



How to become a professional speaker?

How to become a professional speaker (my 2 cents)

This article is for people who would love to become a professional speaker.

Maybe you have already been in a role as a coach, trainer or facilitator and probably you already gave a few (free) speeches and you loved it.

You want to take the next step and build up a business around your speeches - possibly combined with coaching, workshops and training.

The whole article is just worth my two cents.

Time for a coffee?

I get quite a lot of request from people who want to have a coffee/tea with me. They have just quit their (boring?) 'corporate' job and made the jump to become self-employed.

Congratulations. It's a huge step and really great to see that more and more people are following their real passion. Or at least are exploring what their real passion can be. And it's very smart to reach out to some more experienced people who inspire you.

I've noticed that the title 'Global professional speaker' attracts quite some attention.

And it is the best job in the world ... for me ... at this moment.

I get almost every week an invitation to meet up with somebody and share my experiences as an international speaker. I feel very grateful for this, but it's not possible for me to have meetings with everybody - because I also have to run my business.

For that reason, I've created this article where I share a lot of insights and learnings that I've got.

Okay, I'm self-employed and now?

Yes, you have managed to get through all the paperwork and you have started your own business (or you're still in this process).

The website is ready for your audience.

Your slides are ready.

You're ready to deliver your first (paid) speech.

And now ... where are those customers?

One mistake that I've seen quite a lot of times that people are longing a long time to become a professional speaker, but they forget that you're in the first place an entrepreneur.

You have to run a business - and in this case your speeches are the product.

I totally get it that you prefer the role of the speaker, because that's your passion - sharing your message with an audience, but there are many more roles you have to fulfil.

=== You are the CEO - Chief Executive Officer

What kind of business do you want to develop? Keynote speaking, a combination between training and speaking? Going (inter)national? So yes, it is important to think about your URL registration: .be, .sg or .com

=== You are the COO - Chief Operating Officer

You need to run your daily business. So what are the tasks you are going to focus on today?

=== You are the CFO - Chief Financial Officer

Yes, it is handy if there is also a stream of money coming to your side. It's quite easy to 'invest' money in courses, a great laptop, podcast materials and other apps, but somebody has to pay the bills. You.

=== You are the CMO - Chief Marketing Officer

Nope, the clients aren't waiting at your door. Not even the ones you spoke before you decided to become self-employed. You have to reach out and convince them to work with you.

=== And probably you are a lot more CO abbreviations.

And yes, one of those roles is also to speak on stage, but that's probably only 1.5% of your time*, if you're a good speaker.

*estimation of the time you're probably on stage. Assume you deliver 50 speeches/year - 1 hour on stage = 50 hours/year on stage.

And let's say that you work around 330 days/year (self-employed= almost every day busy with your business. So 330 days is probably a low estimation) x 10 hours (huh, 8 hour workdays???) = 3.300 hours = time that you're busy with your business.

I'm exaggerating a bit, but I want to make clear that **98% of your time you're not on stage**. Of course, the percentage you're busy with your content is a lot bigger: research, writing, creating your presentation, learning, practising, ...

Basic stuff that has to be done before even thinking about getting a client

- **The number one thing to become a successful professional speaker is being ready to deliver a brilliant speech.**

That's the essence. Delivering a great speech is THE best promotion to get new speaking requests. I dare to say that 90% of my new speaking requests come via enthusiastic participants who spread my name in their companies, to their wives and spouses or neighbours.

For that reason, try to do as many speeches as you can at the start of your speaking career, even for free, because you want to grow stronger as a speaker, get more experience and finetune your content. The best way to do so is with a live audience. Ask the audience for feedback but even better, invite some speaker colleagues and ask them for honest, raw feedback. They are in the same profession as you and look at your speech from a different angle than the audience. All feedback is good to improve (Fredrik Haren has written a nice [blogpost on feedback](#)).

- **The number two requirement is shared with two elements: website and video.**

I need to find you online, if I look for your name. And you need a video of you performing in front of an audience. You are a speaker, so I want to see your skills in front of a real audience. And even if you have a crappy website or video, it's better than NO website or video at all. Just put your smartphone in a corner the next time you speak and film yourself.

I've heard a speaking agency share a story where they explained that there was a correlation between the fee you charge and your website/showreel. If you are a \$250 speaker, then a website/video that's worth that amount of money is fine. If you are a \$10K speaker, I want to see a \$10 K website and \$10K showreel and I think that's true.

- **The number 3 requirement would be: recommendations.**

Ask a recommendation after your speech. I always try to get a recommendation from the event-organiser and/or the 'highest person in rank' of the organisation to write 1 or 2 lines for me. LinkedIn is a great platform for recommendations. Be aware that you have to follow up probably 2 or 3 times before you get the recommendation. Video-testimonials are also great. Do them within 30 minutes after your speech to get the best ones. And just to add on that one: follow up on everything (emails, proposals, ...): put a to-do on your list to follow up the next week.

In what league do you want to play?

Just like in many sports, there are many leagues. You normally start out at a lower 'league' and build your way up, depending on your ambitions and skills.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with choosing a certain league and staying in that league.

If you are a speaker who mainly speaks locally (in a scope of 50km around your home), that's great. This is not worse or better than focussing on being a global speaker.

Every league has its own advantages and disadvantages.

I know many great speakers who focus on speaking in their own country (the main reason is the disadvantages of travel).

- Local (focus on one city and surroundings)
- Country (speaking in different cities within their country)
- Continent (speaking in different countries within the continent)
- Global (all over the place)

The most logical way is, of course, to start locally and build up your network. If you do a good job, the word will spread and you might get requests from other cities in your country. The boundary between countries is most of the time a bit more difficult to cross and you need to put in extra actions to get noticed abroad. Unless you can speak at an international event in your country.

My experience with speaking agencies

There's an expression that if you are starting as a speaker and looking for bookings, no speaker bureau is interested in you and once you are successful and don't need a speaking agency, they will be standing at your door.

And it's true (for me). You probably can get quite easily on a website of a speaking agency, but you'll be number 137 speaking about leadership or motivation or change. In my first 5 years as a speaker, I was on the list of 3 speaking bureaus and I've got 2 speaking requests - which led to 1 paid engagement - during those 5 years.

So don't put all your eggs in the speaking agencies basket at the beginning of your career. Focus instead on your own network: mail, call, connect to people in your network and if you do a good job, they will be happy to refer you to some other connections.



How to become a professional speaker?

Would you love to become a professional speaker, but do have questions?

Maybe you have already been in a role as a coach, trainer or facilitator and probably you already gave a few (free) speeches and you loved it. Now you want to take the next step and build up a business around your speeches. But... you'd like to hear and learn some stories, tips and tricks, some do's & don'ts from an experienced global speaker.

Maybe

- you want to learn more?
- you want to know how I'm doing it as a global speaker?
- you want to know how it all started for me?
- you want to know how I'm doing it right now?
- you want to know more about my marketing?
- you want to know more about creating speaking opportunities?
- you want to know what I did to become a global speaker?
- you want to have a personal chat with me?

Are you into an "ask me anything session"?

More info, check out www.cyrielkortleven.com/speaker