

Speak Up

PMM5 Postscript™ Number 33

Background Information: Chapter 21 in *Professional Meeting Management*®, fifth edition, provides a comprehensive overview for hiring speakers and working with speaker bureaus. In that chapter, Brian Palmer and Donald Jenkins:

- Recognize the importance a speaker has on the success of a meeting
- Identify details that must be included in a speaker's contract
- Discuss ways to affirm, confirm and reaffirm all arrangements made with speakers

PMM5 Postscript™ Use: While meeting managers should anticipate and expect that speakers will prepare for their appearance at a meeting, it is incumbent on meeting managers to “speak up” to prime all speakers. This PMM5 Postscript™ addresses the steps for meeting managers to prepare their speakers. The PMM5 Postscript™ also supplies actual text to include in speaker guidelines. This PMM5 Postscript™ also includes additional group discussion or research projects to supplement the PMM5 chapter.

Learner Outcomes: At the completion of this reading, you should be able to:

- Describe the challenge of creating attention.
- Identify six ways for speakers to create positive attention.
- Identify the benefits of speaker guidelines for the meeting manager and the speaker.
- List the steps for speaker preparation including pre-program and on-site activities.

Related PMM5 Chapter: Chapter 21, Hiring Speakers and Working with Speakers Bureaus
Authors: Brian Palmer and Donald Jenkins, CASE



Creating Attention

Thomas Davenport and John Beck, authors of *The Attention Economy: Understanding the New Currency of Business*, call the challenge of getting and keeping audiences' attention "Corporate Attention Deficit Syndrome."

In their book, Davenport and Beck, outline what people pay attention to and divide attention into six types:

- Attraction (victory, super models)
- Aversion (car wrecks)
- Captive (bad weather, movies)
- Voluntary (hobbies, print advertising)
- Front of Mind (discussion, task at hand)
- Back of Mind (to do list, commuting)

They say that given the glut of information, understanding and managing attention is now the single most important determinant of business success (Davenport & Beck, 2001).

Meeting managers must craft meetings that are an *attraction* rather than *back of mind*. Meeting managers and presenters must create environments where audiences are a participant not a *captive*.

So much goes into a "great" speaker — content, delivery, rapport with the audience. Meeting managers can help create positive attention (attraction) in meetings by encouraging speakers to use:

- **Stories** — Stories woven within a presentation create pictures in people's minds. Stories work to grab attention and create emotional connections. When done in support of a point in the presentation, stories help increase retention and interest.
- **Props** — Props help make information tangible. Props should illustrate or emphasize a key point. Several suggestions for presenters when using props:
 - Make sure the prop is large enough to be seen
 - Allow sufficient time for the audience to see the prop
 - Don't let the prop become a distraction from you or your presentation
- **Handouts** — Handouts need not be the PowerPoint slides reproduced. Handouts can include background information, supplemental charts and statistics, anything that supports the presentation. Handouts have the following advantages:
 - Fills in gaps in the audience's knowledge and understanding of the topic
 - Adds to the presenter's credibility
 - Keeps everyone focused
 - Serves as a place to take notes
- **Movement** — The same part of the brain that controls long-term memory also controls large motor skills. When a presenter asks the audience to move, they get their attention and re-awaken the part of the brain that controls long-term memory.
- **Questions** — Questions ask the audience if the picture is complete for them. Presenters can ask rhetorical questions or they can ask the audience to respond to a question. Addi-

tionally, PowerPoint slides can be crafted in such a way that each slide asks questions thereby inviting the audience to reflect and possibly express their opinions and feelings.

More information about these techniques is included in PMM Postscript™ Number 31 on keynotes.

- **Involvement** — While speakers strive to engage with the audience, many speakers steer away from audience involvement as a method of connecting. Meeting managers should inform all speakers that one expectation is that they will use one to three interactive formats during their presentation. Karen Lawson cites four reasons that speakers shy away from audience involvement (Lawson, 1999):
 - It takes time. Not only does it take time away from the speaker's actual delivery of his or her message, but it also takes time to plan how one will incorporate these techniques into the speech or presentation.
 - It can be risky. Many speakers are afraid of losing control of the situation.
 - It requires a different approach. Sometimes speakers prefer to stick to the tried-and-true method of simply standing before an audience and delivering their powerful message. Getting an audience to participate requires a different skill set that many speakers have not as yet mastered.
 - Speakers simply see no need to do so. However, today's audiences are different. Conditioned by their experiences in school and corporate training programs, audiences expect to be involved. They expect a speech or a presentation to be a learning experience and they expect a learning experience to be an interactive one.

