

So, How Can I Become a Professional Speaker?

So many times after a presentation, an audience member approaches me and says, "I would LOVE to do what you do! How did you get started?"

Due to the crowds of people and short breaks between speakers, I rarely have the opportunity to effectively answer their questions. Recently someone asked if I had information on my website on how to become a full-time speaker! What a great idea!

So in response to all of you who have asked - here is my story.

(Don't worry – it's just the short version)

I was a high school literature teacher and basketball coach for over 20 years. And it was as a coach that I was always looking to bring in speakers, business and church leaders, and other people to build our players as people and to improve our culture.

One year I brought in a team building facilitator, and I was intrigued by the lessons and impact that his activities inspired in our team.

So he became a mentor of sorts, and a few years later I was facilitating team building events for university teams, school faculties, and corporate groups myself! Then I realized that my experiences building teams as a successful coach could help team leaders be more successful in any industry, and I joined Toastmasters to begin crafting my message and stories and improve my platform skills.

After a year in Toastmasters, and after putting together the pieces that would become the first version of my "Rapid Teamwork" keynote and book, I joined NSA Georgia to learn more about the business side of speaking. What an awesome group of people!

As I got more involved with NSA Georgia, and as I built relationships at NSA national conferences, I began to grow and learn and transition from speaking as a hobby to understanding how to build a successful speaking business.

Okay – so that's enough about me, right?

YOU want to know **how you can learn to be a professional speaker.**

So turn the page and you will find a 12-step program that should get you started!



Your 12 Step Program for Becoming a Professional Speaker:

Step 1. Identify what it is that you have earned a right to talk about. In what field are you experienced? Have you survived a particular hardship? Are you an expert on something?

Step 2. Pinpoint who your best audience would be for the topic you plan to speak on. Who would want to hear or benefit from hearing your message?

Step 3. Clarify what makes you different! How will you differentiate yourself? How are you and your message unique? There are hundreds of leadership speakers. What is the specific niche or special perspective that you offer that will be intriguing?

Step 4. Identify who would be willing or able to pay to hear your message! Make a list of the reasons that someone would want to hire you – what is the problem that you solve? Begin to think and talk about your topic in terms of its benefits, not just its content and features.

Step 5. Make a list of places you can present for free to gain experience! Service clubs, volunteer organizations, and chambers of commerce are great places to start. It takes time to craft your work and nothing gets you in shape faster than presenting in front of a live audience. As a new speaker, always provide and collect evaluations and see critics as free coaches. You do well what you do often, and you have to be willing to be bad long enough to get better!

Step 6. Find someone who is an experienced speaker to serve as your unofficial mentor. Many speakers are willing to help others, as long as you are not too demanding of their time. Be up front about your situation and prepare yourself with a list of questions. Ask them to coffee, be grateful for their investment in you, and seek ways to pay forward the favor...



Step 7. If your budget allows, considering hiring a speaking coach for your presentation skills and / or your business development. Speakers I admire have suggested that there are three areas you will need to master if you want to be a success in this business:

Platform skills – the ability to perform and deliver your content

Marketing skills – the ability to promote and sell your expertise

People skills – the ability to understand and meet the needs of the event planner

Step 8. As you begin to put together your talks, be sure that you always use your own original material. It is an industry no-no to use other speaker's materials and signature stories as if they are your own. Listen to speakers to learn styles, pacing, and design for inspiration - but then craft your talk with your own original stories, content, and style.

Step 9. Join an organization that will help you grow into the person you want to be. Many speakers got their start and practiced their craft in [Toastmasters International](#). Toastmasters groups meet in cities and towns all over America, at all different times. It's an inexpensive and very helpful way to get “stage time” and criticism and grow your platform skills.

Once you feel you are comfortable speaking in front of a group with pauses, vocal variety, gestures, and engaging content, I would also encourage you to join the [National Speakers Association](#). This is for people who speak professionally, so the membership fee is fairly steep, but the educational benefits are well worth the investment! They also have fabulous, affordable tapes of their conference speakers, which is a great way to jump-start your learning. When you contact NSA and request their prospective member information, you'll get info about the tapes, their upcoming national events, and where to find the NSA chapter nearest you.

Step 10. Invest in a few good books! You can learn a lot if you will grab a copy of these few books and read them with a highlighter and note pad beside you:

[The Wealthy Speaker 2.0](#)

by Jane E. Atkinson

[The Message of You](#)

by Judy Carter

[Steal the Show](#)

by Michael Port

[Money Talks](#)

by Alan Weiss



Step 11. Market your message. Promoting your speaking topic and business is the only way others will know that you are available to speak! When I began, I printed and sent out a “one sheet” flyer to over a hundred schools and businesses.

A “one sheet” is an inexpensive way for you to list your program title and description, a short bio and picture, and your contact information. That, and a really bad website that I put together on my own, is how I got started. Thankfully, my website has been updated by a professional since then, but you have to market your services to get yourself out there. Consider how you can begin to Brand Yourself – images, colors, etc. to create a strong and lasting impression.

And you should take a look back at #5 through 9 on the list again. The truth is that your best marketing is a GREAT presentation that others will refer to their friends.

Step 12. Make connections and share your content on social media. Social media is not just for sharing pictures of your dinner plate and vacations. You may want to set up an account that is specifically for your speaking business, or at the very least begin to use your existing accounts more professionally to build a following and establish a platform where you are seen as an expert in your chosen topic.

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If you are serious about becoming a speaker, I would be happy to talk with you in person further, **after you have taken action** on the ideas I have listed above.

And I encourage you to surround yourself with people who believe in your dream.

But don't quit your day job too soon.

I was a “part time” speaker for a few years before I even considered leaving my “real job” – and you need to be prepared for the fluctuations and inconsistencies of bookings and business that will occur throughout the year. If you are imagining that this career is fun and easy, please note that like any job there are things to love and things that are difficult...

Even experienced speakers sometimes question their decision to live a life of frequent travel, packing supplies and working to produce more and different content. But if you are passionate and committed, sharing an important message can be a tremendously rewarding experience.



ABOUT SEAN GLAZE

Sean Glaze inspires people to have fun laughing together so they can have more success working together.

His three books, [The Unexpected Leader](#), [Rapid Teamwork](#), and [10 Commandments of Winning Teammates](#) are powerful parables for building and leading great teams!

As a successful basketball coach and educator for over 20 years, Sean gained valuable insights into how to develop winning teams, and he founded Great Results Teambuilding to share those lessons...

Today, Sean travels around the country delivering interactive events and entertaining keynotes that transform employees into **winning teammates!**

