THE SUCCESSFUL SPEAKER

FIVE STEPS FOR BOOKING GIGS, GETTING PAID, AND BUILDING YOUR PLATFORM

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WITH JEFF GOINS

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This book is dedicated to speakers everywhere who desire to make an impact.
The world needs your message.
You can do this.
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AUTHOR’S NOTE

Throughout this book, I share resources, tools, and tips on how to become a professional speaker. I did my best to make these references as helpful as possible. Since technology changes so often, I decided to keep the most up-to-date resources on a separate website, which I’ll refer to at the end of each chapter, and in a few other places throughout the book when relevant. On this website, I’ve also included links to various free trainings that I offer and a current list of the best tools for building your brand and business as a speaker.

You can find this list of resources, tools, and other free bonuses at SpeakerBookBonus.com. You can also check out the pages in the back of this book for more information.
INTRODUCTION
How I Became a Speaker

In 2006 my wife, Sheila, and I decided to pursue a dream. We had no savings, had just left a stable position at a church where I was serving as the youth pastor, and—oh, yeah—our first daughter, Sydnee, had just been born. We were newlyweds, recent college graduates, and brand-new parents. After we left the church job with no firm career plans, our friends and family were asking what we were going to do about money and health insurance, and in retrospect those were pretty good questions.

Because we had no idea.

Sheila was learning how to be a mom for the first time, while I held down a few part-time jobs as a security guard and waiter to make ends meet. On the side I was moonlighting as a public speaker, a job for which I had yet to be paid, so I guess you couldn’t really call it a job. It was more like a really cool idea that was becoming less cool every single day.
For over a year, I juggled too many things and prayed nothing would come crashing to the ground. My wife was hanging in there, but we were both getting tired of the juggling act, and I knew things couldn’t continue this way much longer. Something had to change, or I’d have to give up my dream. My wife had been patient, but time and money were running out, and we were both close to giving up.

In those days, I would reach out to anyone I could think of who might want to book me as a speaker. To my surprise, one of those emails received a reply that didn’t start with “please remove me from your list.” The event planner of a nearby 4-H conference wanted me to speak about leadership to a group of a few hundred students. The event was only a few hours from where I lived, so I gratefully accepted.

The night before the conference, I drove to the venue, checked into my hotel room, where there was a gift basket waiting for me, and thought, “So this is how it’s going to be from now on. This is my new life. Gift baskets and hotel rooms galore.” I went to bed blissfully ignorant of the long and hard road that lay ahead of me.

The next day I woke up, ate breakfast, and made my way to the convention center. Many young people are skeptical of motivational speakers, and this group was no different. I was nervous and unsure of myself, but this was the moment I’d been waiting for. After practicing the speech dozens of times over the previous weeks, now it was time to see if all my work would pay off. Either I’d fall flat on my face—figuratively and perhaps even literally—or this dream just might work. Either way, I’d know if speaking was in the cards for me. As soon as I stepped onstage, standing before four hundred young
people, my anxiety faded. It was still there, but I stood and delivered the talk the best I could.

Then, nothing happened. At least not at first. There was just this moment of stillness, and I was left wondering if I’d blown my only chance at being a speaker. Had I rushed the talk? Spoken too quickly? Did I botch the delivery? Was the topic not appropriate? Did I accidentally slip into speaking sloppy sophomore-level Spanish? All these thoughts flashed through my mind in a matter of milliseconds when finally, someone broke the silence and started clapping. It was one at first, then another quickly followed. Then another, and another, and so on until a room full of teenagers and adults were standing on their feet, applauding my speech. I couldn’t believe it; my first speaking gig was receiving a standing ovation.

Afterward, students and adults came to thank me, some even inviting me to speak at their upcoming events. Ever since I had been a kid in youth group watching my youth pastor captivate an audience with his words, this had been a dream of mine—to speak for a living—and here I was, actually doing it. On my way out the door, I stopped to see the event planner and thank him for having me, and he handed me an envelope with my name on it. I opened the envelope to see a check for $1,000. Though our contract had been for this amount, all I could do was stare at it, dumbfounded. I may have even drooled a little. You just paid me $1,000, I thought, to run my mouth for forty-five minutes, and it was pure fun.

