

From the Soapbox to the Stage

How To Use Your Passion to Start A Speaking Business

by Bill Corbett

Published by
Cooperative Kids Publishing
P.O. Box 432
Enfield, CT 06083-0432
<http://Cooperativekids.vpweb.com>

Copyright © 2013 Bill Corbett. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reprinted, reproduced, utilized, transmitted in whole or in part in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, and recording, without written permission from the author or publisher, except in the case of brief quotations in articles or reviews.

Cover designed by T. Lak

ISBN-13: 978-0-9821121-4-4

ISBN-10: 0-9821121-4-9

Printed in the United States of America.

Introduction

It happened early in my career as a young management professional. The large company I was working for called all of its employees into the auditorium to hear a motivational speaker. His mission was to get us excited about changes that would be handed down from a new leadership team. Like many people, I've been forced to sit through presentations that were about as exciting as watching paint dry. There was no reason to expect this one to be any different.

One of the department heads was introducing the speaker and then, at just the right moment, a short, bald-headed man in a suit strode confidently and quickly across the stage carrying a plastic milk crate.

Through the applause, my attention was immediately captured because he was carrying such an odd thing. Then, as he arrived at the lectern, he dropped the crate on the floor behind it and stepped onto it giving himself enough height to see over the lectern. The entire audience immediately broke into laughter. The speaker had quickly completed his first objective: to capture our attention.

His message of “embracing change” was inspiring, expertly presented and probably exactly what the company wanted us to hear, but I was paying closer attention to the mechanics of the talk. I took note of what the speaker said and did that invoked laughter from my fellow professionals.

I paid attention to the different components of his speech like the tone and pitch of his voice, his body language and how well it matched up with each individual point he was making, and how his ability to make eye contact seemed to make me feel like he was talking to me personally.

This speaker was different from all the others I had heard, and I began to realize that it was his collection of personalized techniques

From the Soapbox to the Stage

like using the milk crate that had the power to separate great speakers from the rest.

The 90 minutes went by so quickly. I filled several pages in my notebook and my mind was exploding with ideas and a craving for more information about speaking. After the final applause, my coworkers all headed back to their respective cubicles. I, however, made my way against the flow of people to the stage. I wanted to have just a few minutes with the speaker to let him know how much I enjoyed it and how much I had learned.

I waited patiently while he took the time to shake hands and converse with all the appropriate people, very aware that something in my mind had shifted during the course of this man's presentation. You see, up until that moment, I had little clarity regarding my career and personal goals. I knew I wanted to accomplish things - everybody does. I knew I wanted to do something meaningful, everybody wants that too. But I also knew that I wasn't there yet.

When he had finished with management, he made his way over to me. I thanked him for the inspiring talk and then confessed that I wanted to do what he does. I asked him if he would mind sharing one tip that could help move me in the direction of becoming a professional speaker. His advice: find mentors.

He told me to seek out those who were already doing what I was dreaming of doing and to network with them. He said to write to them, attend their talks and if appropriate, buy them a coffee or lunch in exchange for one or two tips that had helped them while they were building their successful speaking business.

By the time I had left that room, the seed of an idea had taken root and from that moment forward I believed there was a way for me to have a fulfilling professional life as a speaker. I wasn't exactly sure what to do next, or how to do it. All I knew for sure was that I had just met my first mentor, and now I was on my way to doing what he was doing - using knowledge, wit, wisdom, enthusiasm, and humor to inspire and motivate nearly 150 adults - all at one time.

From the Soapbox to the Stage

For the next several years I set out to find local speakers to connect with. I attended their talks and learned what I could about their businesses. I found myself suddenly more aware of speakers and their presentations at work, in the community, and on television. Sunday morning worship services at my church had now changed for me. I found myself glued to the pastor's sermon, watching his every move and listening closely to how it was constructed. I bought coffee or lunch for any speaker who would give me the time of day, those with lots of experience and those just starting out.

