

Preparing to Speak

Written by Steve Marr
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In the public speaking I have done in my career, I have learned some principles that have guided my preparation. Perhaps they will be helpful to you.

1. Know who you are as a speaker.

I don't try to wow my listeners with high energy that lifts them out of their seats. I am not a motivational speaker; I am a content driven speaker. My presentations are not designed to entertain or excite. Instead, they provide solid and useful information. Before accepting an invitation, I make sure the organization understands what they get when they schedule me.

2. Find out what your audience expects.

I carefully validate what the audience and the sponsoring organization want. When I prepare to speak, I only choose topics that I am familiar with and have personal experience with. I'm not going to spend a lot of time researching areas I don't have enough first-hand knowledge or experience. Others who have that information are better candidates to speak on those topics.

I am also a faith-based speaker. When I choose a topic, I focus on examples from Scripture that will speak to the specific topic. Over the years I have enough stories in my memory bank to make excellent illustrations for most talks.

3. Update examples and content.

I have some presentations I've used in some form for over 20 years. However, my audience deserves and expects updated examples and material which they're able to relate to. They don't need a history lesson that shares how it used to be.

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4. Understand your audience.

Before I accept a speaking engagement, I ask the sponsoring organization to clarify who the audience is, what they expect and how they determine what makes a successful speaking event. If I were invited to talk about the latest tech developments, I would be a poor fit and disappoint everyone.

5. Verify that you have useful material.

For example, once I understand what the audience wants and what topic they have asked me to speak on; I go back to one of my books or articles, pull material and use it as the basis for the text of my talk. In most circumstances I don't want to tackle material unfamiliar to me. When I counsel authors about marketing a book they published, I recommend they speak from their book.

King Solomon wrote, "Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty." (Proverbs 21:5, NLT) I have learned that when I follow these steps carefully, the speaking event becomes a tool God uses to bless and enrich people. When I cut corners, not only do I disappoint myself; others leave with less than they deserve. Good planning and no shortcuts make a difference.