Before they decided to change their minds, I hightailed it out of there, escaping the convention center with check in hand, not stopping until I got to my car, where I immediately broke down crying. This wasn’t your romantic-comedy
single-tear-on-the-cheek kind of sniffling, by the way. No, it was grab-the-Kleenex-box-and-pause-%22Old-Yeller%22, full-on, ugly-man weeping. At the time, my family had next to nothing, and we were running on fumes. This was just what we needed to keep going, both emotionally and financially. The moment hit me hard.

Instead of starting the engine and driving home, I sat in the driver’s seat for a moment and said to myself, “This is what I want to do. This is what I am meant to do. I know I just made a difference—and they paid me to do it!”

From that point on I knew I wanted to be a speaker. I wanted to travel. I wanted to make an impact. And over the next ten years I did just that, delivering over a thousand presentations, earning more than two million dollars in speaking fees, and speaking to over half a million people. It’s been an amazing and unforgettable journey, and I wouldn’t trade it for the world.

But let me be clear about something: all those numbers are nice; they’re cute and cuddly and make me feel good inside. But I don’t share any of them to pat myself on the back. I share all this to say if I can do it, you can do it. If you have a desire to share your message with the world, if you’ve wondered if this is something you can do, if you’re even just a little curious about being a speaker, this book is for you. If you have a message the world needs to hear, then it’s up to you to find a way to share it.

In this book, I want to share with you how to do that, along with one very important message: You can be a professional speaker. Not an amateur. Not an “aspiring” speaker. Not someone who fakes it till they make it. The real deal. A successful speaker.
INTRODUCTION

But don’t just take my word for it. On this journey of becoming a speaker, I’ve met hundreds of other successful communicators who have done the same, and they all followed a very specific system. Sure, some of them did this intuitively and others did it intentionally, but what it takes to succeed as a speaker is more than dumb luck. You need a proven process.

In this book I’m going to share that process with you. It’s a system I’ve learned through trial and error, as well as from meeting many speaking mentors along the way. This is the same framework I’ve been teaching thousands of people over the years whose stories you’re going to hear in the coming chapters. These are people who had something to say. People who had a message to share. People just like you.
ABOUT THIS BOOK

What’s in It and Who Is This Guy?

What does it mean to be a professional speaker? In a nutshell, it means to start a speaking business. Very few speakers think about this when they get into a speaking career, which is why many fail.

Over the years, people have asked me, “Hey, Grant. I see what you’ve been doing with your speaking business. How do I do that? How would I go about becoming a speaker?” For the longest time I didn’t know how to answer them. One of the great challenges of speaking is that the business part of it can be mysterious. It’s one thing to tell you how to deliver a great speech and quite another to tell you what it takes to get your name out there in your respective industry, to get event planners to notice you, and to get booked and paid for that speech.

Professional speaking is an intriguing industry few understand, even those who are in it. In order to get speaking gigs, do you have to be famous? Do you have to write a bestselling
book? Do you have to be some “big name” other people know? How does it actually work? The more I heard these questions and attempted to answer them, the more I realized this was a problem I could solve. How do you become a successful speaker? To answer the question, I started a podcast called The Speaker Lab, where I began interviewing many of the world’s most successful speakers and sharing the lessons they’ve learned about the business and craft of professional speaking. On the show, I share my own experiences as a speaker and the insights I’ve gained along the way. As listeners of the podcast told me how these stories and lessons resonated with them, I realized what I was sharing was important. The pattern I was starting to see and the process I was starting to teach—how speakers succeed in any industry—wasn’t just luck or coincidence. It worked.

Eventually, I created other resources to help speakers, including a training program called Booked and Paid to Speak, which thousands of people have used to become successful speakers. In this book you’ll get to meet some of them and understand what they did, how they did it, why it worked, and how you can follow in their footsteps to launch your own speaking business.

What’s in This Book?

Many people want to become a speaker but don’t know how to get started. They feel like they have a message to share, a story to tell, or something important to say. Since you’re reading this book, then that probably describes you as well. And at one point or another, you may have wondered, “Is this even possible? Can I make a living as a speaker?” In this
book I’m going to show you my proven process for getting booked and paid to speak. Whether you want to speak a couple of times a year or do it full-time, this book is for you.

