



HOW DID ANDY GET STARTED

“How did you get this great job?” and “How can I become a public speaker?” are the two most commonly asked questions of Andy. With such limited time to answer that question after a speech, he's put the answers on paper. For those of you who are genuinely interested, this article could be of powerful importance!

IN THE BEGINNING...

I must open by explaining about my former speaking partner, Stuart Saunders. From 1992 to late 1998, we did all of our presentations together. When we both got married and he started having children, we decided to divide the speaking between us. We thus stopped traveling together. In 2001 we separated our two companies. Stu retained Leadership Innovations Inc., the summer camp and our October leadership conference, while I started Andy Thibodeau Impact Programs. We continue to be great friends and share contacts and insights.

Stu and I have known each other since grade 3. In elementary school and high school we were both active athletes and student council leaders. Our schooling together concluded with us being students' council executives in our final year of high school, 1988-'89. I was president and Stu was activities director. It was through council that we developed a friendship that shared the love of being on stage, running events, helping others and making our audiences laugh and cheer. Stu went to college briefly and ended up in clothing sales, working for a company that wanted to expand into the high school market. I was in university, still active on students' council, and majoring in history to eventually become a high school teacher. Socially, we became closer after high school. In December of '91, when we were both 21 and I was in third year, Stu was making a clothing presentation to all of the students' council presidents in our hometown of London, Ontario. For years London's student leaders have had an organization that meets monthly to discuss issues. Stu wisely decided to sit through the rest of the meeting to hear what was of importance to these leaders. They were complaining that not enough people came to their meetings and they should do more for London's councils. Stu suggested that they organize a one-day conference for all of the city's leaders. They loved the idea, but it soon faltered because they agreed that they had no money to hire any sort of quality speaker. That was when Stu piped up and said that he would love to speak to their conference for free. He had a tremendous amount of experience in leadership and being on stage and would love to talk about it. They tentatively agreed to his idea, and the next day called him and said it was a go! However, to Stu's shock, they requested a presentation that was an hour and a half in length! Thinking quickly, he convinced them that he would do it if his former students' council partner Andy would help him. That's when Stu gave me a call, and it changed my life.

Stu knew I wanted to be a teacher and that I loved talking about leadership and school spirit. He also knew that for two years I had volunteered to speak to the grade 8 classes in June at the 4 elementary schools that fed my high school. My message to them was to get involved in school and “dare to care”. When he called and asked for my help, I quickly jumped at this exciting opportunity. We met 3 times over a week and a half to practice a presentation that combined energy and humour with motivating leadership stories and useful tips for improving students' councils. I fully went into that day thinking it would be a fun way to gain experience in teaching, give back to my community, and unleash years of lessons locked in my head. Stu also saw the benefits in improving interest in his school spirit clothing. Our preparation and years of leadership and speaking experiences paid off BIG TIME! Three schools approached us after the speech to ask us if we could speak to their students! We were floored! Over the next few weeks we arranged to speak at those schools in February at a \$150 a school for two 45-minute assemblies. Our thought was that this would be a fun way to make a little income while helping others and gaining valuable experience for my teaching. We developed a totally different talk over the weeks prior to our landmark February 13th

