studies, statistics, market trends, survey results – these should not be the foundation of any presentation. They should be used to support ideas and add validity to stories. The problem is that many speakers believe that sharing data makes them legitimate experts. The more facts and figures they show, the smarter they are.

As any audience member whose had to sit through a presentation of numbers and formulas will tell you, that’s not the case. Speakers that focus on relevant stories and real word examples typically rate higher by attendees than speakers who share facts and figures.

While it can be tempting to believe an academic speaker will educate your attendees more than a “soft skills” speaker, the fact is that even if the audience’s interest can be held for the entire presentation, they likely won’t retain everything anyway.

Many event planners have a strategy of simply starting with what key takeaways they want attendees to leave with based on the theme of the event. Then finding a speaker that can deliver those in a way that is entertaining and interesting.

NOTES

RULE #7

IMPROVISATION IS A SKILLED BEST LEFT FOR DRAMA CLASS.

I don't think he had a topic or plan or anything. He just ranted on for 60 minutes with random thoughts about his childhood, dating, and how stupid YouTubers are. He said millennials are all lazy, unskilled slackers who don't deserve success. Then he told everyone to go home and punch their mothers in the mouth. They should be ashamed and embarrassed for bringing this guy in.
Leonie D., System2 attendee

Some (as in most) speakers love the sound of their own voice. And when a select few get booked based on their status instead of their material, they feel empowered to not have to stick to the script, choosing instead to say whatever happens to be on their mind. Which can range from random nonsense to offensive ranting.

Your conference deserves better. Your attendees deserve better. You deserve better. Sure, the speaker may be a draw and gets bums in seats, but that won't matter when people start walking out.

Find a speaker that respects the rules. Then hold him to a specific topic while sharing some key points. This will allow you to accurately market the presentation. He delivers as promised and the attendees get exactly what they believed they should.

How can you ensure this? Start by watching some of the speaker's presentation videos. If those check out, then ask him directly what will be covered. Some planners go so far as to have a content clause in the contract.

NOTES

RULE #8

FORGET INTERACTION. ENGAGEMENT IS WHAT YOU WANT.

As soon as he got up he started with the questions. And they were so obvious. “Who wants more money, who wants more free time, who wants less stress?” It was ridiculous. Could he not see that fewer hands went up each time? People were getting tired of all the questions.

Sheila B, Lexus

Audience interaction is encouraged within the speaking community. Event organizers ask for it and speakers are encouraged to do it. The problem is that the focus is on interaction, when engagement is what’s more important.

Interaction is two way communication. The speaker asks a question and the audience answers. In most cases this is reduced to hands being raised or maybe some clapping. It’s been done. Time to move on. Audiences are tired of being asked questions that go something like “*Do you think relationships are important in business? Yes or yes?*”

Engagement on the other hand is something that truly reflects the quality of the presentation. The true definition of engagement is “to occupy the attention or efforts of a person or persons”. This can take many forms, from raising hands to laughing at a joke. If the audience is paying attention then they are engaged. Engaged audiences see themselves in the stories, they relate to the examples, they start to develop their own ideas, see the world differently, and may even have a few “a-ha” moments.

A great presentation doesn’t require everyone to raise their hands.

NOTES

RULE #9

GREAT SPEAKERS ARE ALWAYS WILLING TO DO MORE.

She was so accommodating. We added her to a panel group. Then she did a book signing. Then she attended our networking event. She offered to do all these extra services that were not part of the contract. The attendees loved it. She made a huge contribution to the success of the conference.

Daniel R., Verizon

Successful speakers know they are in the service business. Beyond the presentation itself, the level and number of services they provide off the stage can have a huge impact on the attendee experience.

While it would make sense that a speaker would be willing to participate in other sessions or activities –after all what else have they got going on – it seems to be the exception rather than the rule. With many speakers only willing to stay for a book signing, they are often more eager to run off.

When researching and interviewing potential speakers, make this an important point. Even if you may not want the speaker for anything other than the presentation, their response to the question “what other activities would you be willing to take part in?” will say a lot about the standard of service they provide.

NOTES

RULE #10

AVOID SPEAKERS THAT ARRIVE WITH AN EGO.

We received his rider about a week before the conference. Two pages. The first one was the AV requirements including lighting, the size and position of the comfort monitor, where the podium had to be, the screen sizes, and other stuff. The second page was about his hotel room, meal schedule, and his availability – which was not much. Like I didn't have enough to worry about.
Elise F., Event Planner

Keynote speakers have the power to influence the atmosphere of an event. They are often presented as celebrities, professional athletes, leaders of industry, or having accomplished something great. All of this can contribute to many of them believing that they are an integral part and contributor to the success of the event.