Throughout these pages, you’ll meet many of my clients, the speakers I’ve trained over the years, and some of the world’s most sought-after communicators. I’ll share the system these people have used, which I call the “Speaker Success Roadmap,” and how it can help you go from amateur to professional.

I’m confident in this material, not just because I’ve used it myself, but because I’ve seen countless others win with it as well. I know it can help you too.

Who Is This Guy?

Before we go any further, I think we should address the elephant in the room: Why should you trust me? You don’t know me. We didn’t share a room in college or appear in each other’s wedding (unless it’s you, Brad, reading this, in which case—Hi, Brad!).

In the event that you’re not Brad, though, let me just say I’m an ordinary guy. Really. When I started out as a speaker, I didn’t have a huge following. I didn’t have a “big name.” I didn’t survive 9/11 or have a *New York Times* bestselling book or land a plane on a major body of water. None of that. I didn’t have a massive platform or serve on a presidential cabinet. I didn’t survive cancer or climb Everest. Heck, I didn’t even have a full head of hair. So what did I have to say? And how could I get people to listen?

What I learned is that being a successful speaker has little to do with any of that. It’s more about following a certain set
of principles that work again and again, year after year, from industry to industry. As I’ve seen others apply these same principles and experience success, I’ve come to trust this process and believe it can work for just about anyone anywhere. In fact, many of my clients have achieved far greater success in their careers than I ever did, which tells me this stuff works. You can trust it.

One more thing before we get started: I know life isn’t all about money. Believe me; you don’t have to tell me that. I came from a youth ministry background, remember? Do you think I was raking in the big bucks leading a youth group for a small Missouri church? No way. And to be honest, I never did it for the money; speaking was always a passion for me, a calling. However, I knew if I was going to speak for a living, I would need to pay my bills, so money, at some point, was going to have to be part of the equation. That’s why that first gig was so important to me. It helped me realize I could get paid to speak and keep doing it. I want you to realize the same. This is not something you have to starve or suffer for; you can make a legitimate income off your message and turn it into a full-time career if you wish. You can be a successful speaker. Whatever success looks like for you, whatever that means in your world, I want to help you build and grow a successful speaking business so you can reach more people and make an impact with your words. I’m thrilled to share this journey with you, helping you wherever you’re at, so you can truly succeed and get the rewards your work deserves.

So, yes, we’re going to talk about money. We’re also going to talk about microphones and speech preparation and travel and all kinds of things. It’s a lot, but I promise to make it fun...
and practical and easy. We’ll just take it one step at a time, okay? And here’s my final promise: If you do everything in this book, it won’t be a question of if people start booking you to speak and paying you to do what you love. It’ll be a matter of when. Now let’s get started.
Imagine you want to take your family on a vacation. If you don’t have a family, imagine you and your puppy are going on a trip together. And if you don’t have a puppy, it’s time to get one, because those guys are adorable. Anyway, you pack your stuff, grab your family, and load up the car. Then you start driving. Soon, the passengers ask, “Where are we going? When will we get there? Are we there yet?” And you realize you don’t know. You don’t have a map and never really planned the trip to begin with. You’re in trouble (and let’s be honest, you’re pretty terrible at planning vacations—who gave you that job?).

This is what a lot of us do with speaking. We set out with some vague idea of becoming a speaker. We have an idea of what we want to do but don’t know much more than that. Where will we speak? What will we speak about? To whom will we be speaking? We aren’t sure. Did you know that most successful speakers follow a proven process? They may not know they’re doing it, but every professional speaker I’ve ever
met followed the same roadmap. This is good news for us, because if there’s a process they followed, we can do the same.

Before we start following that roadmap, we need to start with you. The first step in this journey is deciding you want to be a speaker, that you want to make a difference with your words. That’s a declaration you can make to your family, friends, and coworkers today if you want to. If you’re afraid of what questions they’ll ask, questions you can’t answer right away, don’t worry. I’ve got you covered. We’ll work through all that. This book will get you on the path to a successful speaking career and help you navigate all those areas you may not have anticipated. I’ve seen this system work over and over again, so I’m confident it will work for you.

