

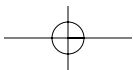
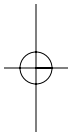
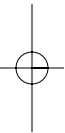
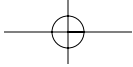
PART I

IDENTIFYING AND CREATING A DYNAMITE SPEAKING TOPIC

Before you can be an effective speaker, you need to have a dynamite speaking topic. The big mistake that aspiring public speakers make is harboring a strong desire to speak while not actively pursuing the development of promising speaking topics.

The seven chapters in Part I explain precisely how to identify, test, develop, and refine a speaking topic that will interest and enthrall audiences. Public speakers whose audiences give them high ratings undertake considerable effort on their topics before anyone ever hears them. Fortunately, it is not difficult work to devise a topic; rather, it is an enjoyable, exciting, and even energizing intellectual pursuit. The chapters here will give you the fundamentals of succeeding in the vital area of topic development.

Throughout the book, I will heavily refer to other professional speakers, and to the tips and techniques that they offer. For consistency, I will draw largely upon artifacts and examples from my own speaking career. By referring to my own marketing materials, preprinted forms, and approaches, and you will be able to follow a path of sorts that offers a fuller, holistic sense of successful strategies for both public speaking and professional speaking.





A Bevy of Speech Topics

When I was younger, I worked for three different firms in management consulting over a total of nine years. With my second firm, in my fourth year in the profession, 16 of the 24 staff consultants were fired. I was among the “lucky” eight. That experience taught me to develop *career advancement skills*. As a part of this development process, I spoke to groups outside of work (at breakfast meetings, during lunch, and after work). I wrote articles. I took steps that would make me indispensable on the job.

I developed a personal set of behaviors and strategies for success. I had no idea that I was going to be a speaker, nor did I have any idea that I was going to be an author. Unknowingly, I was living my future material.

I had been developing career advancement strategies for myself, and I realized that if the strategies had helped me overcome obstacles, then surely they’d be of benefit to someone else. This experience prepared me for writing a book many years later on career advancement strategies.

The following is a list of some of the chapters in the book that I wrote. As you read, you might envision speech topics from your own experiences emerging:

- Your Personal Marketing Plan
- Time Management and Career Marketing

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- Finding a Career Counselor or Mentor
- Becoming Indispensable
- When Your Boss Is a Roadblock

Every one of these chapters could be a topic for a speech. In many instances, the problems we face are exactly what others want to hear about, particularly if we were good at overcoming these roadblocks. There are some topics that we've become experts in, without even realizing it.

IS YOUR TOPIC SEASONAL?

Another type of speaking topic is what I call a *seasonal* topic. For example, if, during the holidays, you were to lead a management seminar on stress, you could include a message that would fit the appropriate holiday.

For example, I'm hired a couple of times a year by groups to deliver a variation of my overall theme of breathing space and shape it to fit the seasonal topic of having breathing space for the holidays. My primary message is that you don't have to have stress during the holidays; you can have breathing space.

To capitalize on the seasonal topics, look at your calendar, identify events, and perhaps develop some kind of expertise. You may not be hired for a seasonal topic throughout the year, but you may be able to get two or three engagements annually, and you may be hired months in advance.

CYCLICAL, PARADIGM SHIFT, AND LONG-TERM TOPICS

There are also examples of speakers who capitalize on "hot topics." For example, Dr. Ken Dychtwald, author of *Age Ware*, a book that looks at trends within life expectancy and aging, has become a sought-after speaker as Baby Boomers hit their fifties. He commands enormous sums because he is an expert on this hot topic. In addition to hot topics and seasonal topics, there are *cyclical* topics. These are subjects that come around again and again. It might be once a year; it might be every couple of years.

A cyclical topic may arise when a business is going through major changes and consultant speakers are brought in. The business may even out for a while, shift, and eventually, changes will again occur and the corporation will want the speaker back again.

The fourth type of topic for speeches is what I call the *one time*, or *paradigm shift*. This refers to a shift that is not going to return to where it was, for example, downsizing as we know it. This topic is neither seasonal nor cyclical; it is lasting because of technology and the way people compete. Corporations will continue to maintain a core staff and use more supplemental staff (people who are not full-time, but who can provide specific services). If you have expertise in this area, you will be among those who get hired.

Ten Ways to Spot a Trend before Everyone Else

Increasingly, many professionals speak about change. Being able to spot trends ahead of everyone else can prove to be a valuable skill.

- Read magazines such as *The Futurist*.
- Listen to lectures or review books and cassettes from leading forecasters.
- Visit the Web sites of top opinion pollsters and survey research firms.
- Cross fertilize your thinking by reading alternative magazines.
- Attend meetings and expositions that you normally would not attend.
- Take a college or adult education course on forecasting or futurism.
- Examine longitudinal trends (such as those published by the U.S. Census Bureau) to make reasonable predictions as to where those trends will head in the future.
- Learn to develop and trust your intuition.
- Read *Advertising Age*, *Variety*, and other publications that discuss the themes and campaigns designed by Madison Avenue and Hollywood moguls.
- Read books by Bill Gates, Jack Welch, Andy Grove, and other industry leaders.

THE BUZZWORD APPROACH

Buzzwords permeate business, industry, health care, and government. Dr. Charles Digart, based in Columbus, Ohio, observes, “The avalanche of buzzwords is never-ending and growing in size and complexity. The frequency of change is compressing at an alarming rate.”

One way public speakers can stay abreast of this phenomenon while honing their skills in making effective, timely, presentations is to learn the buzzwords in their industry. If you want to be successful in speaking to bankers, then immerse yourself in the issues and affairs of bankers. Learn the jargon. Subscribe to the magazines that they read. Expose yourself to the broad array of traditional and emerging terms that bankers know and use or will have to know and use in the future.