For event planners, this can mean having to deal with outrageous demands, inaccessibility, and the occasional mood swing. For attendees, these types of speakers can be aloof, unapproachable, perhaps even rude. All of this can impact the event experience.

Professional speakers know their presentation is their time to shine. Before and after they should be accessible but not underfoot, clear about what they need but not unreasonable, and available but not loitering. And they should leave their egos at the door.

NOTES

RULE #11

ACCEPT THAT SOMEONE WILL BE OFFENDED.

He told a story about how he can never remember his wedding anniversary. As someone who was in an unhappy marriage, I was quite offended. As such I was not able to enjoy the rest of his presentation. It would have been nice if he had told a story that was more inclusive and sensitive to the feelings of others.

Stacey B., retail conference attendee

Contrary to what some might think, speakers do not try to offend their audiences. Even those that cuss do so only to add style or reinforce their persona. Speakers at all levels of experience, regardless of industry or subject, want to be loved by audiences. Not hated.

Now that's not to say that blurting out swear words or using offensive terms is okay. Professional speakers understand that being inclusive and welcoming is the foundation for any successful presentation. And any event planner should expect no less.

But the fact is, if you take a couple hundred people from all walks of life and put them in a room and make them listen to a speaker for an hour, they will each have a different opinion about what is being shared. Everything from gender and cultural backgrounds to personal experiences will impact how stories and phrases are interpreted. This may result in some being amused while others are offended.

Being inclusive is the goal of every speaker. However trying to be politically correct and staying away from polarizing topics such as sports or politics only results in a presentation that is dull and uninspiring. It's been said that if someone wants to feel offended, they will always find a reason to be.

NOTES

RULE #12

THE SPEAKER SHOULD BE JUST AS INTERESTED IN YOUR INDUSTRY AS IN YOUR EVENT.

The attendees were totally impressed with the content. She had clearly done her homework. She thoroughly knew the industry, the current market, and even industry terms. This not only endeared her to the group, but her examples were relevant and practical.

Paul C, event planner

Every company has its own culture. Every association has its own objectives. And every industry has its own jargon.

A professional speaker will do their best to learn all of these. They will reach out to the staff, management, read some industry publications, and learn the issues of the day. Then integrate them into their presentation in order to make it as relevant as possible.

While this may seem obvious, it is not as common as you might think. So it would be best to inquire about that before the speaker is booked.

One caveat though. Every speaker has an area of specialty. They have been booked based on their unique skills, experience or knowledge, which may not always be specific to your industry. As such, while it would not be unreasonable to expect them to use some industry relevant examples, they should not be asked to entirely customize their presentation.

Attendees that see presentations that are relevant to their industry are generally more engaged and provide more positive feedback. In addition, speakers that sound like a member of the industry are more likely to value those that are.

NOTES

ABOUT MARC GORDON

Marc Gordon is the internationally recognized authority in the field of customer experience. He works with companies who understand the importance of creating exceptional experiences that cultivate relationships and build loyalty.

Marc has consulted and provided marketing services for some of the world's most respected organizations and has spoken on stages from Toronto to Tehran and from New York to Naples.

Regularly featured on television and radio for his opinions, Marc has shared his thoughts on topics that include the boycotting of brands, customer service in the airline industry, and organizations such as Sears, Toys R Us, the NRA, and Starbucks.



As a speaker, Marc brings fresh insight and sensible ideas, delivered in his trademark high energy style. His presentations have been called “powerful”, “a game changer”, and “the best choice to start or finish any conference”.

Marc is also the founder of a marketing and consultancy firm that works directly with companies seeking a competitive edge. Working with management and front-line workers, he helps implement service strategies that deliver exceptional customer experiences. Past clients have included Bausch & Lomb, Toyota, Mondelez, Johnson & Johnson, and many non-profit associations.

As a board member of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers (CAPS), Marc has worked with Event Planners and speakers in the sharing of ideas for creating new opportunities within the meeting industry. He has also been a vocal proponent in setting professional standards for ethics and professionalism in the speaking industry.

Looking for a speaker that can add energy and insight? Contact The Atlantic Speakers Bureau and find out how Marc can create a unique experience for your next event.



Atlantic Speakers Bureau
(506)-465-0990
atlanticspeakersbureau.com