It took me years to figure out the Speaker Success Roadmap, but once I figured it out, everything became clearer. In a way, it made the journey a lot easier because I always knew what I needed to do next. Over the past several years of teaching this system, I’ve tested and tweaked it with thousands of speakers, and you know what I’ve learned? It works! Time and time again, the Roadmap is a blueprint for growth and success for any speaker.

If you follow the Roadmap, you’ll know where you’re going and what to do when you get there. You’ll also get bragging rights at the next family party, because you’ll be able to answer all the skeptical questions from Aunt Sally and Uncle Sal. And you can finally stop hating Monday mornings.

What Is the Speaker Success Roadmap?

The Speaker Success Roadmap is an easy-to-follow, step-by-step roadmap designed to help speakers start and scale
a business from the ground up. It’s the tool you need to help you clarify your message, help your speaker brand spread, and create the impact you want to make. It’s easy to remember because it’s the acronym S.P.E.A.K. Clever, right? Here it is in a nutshell:

- **S**elect a problem to solve.
- **P**repare and deliver your talk.
- **E**stablish your expertise.
- **A**cquire paid speaking gigs.
- **K**now when to scale.

Each part of this book will cover a different step in the process. By the end of it, we will have walked through the entire Roadmap together. In each chapter you will get specific action steps and stories to illustrate the process, and at the end of each step we cover, you’ll have something practical to do so you can start seeing immediate results. If you follow the steps laid out in this book, you’ll be on your way to becoming a successful speaker and living life on your own terms. No more working for someone else, no more dreaming of sharing your story with the world. You can finally stop going around in circles trying to figure it all out. You will be doing it.

**Becoming a Speaker**

It was 2009, and Erick Rheam had been evaluating his life. As he began to think more about the concept of “lifestyle design,” he realized his current job was not giving him the
life he wanted. At the time, Erick was working as a customer relations manager at a utility company, which paid well and offered plenty of benefits, but there was something missing. He wanted to have the freedom to do what he wanted, like taking a nap in the middle of the day if he wished, and that just wasn’t the case. He felt trapped.

Erick decided to redesign his life and work. First, he left his job and accepted a new position as vice president for business development at a software company, which offered him the freedom to work from home and gave him more flexibility in his schedule. It also allowed him the ability to travel—a personal goal of his.

The following year, while at a conference, Erick had an epiphany. Looking around the exhibition hall, he saw all the other vendors waiting for the next break while the attendees listened to the speaker. At the time Erick had no aspirations of speaking, but as a salesman, he wanted to get in front of the audience.

“How can I separate myself from all these other guys?” he thought. “There’s got to be a better way.” Then it dawned on him: “I need to be onstage.”

After that event, he asked to teach a breakout session at the next conference but was turned down. He kept asking, though, and eventually someone said yes. As Erick started picking up speaking gigs, he discovered how much he loved it. Significance was always something that mattered to him, no matter what he did, and as he spoke, he sensed that this was the something missing in his life. He didn’t want to be onstage just to represent his company; he had something to say.

By 2014 Erick was speaking regularly but only earning about $5,000 per year in fees. The next year he worked harder,
booked more gigs, and made $9,000. He loved inspiring and motivating people, but if he couldn’t find a way to make this work as a full-time career, he wouldn’t be able to continue devoting so much time to it. He started to feel stuck.

This is not an uncommon story for many speakers. When you’re starting out, you need a path to success you can trust. You need to know that the steps you’re taking are going to lead somewhere significant. You need a roadmap. I met Erick in 2016, and right away he started implementing the steps I outline in the Speaker Success Roadmap. That year, thanks to the Roadmap, he made $30,000 speaking, and the next year he made over $150,000. Today he is a professional speaker, making over $250,000 in annual speaking fees (probably more by the time this book is published).