Meeting managers can help speakers create audience involvement. Meeting managers can:

- Provide examples of ways to create involvement like small group work, peer-to-peer exercises or other activities.
- Create active opening comments that involve the audience. An example is creatively asking people for their expectation.
- Support the use props or other visual aids. Even better is allowing the audience to use props in conjunction with the presentation.
- Support speakers wishing to use visualization or mental imagery to get audiences involved in the presentation.

Purpose of Speaker Guidelines

Speaker guidelines serve both the meeting manager and the speakers or presenters at meetings. For the meeting manager, having standard speaker guidelines helps:

- Maneuver around the tenuous area of coaching internal speakers or paid professional speakers
- Ensure that the speakers deliver what is required for the meeting

For speakers, speaker guidelines serve to:

- Acquaint them with the organization
- Enhance their ability to communicate with employee/members/participants
- Increase their rapport with the audience

In addition to providing standard speaker guidelines, meeting managers should provide speakers with:

- Audience demographics
- Details on the purpose of the meeting or conference
- Purpose of the presentation
- Information on the mood and temperament of the audience

Speaker Guidelines: Advice for Speakers on Building the Presentation

Speaker guidelines may have suggestions for speakers about building their presentation. This next section is actual sample text that meeting managers can adapt for their speaker guidelines:

- **Fit in.** Read any advance information about your presentation. Understand where you fit in (as appropriate) within the context of the entire meeting or event. Please review learner outcomes for your presentation. This is your contract with our meeting participants.
- **Avoid overload.** While you are the expert, keep information simple, applicable and tangible. Planning the major points of your presentation ahead of time will allow you to tap into own natural energy and enthusiasm. Structure time in your presentation for people to absorb your key points through application, discussion, small group work, case studies, writing, planning, or thinking.
- **Be clear.** Avoid acronyms, jargon and buzz words. Provide definitions where appropriate. Audiences are not impressed by your knowledge; they are impressed when they take away something they can use. Relate the visuals to your presentation. Audiences feel “misled” if the visuals do not track to the presentation flow. Main points should be included in your visuals and your presentation.
- **Answer the WIIFM question.** Always answer the question that the audience is asking — “What’s in it for me?” Make your presentation specifically address how they can improve their life, work, product or service by listening to you. Be audience-centric in building your presentation.
- **Make it real.** Don’t speak in generic or abstract terms. Accompany most of your key points with analogies or real-life examples. Use stories, example, pose problems, use metaphors, anecdotes, videos, charts, graphics, case studies and examples to make your ideas more tangible.
- **Build in audience interaction.** Use the audience as a resource. Respect and build upon their knowledge base and experience. Encourage questions. Other ways to foster interaction include group discussions, small group work, individual action planning, case studies, or round-robin formats.
- **Look and feel.** Edit your presentation into meaningful, telegraphic words that support your statement rather than repeat them. This enhances readability and also doesn’t tip your hand to reveal more information than needed. The audience will read ahead and not listen to what you are saying. (They can’t help themselves as their

brains can process faster than you can speak.) A well-paced slide presentation should have a slide change every 20 seconds. Longer intervals between slides will inevitably bore and disinterest your audience. Use the SHIFT-B or SHIFT-W to change the screen to an all black or all white screen.

- **Be familiar with your material.** Know the order of your visuals. Be prepared to talk to the audience as you would talk to an individual one-on-one. Your presentation should not be a recitation or reading of your visuals.
- **No sales pitches.** This is an opportunity for education not promotion. You are encouraged to use your presentation as a starting point for a future business relationship. Don't make negative references to competitors, other products or services.

Speaker Guidelines: Advice for Speakers on Presentation Tips

Additionally, speakers can be coached on presentation tips. Again this text is an actual section that a meeting manager might include in Speaker Guidelines under a section entitled "Presentation Tips".

- **Be familiar with your material.** Do not recite nor read the bullets on your PowerPoint slides or handouts. Add depth, experience and relevance to your presentation.
- **Meet and greet.** As much as possible, individually welcome and interact with members of the audience. The 15-20 minutes before your presentation should not be focused on audio-visual checks, reviewing your notes, or last-minute changes. Arrive early to double check these issues. When people begin arriving, focus on them.
- **Begin with outcomes.** People will evaluate your presentation based upon the outcomes provided in advance or their own unspoken objectives. Invite people to tell you what they want to get out of the presentation. This activity will unite and focus your audience.
- **Be yourself.** Within your own presentation style strive to be lively and animated, vary your tone and pace, introduce humor (not necessarily canned jokes) and movement. Non-verbal communication is critical to overall communication. A 1967 study conducted by psychologist Albert Mehrabian concluded that communication is 7% verbal, 38% vocal, and 55% facial.
- **Use eye contact to connect** with your audience. For large groups, glance in general directions, making eye contact with handfuls of individuals. Rely on movement, gesture, posture, facial expression, vocal inflection, tempo, rhythm, pitch, eye contact and sometimes even touch and smell to communicate your message. Speak more slowly and deliberately on the key points of your presentation, and pick up the pace on the information that is filler. Use pauses for accentuation.
- **Remain the focus.** You should remain the center of attention, not the visuals. When you do use slides, stand next to the projected image, so that you always remain in view. Speak to the audience, not to the slide. If you want to draw the participant's attention to the screen, stop speaking. Then point to the screen, then return your eyes to the audience and resume speaking.
- **Audience Involvement.** Inviting questions is important, but equally critical is how you respond and answer them. You must convey that it will be safe and comfortable to ask questions. Prior to answering a question, repeat the question that was asked so that the audi-

