

# Seven Steps to Quickly Getting Paid Speaking Gigs!

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When people begin their speaking careers, they usually have one overarching question: *How can I start getting paid to speak as quickly as possible???*

That's a good question, and the answer depends on many things. And, while we can appreciate your desire to earn money quickly, we also recommend you take a long term approach to building your speaking career. Being a professional speaker is like running any other business; it takes time, work, and persistence to "make it."

However, just because you should take a long term view doesn't mean that you should spend years never getting paid to speak...

The seven steps below represent a system to get you generating speaking leads and business as fast as possible. They will also lay a foundation for your long term success.

To be clear, this is **not** the only way. This is not necessarily the **best** way. In fact, there is not universal best way; there are many paths to success in the speaking business. You'll need to figure out what your personal best way is.

However, the steps outlined below are, in my opinion, the **fastest** way to get started making money in the speaking business.

So keep a long term approach to building your speaking business, but start with the steps below to accelerate your path to speaking success!

<http://www.SpeakingExpert.com>  
<http://www.TheSpeakingSchool.com>  
<http://www.ImprovForSpeakers.com>

## **Step 1 – Pick a Niche**

Many speakers, especially when they first start out, make the mistake of starting too broadly. Ask them who they speak to and they'll say, "Anyone!" Ask them what topic they speak on and they'll say, "Anything!"

This may sound like a way of maximizing your potential business, but it really only accomplishes three things, none of which are good:

1. **It makes you sound like a “jack of all trades, master of none.”** It's hard to position yourself as an expert when you claim to be able to do anything.
2. **It makes it hard for people to think about how to use your services.** If you say you can speak on “anything,” the person you're talking to will have no idea how to specifically use you. If you solve a specific problem or address a specific topic, it will be much easier for him or her to visualize hiring you.
3. **It makes it hard for people to refer you.** Quite often you'll talk with people who can't hire you but know someone who can. If you say, “I can speak to anyone,” they won't have a clear idea of who to refer to you. If you say, “I speak to human resource professionals,” they will immediately scan their mind for all the HR people they know.

The solution to this is to pick a niche. A “niche” is simply a thin slice of the market. You can niche the market in a few ways:

- **By industry** (“I speak to organizations in the insurance industry”)
- **By position** (“I speak to CFOs”)
- **By demographic** (“I speak to female college students”)
- **By department** (“I speak to IT departments”)
- **By topic** (“I speak on leadership skills”)
- **By unique approach** (“I use juggling as a metaphor for change”)

There are more ways, but that should get you started. Some of these will lend themselves to an easier road than others.

If you are starting out and looking to get paid speaking work soon, I would suggest picking two: a topic and an industry. For example, “I speak to sales professionals in the financial services industry.”

That may sound limiting, but trust me, it will make your marketing, conversations, and referrals, much easier.

The best starting niche can be found at the intersection of three roads:

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- **Your background** – Whatever work or education experience you have, that is usually your best place to niche. If you have successfully spoken to a group or published books or articles relevant to a niche, that counts too.
- **Your contacts** – If you have a lot of family, friends, or business contacts in a certain industry, then that is a good place to start. All business are relationship businesses, and, especially when you are starting out, nothing will get you going faster than a personal contact or introduction.
- **Your interests** – You may find the perfect blend of background and contacts, but if you hate the topic or industry, it will show. You don't need to be "passionate," (though it helps) but you at least need to not be repulsed. So if you were a banker with lots of banking clients but the thought of speaking to bankers makes you want to scream, you may need to keep looking.

The nice thing is that these three will quite often be related. You have an interest in an industry, so you get a job (which gives you experience), and through that job you make contacts and friends.

Find your niche by brainstorming these three areas and identifying where they intersect.

**Bonus:** Keep your brainstormed list of contacts. It will come in handy later.

## **Step 2 – Get Good**

While your niche and your market may get you speaking work at first, it's your content and skill as a speaker that will determine the repeat business, referrals, and sustainability of your business.

To get good, you need to speak. **A lot.** The easiest way to do that when you don't have gigs lined up is to attend Toastmasters meetings.

Toastmasters is an organization dedicated to helping people become better speakers. There are Toastmasters clubs everywhere. Go to [Toastmasters.org](http://Toastmasters.org) and find locations near you.

There will probably be many groups in your area. Don't just pick one and attend once every two weeks. Join a whole bunch, and go to as many meetings a week as you can, and speak as much as you can at them. After each speech you give, listen to the feedback you get and **try to make the next one a little better.**

**This is critical!** Your goal is not to show everyone how good you are. Your goal is to keep pushing yourself to get better and better. If you hear nothing but praise, push yourself to try new things (be funnier, use visuals, tell deeper stories, etc).