Why did Erick succeed? “I think I’m just an average speaker,” he told me. “I just started running through the process and implementing some key things.” To succeed as a speaker, you have to be able to deliver a powerful message to an audience, but it takes more than talent to make it in this business. Plenty of skilled communicators can’t find a way to make a living off their message. What makes Erick a success is that he had a plan, he worked the plan, and the plan worked. That plan is the Speaker Success Roadmap.

For the rest of this book, I’m going to share with you the system used by Erick, myself, and virtually every other professional speaker I’ve ever met. If you use it, too, it can change everything.
Where do we begin? With a problem, of course. Why is this the first step? Because if you don’t get this part right, nothing else will work. I think of it as the foundation of a house: the part that isn’t flashy and nobody sees, but it is crucial to everything else. When I meet speakers who are struggling, even experienced communicators who aren’t gaining traction, I always come back to the same question: “What problem are you solving?” If you don’t know that, you can’t expect to be booked, because speaking doesn’t start with what you want to say. It starts with the problem you want to solve.

The question people most often ask speakers is, “What do you speak about?” It is, of course, the obvious one to ask, but this is the wrong way to think about what a speaker does. We don’t just speak on a given topic. We solve problems. That problem could be the problem of boredom or of feeling numb inside. It could be the problem of suffering from a
chronic illness or just feeling unmotivated at work. Regardless, your job is to solve someone’s problem, not deliver a speech. The speech is the way you get the job done. When people ask you what you speak about, they’re really asking, “What problem do you solve? And why should I care?”

No matter how great you are, the audience will always be wondering what’s in it for them. Why should they pay attention? What are you helping them with? When we’re starting out in our speaking careers, it’s not a topic we need to select as much as it’s a problem we want to solve. That’s step 1 in the Speaker Success Roadmap.

When someone asks what problem you solve, you should be able to answer with the following: I help GROUP do TOPIC so they can SOLUTION.

For example: I help corporate executives maximize their productivity so they can spend more time with their families.

The main goal is to keep your solution short, clear, and simple. Don’t complicate it. My seven-year-old should be able to understand what you mean. If you’re clear on the problem you solve, it will be clear to clients whether they should book you. Don’t worry about filling in those blanks just yet. Over the next few chapters we’ll help you answer each of those questions one at a time. You need to figure out who you’re speaking to, what problem you’re going to solve, and how you can stand out from everyone else. I call this the “Topic Trifecta” of selecting a problem to solve:

- Choose an Industry
- Identify an Interest
- Speak with Integrity
SELECT A PROBLEM TO SOLVE

In the next few chapters, we are going to examine each of these “I” words, and at the end of each chapter, you’ll get an action plan with clear takeaways on what to do next. Let’s start with Industry, because before you know what you’re going to say, you first have to know who you’re talking to.
Melanie Deziel never wanted to be a speaker, but when an opportunity came up at her job, she took it. At the time, she was working for T Brand Studio, a division of the advertising department of the New York Times. With both undergrad and graduate degrees in journalism, working there was the culmination of her career, a dream come true. In 2011 the New York Times Customer Insight Group published a research study about social sharing, and a tourism conference in Florida requested someone from the company come present the findings. The opportunity worked its way through a number of coworkers, all of whom passed on it, before it landed on Melanie’s desk. She was a junior member of the team and thus low on the list of potential speakers, but when no one else took it, she decided to go.

Melanie only had experience speaking to smaller groups, never at a conference or on a stage, but she thought it might be fun. To make matters more complicated, she hadn’t written
the study, so she was unfamiliar with the content. Now she had to present someone else’s research to an audience she knew little about—through a communication format with which she had little experience. She took the opportunity seriously, spending hours reading the report and translating the findings into terms that were relevant to a tourism event in Florida. The talk went well, and she enjoyed it more than expected, which sparked a desire in her to do more speaking.

As fun as the tourism conference was, Melanie realized that if she was going to do more speaking, she would need her own message. She knew she wanted to speak but also knew she needed something of her own to communicate and couldn’t just present other people’s material. This is true of many speakers. We want to speak but aren’t quite sure what we should talk about or what people will want to hear. When we’re getting started, most of us are unfocused. We want to speak to everyone and anyone about all the things, and that, my friend, just does not work. Melanie began to think about what she was interested in and realized that storytelling, particularly from the perspective of a journalist, was something that fascinated her. But who would be interested in that? She was about to find out.