One of the most memorable cups of coffee I ever bought was for national radio talk show host, Phil Valentine. In addition to being a sought-after keynote speaker, he has written several books, has appeared on television, in movies, and is on the list of the 100 Most Influential Radio Talk Show Hosts of All Time. At the time of this writing, he was also ranked #39 on the Heavy Hundred list according to *Talkers Magazine*.

I had the honor of meeting Phil while I was hosting my own weekend radio show at the Clear Channel WLAC studios in Nashville, Tennessee. We met for breakfast at the world famous Pancake Pantry restaurant on 21st Avenue in Nashville, and I had the privilege of asking him many questions about being a speaker as well as a radio show host.

Phil generously shared many tips and ideas with me, but the one thing he really emphasized was that whether you are a radio show host or a speaker, it's the passion you bring into your work that will have the greatest impact on your audience.

In Ian Hollander's book: *PASSION! How to Do What You LOVE For a Living & Wake Up The WORLD With Your Work*, he describes what passion is. He writes:

The truth is, passion is such a personal thing – an intimate exercise in expressing your authentic self... I believe whatever it is that burns brightly in you – that you'd love to get up every day and DO – is simply waiting to wake up. (Hollander, 2013)

From the Soapbox to the Stage

Maybe you've had an experience that awakened your desire and ignited your passion to stand up and share something meaningful. Now, you're reading this book so you can learn how to share what burns brightly inside of you with others. One of the first tips I have to share with you as you start your journey is the knowledge that it is absolutely possible to grow your speaking business without quitting your 'day job.'

In *Quitter: Closing the Gap Between Your Day Job & Your Dream Job*, Jon Acuff advises launching your dream job or business while you're still employed. He points out several reasons for taking this approach: it avoids freaking out your spouse and putting your marriage in peril; it side-steps the financial risk of starting a new business and possibly destroying your dream and your life in the process; and it eliminates the loss of leverage created by conflicts between your new venture and the security of your everyday life.

A speaking business really is one of those career shifts that can easily be started while maintaining full-time employment. This book is written to provide a step-by-step guide for taking your desire and passion and building them into a successful speaking career. It doesn't matter whether you are an absolute beginner, a gifted amateur or a seasoned professional; this book is full of information, strategies, and techniques you can use to get started, or, to enhance and expand the toolbox of techniques you already have.

These are the steps I used to start my speaking career and I've loved my job ever since!

Chapter 1

“You’re Not a Speaker... You’re My Husband!”

I remember when I began sharing my dream of building a successful speaking career with family and friends. If I mentioned my latest success at family gatherings, the topic would seem to die quickly and someone would change the subject. At one event a family member came up to me and privately said, “Don’t be such a dreamer... speaking won’t pay the bills.”

I want to believe that person probably meant well. I’m sure he didn’t want to see me fail or feel disappointment if my speaking business didn’t work out. He, like so many people, just doesn’t know how to support an idea or a goal he knows nothing about. No one in my circle of family or friends has ever attempted to become a professional speaker before me. If I was trying to be the first person in my family to get a PHD, or to be a doctor or lawyer, they’d probably all line up to congratulate me on my choice.

It’s the unknown that tends to bring out the pessimistic side of the people around us, and instead of encouraging us, they tend to zero in on the risks. I, on the other hand, was being a pioneer in my circle of family and friends. In today’s lingo...I was being an entrepreneur.

When my speaking business was only a few months old, I had already spoken at a few different venues but hadn’t landed a paying gig yet. One day my wife called me at my day job and asked if I knew where she could find a speaker for an event. Her boss had instructed her to go out and find a motivational speaker for a half-day off site meeting for the managers in her organization. She had been searching the Yellow Pages, but couldn’t find anything listed.