school presentation. Its focus was to encourage students to get involved (don't be afraid of looking stupid, do what you want to do), dare to care, and that the greatest reward of school is your education and friendships. All 3 schools went well, each one an improvement on the previous one. Our big break occurred late that month when a large leadership conference for London and the surrounding 6 counties had its keynote speaker cancel at the last minute. Stu and I ran this exact annual conference four years earlier while in high school! Stu's clothing company also happened to have the T-shirt contract for the conference; thus they gave him a call to bail them out. This was huge because this one conference speech allowed even more schools to see us. A group from Canada's East Coast saw us, which led to our first out-of-province appearance that May. This conference was one of twelve for our province thus organizers from other regions who attended were impressed by our work. Finally, a representative from Jostens, the ring, yearbook & photography company, was at the conference and remembered us from our days in high school. He was unable to attend that night but showed up at our next school speech. He took us out for lunch afterwards and said that Jostens gets requests for youth speakers all of the time. The few speakers he knew of were Americans who charged big dollars and were not easily accessible. Jostens was looking for presenters like us! Dave set up a meeting with his manager and us a few weeks later. Suddenly, after 4 presentations, we were signing a 6-year speaking sponsorship contract with North America's largest school recognition company! Jostens agreed to help market our services to schools and youth conferences across Canada, including paying for flyers and a promo video. In return we agreed to charge schools with Jostens products a lower fee. Gradually over two years, reps would promote us to a conference or schools, get good feedback, tell other reps and book more schools and conferences. From there, the snowball effect took over. A conference speech led to school presentations, one school would tell another school about us, one Jostens rep would recommend us to another rep, so that every time we got on stage and made a difference with others, it made a big difference in our career and reputation. In the 1992 – '93 school year, we spoke part-time as I took one university course. We did not know if we wanted to make this our living and we thus visited about 70 schools and conferences. By early '93, we were convinced that this was a lifestyle we could really enjoy and thus pushed forward to make a full-time career out of speaking. In 1993-'94 we began weeklong school tours to other provinces that suddenly jumped our income levels. About 130 schools and conferences had us visit that year. From the fall of '94 onward, we averaged 175 bookings a year. In 1994 we keynoted the Canadian Student Leadership Conference, showing us that we had risen to near the top of our profession in 2 years. When we keynoted the Newfoundland Student Leadership Conference in the fall of 1995, it made us the first and only speakers to present at all 10 provincial youth leadership conferences. In June of 1996 we spoke at the US national student leadership conference, dramatically altering our speaking career. In 1995-'96, we gave 2 presentations in states. In 1996-'97, we visited 47 schools and conferences south of the border, including 10 state student leadership conventions. At one point in 2002-03 the US made up 60% of my income! Now that I have a family, my US work has dropped to 15 per cent and has been replaced by more

local bookings. I continue to average about 100 schools, 45 conferences, and 40 college/university presentations each year. I tend to be away about 25 to 33% of the evenings across the school year, with late August to early December; late January to mid May being my "busy season". The fall of 1995 saw Stu and I begin to take over the marketing of our speaking. We found Jostens reps were getting busier and unable to help as much. Our new policies of faxing and then calling all of the schools that had seen us at a conference gave us more than 40 new bookings that year. We incorporated an excellent follow-up workshop to compliment our school and conference presentations. By late 1993 we had begun delivering totally different presentations to youth conferences compared to school assemblies. They were very different audiences; thus we had to give them something new. My "Dare to Care" talk was created in the spring of '94 while Stu's favourite conference presentation "Seize Today" began in the fall of '95. I delivered my first university/college presentation in the spring of 1993 and I now deliver 20-30 post-secondary presentations each year (of which around 15 are at my alma mater, the University of Western Ontario). All of these factors allowed us to begin earning a good middle class income and view this as a long-term career with plenty of potential for challenge, happiness, and the opportunity to help others

In the fall of 1998, Stu had his second child. That was when we decided to divide our speaking between the two of us. The advantage of dividing the work between 1998 and 2001 was that: 1) We had more time at home ... at first. Then we each got as busy as we were in 1998 ... in fact, I got even busier! 2) We helped more students in less time. There are not many people who speak at schools for a living, so there is always a

need to get our positive messages out there. 3) We made more money. This is not the driving force of our life but hey ... if you are away as much as we were, you might as well be bringing home good money. It keeps the wife happy! 4) It was cheaper for the schools and conferences that had to fly us in to speak. They now only had to pay one airline ticket and half the food expenses.

In the summer of 2001 I made the next major step in my career. I left my partnership with Stu to form my own company, Andy's IMPACT presentations. I found it too busy to manage my speaking career and that of Stu and another speaker named Philly D. Also, Stu was looking to speak less because of his desire to spend time with his kids and develop his summer leadership camps. Now I just concentrate on my speaking and doing the family, friend and church events I enjoy. Through my association with the Stu's company, Leadership Innovations, I am part of other projects. In 1992 we founded the Canadian Spirit magazine, a student leadership publication distributed to over 1,600 high schools across Canada. Sponsored by Sights & Sounds Video Dance Party, it is now a web-only publication located at www.canadianspirit.ca. In 1993, we started Youth Leadership Camps Canada at a facility located in London. Each year over 250 young leaders are trained in a program that continues strong today under Stu's guidance. I also assist Leadership Innovations with The Ontario Student Leadership Conference. As Canada's second largest student leadership gathering, it annually reaches over 600 youth from across the province. For more info on Stu's company, check out www.leadershipinnovations.com. I have made a full-time commitment to improving leadership and empowering individuals across Canada and the United States. I am so blessed to have the opportunity to travel, help others, and meet so many beautiful and inspiring people every day!