This brings us to the first step in the Speaker Success Roadmap.

Step 1 is “S,” as in “Select a problem to solve.” When someone asks you what you speak about, that’s not what they really want to know. They want to know why what you talk about is relevant to them. They want to know why what you talk about is relevant to them. They want to know that you can help them, or someone they know, in some way. In other words, they want you to solve a problem. And that begins with knowing who you’re speaking to in the first place.
Know Your Audience

Who do you want to speak to?

This is a question I often ask speakers, and almost always the answer is “I want to speak to everyone, Grant. Everyone needs my help. I want everyone to hear my story. I want to help anyone willing to listen, anyone who needs my motivation, inspiration, and education.” That’s great. I know it seems smart to cast the net as wide as possible and try to craft a message that appeals to everyone, but it won’t work. This is the fastest way to be ignored.

Speaking to “everyone” is really the same as speaking to no one, because who wants to hear a message that’s for everyone? It’s like buying a coat that’s “one size fits all.” It’s just not true. Either it will be too big or it will be too small, or maybe if you’re lucky it’ll be just right. It is better to say, “This is who my work is for; it’s not for everyone, but it just might be for you.” You don’t want to speak to all people. You want to speak to the ones who need your message, who are waiting to hear what you have to say, and as soon as they hear it respond, “Yes! This was just for me.”

The best way to break out as a speaker is to find an audience who needs your message and speak directly to them. In other words, you have to choose an industry. That’s what Melanie Deziel did when she decided to use her experience in the field of journalism to teach marketers how to tell better, more compelling stories. We’ll revisit Melanie’s story in the next chapter, but for now understand that when she decided to focus on a particular industry, everything changed for her. The same can be true for you.
Make no mistake, though. This is a decision, and like all decisions, choosing what industry you’re going to focus on as a speaker will limit your ability to reach other people. In the end, though, it will make you a more effective communicator and a more successful speaker. Why? Because you will be speaking to specific people, and when they hear your message, they’ll know it’s for them.

So which industry is right for you, and how do you know? Let’s look at the most common industries that have a demand for speakers so you have an idea of what to choose from. It may be that you’re already in a particular industry and you just didn’t know it. Or it may be time to start making some important decisions. Either way, once you focus on an industry, you’ll have a lot more clarity concerning who you’re speaking to and how to reach them.

Seven Major Industries for Speakers

Knowing who you’re speaking to and what that audience expects is crucial to your success. There are seven major industries for speakers that you should be aware of.

Corporations

Large companies are always looking for speakers to help with ongoing training and education, industry events, and company retreats. These companies are a great source of revenue because they tend to have good-sized speaker budgets every year for events. Once you break into this industry, it can create a significant and consistent source of income for you as a speaker. But event planners are typically looking for
a certain kind of speaker who fits their agenda, so breaking in can be difficult, and since these events usually pay well, it can be competitive. But once you’re in, it can be a very steady source of speaking gigs and clients.

**Associations**

Associations are any group that gathers around a common cause. The American Psychological Association, Future Farmers of America, the National Press Photographers Association, and the Association for Project Management are all examples of associations. These groups meet around a shared interest or profession and often have large conferences or trainings that are well-funded for speakers. Once you become a part of a certain association’s ecosystem, it can be fairly easy to keep getting booked, as many associations have multiple chapters that can refer speakers to each other.

**Faith-Based Organizations**

Churches, synagogues, and other places of worship are used on a regular basis to gather and have someone deliver a message. This is where I started out speaking, and these venues can be great places to practice and even get paid. Larger religious organizations may have a regular speaking budget set aside for guest speakers, but typically these events don’t pay as well as other industries. However, in this industry there tend to be a lot of events, and if nothing else, it can be a great place to practice speaking. Not to mention, if you are delivering a faith-based message, this can be a very meaningful setting to share such a message.
SELECT A PROBLEM TO SOLVE

Nonprofits

This includes local groups like Rotary Clubs, chambers of commerce, or other local civic groups, as well as nongovernment and nonprofit organizations that do community work in areas like pregnancy support, job skill training, and health and wellness. This also applies to groups like energy co-ops and credit unions. And don’t be fooled by the name; just because the organization is a nonprofit doesn’t mean they don’t have money to pay a speaker.

