

How to Choose the Right Keynote Speaker: Myths and Truths

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Today's speaker marketplace comprises literally thousands of speakers who are potentially available as a keynote or featured speaker for your association's events. How do you know if you are making the right choice *before* you commit to a speaker and perhaps paying a very large speaker fee?

Here are some myths and truths when it comes to selecting your keynote or featured speaker.

Myth No. 1: The higher the speaker fee, the better the speaker.

Speaker fees are based on two things: 1., The demand for a given speaker and 2., the perceived demand that the speaker feels exists and how much that demand is worth.

Most speaker fees are determined by the speaker, not the hiring organization. If you have a budget, there is always a speaker out there for every budget on both the high and low-end. High-end fees do not necessarily equate quality.

Myth No. 2: If someone has been on the speaker circuit for many years they must be really, really good.

Not necessarily. They may be on the circuit simply because people keep hiring them because they are already on the circuit and so they *assume* they are really, really good.

Myth No. 3: If someone has written a book, they must have something very meaningful to say.

Not always. With the ease with which to self-publish today, being an author is not the same as being a New York Times best-selling author. And the sub-myth is that being a best-selling author means you are a good speaker. Actually, it may only mean you are a good writer.

Myth No. 4: A speaker must have experience working with your particular audience or industry to be able to relate to your audience.

While it often works well to have a speaker with your required experience, the primary goal here is for the presenter to have content that is applicable to your audience, even without prior experience with your audience profile. That could mean content that cuts across all industries and job functions. Conversely, it's often good to get a perspective from someone in a different industry to allow for thinking "out of the box."

Truth No. 1: It's crucial to decide on the objectives of what you want your keynote speaker to accomplish and what you perceive the needs of your audience to be.

Truth No. 2: You need to decide what type of speaker or speakers you need for each event. It's usually one (or a combination) of these types:

- Inspirational/motivational or entertaining speaker
- A "name" speaker who will allow attendees to say, "I saw Mr. or Ms. X at the XYZ Conference."
- SME – subject matter expert: an industry expert who can be either a professional speaker or an author or consultant or all of those, but is someone known as a luminary in the field.

Truth No. 3: You should always try to have a conversation with the targeted speaker before you commit to him or her, to make sure the speaker will tailor their presentation to your needs and objectives, and to feel confident that you are making a quality monetary investment.

Truth No. 4: Decide upon your budget and the number of keynotes or featured speakers you need/want far in advance. Conference kick-off keynote only? Lunch keynote? First speaker each day?

At the end of the day, your primary objective should be to hire *memorable* keynote speakers that will give you a good return on your investment. You want your attendees to walk away from a keynote presentation saying “that was great” and to remember your event many months later, along with the names of the speakers. Then you will know you made the right choices.