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Navigating speakers, when travel is an issue

By [JEFF DAVIDSON, MBA, CMC](#) January 21, 2013

When it comes to working with speakers, it's important to book those who have an added measure of flexibility. These are not days in which a high-priced speaker can simply bop into town on a morning flight, give a mid-afternoon speech and be gone.

Here are some considerations that make sense for both meeting professionals and speakers when travel might be an issue:

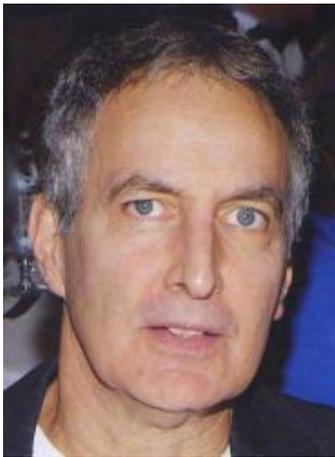
Within drive time. Seek speakers within a four-hour radius of your meeting place. Why four hours? If push comes to shove, and it may, a driving trip of four hours or less may save the speaker time versus flying, considering the current two- to three-hour waits at airports. Further, booking speakers within a four-hour driving radius gives you an added measure of insurance. Even with a delay, it would still be feasible to expect your speaker to arrive in a timely manner. This presumes that you haven't booked a speaker who is hopping from city to city. While it's perfectly within the speaker's right to book engagements one after another, it is permissible for you to ask from what location the speaker will be arriving for your meeting and to know whether he or she can be on-site one day or evening beforehand.

Resort to Plan B. Contingency planning has never been so important. Early in your discussions, ask the speaker if he or she has a suitable fill-in, presumably someone who lives within a 30- to 60-minute drive of your meeting, should the primary speaker incur travel delays or obstacles that preclude arriving on time.

I was scheduled to speak on September 13, 2001 to 85 executives in the customer service division of the U.S. Postal Service in Miami. Everyone attending the event was within driving range. As the closing keynote speaker, I had booked passage from my departing airport, Raleigh-Durham International in North Carolina, well in advance. But planes were grounded on September 11, forcing me to miss the presentation -- the only time in my career, even to this day.

Fortunately, my network of fellow speakers included a friend who lived within 30 minutes of the meeting. I was able to catch up with her in time, get approval from the meeting planner and connect them.

My fill-in speaker performed admirably. The audience was impressed, the meeting planner was more than satisfied and, though not via my preferred method, I was able to serve my client.



Jeff Davidson is "The Work-Life Balance Expert," and thought leader on work-life balance issues. He's written 59 mainstream books, is an authority on time management and is a professional speaker, having made more than 800 presentations to such clients as Kaiser Permanente, IBM, Novo Nordisk, American Express, Lufthansa, Swissotel, Experient, Re/Max, USAA and the World Bank. He is the author of "Breathing Space," and "Simpler Living." His books the "60-Second Organizer," "60-Second Self-Starter" and "60-Second Innovator" are popular in China, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Russia, Turkey, Italy, Poland, Spain, France and Brazil. Jeff is often quoted in The Washington Post, L.A. Times, N.Y. Times, USA Today, Businessweek and Forbes Travel. Cited as a "consummate speaker," Jeff believes career professionals today are responsible for achieving their own sense of work-life balance, and supports them at www.BreathingSpace.com.