I immediately asked her, “What about me?” She responded with, “You’re not a speaker, you’re my husband.” This is testimony to the fact

From the Soapbox to the Stage

that even those closest and most supportive of us can forget that we have something new to offer. Strangers on the other hand, don't always know we are just starting out and are often more willing to accept us when we market ourselves, our skills, and follow through in a professional manner. I immediately faxed her a proposal to give to her boss, and I got the job. That half-day motivational seminar was my first paid speaking gig.

Even when we are successful though, there will still be 'crabs' trying to dismiss our accomplishments. Filipina feminist author and journalist, Ninotchka Rosca documented what Filipino fisherman noticed about the behavior of crabs in a bucket; when one gets close to the rim of the bucket the others seem to be grabbing its legs to keep it from escaping.

The 'crabs' in our lives are the individuals who don't deal well with people who are happier or more successful than they are. They will do or say whatever it takes to taint our success, dismiss our joy, and remind us that there's nothing special about us or what we have to offer.

This is when it's very important to remember that we get to decide who we are. Starting anything new is a challenge and although it's difficult at times, we do have the power to change the language in our self-talk to keep us positive and moving forward.

When my children were growing up, I taught them a mantra-like phrase to say to themselves for inner strength whenever they were confronted with discouraging words dished out by others. The phrase was, "No matter what you say or do to me, I'm still a worthwhile person."

As I continued to build my speaking business from scratch, I frequently put a similar phrase to work inside my mind. I used it to stay strong against the discouraging messages around me: "No matter what you say about my dream to become a speaker, it is still a worthwhile dream, and I will remain steadfast to pursue it."

We need phrases like this to replace the ones we might have heard over and over again during our youth. If we don't create them and use

From the Soapbox to the Stage

them, we could end up becoming our own worst enemy with a monologue of self-limiting thoughts constantly running through our mind.

In his book *Real Magic: Creating Miracles in Everyday Life*, Dr. Wayne Dyer wrote about how we all had delightful thoughts as children that let us believe we could do great and magical things. Over time though, those thoughts were replaced by thoughts that now limit us. He wrote:

Somewhere along the way you began to doubt your ability to create magic for yourself. Never doubt that being able to walk from the perspective of the crawler is truly a miracle. You lost the ability to extend that belief to new and more 'impossible' miracles. You began to buy into the misbeliefs of those around you who were 'many limits' people, who said, 'You must learn your limitations.' Or 'You can't do that.' Or 'You are just like your father, and he couldn't do those things either.' The list was endless, and so too became the limitations.

To recapture that childhood magic and become your own miracle worker, you will have to change the thoughts that created your world of limits and boundaries. That takes place in your mind first, and since thoughts originate with you, you have the ability to recreate your own image of what your life is going to be from now on. Why not include the presence of real magic in your life as well? (Dyer, 1989)

One of the many people who inspired me is author, professional speaker and ultra athlete, Croix Sather, a man who followed his dream. Croix ran 100 marathons in 100 days from California to New York and inspired hundreds of adults and teens along the route. In his book *Dream Big Act Big: Breakthrough and Unleash the Superstar within You*, he wrote:

From the Soapbox to the Stage

Don't EVER let anyone tell you that your dream is impossible! Nobody! Not your friends, not your parents, not your brother, sister or grandma. Certainly not that schmuck boss, or that narrow minded teacher you once had. Not that pathetic boyfriend or girlfriend whom you never should have dated in the first place. Not that moron critic or the town gossip. *Nobody*. Most importantly, don't ever listen to yourself when you hear those words of self-doubt creep out of the darkness of your mind. (Sather, 2011)

Chapter 2

Why Start a Speaking Business?

I asked myself this very question many times and I came up with two basic answers. The first answer is so I could stop existing as someone else's employee. There's nothing wrong with working for someone else. There's just something very fulfilling about being able to take care of yourself and your family doing something that you love to do.