INSIGHTS ON BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL SPEAKER

1. My Experience Will Not Be Yours

I should clearly begin by saying that every professional speaker I know has a different story on how he or she got started. Some started early in their 20's, while others began their careers much later in their lives. What is rare about my story is that it was my first and still only career after school. My point is for you to please avoid comparisons between yourself and the success levels of other speakers. The exact circumstances are just not going to be repeated for you. For example, Stu and my Jostens sponsorship was a huge benefit early in my career that I can guarantee you will not happen again. The situation of the early 1990's will not be repeated. At the time, Jostens reps and management were looking to sponsor Canadian talent because there was only one quality Canadian speaker at that time. (Alvin Law, an amazing presenter out of Yorkton, Saskatchewan, now based in Calgary, Alberta. www.alvinlaw.com. He is a good friend!) I feel bad when I honestly respond to the inquiry, "do you think Jostens would do that for me?" with a "no, I really doubt it." However, this next section highlights what all the speakers I know have in common that have gained them success.

2. Experience

Whatever your topic, it is imperative you have actual experience living in that lifestyle in order to be powerful and effective on stage. Right from the beginning I spoke about getting involved and caring because that is what I did in high school. I spoke to high schools because it was something I had the most experience with and felt the most passionate about. Thus my stories, insight and humour reached my audience because I knew their situation. The next obvious calling was student leadership conferences because as an experienced student leader at the elementary, secondary, and university levels, my experiences and insights became greatly valued. I talk about my experiences and my beliefs. This is very important. My speech teacher at university correctly taught us that an audience's first question when you "get on-stage" is "why are you talking to me?" You must answer this question throughout the talk by telling personal stories and insights that allow people to get to know you. Don't rely on famous stories or jokes to get across your point. Tell stories from your past or of someone you know. What is your opinion on that topic? What gets you excited or dismayed? What did you learn and how can the audience benefit from your experiences?

For Stu and I, our hilarious and powerful stories about our experiences have been the key to our success. We related personal stories on everything from negative peer pressure, self-doubt, the fun and friendships of

being involved in sports and leadership, the challenges of students' councils and the lessons I learned. Our audiences listened because they could relate! Its important to note that while talking about personal success is easy; it is very important and more difficult to convey stories of personal failure. I know that Stu and my open admission to many human failings actually increase our audiences' appreciation of us. Too often speakers are perceived as the "know-it-all's" who are on-stage because they are so perfect. The reality is that people do not want to listen to someone who they perceive as perfect. They would rather hear someone who they can relate to because everyone makes mistakes and experiences failure and challenge. When I admit that I did not try out for the football team for two years because my first tryout smothered my confidence, I find my audience listening intently and not making fun of me. The attentive silence I get during this story tells me that most are sympathizing with my experience and appreciate my honesty. I am greatly in demand during university orientation weeks because my "first-year student" presentation is a personal journey of the doubts, challenges and successes I experienced during first year. In fact, as of the summer of 1999, I am the only professional speaker in Canada that speaks to college and university students specifically about my personal experiences there

The Lesson: When designing a talk, open with a "why I am here statement" and ensure your speech is based on your stories, experiences and opinions. Not everyone has to agree with you, but they appreciate hearing what YOU think. For example, I open my speech by saying, "I am not here today because I'm perfect or that I'm the greatest student leader of all time! I'm up here today because I love to make people laugh; at the same time I will make you think. The most important reason that I'm up here is because I sat right there, I was a high school student (or student leader, or university leader, or a person working with youth, or whoever I am talking with) just like you. I know the ups and downs, I did things right and wrong, I'm not here because I am perfect, and I'm here because I understand!"