Government and Military

This can be local, state, or federal government departments that bring in speakers for events or trainings. The military also brings in speakers for various trainings at their bases as well as other training and support services for soldiers and their families, and the budgets for these events can be quite large. The military is a great industry to break into, because as difficult as it is to break in, once you’re in, you’re usually in for good. So it can be a place of steady referrals for ongoing work.

Colleges and Universities

Universities are often large entities and hard to get into, so it’s better to be more specific and try to speak for groups that gather on campus. For example, this could be new student orientation groups, campus life activities, Greek life (fraternities and sororities), or even student government. Most schools also have hundreds of clubs and student groups on a wide range of topics that may bring in speakers. There are lots of opportunities to speak and get paid for a college gig other than a commencement speech.
**Education (K-12)**

There are literally thousands of elementary, middle, and high schools around the U.S. Many of them bring in speakers for back-to-school rallies, pretest encouragements, and general assemblies throughout the year. In addition, plenty of schools have opportunities to speak to teachers and parents.

Whenever I share these seven industries, people ask me which one pays the best, which I get, but honestly that’s the wrong question. The truth is that speakers thrive in all of these areas if they are good and know how to effectively reach that audience. So the better question is, “Which industry am I best suited for?” And keep in mind, you can’t say “all of them.” Even if that’s true, it just doesn’t work. Remember, every potential client wants someone who is just right for their event.

Once you’ve picked an industry, choosing which problem to solve will become much easier, because now you can narrow it down to a more specific topic. For example, if you’re speaking to a group of military leaders, you can now ask the question, “What struggles do these people have, and how can I help?” Knowing who you’re speaking to can help you figure out what topic to speak on. So industry comes first, and interest follows.

**Which Industry Best Fits You?**

If deciding who your audience is right now feels overwhelming, that’s totally normal. Choosing an industry is one of the most challenging steps to becoming a professional speaker.
The worst thing you can do, though, is nothing. Don’t assume you have to absolutely know who you’re speaking to for the rest of your life. Just pick the industry that seems like the best fit for you right now. Worst-case scenario: you pick the wrong industry, get a few gigs, and have to go back to square one.

That said, here are a couple questions that may help you decide:

- Are you currently working, or have you worked, in one of the seven key industries for speakers? If you have decades of experience in corporate America, breaking into corporate events as a speaker may be easier for you than for others. Do you have connections in a branch of the military that can help you get booked? Pay attention to those kinds of connections. Use what you have, including even the job you may be trying to escape from. Who knows? You may like your industry a lot more if you don’t have to work for an employer in it! The idea is to use whatever advantages you have. You’re not required to speak in an industry that you’ve worked in before, but if you have experience that could help your speaking career, you should at least consider using it.
- Which industry do you feel the most passionate about or have the most knowledge in? Of course, experience is not enough. You need to care about this industry. You need to be both knowledgeable and passionate about it, because how else will you be able to relate to your audience? Don’t pick an industry just because it pays well or you know you can get
booked. Rather, find a group of people you want to serve, who need your message, and focus on helping them.

Finding the right industry for you is the difference between forcing a square peg into a round hole and fitting your message in just the right place with the right audience. Knowing what to speak about really begins with understanding that your past may be a valuable asset to your future. Just ask Sue Ettinger.

The Veterinarian Whisperer

In 2015 Dr. Sue Ettinger was invited to speak at the largest veterinarian conference in the United States. At that point in her life, she was a busy veterinarian, mother of young children, and like many moms, just trying to keep up with life. Still, she was honored to receive the invitation to speak and took it seriously.

At the conference, Sue delivered six different talks on various subjects, including her core area of expertise: pet cancer. For years she had run a pet cancer awareness program called “See Something, Do Something,” and this gig was the perfect opportunity to get the word out on a topic about which she was passionate. After the gig, Sue went home and realized she’d been “bit” by the speaking bug, and she told her husband she needed to figure out how to make speaking more of what she did on a regular basis.