Likewise, if you choose to speak to manufacturers, club managers, accountants, or yacht captains, you need to know the latest buzzwords in those areas. Once you become familiar with the terminology, an array of topic ideas presents itself.

In the past few years, Dr. Digart notes, a variety of business buzzwords have emerged, each of which carries the seeds of a potential presentation topic. A brief listing of such words includes:

- Groupware
- Netiquette
- Telecommunicating
- Benchmarking
- Self-directed teams
- Scenario thinking
- Learner-friendly
- Open architecture
- Core staff
- Team orientation
- Reengineering
- Virtual teams
- Multimedia
- Cross-training
- User-based
- Diversity training
- Multitasking
- Global market
- Gain sharing
- Right sizing
- Knowledge worker
- Shareholder value
- Micro-technology
- Chief operating officer
- Learning organizations
- Virtual manufacturing
- Relationship assets
- Career coach
- Transferable skills
- Matrix management

Similarly, in these and other arenas, a host of new terms representing new concepts or variations on old themes continually appears. Each of them carries the seeds of potential speaker topic development. Sometimes simply by reviewing such a list for any given industry or drawing up a list

of the buzzwords with which you are already familiar, you develop new ideas for presentation topics.

DEVELOPING TOPICS WITH LONG SHELF LIVES

If you're going to take the time and energy to develop a topic that you can successfully present to an audience, why undercut yourself by choosing a topic with a short shelf life? Be on the lookout for topics that are in demand today and, with minimal updating, will continue to be in demand in the future. (Chapter 4 discusses how to continually stay in touch with developments in your field and on your topics.)

As professional speaker Bruce Wilkinson says, "Most speakers today look for a single topic that they can sell to a specific market or audience. Tomorrow's speakers are looking for specific topics that they can sell to multiple markets and audiences." Wilkinson suggests considering the following criteria when developing a multiple market topic:

- 1.** Is there a need for this topic in associations and corporations? This is an important consideration because most successful speakers develop a blend of association and corporation business; furthermore, speaking to associations actually enhances your corporate business and vice versa. When you speak to local, state, regional, national, or even international associations, audiences are comprised of individuals who come from different organizations, even if they all happen to be in the same industry. As such, a sterling speech to a large association could result in your being scheduled to speak within the corporations of audience members. For the same reason, you increase the chances of developing more association business when you speak to corporate groups. The best way to ensure that you benefit from this cross-exposure is to develop a topic that will work within both associations and corporate markets with minimum modifications. The same logic applies for speaking at partner's programs during a convention. The larger the audience, the greater the potential for spin-off business.

- 2.** Use several titles for the same subject to attract multiple markets. Sometimes merely changing the wording of your presentation titles makes them more attractive to entirely different markets. For example, my presentation on managing information and communication overload is

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worded so as to attract corporate markets. Essentially the same presentation, re-titled “Managing the Pace with Grace,” is attractive to local groups, cruise ship audiences, and even as breakout sessions for a spouse’s or partner’s program at association conventions.

3. Create both a serious and a humorous version of the same topic. This is a bit arduous for the aspiring public speaker. If you have been making presentations for a while, however, devising serious and humorous versions won’t be too difficult.

Consider the topics offered by speaker Joel Blackwell. He speaks on grassroots lobbying and is effective in serving associations that call on members of Congress to get their points across. He can deliver a highly serious presentation on this topic as a keynote address, a breakout session, an executive roundtable, or a half-day or full-day seminar. He is also creative and witty enough to offer this session as a humorous keynote presentation or as a short after-lunch or after-dinner presentation. As a result, he is not limited to fixed slots within an organization’s conference agenda.

4. Present this topic with and without a handout or audience participant packet. Many public speakers do an adequate job of making a presentation armed with printed materials. Giving a presentation without such aids is harder, but developing that capacity increases the range of venues at which you could be successful. If, for example, a meeting planner requests your services for a luncheon gathering of 1,800 people, a handout, workbook, or audience participant packet may not be practical. Moreover, the levels of enthusiasm, energy, and humor required for such a presentation necessitate that it be markedly different from its counterpart in front of a smaller audience. These issues are discussed in much greater detail, but for now, the point is that flexibility can go a long way in your being hired for speaking at vastly different events, while still addressing essentially the same topic.

IDENTIFYING SECONDARY AUDIENCES

Wilkinson says, “To be successful in selling today’s topics for tomorrow’s profits, speakers need to identify each secondary audience before

they step onto the platform.” Hence, at the same convention, you might deliver a keynote presentation to the members of an association and, at a different point in the day, deliver a presentation for nonmembers who are in attendance.

The public speaker who is on the lookout for topics that he or she can use for presentations to multiple markets and multiple audiences is always cognizant of the value of employing stories, anecdotes, and references that will appeal to diverse elements of society.

You know that you have a topic that has broad appeal when it can interest a wide range of groups such as those in government, education, military, and health care. Is the topic in the news? Is it in professional journals, the Internet, and magazines? In addition, it is not unprofessional to attend a presentation, workshop, or training session on the topic you have in mind to see if it is something you wish to further develop and pursue on your own.

To maintain an ethical stance, you would not engage in any lifting of another presenter’s material, and you certainly would not violate any copyright, trademark, or other intellectual property rights. Instead, your quest is to gather ideas, from any source, reflect on them, expand on them, and arrange them in some type of sequence. The next chapters help you develop your own stellar, engaging presentation. In Chapter 2, we begin to develop your topic by selecting a subject that appeals to people’s emotions.