

## Choosing The Perfect Speaker For Your Next Meeting

During my travels as a professional speaker, I've frequently given both meeting professionals and their clients various recommendations: Books, Venues, Locations, Themes, etc. One of the most common questions I hear is, "Can you recommend a good speaker for our event?" After all, I share the stage with dozens of established and upcoming keynotes every year.

These days, my answer is, "It depends on the objectives of your event." As wishy-washy as it sounds, the reality is that a great speaker may still be a miss for your event. It's not just about skills, hi-content or even fame - the speaker must deliver game changing ROI for your organization. More than ever, meetings must justify their existence.

To paraphrase author and speech coach wunderkind Nick Morgan, "The only reason to have a meeting is to change the world." In other words, meetings need to move the organization forward. They are the social operating system of an organization: the values delivery system for leadership and the relationship building platform for their followers.

In the case of carpet manufacturer Interface Inc., a single sales meeting in 1997 produced a paradigm shift that led to radical innovations in how it produced, sold, distributed and disposed of its products. This meeting is credited to being the tipping point in the company's culture as it climbed "Mount Sustainability." The prevailing thought at the company was "Doing Good For The Environment Is Costly." The desired outcome for the meeting was a widespread belief in the company that "Doing Well For the Environment Is Free."

According to a case study by Houston Advanced Research Center, the meeting was a teaching metaphor for the group. Speakers like author and firebrand Paul Hawken were selected for their fit into this objective. Hawken talked about waste as 'stealing from the future' and how companies could save money by giving efficiency a new and deeper meaning throughout the enterprise. His talk reinforced what the company's founder, Ray Anderson, had been evangelizing around headquarters and in the field since 1994.

To support the content, meeting professionals teamed up with the Grand Wailea Hotel team to measure electrical, propane and waste usage during the event, and how it was declining as each day passed. During plenary sessions, they'd report the progress during housekeeping announcement. In the end, the audience was transformed in their thinking and within a few years, the company cuts it's carbon footprint by over twenty five percent!

In her remarkable book, **Resonate: Present Visual Stories That Transform Audiences**, Nancy Duarte explains that the greatest speeches move the

audience from Point A (status quo, a broken place) to Point B (vision, a better/best place). This is why I believe that my job as a professional speaker is to be the outsider hired to validate and activate the insider's agenda or point of view. If you hire a speaker to generate buzz or get butts-in-seats, you are wasting your money - and risking that your budgets will get slashed during any downturn.

For your next speaker selection, then, in lieu of a video shootout, take the following approach to picking the right change-agent.

### **1. Create a post-meeting Vision For Success.**

What is the current thinking/doing pattern that your leadership team wants to change? That's Point A, and there is NO organization that couldn't use a little thought-tweaking. Where do you want them to be when they get home from the meeting? And how will those new attitudes translate into changed behavior. That's Point B. Know these two coordinates, and you have a framework for choosing a speaker that will help you make this leap.

*For example, at a recent event I was hired for, we determined that the leaders of the company thought that technology was the center of their business. The new CEO wanted to change this, installing a new perspective: People are the center of the business. His new vision was the secret to the company's turnaround, and he wanted to leverage the offsite leadership meeting to get the ball rolling. My job, then, was to leverage my credibility and content to move the audience to a more people-centric way of leading ... Point B.*

### **2. Screen speakers for their capability to move the group to Point B.**

Will his credentials be sufficient to get the audience to grant him provincial authority? Does her personal story resonate with the point of view you are aiming towards? How do their talking points line up with and validate your leader's own? Who is willing to do the hard work of customization that's required to install this new belief?

Review speaker videos for content, energy and familiarity. Which of the qualified finalists will likely resonate with your culture? Or, as in the case of some old-school companies, which speaker will be a pleasant surprise for your audience, a breath of fresh air on a widely talked about change-subject?

Schedule a phone call to interview the top speaker candidates, trust me, they are willing to do it to win some business. Divulge the leader's agenda for the meeting, outlining current thinking and desired outcomes. Let the candidates explain how they'd move the audience, including examples or proof points. When you've found the right speaker, you'll know it through his authentic excitement about the challenge and the synergy his points will make with your leader.

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There's a side benefit to this selection process too. Your speakers will give you one-of-a-kind talks, far beyond tailoring. By giving them a very clear goal: Help us move the audience from here to there, you'll ignite the creative force of purpose. Unlike a "gig", where a speaker tells his or her story and doles out some takeaways from it, you'll feature a determined performer that's got an eye on making a real difference from the platform.

When Tim Sanders isn't giving advice about speakers, books or places to visit, he blogs at <http://www.SandersSays.com>