ence can hear it. Use the word “*and*” instead of “*but*”. Do not respond, “But...”. The use of the word “*but*” negates the comment from the participant. Build upon their comments with the word “*and*” in your response.

Speaker Guidelines: Other Key Information

Each meeting manager should determine what additional information is important to include in speaker guidelines. Sample text for two additional guidelines (verbatim text):

- **No Connection.** If you feel you aren’t connecting with the audience, stop your presentation and find a way to reconnect. Ask them what’s amiss or ask them what they need. It is better to deviate from the planned presentation in order to make a connection with the audience.
- **Transitions between Presenters.** When “on” do not leave the presentation area or the podium until the next speaker is next to you. Your audience is focused on the stage or podium. Do not leave it unattended because it leaves the audience unattended.

Planning

The best possible programs stem from planning and preparation which also extends to speakers. Booking a speaker and sending a confirmation letter/contract is only the first step for a meeting manager. Work with speakers during all stages of the planning process.

Pre-Program

Pre-program preparation will ensure that speakers will feel welcomed, comfortable and be prepared to deliver an outstanding presentation. Prior to the presentation, meeting managers should:

- Provide the speaker with clear expectations. Outline what components or elements must be contained in all presentations.
- Specify the size and demographics of the audience.
- Inform the speaker in advance about other speakers on the program, if applicable. This gives the speaker the opportunity to build on (and not duplicate) what the other speakers say.
- Work with speakers on program descriptions. Create titles that are intriguing. In the program description, clearly state the learning outcomes so meeting participants don’t have to “dig” for the take-away value.
- Ensure the speaker understands how to maximize the perception and reality of “take away” value.
- Send detailed directions and a map.
- Secure a biography and an introduction in advance for your speaker. Use both documents to prepare a customized introduction for the event. Use the introduction to establish the speaker’s credibility and offer a personal recommendation. Don’t use introductions as a time to rattle off educational degrees, client lists or speaking appearances. Make the introduction relevant for your audience; tell the audience why this speaker was selected and what he or she offers through their presentation.

On-site

On site preparations include:

- Provide a welcome letter at either the front desk of the hotel or the registration desk with all pertinent information:
 - Final list of attendees for session, if pre-registered
 - Meeting room location
 - Reiterate expectations for their session
 - Any changes in the meeting or conference schedule
- Meet speakers in the meeting room prior to the program beginning to go over last-minute issues, if possible.
- Determine who will introduce the speaker. Introduce the speaker to that person prior to the start of the program.
- Obtain the name, room number, and cell and office telephone numbers of the venue's technical support person, and make sure that the speaker has this information on hand.
- Thoroughly test every aspect of the presentation, especially if it incorporates audio, video, or other media.

Speakers will be the most comfortable when there are no surprises in the environment in which they will be presenting. Double check that the lighting, sound system and staging are set up as requested.

Summary

By preparing all speakers — professional speakers, consultants, academics, industry practitioners, panelists, moderators, subject matter experts — with clear expectations, with current information about the meeting and participants, and with suggestions for success, the meeting manager can help create a spectacular meeting.

Creating standard guidelines helps ensure that complete speaker preparation is simply part of the planning process rather than an extra, special task. Even professional speakers will appreciate the attention to detail.

Advance speaker preparations set the stage for a successful event. Savvy meeting managers offer speakers the preparation they deserve to allow them to shine.

Group Discussion or Projects

1. Borrowing from Davenport and Beck's categories of attention, name three to five things a speaker might do that create "aversion" for you? What can a meeting manager do to avoid these "turn-offs?"
2. How can a meeting manager "manage" a speaker who won't incorporate any involvement into their presentation?
3. How do audience demographics affect a speaker's ability to command attention?

4. Why would a meeting manager set up a speaker lounge or speaker-ready room? What things would you arrange to have in the speaker lounge? How would the on-site staff and speakers use the lounge?
5. Draft a sample letter to a speaker including the information that you feel is essential to communicate to the speaker about speaking at an upcoming conference. Assume that this is your first correspondence following the signing of the contract.
6. What arrangements should meeting managers make to make speakers feel like VIPs?

References

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