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## PLANNING YOUR NEXT EVENT: CAN ALL SPEAKERS TALK?

Although it was flattering to receive an invitation to speak on his specialist subject, David Johnson had never presented to a large audience before. He was nervous, not only about the reception his ideas would receive but also about his under-developed presentation skills. The invitation provided him with no help on either topic and asked only for a written version of the talk on disk in advance of the event.

Some seminars are simply a list of guest speakers following one another onto the stage to describe their experiences or to stimulate controversy with a new theory. Other events will invite a single guest speaker to add authority to the subject matter and to give the audience a change of face and a change of pace.

In order to get the best possible performance from your speakers, they need to be cosseted, spoiled and micro-managed. Those with a top reputation in their field will be expensive and in high demand so make your booking really far in advance; twelve months is not uncommon. You may get lucky with a late cancellation but don't put money on it!

Treat your speakers like the honored guests that they are. Take care of their travel arrangements, accommodation and rehearsal with enormous attention to detail. Brief them thoroughly about the event, listen carefully to their needs, act quickly and appropriately to solve problems and collect feedback from the audience specifically for them.

When using a series of speakers talking on a specific subject, it helps if the audience is not exposed to excessive repetition. Take care to produce a brief for each speaker that considers the subject from different angles and check that they are not straying too far from their given viewpoint as they develop their presentations.

To achieve maximum value from their presentations, especially where the event has scientific or technical merit, it is fairly customary to publish the proceedings of the event as a complete volume. However to acquire the narrative of a 30-minute talk may need one or two month's notice to your speakers followed by a series of regular reminders. Remember that they will almost all have a real job to do as well as preparing for your event.

Much better to video record the seminar and make the DVD available to delegates a week or two later.

The largest assumption and therefore the largest mistake that an event organizer can make is to presuppose that all speakers have highly developed presentation skills. Many theoretical experts do not have the flair to make a talk stimulating, however your event would lose the necessary balance if some opinions were unrepresented.

For David Johnson, his nervousness was eased greatly by the event organizers. They called him regularly to check progress and, through informal discussion, discovered his apprehension about speaking to a large audience. By recommending a voice and presentation coach who was able to improve his capability and confidence, the organizers guaranteed success not only for themselves, but for David too.