

What's to be expected from Speaker Bureaus and Speakers – Part II

As promised, this is addressed to the speakers themselves.

- 1) Make sure the bureaus can reach you at all times. That's simple these days with PDAs and yes, bleedin' Blackberries, if you're that pretentious. I got an 'out of office' notice from a speaker the day of writing this, saying 'I'll be back in office on 4th March. Dear grief. How do you run your life like that? No comms for twenty days? Get back to the bureau a.s.a.p. Make sure they know the *easiest* way to reach you.
- 2) Show some ethics when it comes to the subject material. Yes, you can sometimes do a bit of creative tweaking. But I've heard people stand up and present their same sad old pastiche and schpiel, which just happens to be way off brief, and they just alter a sentence or two here or there to make it sound new or relevant. If it's not your bag, have the cohunes to refuse the assignment – or recommend someone else.
- 3) Part of your fee includes a client briefing. Make sure you get to the originator of the speaking request. I've been given briefs (not of the underwear kind!) by PR 'poppies' as I call them, with just two brain cells struggling for survival. In some cases their concept of what the marketing director or CEO wanted, was in fact 180° the opposite.
- 4) You need to be absolutely explicit, up front, about what your fee does or does not include. I've heard of innumerable post-event dramas where the phrase, 'Oh but I thought...' is the catalyst.
- 5) The speaking assignment is not an opportunity for you to peddle your collateral material and books like you're having a garage sale. Clear it with the bureau and the client before embarrassing yourself and them, by behaving like some kind of *smous*.
- 6) If your assignment is early in the morning at a distant location, you just *have* to go in the night before. Too bad if you love your wife or will miss your toy-boy, bimlette or himbette. Today's traffic and transport hazards militate against getting in under the bell. And some of you wonder why the term 'motivational speaker' has people reaching for a barf-bag? Just a few people regularly keep the reputation of public speakers in the doldrums.
- 7) The golden rule in the business is, 'be there.' The instant you arrive, notify the appropriate contact person that you're there. Don't hide out in your hotel or lodge room – particularly in remote areas not yet served by mobile phone signals. That's the kind of stuff that gives us a bad name.
- 8) Make sure you have a pre-printed, customized-to-the-event intro on you for the MC. Have a backup copy.
- 9) Have your presentation visuals on your own notebook computer, on a back-up CD or DVD (ensuring that the original video files are intact) and also a hard copy printout of the presentation.
- 10) Have you thought of power cuts? Could you continue presenting without power? It's a new dimension in our speaking environment. Factor it in and include something about it (if necessary, a disclaimer) in your Terms and Conditions.
- 11) It's not the client's responsibility to check your equipment, the infrastructure, the room configuration or the logistics for your program. That should have been done *way* back as part of a written brief from you, as I put it, 'In order to deliver a professional service with an optimal outcome for your investment'. That keeps clients happy.
- 12) Please don't blatantly steal anecdotes and material from other speakers on the same program. I custom-crafted a process model. A fellow speaker sat in on my session and without batting an eyelid, produced that same model in a presentation a few months later. I don't think he anticipated me being in the audience. ☺

- 13) If you don't want to be videotaped or audio-recorded without a pre-negotiated additional fee, it had better be sorted out via your Terms and Conditions. If you don't have Terms and Conditions, ask a more professional speaker for a copy of theirs.
- 14) Accommodation paid for by the client will only occasionally (they'll tell you) cover your 'extras'. So if you use room service, the mini-bar or valet services, make darn sure you produce your plastic for swiping when checking out.
- 15) If you're going to check out late, or stay a day extra make sure it's cleared and understood that it will be for your own account.
- 16) Sneaking your partner or lover into the room for the night isn't OK. Not without paying the additional tab anyway.
- 17) Don't ever tell the client that they can get you for less by coming direct the next time. That's reprehensible theft and totally unethical behaviour. If someone said that to me, I'd never use them again as a matter of principle. If they're comfortable screwing their bureau, they'll do the same to the client at some point.
- 18) Don't flirt with or bonk the event delegates or engage in otherwise distasteful innuendo or behaviour. Some speakers on the so-called circuit are notorious for wanting to bed whatever's in sight.
- 19) An amorous couple (the speaker and the client) shacked up in the suite next to mine at one bush-lodge location. The following morning, as I was leaving, I noticed a baboon making for the woman's handbag (she was the client) that she'd left on the table outside the room. I couldn't stay. I had to discreetly tap on the door and say (not without a wicked grin) to the sheepish speaker-dude who opened the sliding door, 'You've left your handbag on the table - and the monkeys are going to take it.' The client was accommodated in another camp, several kilometers away from the man's room. She was driven, I'm told, with dishevelled hair and smeared mascara, like some sort of lady of the night, at 10 a.m. through the main camp. Yeesh. Reputations people, reputations.
- 20) Don't use bad language or make sexist or ethnic remarks in your presentation. If you're Black you can refer to your buddies as 'nigger'. If you're Jewish, you can tell as many kyke jokes as you wish. Wop jokes if you're Italian, Spic jokes if Hispanic and Polak jokes if you're from that neck of the woods. If you're an Afrikaner you can trash Van der Merwe and his ancestors. If you're lesbi-gay, you can bliksem the moffies at will. But if you're not one of these majorities or minorities, leave well alone. And regardless of your ethnicity or sexual persuasion, unless you're the paid comedian for the event, stay away from any brand of politics or religion. Capish?
- 21) Don't get pickled during any part of the proceedings. You're representing more than just yourself. I've seen people take bets on who could projectile-vomit the furthest, after a rampant night in a casino. That's not a great image.
- 22) Don't blame the bureau for late payment if you're terrible at admin and don't invoice them in advance or on time.
- 23) If you undertake to e-mail or send other materials as a result of some spontaneous discussion during your talk or workshop – get that stuff to someone responsible for re-distribution at the earliest opportunity.
- 24) Get a thank-you e-mail to the organising person and your bureau as a matter of priority. Ideally within an hour of leaving the venue – or even before you leave. Even an SMS can do the trick.
- 25) If the speaker bureau has a policy which asks that you distribute only their business cards, and they've sourced the assignment for you – then *don't* give people your personal business card – even if they ask.
- 26) If you have a clear sense that you're being offered work over and above the particular assignment, tell the client you'll discuss it with the bureau. And then tell the bureau and agree

