

# THE 12 CRITICAL FACTORS FOR HIRING A GREAT SPEAKER

A SUPPORT GUIDE FOR EVENT PLANNERS AND TALENT AGENTS



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# INTRODUCTION

In a fast-paced world filled with tons of technology and less personal interactions, the opportunity to physically and verbally communicate with people is rare, but more important than ever before.

Over the last 20 years I have been on the board of many business and non-profit organizations with an opportunity to evaluate over 150 speakers and be a part of creating and filling a learning calendar with high-impact speakers that deliver value.

I have also had the honor to work with many amazing event planners while speaking at events with various audiences ranging from budding entrepreneurs to business executives of the Fortune 500.

What does that mean? In this guide I am able to bring a perspective from both an event planner myself and a speaker.

I have studied what differentiates an average speaker from a phenomenal one as well as exactly what event planners are looking for (and expect) to make their next event a true success.

I am constantly learning and seeking feedback as there are always opportunities improve by speaking with event planners before and after events along with studying and taking notes while watching other speakers. From the body language they use to captivate an audience, to the types of visuals you should leverage, and even down to the engagement strategies they use to connect with each person in the room - I've studied it all!.

From my experience, here are 12 critical factors I would consider applying to your next potential speaker before making the hire.

## 1. HOW WELL DO THEY LISTEN?

Being a powerful and effective speaker on stage is one thing, however, being professional and easy to work with is often another. Though a speaker may have an impactful message or a dynamic delivery, how easy (or hard) it is to communicate with them leading up to the event is important to consider. Did they take the time to understand the theme or purpose of the event? Have they asked about your expectations? Are they invested in taking the time to make sure their speech will fit your audience and be a success? These are all questions to consider that go well beyond the speaker's content and/or their overall reputation.

For example, recently I was asked to speak at an entrepreneurial organization in Washington, DC that had an event theme of "Think Differently". Although my presentation included a lot of applicable material and strategies that fit well with this theme, I made sure to add in specific phrases and new information throughout my speech that would directly address this theme.

## 2. DOES THE SPEAKER HAVE TRUE CREDIBILITY?

Understanding more about their background and their track record is important when deciding which speaker to choose. Considering questions like: Do they practice what they preach? Are they published? Do they have an established online presence? Your event attendees will likely search the internet to learn more about your speaker and it is valuable if their work is available online as proof of their expertise.



I've written dozens of published articles and I often write an article after many of my speaking engagements to highlight any new material I've used or to share additional insights with other business leaders. In fact, one of the funnier slides that I have used in a presentation was based on an Inc magazine article I wrote called "I Would Outsource Brushing My Teeth If I Could." This was a great way for me to bring my real-world credibility into my presentation and gave me an opportunity to earn credibility by showing that I truly practice what I preach.

### 3. WHAT IS THEIR SPEAKING TRACK RECORD?

Credibility is one element, but it is vital to do your due diligence and make sure they have the credentials and experience to back it up. Ask for recommendations or speak with prior event hosts who had to work with them to get an insider's view of how their speech went and their overall process. You can read testimonials, but it is also good to make a few calls to be able to get more direct and targeted feedback about the speaker before you hire them.

### 4. HAVE YOU SEEN MORE THAN JUST THEIR HIGHLIGHT REEL AND DO THEY HAVE PROMOTIONAL VIDEOS OR MATERIAL TO HELP YOU PROMOTE THEM AT THE EVENT?

Many speakers have highlight reels, depicting the best 5-10 speech snippets, usually woven together into a nice promotional video. Keep in mind, these highlight reels are made by the speaker and are often done in a way to showcase their speeches in the best light possible. You want to always ask for an extended speech sample that is at least 5-10 minutes in length for you to get a better feel for their delivery style, speed, volume, crowd engagement, etc.

Also, providing you with promotional videos, content, photos, pre-made social media posts, landing pages or other resources to make it turn-key for you to promote them as a speaker for your event. This is something I found event coordinators absolutely love so we developed a dedicated page with all of our support resources easily accessible and a short video explaining each of them. It's a win-win for the speaker and the coordinator!

## 5. ARE THEY DEMANDING UNREALISTIC ACCOMMODATIONS?

Simply put... are they a pain in the ass to work with? If they're requiring only green M&Ms and fresh goat milk in their waiting room, then it is probably a sign that they may be too "high maintenance." Many speakers get caught up in their own high-end travel needs, that they may request specific (and often odd) requirements before they agree to take a speaking engagement.

## 6. DO THEY HAVE A CLEAR IDEA OF HOW THEY WILL ENGAGE THE AUDIENCE?

It is always good practice to ask the speaker what it is they want the audience to take away from their speech. Knowing the end objective or the outcome of where they want to take the audience is important in determining if they are the right speaker for your event. As often as possible, reflect and truly ask yourself, "Does the speaker have a clear idea of the journey they are taking the user on or just pushing out information?" This is where taking the time to understand the audience is important to ensure that what is being presented (by the speaker) is both relevant and engaging to the event attendees.



## 7. IS THEIR CONTENT EASY TO UNDERSTAND?

Again, this goes back to having a speaker that is willing and invested in learning the audience. There is nothing worse than hiring a speaker and having the content they present either confuse or completely go over the head of the audience. If you are able to get an outline beforehand of the speech, that is highly recommended so you can review the content and be able to determine if it is both easy to follow and actionable.

## 8. CAN THEY MAKE THE AUDIENCE FEEL SOMETHING?

As Maya Angelou says, "people will forget what you said, and people will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel." Regardless of the type of event you are hiring a speaker for, whether it be to talk about tax planning or as part of a larger motivational event, you should ask them *how* they want the audience to feel during the experience. Providing content is only a small part of the success of a speaking engagement, instead, the effectiveness is much more rooted in evoking a feeling within the audience and giving them actionable items they can use.