3. Always do extra, because who is watching you?

I am often asked about how I promote my work as a speaker. We are in a unique "industry" where radio ads, magazine ads, or yellow pages listing are just not appropriate. My number one form of promotion is staff and student leaders viewing us at multi-school conferences. My number two form of promotion is the recommendation of a person or school to another school or conference. The rest of our bookings rely on "cold-calls" to conferences or schools where we use our association with someone they know as an "in". For example, I recently booked an all-girls school in Winnipeg which set me up with their "brother" school nearby. Still, ninety percent or more of our bookings depend on word of mouth and someone viewing our presentation. This highlights the incredible need we have to ensure that we deliver a quality performance every time we are on stage. What is a quality presentation? Sure, it's the obvious points such as displaying high energy, making the audience laugh with original material, making people think via powerful insights, and being easy to listen to and understand. However, it's the extras that we give as presenters that have schools and conferences booking us again and again. • Be on time! We arrive at least 20 to 30 minutes early to ensure the auditorium is set up correctly and to meet everyone that arranged the presentation. Realize that the organizers are really counting on you to make a difference so they will be nervous/excited about your arrival. I always have a cellular phone because if I'm going to be less than 30 minutes before my start time I give them call to provide some reassurance.

Get to know the booking party. I ask a lot of questions when I arrive at a school or conference. I use their insights to incorporate what they feel is important in the speech. For example, at schools I learn the mascot name and at least 3 to 6 upcoming events in sports, music, drama and general activities so I can promote them in the body of the speech. Time and again I get the comment from school leaders how much they appreciate my efforts to personalize my speech to promote their activities. At conferences, smartly incorporating the conference theme into the presentation shows that you respect their choice. Most important is getting the names of those who arranged the visit correct so I can thank them both at the beginning and end of the speech.

- Be on time, part two. I will learn quickly upon my arrival what is the exact length time I have for my presentation. Both schools and conferences have busy schedules so you must respect the time they give you without hesitation. Thus, I have delivered 30-minute versions of my speech and I have delivered hour and half versions. The respect you get from the booking party for being on time will only enhance your reputation as a "professional".

- Perform the extras! At schools, this can include pulling the student leaders on stage for a final cheer if there is time at the speech's conclusion. I always get out into the audience and shake the hands of the students as they leave the show. I often have lunch with the leaders, especially when it is part of my leadership workshop. I have also done the following: worn their school clothing while speaking; performed a fashion show with school clothing; performed in chubby bunny contests (marshmallow stuffing in the mouth) and milk chugs; helped supervise an on-stage contest; offer to read out that days' announcements while on stage. At conferences, this can include other types of extras. For example: performing cheers, icebreakers or games whenever needed; eating meals with the delegates and specifically "spreading yourself out" so as not to show favourites amongst the crowd; keep in close contact with the conference organizers so you can be on hand to help or give insight; meet as many people as you can and smile and say "hi" to everyone!
- Provide more! Stu and my income took a serious increase when we perfected our powerful "Making Care Contagious" workshop. For an extra fee, schools or conferences get the opportunity to learn "hands-on" insight that allows the student leaders to build on the messages we provide in the keynote. We published a book with all of these tips and give it to the schools that book the session and sell them at the conferences. We also provide a handout for all that participate.

4. Get an Education! What type of Education?

Another frequently asked question asked of me is, "what did you take at university in order to get this job?" Well, I don't have good news for those of you who hope that a particular focus in school will prepare you to be a speaker. There is no "subject-pattern" amongst the speakers I know. I was a history/geography major in university, Stu took radio-broadcasting in college, Alvin Law also took radio, Tyler has his outdoor recreational leadership, Sunjay was in engineering, Phil went directly into the workforce managing a DJ company ... well, see what I mean ... no pattern! My only advice, and the advice of many, is to take in school what truly interests you! Do not take a course focus just because of job prospects. Passion and enthusiasm as well as education are among the keys to success in your career. If you cannot get passionate about your subject choice, it will affect your enthusiasm and work ethic. If you really want to become a speaker of some sorts, my only insight is to keep an eye for communication and business courses that can challenge you with classroom presentation opportunities. For example, my university offered an amazing course called "Speech" that focused on improving your presentation skills in front of others. I just happened to be taking the course while Stu and I first began in 1992 and it did a lot in preparing me for being an effective speaker. We would watch ourselves on video after we gave one of the ten required presentations in order to improve our delivery, voice tone and speed, body language, and gain insight on creativity.

