

Increase Your Organization's Profile By Speaking Out

By Lauren Fleming

Eight Pointers to Get You Started

There's a secret about being a speaker — anyone can do it. You don't have to be Oprah to stand in front of an audience and have a message. *Anyone* with something to say can be a speaker and gain the publicity, credibility, and buzz that comes with it.

“There's a secret about being a speaker — anyone can do it.”

Speaking is a great way to promote your organization and your cause. How do you make it happen? These tips will help you on your way to building your reputation as a speaker and leader in your field.

1. Face Your Fears.

Public speaking ranks as the number one fear in America — beating out shark attacks, natural disasters, and, yes, death itself. Mark Twain's thoughts on public speaking say it all: “There are two types of speakers. Those who get nervous and those who are liars.”

But nervousness is something you can face. You can live through it, survive, and feel stronger and better about yourself afterward. Speaking is a skill like any other. If you confront your fears and put in the time to practice, you can learn to speak well. Doing so is an excellent way to get your message across. It's also something that can set you apart from the pack, since many don't have the gumption to get up there.

2. Make a Speaker Sheet.

A speaker sheet is one page that describes who you are and what you do. It answers questions like these:

- **What's your message?** What makes you unique?
- **What kind of practical knowledge** do you have?
- **What's the list of topics** you can speak about?
- **Why should they book you** and not someone else?

Put together a nice PDF, use colors and pictures, and include your contact information and Web site address. After you've done a little speaking you may want to add quotes (“We had Jane speak at our event and she was phenomenal!”)

Think about your organization's goals and how to achieve them. Pinpoint those that are most important to you at this time. For example:

- **Do you want new donors?** Volunteers? Board members?
- **Are you hoping to make your organization's name more recognizable?** Do you want to clarify what your organization stands for?
- **Are you looking for collaborators** and new partners?

Organize your speaker sheet with those goals in mind.

3. Be Free.

The best way to begin speaking is for free. Being a free speaker will get you exposure and experience.

Remember all the intangible things you're getting out of being a speaker. How do you measure the value of getting your name out there?

As you become better known, you may be able to command small fees, or at least have your travel costs covered. But the people who make a living as a speaker are few and far between, and that's not your primary goal.

“Organize your speaker sheet with your organization’s goals in mind.”

4. Start Small.

Look at your local Chamber of Commerce or seek out networking groups in your field. Rotary Clubs, which meet weekly, are always looking for speakers for their meetings. It’s not hard to track down e-mail addresses for these organizations, and shoot them your speaker sheet.

Such groups will probably be small (5 to 20 people), and not terribly invested in what you’re saying (they come for the scheduled meeting whether they’re interested in the speaker or not). This is actually a good thing! It gives you a chance to get comfortable in front of an audience, but with low stakes.

5. Promote Yourself.

Here are a few free (or almost free) ways to promote yourself on the Internet, in ways that can reach both people you know and people you don’t:

- **Add “Speaker” to the list of things you do** on your resume and Linked-In pages.
- **On your organization’s Web site, add a page that’s totally dedicated to you as a speaker**, and have a downloadable copy of your speaker sheet.
- **Have someone film you speaking**, and make yourself a YouTube account.
- **Every time you speak, post the when/where on your Facebook page, blog, and Web site**, and send it out to your e-mail list. Then, after you speak, follow up with a recap.

6. Network.

Attend the kind of events you’d like to speak at, and let people know you’re available. This sounds simple, but it comes with a few caveats:

- **Make sure you’re in the right place.** Do a little research ahead of time so you can be the right fish in the right pond.
- **Find meetings where people are actually in a position** to choose future speakers.
- **Don’t let networking be a one-way street.** Find ways to help other people get what they want. Then they’ll be more willing to help you in the future.

7. Team Up.

One of the best ways to get started is to collaborate with other speakers. Try some of these approaches:

- **Ask yourself: Is there someone in your field** who is already a speaker? Even better, do you have a colleague who speaks? Give these people a call. Offer to open for them at an event.
- **Hold a conference** where you and a few others speak.

“Use a better-known speaker’s fan base to build your own.”

- **Use a better-known speaker’s fan base** to build your own. It’s a win-win situation: They get a chance to promote themselves as top rung. You gain credibility by being associated with someone who is already respected.
- **Again, be sure to follow the rules of networking.** Don’t pester someone who isn’t interested, and don’t make them feel used.

8. Be Consistent.

The more speaking you do, the better you’ll get at it. You’ll become more attuned to your audiences and be able to refine your material. You’ll get better at adapting to different kinds of crowds. You’ll need fewer notes. Your material will stay current. You’ll become more at ease answering questions. You’ll learn the skill of bouncing back after a flub.

As your speaking improves, you’ll gain more opportunities. You’ll keep yourself part of the conversation.

Don’t speak just once or twice a year. Set a goal for yourself — maybe every month or every other month. Stick to it. Even if you’re only speaking at small venues or networking groups, it will keep your skills sharp. 



Lauren Fleming is a publishing specialist at Emerson Consulting Group, Inc. (based like its namesake, Ralph Waldo Emerson, in Cambridge, Massachusetts). Lauren can be reached at lauren@thoughtleading.com.



Standing Ovation

Check out these keys to spreading your message through dynamic communication (available at the Society’s Library, www.NonprofitWorld.org/members):

On Your Feet & Speaking: An Absolute Requirement for Today’s Nonprofit Leader (Vol. 13, No. 5)

Face to Face (Vol. 14, No. 1)

Fear of Feelings: Dealing with Emotions in Public Speaking (Vol. 17, No. 2)

You Have a Story to Tell (Vol. 25, No. 1)