Speak a lot, get feedback, and continuously push yourself to get better. Do that 3-5 times per week and you will get good very quickly.

### ***Step 3 – Develop a Speech Topic***

You don't need a full speech yet; you just need the topic.

In one sentence, write a summary of what the audience will gain by listening to your speech.

Notice the language there; this is not about what you will say or what you will teach them. It's about how **they** will benefit from listening to you.

A good way to do this is to position it as **“what they audience will be able to do differently after hearing my speech.”**

Remember the section on “picking a niche”? Refer back to your chosen niche, and make sure your topic addresses the specific problems, wants, and needs of that group.

This may take time. Don't get discouraged if you don't knock this out in one five minute session. This is the most important piece when it comes to both marketing and speech development. Come up with a dynamite one sentence and your life will be a whole lot easier.

## **Step 4 - Develop a Pitch**

You're going to need two types of pitches:

1. One for **personal contacts and conversations**
2. One for the **end of your speech**

When you meet someone, you need to be able to sum up what you do in a short form that gives them an idea of how they could use you or to whom they could refer you.

When you speak, especially when you speak for free, you need to have a short (one minute or so) pitch for your speaking services so everyone in the audience knows how they can use you and to whom they can refer you.

If you took the time to do step 3 properly, this step will be easy.

As far as specific language, there are a lot of different formats. I'll share my two favorites, one for conversation and one for presentation:

### **Conversational Pitch:**

When you meet someone and they ask, "what do you do?" say this (or a variation on it):

"My name is [your name]. I am a professional speaker, and I speak to [niche] about how they can [benefit]."

Bonus additional lines

- **Uniqueness:** State your unique approach. "I speak to [niche] about how they can [benefit], and I use [your unique approach] to make it [reason why you use that approach]"
- **Who I want to meet:** Great for networking events. "I speak to [niche] about how they can [benefit]. I'm looking to meet [the position or title of the person you want to meet]."

### **End of Presentation Pitch:**

Near the end of your speech, right before your conclusion/summary, say this (or some variation on it):

"I'm going to wrap up in a moment. I just wanted to take a second and, for the people interested, tell you a little about what I do. I speak to [niche] about how they can [benefit]. If you'd like to talk about bringing me to your organization, please see me afterward, I will stick around for a little while. If you think you might know someone in [niche] who might be interested in [benefit], please see me afterward or give me your card before you leave, I would love to find out more."

You will evolve that pitch as you go, but the one above is short and to the point. If you have given great value in your presentation, no one will mind if you take 60 seconds to respectfully pitch your services.

## **Step 5 – Reach Out to Your Contact List**

Remember that contact list you made in step 1? Pull it out, and **contact every single person on that list**. If you can, set up personal meetings. If not, make phone calls. Email is the weakest, and a mass email sent to all your contacts at once will net you a very minimal response.

When you meet with/talk to them, just tell them you are starting this new venture and you were looking for a little help. Tell them your topic and niche, and see if they know anyone who might be interested.

Try to give them specifics. If you say, “do you know anyone who will hire a speaker?” they’ll probably go blank. If you say, “I am specifically looking for Directors of IT,” or, “I’d love to meet managers who oversee groups of financial advisors,” or, “do you know anyone in the human resources department?”

Have a few different specific groups to ask about. Also, use these questions only as a starting point. **Let the discussion flow** and you might be surprised at who your contacts come up.

Once they have given you some names, ask for a personal introduction. **THIS IS CRITICAL!!** If they just give you a name and tell you that’s who you should contact, that’s relatively useless. Personally, I don’t even bother making that contact, because at that point you’re just another cold caller/cold emailer. If your contact doesn’t know the person well enough to make the introduction, it’s not a real referral.

My personal favorite method is to have my friend send an email with me CC’ed on it.

Once you get that intro, set up a phone call with the contact. If they are the decision maker, you’ve got a great foot in the door and a terrific chance to book a speaking gig. If not, then find out from them who you should be speaking to (and again, ask for a personal introduction).

**NOTE:** If you have few contacts in your target niche you have two options:

1. **Consider a new niche.** Seriously, when you are starting out your personal contacts are your greatest asset.
2. **Reach out to non-niche friends.** You may not know many people in your niche, but you probably have lots of people you are friendly enough with to meet for lunch or coffee (your treat). Meet with them and ask them if they know anyone in your target niche. This will be a longer more difficult road, but it can definitely generate you some leads.