I really would encourage you to get a college/university education. For me, university was more than history, geography and psychology subject material. I learned time management by balancing school, student activities, and free time, I learned basics of business such as marketing and budget by organizing orientation week events, and I learned stress management and developed a powerful work ethic. Not to mention how the ability to express your thoughts effectively, both on paper and in voice, was a tremendous benefit of my school experience. "How did you learn to run your business?" I've been asked. The answer, "because as orientation week coordinator I was overseeing a \$55 000 budget at age 22!" "Andy, how do you balance all of the people and events in your life?" The answer, "because I've been doing it since elementary school and I really learned it in university!" School also opens your eyes to value of "life-long learning" and so I read and listen to sources of insight and new ideas. Of course, the largest benefit was the opportunity to perform classroom presentations at a higher level. This significantly helps your speaking abilities because professors are critiquing you. I then challenged myself further by being active with students' council and learning to speak to new people in groups of 1, 5 or 500 via the many activities I volunteered for. This included being a tour guide for my college and joining the "spirit team" to set up activities. Critical for me was my three-year membership of our orientation week team. It involved organizing a weeks-worth of activities, leading cheers, giving speeches, meeting tons of people and answering their questions, and staying upbeat and positive during long days of activities. All of this provided me tremendous people skills that were critical in my speaking success. A great side benefit is the extra three to five thousand dollars I earn each year speaking to college/university audiences that greatly rely on my own university references.

Go to school, but realize that the classroom is only fifty percent of your education. The other fifty-percent is displayed via posters on the walls of your school. Join councils, be part of a club, volunteer, and attend activi-

ties. From fashion shows, to pubs, to guest speakers, to special meals, I was there! No wonder I was voted "Most Spirited Male Graduate, 1993!" The extra activities provide some of your fondest school memories and the opportunity to get the well-rounded education that you are paying the big bucks for. As an example, one of our history club meetings featured one of our professors give an incredibly interested account of his flight from the Nazi's while a young boy in France during the war. Now that is living history! I would have never heard this unless I took the time to attend the meeting.

5. The biggest challenge: Learning to forgive yourself.

Every summer since 1997 I have been a presenter at a fantastic youth leadership camp called "Eagle U". One particularly exciting and powerful element of their program is the "Mentor Workshop". This is when the participants, aged 14 to 25, have the opportunity to sit down with men and women in careers and interview them. The questions are always challenging and their interest in my answers is very powerful. When I was recently asked, "what is the greatest challenge you face in your business", I was surprised how an answer suddenly came to mind that I had never thought of in any depth. "Forgiving yourself when you make a mistake. Also, the ability to look at a business partner, employee, client, friend or my wife and say, 'I'm sorry, my mistake, it won't happen again, help me be aware when I have not met your expectations.'" The more I think about my insights to these young people, the more I am convinced that my sudden inspiration was perfectly correct. Without a doubt, the ability to move ahead in life and in business after making a mistake is the key to personal happiness with yourself and your career. Its having an attitude of "okay, I made an error, what can I learn from this, and not look back". No one is perfect! We all make mistakes! From the famous business leaders like Bill Gates to Henry Ford to less famous like me and you, we all will make errors ... some of which qualify under the "what the heck was I thinking?" category! Forgive yourself! Take a deep breath and say, "right now I feel bad but the feeling will go away and I'm not going to let this bring me down!"

As examples, I find myself with many because, again, I'm not perfect! I think about our company's decision in 1995 to take our leadership camp concept, one that was doing marginally well in our home province, and take it suddenly to 4 other provinces across Canada. We had two summers of powerful camps that made a difference with youth, but created a cumbersome office set-up, two unhappy business partners, and \$70 000 plus in debt. We realized during the summer of 1996 the size of our mistake. Yet, with optimism, new ideas, dramatic changes to how we ran the business (we moved to a smaller office, less employees, concentrated on the camp in our home province) and an attitude of "oh well, we wouldn't have known unless we tried", I can tell you that we have not only survived but prospered. The debt is now paid, our speaking career is still booming, and our camp is now selling out and drawing campers from across the continent. All of this, and no one has ever said to us, "you guys were so depressed back then and so awful to be around." Sure, we had our moments of pain and doubt, but by focusing on the positive (we are still in business; the camps did help people; how were we to know this would happen; this year will be great), and by forgiving ourselves, we have moved on. Now, we laugh about those times and comment that it now gives us materials for future speeches. A presentation title could be "How we almost went bankrupt and now we are having the time of our lives!"

