



QUICK TIPS FOR BEGINNING SPEAKERS

BY ROB EAGAR

**Bonus article based on Rob Eagar's *Sell Your Book Like Wildfire*
(bookwildfire.com)

Almost every author eventually tries her hand at public speaking. If you're just getting started, use these recommendations to make the road a little smoother.

1. Start small

Don't try to speak in front of large audiences until you've acquired some experience on the stage. Otherwise you could short-circuit your growth, hurt your reputation, and hinder your chances for referrals. Test your comfort level by speaking locally as much as possible. Organizations, such as Toastmasters (www.Toastmasters.org), the National Speakers Association (www.NSAspeaker.org), or even your local church, can provide a good training ground to test your skills. As your confidence grows, extend your reach into neighboring cities or states. Building a national platform usually takes two to five years. Be sure to set realistic expectations for yourself.

You may need to start off speaking for free until you're able to prove your value and expertise. Raise your fees as your value grows. When lead-

ers are convinced you can create positive results, your fees will be less of a concern. However, expect some fee resistance at least 20 percent of the time. If leaders rarely complain about your fees, you're not charging enough.

2. Pick up other speakers' leftovers

As intermediate and advanced speakers get busier, sometimes they can't accommodate all of the requests they receive to speak. For this reason, try to build a close relationship with one or two speakers just above your level. Don't pursue them solely to get bookings. Seek to learn as much as you can from them. Watch what works and learn from their mistakes.

Tell these speakers that you're available to cover for them or take events that they don't want. Offer to return the favor by assisting their organization or helping promote their book. For instance, you could help run their resource table, handle some their office work, or write an article for their newsletter. Position yourself as a partner, and you can create an extra source of new bookings.

3. Create piggyback events

If you're new to speaking and enjoy traveling, you can boost your experience by creating add-on events to your current bookings. For example, if you have a speaking event lined up in a major city six months from now, spend a day researching and calling other organizations that could also use your value during your visit.

Contact those leaders and say, "I'm already booked to speak in your area on this date. Would you have an opportunity for me to address your group, too?" Sometimes your current booking can provide enough credibility for another leader to book you on short notice. However, don't accept a piggyback event that could cannibalize attendance at your primary event. That would be unprofessional. In addition, don't discount your speaking fees for add-on events. Instead offer to split the travel expenses with the original organization and make everybody happy.