how you both think it can best be handled. As you want the bureau to play open cards with you, so you must do with them.

- 27) Is it fair or reasonable for a bureau to expect commission on what you do for a client several months or even years after an initial introduction? This is something that the industry needs to sort out among its role-players. Some protocol needs to be accepted and implemented.
- 28) Don't put yourself in the running for any prizes or competitions at the function – unless the originating client insists. I wanted to die from embarrassment, years ago, when the program organiser at a major Sandton Sun Hotel function, 'drew' the winning ticket for a bank account, with her own name on it. That was an all-time low for me.
- 29) Find out what the dress code is for the event and present yourself dressed just one notch smarter than that. Even at a seaside resort. You're 'working' and you're also on show. How you look and how you're packaged is a predictor of what they can expect to hear and learn from you.
- 30) If you're custom-crafting materials as learning guides, use the client's logo on it and make darn sure that references to other clients have been deleted. I saw one dude hand out HR materials and the name of a major brewery was left inside, in various places, from his previous 'customisation.' Nobody was kind, or unkind enough, to tell him.
- 31) Don't lie about your fees, your huge client base and your success and then land up crawling to other speakers when you can't put food on your table. That's really stoopid.
- 32) Stop competing at airports about whether you're flying first or business class, or how many air trips you've made in the last ten days, or how many countries you've just finished speaking in. That's the behaviour of the *nouveau riche* – plain vulgar.
- 33) We're really not interested that you had to charter a 'chopper' to get to this assignment because you're so busy (or disorganised, or need to impress). It speaks volumes about your lack of self worth that you rabbit on about it. So shut it, already, OK?
- 34) If you're with the client and their team for a few days, make sure that you circulate widely and that you don't just hang with the top dogs.
- 35) Don't bad-mouth other speakers or bureaus to the client. If you can't say something positive and constructive, then say nothing, or change the topic.
- 36) If you refer work to other speakers, sort out in your own head *before* you do so, whether you want commission on that work or not. I never have and never will take commission from friends or colleagues. But some folk are cool with doing so. Be sure that you're all on the same page or those friends may no longer be your friends after the gig!
- 37) Ask for feedback on what you do from a variety of sources. Most people are only too happy to blow smoke up your butt and tell you how wonderful you are. Ask a few people whose judgement and insight you trust and respect to give you some frank and constructive feedback from time to time.
- 38) Don't become a legend in your own lunch-time. Ego, arrogance and attitude are unattractive at the best of times.
- 39) If you preach what people should practice, you'd better practise what you preach. There's a loudmouth on the circuit who pontificates about relationships and he's a wife-batterer. How's that for credibility and integrity? Don't live two lives: one on-stage and the other off-stage. You damage yourself and other people by doing that.
- 40) Are you putting anything back into the speaking business? Are you helping to grow and mentor and develop other speakers?
- 41) What do you do for the community? I was shocked this year to hear a speaker who's done very well out of South Africa, say, 'I don't do freebies!' Wow. I believe we all have a moral obligation to do something great for kids, HIV/AIDS causes, CANSA and the like. We're smaller people for not doing so.

- 42) Would you be comfortable to look your best friend or loved one in the eye and tell them about what you're doing out of their visual and auditory range? About how you're treating those around you in your business? And about how you're treating those you work with in the speaking business? Here's a little thought to put to yourself before you got to sleep at night: *'Is the world a better place today, because I was in it?'*
- 43) Finally, I hope some of you will add to this list. Maybe someday we can give it, or something similar, to wannabe or emerging speakers, as a self-applied speaker charter. If we all buy into a professional, responsible, respectful, ethical and symbiotic approach, the industry will be a better place for it. And maybe bureaus and speakers will finally be able to bury their paranoid hatchets, not in each others heads, but in the ground, forever! But that won't happen without both parties talking. If they go off in a huff and sulk, well, *a luta continua* – the struggle continues.