Complimenting this attitude of self-forgiveness is the powerful action of saying the following six words: "I admit I made a mistake." Making an error in front of friends, business partners, employees or your loved ones does not show that you are weak or stupid! By acknowledging your error and having the guts to say, "I'm sorry, let me fix this", actually elevates you in their eyes! No one likes spending time with people who "just think they are so perfect!" In fact, by admitting mistakes, you increase people's trust and faith in you! Just think, if you are open about your mistakes, even it makes you "look bad", it means you trust that person (the ultimate compliment you can pay them). It also demonstrates that if you admit your little mistakes, others cannot question your sincerity on other issues in life. People around you will think, "hey, if he tells the truth about things that reveal he made an error, then why would he not tell the truth about anything else."

As I said earlier, I credit some of my success in speaking due to my admission on-stage of past errors and lessons I have learned "the hard way". This is not easy! Believe me, my first inclination when I realize that I have "goofed" is to figure out a quick reason why it someone/something else's fault. A part of me feels embarrassed because I feel I have an image to maintain as a husband, business partner, friend, or employer that

doesn't allow me to error. Over the last few years especially, because of my close association with Stu as a former business partner and Lizz my wife, I have learned to admit mistakes a lot quicker and with less "heated discussion". Wow, what a positive difference it has made in my life! By admitting an error, the anger and disappointment felt by someone else eases very quickly. In turn, their forgiveness comes easier when I admit fault. Thus, we can move on to better things!

Another powerful result of this is that it creates an atmosphere that "its okay to try new things and risk making a mistake." Stu, Lizz and others now seem more willing to say, "My mistake, I'm sorry" and thus making it easier for me to forgive and forget. As a company, we have become more flexible in trying new things in the last few years, leading to some "lessons" and to some powerful results.

6. A Key to Making this Business Work: Enthusiasm

When asked what I've done to bring myself success in my career, and how it can help others in their career choice, my first reaction was "enthusiasm!" I truly feel that everyone has it inside himself or herself to be genuinely enthusiastic about elements of their life. But, because of self-doubt, negative peer pressure, or past failures, many people cover up their enthusiasm for what they feel is important to them. If you like something, let that enthusiasm out! I like speaking on stage, I love meeting new people, I love helping others, I get excited that I have an opportunity to travel across the continent and perform ... can't you tell? Of course you can! People always compliment me on my energy! I smile, I move about, I laugh easy, I listen with interest, and I speak with a voice of both power and passion. This enthusiasm has an incredible reaction in my audience, friends and family ... it makes me more genuine and trustworthy! People equate enthusiasm with honesty! If I truly like something or truly believe in something, then the enthusiasm will come naturally in my presentation style and speaking. This carries over to phone marketing where my enthusiasm over the line, for either my work or the abilities of my colleagues on our speakers' bureau, helps get us bookings! The client believes I will make an impact! Keeping in mind, many of these people had at least seen or heard about me, but I still have booked schools where they had never seen me.

7. Gaining speaking experience outside of school.

I must admit that I have little first hand knowledge of starting a speaking career in environments outside of schools and youth conferences. Some of these suggestions are based on my insights and of those who I have met in the business.

For me, my first instances of speaking outside of school were the 4 years of volunteering to talk to the grade eights of the four local elementary schools. My first presentation in 1988 was because I was representing my high school as student president. From 1990 to 1992, it was a matter of me calling the principal and offering to perform the service. Apparently, other speakers give similar stories. First speeches are mostly volunteer opportunities that were created when the speaker called and said, "Hey, can I help?" Rotary & Lions clubs, community and charity groups, schools ... all could just be looking for a short, good, yet free (or low price) presentation at their next meeting. Often, you will have to call and get it. Try smaller groups at first, in order to work on your presentation. Ask for constructive feedback from several audience members. Get it videotaped so you can review later.

Toastmasters International is an amazing way to get hands-on experience giving presentations in a learning and constructive environment. Most major centers have one or many Toastmasters chapters that you can look up in the phone book. Basically, it's a club you join that meets on a monthly basis to hear the presentations of its members. Everyone gets an opportunity to present and to listen and critique.