## ***Step 6 – Find Targeted Groups and Network***

Once you have identified your niche, find associations that members of that niche belong to. Trust me, **there are associations for everything!** Just do a Google search on “association of [Your Niche].”

Find local meetings and start attending them ASAP. Get to know people and build relationships. Don't start selling your services right away. The last thing you want is to be branded as a leech who is just trying to get business. Help where you can and get to know people.

If you stumble across someone who needs your services, great! If not, once you have gotten to know a few people, repeat step 5 with them.

When it comes to networking, the quality of the group is critical! Don't attend general networking meetings (unless you **love** networking and are **great** at it). Only a tiny fraction of people you meet will be good contacts (many times there will be no good contacts) and you will waste your time and get discouraged. You are much better off going to a targeted association than, say, a local Chamber of Commerce meeting (unless Chamber members happen to be your niche).

## **Step 7 – Find Targeted Groups and Offer to Speak**

Most associations have speakers regularly present at their meetings. Your goal is to be one of those speakers. **Speaking to a targeted group is one of the best ways to get speaking business and leads.**

It's ok to speak to those groups for no-fee. If you can get paid, even better, but remember, your real goal with that speech is the marketing opportunity (though if you have to travel they should pay expenses).

You don't have to be a member of these groups to speak at them, though it can help. If you become an active member/attendee of your targeted associations, get to know the **Program or Education Chair** – they're the ones who schedule speakers. If you aren't a member of the group, contact them via phone or email and ask how to be considered to be a speaker.

Towards the end of your speech, give your mini-presentation pitch and stick around afterward to talk to anyone who might be interested in more info. If you have something you can giveaway (a book, a CD, etc), conduct a raffle where you collect business cards. If you don't have something of your own to giveaway, giveaway someone else's book that is relevant to your topic (and that you refer to in your speech).

A day or two after you speak, **follow up with everyone** whose card you collected and repeat step 5 with them.

## ***Bonus! Step 8 - Lather, Rinse, Repeat***

Yes, this is an eighth step for a seven step program, but that's because this step is basically a "repeat as needed" step.

If you have diligently done steps 1-7, you should have started to generate speaking leads (and probably business). **The speed with which you generate leads is directly related to how aggressively you follow the plan.** If you attend one networking meeting a month and only reach out to a couple of friends a week, things will be slow. If you attend ten networking meetings in a month and reach out individually to all fifty of the people on your contact list, you'll see much faster results.

As you get going, pay attention to your results. Remember, **your goal is to figure out your own personal best plan.** You will (and should) modify the seven steps as you get more comfortable with what does and doesn't work for you.

There is obviously a lot more that goes into building a successful speaking business: Websites, marketing materials, product creation, information marketing, technology, accounting, PR, putting on your own events, partnering, developing your USP, etc.

All of those things are wonderful and important. However, the point of **this** article is to get you speaking business as fast as possible. Once you have started speaking, a lot of the other stuff will be a lot easier to do.

Follow the steps above and you will be getting paid speaking work in no time!

## ***Additional Resources***

- **Speaking Expert Series** – Everything you ever wanted to know about the speaking business. Over 14 hours of audio for one low price that covers virtually every aspect of starting and growing a speaking business.  
<http://www.speakingexpert.com/speakingexpert/full-program/>
- **SpeakingExpert.com** – A blog dedicated to showing speakers of all levels how to speak better, make more money, and have more fun!  
<http://www.SpeakingExpert.com>
- **Improv For Speakers** – Use the techniques of improv comedy to be a better, more authentic, and yes, funnier speaker!  
<http://www.ImprovForSpeakers.com>
- **The Speaking School** - A four day intensive workshop that dramatically improves your speaking skills in a very short period of time. Fun, interactive, and limited to six people at a time!  
<http://www.TheSpeakingSchool.com>
- **Paid Public Speaker** – Group coaching program designed to help you build a solid speaking income in six months  
<http://paidpublicspeaker.com/>
- **FredGleek.com** - Every speaker should learn how to package their knowledge and experience into information products. Fred's blog has over a thousand of pages (for free) that shows you how to do just that.  
<http://www.FredGleek.com>
- **Publishing A Book** – Every speaker should also have a book that positions them as an expert, markets their services, and makes them money. This is a group coaching program that takes you through that process  
<http://www.publishingabook.com/>
- **Motivational Smart Ass**– Avish's humor blog. Personal development for people with a sense of humor.  
<http://www.MotivationalSmartAss.com>
- **AvishParashar.com** – Avish's speaking information site.  
<http://www.AvishParashar.com>

<http://www.SpeakingExpert.com>  
<http://www.TheSpeakingSchool.com>  
<http://www.ImprovForSpeakers.com>