

6 Tips to Select the Communication Strategist Best Suited for Your Organization

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“What a waste of time and money that speaker was.”

“We hear all these fine words, but nothing ever changes around here.”

“That presentation had absolutely nothing to do with this company or my job.”

Chances are you don't want to hear these sentiments expressed about a speaker or communication strategist you have booked for your organization. After all, when you hire a speaker, *your* reputation is on the line, and the speaker's performance, whether good or bad, reflects on you. Hire a fantastic communication strategist and you appear the hero. Hire a poor speaker and you may be the next person out the door. As such, doing background research on communication strategists is essential in order to ensure that you get good value and good information. But with so many speakers around, how do you find the one who will deliver what you want?

Fortunately, you can ask every speaker you interview seven key questions that, if answered correctly, will guarantee you will never again have to worry about being sold a lemon when it comes to professional speakers. A list of these questions follows, along with the reason you should ask them and the speaker's desired answer.

1. Are you an NSA Certified Speaking Professional (CSP)? While many talented speakers do not have certification, the letters CSP after a speaker's name show that the speaker is at the very top of his or her profession. Only 17% of members and 200 females in the world of the National Speakers' Association are certified. You would not trust your life to a doctor who isn't board certified, would you? Of course not! So why trust your next meeting to a speaker who isn't certified? The NSA's certification program provides quality assurance in eight professional competencies. They are:

- Expertise in one's topic and knowledge of the professional speaking industry.
- Professional relationships with other speakers.
- Creation and selection of topics and tailoring them to the client's needs.
- Staging and setup of the presentation.
- Performance skills and ability to work with an audience.
- Expansion of the presentation into other media, such as books, audio and video.
- Sales and marketing.
- Business management.

When you hire a communication strategist who is a CSP, you're getting a speaker who has proven experience, who understands what is required, and who knows how to deliver client satisfaction.

2. How many organizations have you worked with and how many people have you trained? This is important, because you want to hire an experienced speaker with an established record of accomplishment. The more people a speaker presents to, the more audience feedback that speaker will get. This feedback is important to speakers, because it is the only way for them to learn their audiences' needs. Be sure the speaker you hire has spoken to at least 100 organizations and has trained at least 1,000 people.

3. Do you have a Post-Graduate Degree or advanced training in your area of specialty? Communication strategists who have post-graduate degrees will be more abreast of current developments and will get to network with some of the best leaders and authors in North America. They will be respected experts in their field, and their audiences will learn more than those of a less knowledgeable speaker will. But remember that not all post-graduate degrees are the same. For example, if you need a speaker who can help your group identify and solve problems, someone with a post-graduate degree in computer sciences probably won't be a good fit. Look for a speaker with the background your firm needs.

4. Do you provide a written report on your observations, findings, and recommendations? How often have you attended a training workshop, only to leave wondering what the next step is or where the organization goes from here? A written report ensures that your company implements the speaker's suggestions by broadcasting the findings of the meeting to everyone in the company, up to and including the CEO. Good business leaders recognize the value of this sort of feedback and take the findings and recommendations into account when planning for their business's future needs. Make sure the communication strategist you choose provides a written report of the workshop that shows decision-makers the challenges, problems, and solutions that the speaker and participants uncovered at the meeting, together with recommendations for keeping the momentum going.

5. Do you spend time researching and understanding an organization and its employees to prepare a customized presentation? One of the most common mistakes a novice speaker makes is to prepare a presentation by making a few minor tweaks to his or her standard speech the night before the meeting, without consulting the intended audience. Businesses vary enormously in their requirements, and a "one size fits all" presentation is unlikely to satisfy anybody. You want the speaker you choose to take time to research your company and its needs before the meeting and talk to the people who will benefit from the presentation, not just the person who hires him or her.

6. How many times have you been published and on what topics? When you hire authors to speak at your business meetings, audience members will know them to be experts in their field, as many will already have reviewed the author's published works. Therefore, be sure to note the specific subjects your prospective speaker has written about, and make sure those topics match your needs. For example, if you need a communication strategist to take down walls, hiring someone who has mainly published

time management books and articles will be of little value to you. What someone primarily writes about is usually his or her specialty.

By asking these six questions before you book a communication strategist for your meetings, you will ensure that you can justify the investment the company makes into that meeting. You need never again hear the dreaded phrase, "The brochure was better than the speaker."