The second answer is because it allows me to live a more fulfilling life by using my passion and gifts to help others live a better life. I love what career consultant Cliff Hakim wrote in his book *We Are All Self-Employed: The New Social Contract for Working in a Changed World*:

For most of us, it is not enough merely to survive – to change according to other people's desires or to get by on a day-to-day basis. Rather, I believe, we want to go beyond survival, not only to awaken our 'inner core' but also to live our passion, express our spirit, and make worthwhile contributions. When we are 'self-employed,' we are not cogs in a wheel, cared for by the organization, but individuals responsible for our own job productivity, career mobility, and career fulfillment. With self-knowledge, we can better identify our needs and values, build a sense of mission into our work lives, and contribute more to others. (Hakim, 1994)

If you already love what you do then perhaps you're already on the right track and just have to make a slight switch at the next 'junction.' Maybe it's time to change from working in the trenches to helping all those people that are in the trenches with you.

From the Soapbox to the Stage

The reality is that too many people feel trapped in a job they hate going to everyday. Just look around you the next time you're at the grocery store, the coffee shop or at the mall. Sometimes it feels like you're living in a zombie movie surrounded by the walking dead. So many people doing the same thing day after day, existing for the sole purpose of producing for someone or something else, and once those widgets have been produced, they get their reward of returning home to the sofa and their television or computer each night. They sit there, remote control or mouse in hand feeling unfulfilled and empty, ready to give up the idea of searching for a more meaningful way of living.

In the early 1980's I began my journey as one of the walking dead. I was just out of the US Air Force and my grandmother told me I should go into the field of data processing because it promised good pay and good benefits. My grandparents were hard-working immigrants who came to this country as children. They did whatever it took to pay the bills and they did it well. But, they also complained about their employers, their jobs, the neighbors, and pretty much everything else. They weren't fulfilled and happy. Still, I had great respect for my grandmother so I took her advice.

Within a few months I found myself working for a bank, mounting magnetic reels on tape drives and loading and unloading giant reams of green and white striped paper called green-bar into humongous printers. I spent my days punching cards and bursting forms until I eventually moved into programming and from there onto management.

I'm not telling you this to fault my grandmother; she was only doing what she had been programmed to do too. Besides, I was making good money and had good benefits. I'm telling you this because back then, I didn't know it was okay to dream of being all that I was meant to be in this life. I didn't have any idea that I had a passion for speaking about families and parenting just waiting to be found.

One of my favorite books was written by American professor of computer science, Randy Pausch. Before dying from complications due to pancreatic cancer, he wrote his national bestseller *The Last Lecture*.

From the Soapbox to the Stage

It contained 61 mini-lectures providing wisdom and guidance to those who read it. My favorite lecture is the one he wrote for his own children titled *Dreams for My Children*. Here is an excerpt from that lecture:

It can be a very disruptive thing for parents to have specific dreams for their kids. As a professor, I've seen many unhappy college freshman picking majors that are all wrong for them. Their parents have put them on a train, and too often, judging by the crying during my office hours, the result is a train wreck.

As I see it, a parent's job is to encourage kids to develop a joy for life and a great urge to follow their own dreams. The best we can do is to help them develop a personal set of tools for the task.

So my dreams for my kids are very exact: I want them to find their own path to fulfillment. And given that I won't be there, I want to make this clear: Kids, don't try to figure out what I wanted you to become. I want you to become what *you* want to become. (Pausch & Zaslow, 2008)

Maybe you've been living your parent's dream, someone else's dream, or you've become a member of the 'walking dead'. If this sounds like you, then this is the perfect time to discover new dreams or to reconnect with dreams you've been denying all along. Right now is the perfect time to reach deep inside yourself to discover and remind yourself of all the ideas that light your soul on fire.

What do you love to talk about so much that when you talk about it, you feel alive? What have you discovered in your life that you'd like to share with others so that they can start living a better life too? What guilty pleasures would you love to bring out into the open?

Are there things that you know how to do really well? Do you have natural talents that others would love to hear about, or that you could teach? What have you learned 'the hard way'? What insight or

From the Soapbox to the Stage

knowledge do you possess that you could talk about right now rather than waiting until it's time for your last lecture?