Rotary Clubs, Optimist Clubs, Churches and Junior Achievement run youth gatherings. Also many churches. They are looking for reasonably priced or volunteer speakers. Again, get letter of reference from these, build up experience, and you will be better as a speaker.

8. Why Do I Do this?

I decided years ago that my mission in life is to "Make Care Contagious". It is thus of little surprise that this is the title of my leadership program and "Dare to Care" is a key part of my school and conference presentations. I have been blessed with a gift ... to reach audiences through my energy, insight and comedy. I feel I must

share this gift with others. I truly believe my work makes a difference. I do not change the outlook of all my audience members, but I know I IMPACT enough that it is worth my effort.

What excites me is that I do not know where they will take the motivation that I have helped to rekindle. My gift to others in turn reaches many more when my audience decides that "Making Care Contagious" is their mission too.

9. Writing a Speech

The following are notes I wrote to a man in his 30's preparing a speech at his former high school's grad. These points are relevant to all motivational talks:

I would focus on telling the grads what high school taught you and how you used it in the world. Grab two to four key points, some thoughtful, some powerful, some funny ... what ever comes to mind. Summarize these points into a quick statement or just as a key word. For example, I just did an athletic banquet, I had a half hour, so I mentioned what competing in sports taught me. I highlighted four key points, all starting with the letter C: Compassion, Character, Courage, Contribution. For each, I had a story from my life or friend's life to outline that point.

I opened the speech with a quick explanation about why I was there. John Campbell in Speech 143 always said that an audience's first thought when they hear a speaker is "why are YOU, talking to ME". Too many speakers never answer that. So, right off the bat, I told them I was there because 1. I love to make people laugh and think, and I plan on making you do both, 2. I care about others, and if my words help you, remind you how special and powerful you are, then my time here is worth it, and 3. most importantly, I sat where you sat! I was a high school athlete just like you! I did some things right, some wrong, but I enjoyed the experience and I would not be the same person I am today if it were not for my involvement in sports. You, for example, could open my saying that you accepted the opportunity to speak at grad because you are a proud graduate of this school. You sat where they sat. You experienced ... (maybe having a class with a teacher that is still there after all these years, or hanging out in an area everyone hangs out at your school ... make it personal to your school), and most importantly, you took the lessons of school into your own life as a 34 year old man. Then you can move into your quick points on what school taught you and how you used it.

Another focus could be good decisions or a bad decision you made within the first year of leaving high school that you hope they can learn from. Personal stories are a key. Just don't tell them to be a leader, make a difference, or work hard. Make the point, but then tell a story from your life or a friend's life that highlights that.

Finally, some food for thought. Brief two sentence quotes or lessons from famous people show intelligence and research. For example, when I talk about caring, I will drop in the line, "as Martin Luther King said, 'not everyone can be famous ... but everyone can be great. What makes you great is the service you give to others'. Another line I use, "The last album the Beatles produced together was called Abbey Road. The last song on the album was simply called 'The End". The final words, of the final Beatles song, says the meaning of life so perfectly : ' and in the end, the love you take, is equal to the love you make'. Keep sharing your love, your care." is how I conclude that speech.

Conclude by restating the key words or phrases again, so they recall the point you are making. Maybe end with a powerful quote.

Future Insights to be added:

Can we team up? How can I join in with you?

Answer: I have been in a partnership on stage, I have been part of a team of speakers that spoke separately but shared office space and contacts, and now I am on my own. I will stay that way forever ... I love being my own boss and yet not having to worry about employees or partners.

You've got to be good! What is good?

Answer: A balance between humour, energy, insight and a message that everyone can leave the room with.

Easy? Hardly! Can people be taught how? A little (like what I share above), but you really have to learn on your own.

The one thing that doesn't change about this business is that there will always be change!

Topics, sources, and how to tailor to audience slightly.

Marketing Insights.

I give deals for conferences because they are my number one source of bookings. My number 2 source are bookings that had me in previous years.

At a conference, when a school is interested, get their information and call/fax/email them first.

At conferences get delegate lists of schools, contacts and email/numbers so you can send promo material out.

Keep good records of your marketing because a no today can be a yes next school year.

Surprise them with how organized you are!

My marketing package: A good website, simple flyers and business cards to handout at conferences,

Good clear fax packs and email packages. I have not used a 1-800 number or a colour flyer in 10 years!