## 9. WHAT'S THEIR ENERGY LEVEL?

Part of a speaker's job is to translate energy into the room and to the participants. This does not mean they have to be super energetic and bouncing off of the walls, but they should be able to command a presence on the stage that captivates the audience. I use the phrase *connected energy* because that is what it's about. It is about having energy, but, more importantly, about truly connecting with the audience by moving around and looking into people's eyes as you deliver content. I am a very high energy individual, and when I first started speaking, I thought the more energy I could bring, the better – but, this wasn't always true. I learned, over time, that I had to throttle that energy up-and-down to create more texture for the experience for the audience.

## 10. HOW WILL THEY INTERACT AND ENGAGE WITH THE AUDIENCE?

So many speakers get caught up in pushing their content out that they don't pull the audience in to engage in the experience. From my research and personal experience, I've found that the speakers with the highest ratings tend to have some element of interaction. This is particularly true if they are doing a workshop, then they may have a high-quality workbook that participants can use during the speech. Having short and impactful videos are also a great way to mix up the experience. In addition, offering a polling feature throughout the speech is an innovative way to get the audience interacting and responding in real-time to the speaker's content.

When I do workshops we have a very specific worksheet I use that gives my content a much deeper impact. I also leverage technology such as a software called "Poll Anywhere" that enables participants to respond via their mobile device as I pose questions throughout my speech. It is little things like this that makes the audience feel more connected to the speaker and more willing to receive the content and improves retention.

## 11. HOW DO THEY BALANCE BODY LANGUAGE VERSUS CONTENT?



The statistics show that communication is 80% about your body language and the way you connect physically with the audience rather than based solely on the content. Amazing speakers can deliver even the most "boring" topics in such a way that instantly moves an audience. When you're looking at highlight reels and speaker examples really take note of their body language, including their posture, how they emphasize points, how well they connect with the audience, and if they consistently make eye contact. Also, incorporating meaningful pauses throughout the delivery is key to allow time for key points to sink in and for the pacing of the speech to not feel rushed or forced.

## 12. WHAT TYPES OF VISUALS DO THEY USE?

Many speakers put audiences through what I call "PowerPoint Hell". Before you commit to hiring them, ask for a sample of their slide deck or even 5-8 slides (if they cannot share the entire presentation) will do fine. When viewing the slides look at the spacing, the types of images used, the amount of text on each slide, the readability, etc. The more visuals the speaker can leverage, the better! You will lose an audience in a heartbeat and get horrible ratings if it is just a bunch of dense text that they are reading. Also, be sure the speaker will not read the text word for word. The visuals should supplement the speech and be used effectively to emphasize points or progress the audience through the content. I recently attended an event where a speaker from a national bank literally had every square inch of space on all the slides jammed with text. Half the audience was nearly sleeping halfway through!

## BONUS: THE DAY AFTER...

Effective and highly reputable speakers will make themselves readily available before and after the event. I personally reach out to clients and ask for their honest feedback as well as asking them for any audience-specific feedback that I can use to improve my presentation and delivery.

I often, immediately after a presentation, make a ton of notes for myself of things that I can do to improve the content from what I've heard how the audience reacted and how I felt on stage. If a speaker has a formal "feedback" approach that they can discuss with you before you hire them, it shows you that they are serious about what they do and are willing to go the extra mile to make sure they are prepared and ready to perform at their best.

Hopefully this has been helpful to give you additional "filters" to consider when bringing your next talent to stage.

You may find as you interact with various speakers that there are more filters to add to this list and I would love to hear your feedback for our next edition!

If you are interested in a speaker who "practices what they preach" in all the above areas, I would welcome the opportunity to be considered for your next event. I invite you to visit the speaking page on my website at [www.BradStevensTraining.com/speaking](http://www.BradStevensTraining.com/speaking) to see videos, feedback and content details and fill out the contact form or reach my speaking coordinator Jaycel directly at [speaking@bradstevenstraining.com](mailto:speaking@bradstevenstraining.com).

I would love to hear more about your speaking engagement needs and be able to provide specific ways that I can bring a highly impactful, engaging, and informative experience to your audience.

Take care!

*Brad Stevens and the BST Team*

Learn more at [bradstevenstraining.com](http://bradstevenstraining.com)

## BRAD STEVENS BIOGRAPHY

Brad Stevens is a lifetime entrepreneur and is the CEO of Brad Stevens Training, an international education and advisory organization focused on growth, innovation and balance to help entrepreneurs and small businesses survive and thrive across all dimensions of their company and personal life.

As a lifetime entrepreneur, Brad has helped build multiple 7 figure businesses in domestic and international markets. He uses innovative growth strategies to build new companies and his organization teaches other entrepreneurs how to leverage these techniques. His company publishes the Top 200 Tools to Fuel Business Growth. For his work with startups to \$100 million firms, he has been featured in Inc Magazine 3 times, the EO Global Innovation Forum, the Wall Street Business Network and was featured on the cover of Small Business Magazine. His is also a recipient of the Top 40 Most Innovative Businesses award

He has become one of the nation's top advisors and keynote speakers for global firms, CEO peer groups, universities, and top-ranked business organizations including EO, YPO, SCORE, Vistage, TAB, and the CEO Brain Trust.

He is also on the local and regional board of EO Atlanta and Startup Atlanta. He lives in Sand Springs, GA with his 3 year old daughter Ella and wife Cindy, an inspirational third grade teacher.

