

WHEN MAKING A SPEECH, USE YOUR EXPERIENCE

By Jeff Davidson



In a world where mentors are valued in every profession, association executives can bring a lot to the table as public speakers. The younger generations always need advice on how to approach the career ladder. They want to hear from professionals about the challenges they once faced and how they overcame the roadblocks.

I never intended to be an author, a public speaker or an “expert” who could be called upon to give advice about public speaking. I started off working for management consulting firms and was witness to the ups and downs of the business. I survived company layoffs; I learned that, sometimes, in order to impress your boss, you have to work harder when he’s away to demonstrate your dependability and motivation; I mastered a hectic load of work, travel and clients.

What I failed to recognize at the time was that I was developing career advancement skills. I was living the life I’d eventually write and speak about. It was only little by little that I began speaking to groups outside of the office—during breakfast meetings, at lunch or after work—and writing short articles.

Before I knew it, my career had taken off in a new direction. I realized that I could generalize the work strategies I had used in my career and construct them in a way that was presentable to others. If those strategies had helped me overcome obstacles, then surely they’d benefit someone else. Why, I thought, don’t more professionals do the same?

If you’ve moved up, can comment on how years of change have affected your industry and think you could be a thoughtful—or even entertaining—speaker, you’re on your way. But before you can become an effective speaker, you need to have a dynamite speaking topic. The big mistake aspiring public speakers often make is failing to actively develop promising speaking topics.

Choosing Successful Speech Topics. Consider the following list of classic speaking topics and then imagine how you might alter and expand upon them to include your own narratives and advice: You Are Your Own Career Coach; Your Personal Marketing Plan; Time Management & Career Marketing; Finding a

Mentor; Career Marketing on the Job; Learning the Ropes in Your Organization; Becoming Indispensable; Career Building & Office Politics; and When Your Boss is a Roadblock.

Another way to start is by picking a speech topic that is seasonal. If you plan to lead a management seminar about stress during the winter holidays, you might tie in an appropriate holiday message or insert topical information. To capitalize on seasonal topics, look at your calendar, identify significant events and develop some kind of expertise in the seasonal-speaking arena. You may not be asked to give seasonal presentations throughout the year, but you’re likely to land two or three annual engagements.

There are subjects that come around regularly, perhaps once a year or even once every couple of years. If you find you’ve become an expert in a recurring area of business—for example, how to gently handle layoffs during a poor economic period—you may find yourself called upon to speak during these cyclical times.

Introducing Future Trends. Increasingly, many professionals speak about changes occurring in their industries. Being able to spot trends ahead of everyone else could make you a popular speaker. Start by becoming an avid reader of publications outside the realm of your association. Several weekly or monthly publications feature cutting-edge advancements in the world at large. *The Futurist*, *Advertising Age* and *Variety* are a few good examples of publications that delve into campaigns being considered or designed by Madison Avenue and Hollywood. Additionally, read books by powerful global business leaders, take college or adult-education courses on forecasting or futurism, listen to lectures from leading forecasters, and use the Internet to find out what top opinion pollsters and survey research firms have to say. The U.S. Census Bureau also publishes longitudinal trends.

Most importantly, develop and trust your intuition. If you have an idea, act upon it and speak up about it. That’s what great thinkers—and speakers—do. ■

Jeff Davidson’s books, “Breathing Space” and “The Complete Guide to Public Speaking,” are available from our bookstore at www.AssociationNews.com. Davidson can be contacted at www.BreathingSpace.com or at (800) 735-1994.

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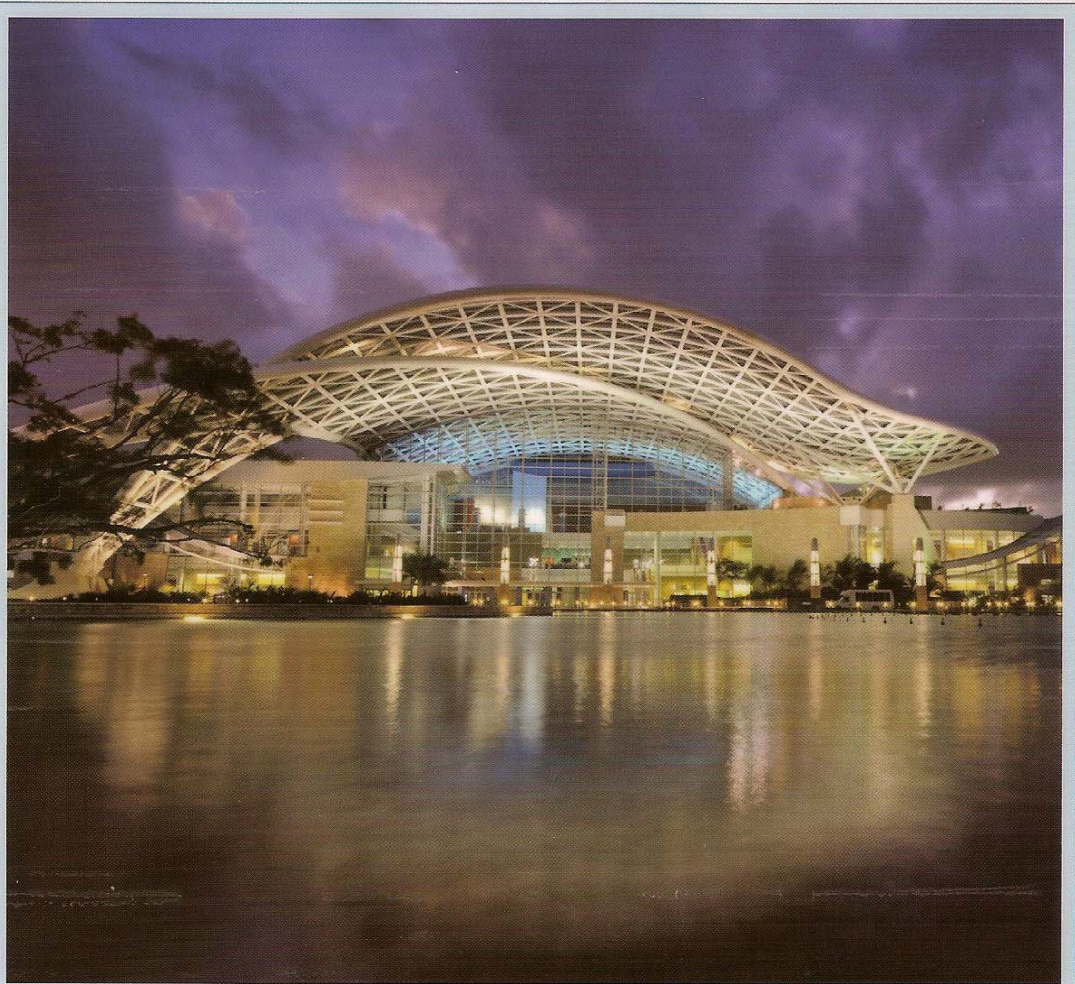
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