

THE PERFECT MEETING

a.k.a.

When You Don't Want to Strangle the Speaker

Have you ever worked for weeks or even months, often far beyond normal office hours on a special meeting event only to have it turn into THE PERFECT STORM? Well, maybe your entire crew didn't perish at sea, but there were those clearly identifiable moments when it looked as if the ship was about to capsize. Although many meeting goblins can contribute to such disasters, sometimes the speaker can be one of the contributing causes. How can such terrors be avoided?

The first preventative measure is to choose your speaker carefully and by this I mean, look a little deeper than usual into his or her modus operandi. Far too often when problems arise, it is because the wrong or at least incomplete criteria were used in selecting the speaker. For instance, it is not uncommon for the only questions to be asked of a professional speaker after viewing their video to be: availability and cost. However, if you want to sleep easier at night, I would suggest that the following issues also be just as carefully considered.

Is the speaker a prima donna? Fortunately there are not too many of these around, but those there are give the rest of us a bad name. Whether a well known professional or a beginner, there is simply no excuse for anyone in or business to be arrogant. We are all there to serve the best interests of our clients and audiences. If not, we do not belong there at all. Any speaker that is arrogant, belligerent or just plain difficult to work with does not belong standing before your audience.

Is this speaker committed to adequately preparing before speaking? More and more meeting planners are asking speakers to truly customize their presentations in order to "reach out and touch" the specific audience where they are at. To do so means that the speaker must be willing to invest into understanding the issues that are at the forefront for each unique audience. This of course is a two way street, in that you must be willing to also take the time to ensure the speaker receives the opportunity to acquire the necessary inputs. However, in the final analysis it is the responsibility of the speaker to only take those engagements that they determine to be a proper

fit and customization does not mean merely updating a few old stories and jokes or sprinkling in a few local names.

Coupled with the previous question is whether the speaker, given their good intentions, has the time to invest into your event? It is often possible to squeeze another few hours into an already overloaded schedule for one more "hit and run" engagement, but is that fair to the meeting planner, client and audience. Let's face it; good speakers today are well compensated for what they do. This is fair, but it is also fair that we give a good measure of effort in return and that does not mean racing to yet another engagement dog tired, speaking and running for the airport before the audience is still applauding. Unfortunately, in this day of frequent and lengthy flight delays, there are already enough unexpected delayed arrivals in the wee hours of the morning and their attendant lack of sleep. These may be totally outside of the speaker's control however, if they really want to serve, they will use their best efforts to schedule sufficient time for your engagement so that they have done what was within their power to arrive fresh, relaxed and ready mentally and physically for your event.

Finally, is the speaker's content rich and current? There was a great deal of conversation at the Dallas NSA Annual Convention as to content and I have been hearing the same from speakers' bureaus and meeting planners alike. Today we are living in difficult economic times. Daily the news is rife with stories of corporate cutbacks and layoffs. Few of us are strictly entertainers, comedians, humorists, etc. Thus as professionals and experts who speak, we owe it to our clients, audiences and ourselves to bring real value in the form of positive solutions to the perplexing problems that they face.

Finally, look for the AAA approval rating: Ability, Authenticity and Attitude. With these three attributes at the forefront, you cannot go wrong in selecting your speaker!



John Di Frances is an internationally recognized expert on Strategic Business Issues. His professional career spans thirty years of global corporate, nonprofit, academic and government agency experience in senior executive and industry leadership positions. John advises senior executives globally and is a prominent professional speaker. Since 1983 he has served as the Managing Partner of DI FRANCES & ASSOCIATES, LLC.