

Why No Speaker Wants to Present For Your Association

By Deborah Gardner, CMP



And What to Do About It

If I had a dollar for every speaker that presented for an association for free, I would be rich. Don't get me wrong, there are associations that do pay something, but most still keep a close eye on the bottom line, especially when it comes to hiring speakers.

If this is true with your association, do you feel stuck trying to sell a high-priced speaker on a budget?

Are you fed up persuading speakers to commit to less than you can afford? So fed up, you've daydreamed about the association accepting every speaker you want, including their fee? Then don't you think it's time to say goodbye to tight speaker budgets and focus on what really matters to your association in order to maximize member ROI?

As a longtime hospitality veteran, I've been involved with many associations, from planning regional meetings to contracting hotel room blocks for citywide conventions to presenting at many of those same conventions. Reflecting on my journey, there has been a lot of changes and growth within the industry, except one important area that directly affects associations — budgets, in particular, speaker budgets.

One keynote speaker curiously asked her client in a recent conversation, "How long have you been offering speakers that fee?" The answer was 12 years!

The speaker then asked, "Would you work a job for 12 years and never get a raise?"

This was a valid point because the truth is speaker budgets haven't changed since the 1980s. Associations have been getting speakers for less, inflation increases, yet the harsh reality is you get what you pay for. Is that what your members deserve?

If not, here is what you can do about it:

FOCUS ON THE MAIN POINT

One of the biggest components for an association is to provide the members the best professional development

opportunities. The learning aspect that members take home from your meeting, event or conference impacts them directly. If they don't feel it's worthy, they will not return — or worse, they will cancel their membership. Yet, learning from expert speakers has not been taken as seriously as spending on gift bags, coffee breaks or other line items. Sadly, associations are missing the fact that budgeting education needs to be top priority, and selecting speakers should be decided upon immediately.

CHANGE YOUR MIND-SET FROM COST TO VALUE

The perception of speakers agreeing to present for your association and just showing up are gone. Just like the extensive back of the house logistical pre-planning



Credit: Deborah Gardner, CMP

Deborah Gardner, CMP, is an expert speaker, who has presented to many associations' audiences worldwide. She strongly supports the need for speaker budgets.

that goes into your upcoming meetings, speakers have to do the same.

Ed Rigsbee, CAE, CSP, author of *The ROI of Membership*, says, "Professional speakers live and die on their reputation. These are the people who generally interview, research the issues, tailor or customize their proven material for each unique audience. They are experts in their field, experienced storytellers or humorists delivering

solid take-home content while also creating a motivating environment. They have to be exciting, motivating and funny — or they don't eat!"

So, hiring a speaker based only on what your association can afford may be dangerous and tarnish your reputation, too.

And, if that doesn't help change your mind, consider the economic benefit as a result of their presentation.

They bring their proven message to you in order to help solve the member's problems. In other words, think of the VALUE that they bring to your association, not the COST!

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Bottom line, understanding that learning from a speaker's expertise helps an association grow.

Your association is there to educate the members. Without education, there are no members. Without members, there is no association.

EDUCATE YOUR ASSOCIATION

Associations often don't understand the numerous decisions and logistics that take place for meetings and events. The best way to help is to proactively educate them. Get them to see what is involved to put on a meeting or event.

Invite your boss, stakeholders, procurement, person in charge of budgets or anyone else that may be part of the speaker selection process into the meetings world. There are plenty of industry organizations that welcome this idea, like PCMA or SGMP.

Introduce them to the industry veterans that can help explain the importance of meetings and how it affects

the association. Plus, they can hear and experience some great speakers at many of these events, too.

Show your passion and guide them beyond just planning meetings. Have the conversation about the importance of meetings and the members' education to your association through Meetings Mean Business. This idea includes celebrating Global Meetings Industry Day (GMID), which could be as simple as having everyone within the association wear the color blue.

Bottom line, no speakers want to present for your association. Today, the old speaker budgets don't work. However, if more association leaders were involved with

the meetings world, there would be a better understanding why the speaker budgets need to be revised. And, with the members' education dollars being of utmost importance to them, it's imperative for associations to recognize this fact.

Oh, and the final outcome of the speaker asking her client the fee discrepancy question?

It turned out the association acknowledged the situation and increased their speaker budget. A prime example that you can adjust or find the monies needed, not only deserving of speakers but for your members education, as well.

Deborah Gardner, CMP is a longtime hospitality veteran, ambassador to Meetings Mean Business, author and performance expert who presents to hundreds of companies and organizations worldwide. Gardner helps to transform her audiences — personal and business — when servicing customers, selling, negotiating or leading. To reach her, visit www.DeborahGardner.com.