Soon after this experience, though, Sue hit a wall and found it difficult to get more speaking gigs. “I thought it would be easier,” she later recalled. Veterinary medicine is its
own unique world, and she thought she could just meet the conference planners and be “in.” But as she says, “There’s a game to play.” This is always true when working in any industry. There are rules and norms, and if you don’t learn them, you’re going to pay a big price. So what did Sue do? How did she learn to play the game?

First, she invested in herself, hiring a business coach and taking training programs like Booked and Paid to Speak to learn more about entrepreneurship and speaking. She also read every how-to and advice book she could find on those subjects. Then she started networking, connecting with her industry peers by talking with other veterinary speakers and asking questions about what they had learned.

Early in Sue’s journey as a speaker, she would try to connect with as many people as possible and help them. No agenda. No big ask. Just reaching out, talking to people, and trying to solve their problems. Over time, this goodwill spread and eventually came back to her, helping her get plenty of speaking gigs once her professional network knew this was something she was now doing. It was something she had learned in her early years of veterinary practice—the power of a referral—and now she was able to apply the same principle to speaking. For Sue, her most valuable marketing practice is to simply “be a nice person.” It turns out that most people want to do business with people they know, like, and trust. Being nice is working out just fine for Sue.

In her first year of speaking, Sue made $35,000. The next year Sue brought in over $70,000, which allowed her to cut back on her veterinary job and speak even more. Today, she is speaking a few times a month and doesn’t have to send out
cold emails anymore. Most of her speaking opportunities come via referrals from those who have heard her speak before or are in her network. She does do a lot of cancer awareness and education for pet owners through social media, but for conferences and speaking, the audience is predominantly veterinary professionals. She speaks all over the world and has been able to take her family on multiple life-changing, “bucket list” trips to places such as Amsterdam and Maui—all because of speaking.

Sue has built a network of other veterinary speakers and belongs to a number of speaker groups, which have all helped her generate consistent business over the years. She has learned that you have to be patient with the business side of speaking because it’s a marathon, not a sprint. Sue studied her industry, did the work, made the right connections, and now she’s an in-demand, international speaker in the world of veterinary medicine.

**ACTION PLAN**

1. List any previous experience or interest you have in any of the seven industries mentioned in this chapter. Try to narrow it down to a few you really like.

2. From there, choose an industry to focus on as you move forward. This isn’t permanent. Don’t feel like you have to stick with that industry forever. You’re allowed to change your mind. But to get started as a speaker, you have to be clear about who it is you want to speak to, so let’s just pick something for now.
SELECT A PROBLEM TO SOLVE

3. Choose a secondary industry as a backup in case the first one doesn’t end up being what you think it is.

BONUS: For more help with finding the right industry for you, check out our list of resources and tools at SpeakerBook Bonus.com.

Now that we’ve covered Industry, let’s move on to the second area of step 1: Interest.
If you liked the first chapter of *The Successful Speaker*, you’re going to love the rest of the book.

It’s the exact system that helped me land over **400 paid speaking gigs** across **46 different states** over the last decade and I know it will help you, too.

In *The Successful Speaker* I’ll be your guide as we go through the **5-step roadmap** for starting and scaling your speaking career:

- **SELECT A PROBLEM TO SOLVE.**
- **PREPARE YOUR TALK.**
- **ESTABLISH YOURSELF AS AN EXPERT.**
- **ACQUIRE PAID SPEAKING GIGS.**
- **KNOW WHEN TO SCALE.**

As we walk through each step of the roadmap, you’ll see just how easy it is to find and book paid speaking gigs.

Whether you want to start making some money on the side or become a full-time professional speaker, my proven, easy-to-follow system can get you there. It has helped me bring in multiple 7-figures in speaking fees, and I know it will help you get your message into the world and get paid doing it, too!

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P.S. ONE OF THE BONUSES I’M INCLUDING IS A SECRET CHAPTER THAT’S NOT IN THE BOOK. YOU ONLY GET IT WHEN YOU PRE-ORDER, AND YOU GET IT INSTANTLY! [MORE INFO HERE.](http://TheSuccessfulSpeakerBook.com)