



Weathering *the*

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People have been complaining about the economy for quite some time. I entered the speaking profession in 1985 and they were complaining about it then. I understand the Pharaohs were somewhat concerned about financing the pyramids, but that was slightly before I was working on my own.

The United States currently has a \$14 trillion economy, the strongest in the history of the world. That, of course, is post-Katrina, post-oil crisis, post-Iraq, and post Britney Spears becoming unglued. Most of the countries in which speakers support formal associations have very fine economies right now. (I'm writing this in London, en route to Italy.)



Economic Storm

Target Real Buyers

Although today's world economies are not the best in history, they are pretty good ones if you know how to market and creatively establish fees. This is the time to raise fees and directly pursue real buyers.

Our buyers are trade association executive directors, and those executives who "own" and sponsor meetings. There are catalysts and middlemen. (I can't bring myself to say "middle people," which sounds like "middle earth" and requires a Hobbit.) Our buyers are not bureaus and meeting planners but if you believe they are, then you will limit your options.

I love bureau heads who tell me that the client is theirs, not ours. We're the talent, and there would be no speaking without us. An insurance company can do business without insurance agents, but the converse does not apply.

Focus on people who can directly authorize a check for your value.

Unbundle Your Services

Speakers make the mistake of selling a commodity—themselves—for a time period. So there is a fee for an hour's keynote or a half-day of training. Bureaus, you will note, demand a "fee schedule," which is silly and disastrous. The following exer-

cise demonstrates how itemizing your services can increase your fees:

- Draw three columns on a sheet of paper and title the columns, from left to right: “pre-event,” “event” and “post-event.” Your speech should be listed in the middle column under “event.”
 - Now, list everything you provide for your presentation in each column. Be creative. I’ll wait.
 - Under “pre-event,” you should have listed things like: interview sample of audience, prepare customized design, “shop” the client, “shop” the client competition, interview customers, hold discussions with client management, etc.
 - In the “post-event” column, you should have listed things such as: debrief with the buyer, provide a hard or electronic copy of the key points, provide a Web page coded and specially customized for the audience, provide coaching via email and/or phone for selected key audience members, etc.
- The items in the middle “event” column should include: conduct a program for spouses, conduct a breakout session for specific application, provide handouts, provide products, allow video recording, etc.



Speaking is a process, not merely an “event.” Don’t throw everything but the family dog into your proposal in an attempt to prove your worth.

I know what you’re thinking: “I already do a lot of that stuff for my speaking fee!” Yes, you do, which is why you’re not a good marketer or allowing middlemen to negotiate for you or demand concessions. You have to unbundle, not bundle, your services.

Raise Your Fees

Speaking is a process, not merely an “event.” Don’t throw everything but the family dog into your proposal in an attempt to prove your worth. Provide options at different points in the process.

No bureau will do that for you, and no meeting planner will entertain it. Meeting planners are paid to conserve budget (“Will you do a second session while you’re here?”), but true buyers are paid to get results. And real buyers have real egos.

They believe they get what they pay for.

The president of a major high-tech firm, while introducing me, asked his senior officers what they thought my fee was for spending six hours conducting a session for them on site. None came within \$15,000. Then he said to them, “You’d better listen up!” He was telling them that I practiced what I preached and that he was getting the very best.

I’ve heard speakers involved with NSA tell me that they are hired hands, and they do whatever the client wants when they are on site. I’m no hired hand—I’m a highly skilled professional, one of the best in the world at what I do. I provide great value. And I receive equitable compensation. What do you believe about yourself?

Let’s be very clear about something: Money is never a resource issue. It’s always a priority issue.

That is, there is always money—the lights are on, the mortgage is being paid, the advertising is being placed. The question is: How is it being allocated? Are you making a sufficient case for your value so that a true buyer is willing to allocate the funds for you? When someone tells you, “We don’t have budget,” he or she is not a real buyer or simply doesn’t want to spend the budget on you.

Choose Your Colleagues Carefully

I’ve heard people state from the platform that the economy is horrible and to be blamed for poor business and lack of success. Many in the audience commiserate and applaud, but some of us know better. I’ve received my highest speaking fees ever in the last year as I’ve built my brand and stood my ground. So have others.

Are you listening to people who are negative and see an adverse economy and society all around? Or are you dealing with people who are optimists and see challenge and excitement wherever they look? I’ve attended chapter meetings where people talked about cutting back and finding bargains. The discussions should be about aggressively marketing expertise. No one grows a practice through cutbacks.

Focus on Your Real Value

Don’t be sidetracked by selling someone else’s product or your own self-published book in the back of the room. You’re not in the book business, or the audio business, or the T-shirt business.

Focus on your real value, which is meeting a buyer’s objectives—a true buyer. Don’t worry about “smile sheets” and what I’ve come to dread more than any other aspect of our work: the standing ovation. We’ve debased that worse than the currency. Who cares if you’re liked? We’re

often there to provoke people and to make them think. If you want unconditional love, get a dog, not a microphone.

There is a huge demand for expertise today, because a great deal of residual expertise has been down-sized and outsourced. Human resources no longer has much credibility or ability to effect organizational change.

Speakers who can impart pragmatic techniques are in great demand. The more diversified you are and the more you can provide in the three columns above—the more value you provide to the client. True buyers may not like to spend large amounts of money, but they detest sacrificing value. Therefore, the more options you provide, the harder it is to revert to a “bare bones” alternative.

If you view this business—and it is a business if your intent is to earn money in return for value—as a “gig” for which you are paid for being present and addressing a group, then you’ll work very hard for whatever money you earn, and will probably be telling the same stories at the same junctures until you’re too old to remember them.

But if you view this business as an opportunity to provide value to people who can improve their professional and personal lives, then you won’t be in the labor-intensive rut of charging based on being somewhere. You’ll be able to charge for helping others get somewhere.



Road Worrier

I met a woman whose husband was rarely around, spending 220 days on the road to speak 110 times for \$1,200 per session.

“Why doesn’t he double his fee and halve his schedule, so he’d at least be home more?” I asked.

“Oh, he could never get that much!” she said. If that’s what they both believe, then they’re right.



Alan Weiss has 14 or so initials after his name. He’s written 32 books which appear in 9 languages. His newest is The Global Consultant (with Omar Kahn) from Wiley. Visit his blog for more contrarian views

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