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## **Consulting Tips from the Million Dollar Consultant: How To Gain A Consulting Contract By Speaking**

By Alan Weiss, Ph.D.

Last month I walked off the stage after delivering the keynote speech for a little over an hour to a major financial institution. As I reached the bottom of the steps, the executive vice president responsible for the division grabbed me by the shoulders and said, "We're hiring you. Call me later this week." Well, I only need to hear that once, and I called as ordered. The result was a \$125,000 contract. I've always maintained that professional speaking, apart from being lucrative in its own right, is a fabulous avenue to gain consulting work. (Most consultants are dreadful speakers, even though the basic skills are really easily mastered.) Here's how to establish an environment in which a speaking engagement can be turned into a consulting contract.

1. **Meet the buyer.** Don't deal exclusively with the event planner, even if that person makes the hiring decision. Demand to see the top person whose people are at the event to ensure that his or her objectives will be met (and to begin your relationship).
2. **Do the homework.** Study the organization, its history, its customers, the conference theme, and other pertinent information to make your talk as relevant as possible. Be sure to use specific examples germane to that organization.
3. **Survey the participants.** Ask permission to call several of the participants to learn their views and perspective. Another alternative is to call the customer's customers, to gather that view.
4. **Call the action.** Describe the specific techniques, behavior changes, new knowledge, new procedures or whatever is necessary for the group to make dramatic progress. Make it clear that you've had experience in the area.
5. **Walk the talk.** Practice the speech, including movements, until you're totally comfortable. Arrive early for a rehearsal and sound check. If you need a coach, get one. You only have one opportunity with every new audience.
6. **Close the loop.** Not every buyer will grab you and offer a job when you leave the stage. Send a letter within the week, not with your expense statement, but with your views and perspective on what took place, and suggestion on what to do from here. Offer your help, formally and informally.

If you can, always arrive so that you can sit in the audience during the earlier speakers (if you're not opening the conference). If you can't, talk to them by phone to learn what they'll be saying. Tie your remarks to theirs, especially if they're executives from the client. Make sure you get their names right, and pronounce them correctly. (I once saw a supposed excellent national speaker continually refer to a key person as "Dick Cavett," I guess because he had a fixation on talk show hosts.) Professional speaking is not for everyone. Only for those consultants who want to stand out in a crowd.

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