

Develop a Sure-Fire Topic

If you've decided to expand your speaking repertoire, there are some surprisingly effective ways you can develop a new topic. One technique I use is to identify obstacles, roadblocks or irritations that people face. As patterns began to emerge, it's an "a-ha" moment for a potential new topic. If you notice as few as two people experiencing a problem in their personal lives, careers or organizations, you should start exploring that topic.

Here are some other ways to identify a new topic.

Talk to your local librarian. Often, librarians keep a roster of frequently requested books and topics. Reference librarians at your municipal library, college libraries and even corporate libraries often maintain lists of frequently requested topics. In a way, it's like gaining built-in research.

Tap the industry influentials. Those who serve, influence and regulate members of a selected niche can identify hot industry topics and those destined to become hot. By meeting such industry influentials and establishing relationships with them, you can find today's hot buttons—key issues affecting your targeted industry. You also should:

Attend meetings, conventions, trade shows, and civic, charitable and social functions where industry influentials will be present.

Contact them via a mutual third party and arrange to meet for lunch.

Call influentials directly and identify a topic of direct interest to them.



Read trend-identifying publications. *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and similar publications and corresponding websites will help you get in front of the pack on a particular emerging topic in which you can carve out a strong niche.

Converse with meeting planners. Talk with co-workers, colleagues and meeting planners to see what types of needs are arising among their employees or association members. Many successful topics have sprung from a meeting planner's request for a speaker to provide a certain type of program. Don't be shy—inquire about the meeting planner's needs. A meeting planner who saw one of my articles on marketing was intrigued and invited me to speak on it.

Expand on the subtopics within your existing topics. When I give my

presentation on *Breathing Space*, I have a component on creative procrastination techniques. I expanded this eight-minute segment into a full-hour program. Now, whenever I'm booked to speak at a major convention for a keynote, I also suggest to the meeting planner that my presentation on creative procrastination would make a wonderful complementary break-out session.

Re-read your interviews. If you have been interviewed by newspaper reporters, you'll notice they ask questions which lead you on tangents. When the conversation gets lively, the seeds of another topic sprout. A *USA Today* reporter interviewed me on how people can have more breathing space in their lives, and he asked me about an issue I hadn't considered as a speaking topic. This issue made for a good break-out and I have added it to my speaking repertoire.

Fill a void. When you look at business practices, educational institutions, government, or human interaction, in general, keep a keen eye out for what's missing. Often, great speaking topics develop because some astute individual concluded that, say, business executives are deficient in some skill set. You can develop a speech to fill that gap.

A TOPIC WITH PIZZAZZ

If you can answer “yes” to the following questions, you have identified a promising new topic for your speaking business:

- 1 Is the topic consistent with your background, your experience, and your being? For example, many people who want to speak on leadership have no experience as leaders.
- 2 Do you have a burning passion to speak about this topic? If you do, you'll

drum up energy and enthusiasm that will easily radiate to your audiences.

- 3 Will you go the extra mile to stay at the forefront of your topic by seeking out new data, insights and perspectives to bring to the podium? If you're a how-to speaker, as opposed to a motivating, entertaining, single-message speaker, you really never can etch your presentation in stone.

- 4 Can you add personal stories and anecdotes that will make your presentation memorable and paint a picture in the minds of those listening to you? Stories and anecdotes, if delivered powerfully, can make an indelible impression.

- 5 Have you timed the information you want to deliver on your topic? How much can you say, and in what sequence do you want to say it, for a

one-hour, two-hour, half-day, or all-day presentation? Being a master of your material and delivery is one thing, knowing how much to parcel out based on the allotted time is another.

As society changes, the opportunity to develop new speaking topics will continue to unfold. Simply engaging in life routinely presents any alert person with at least a handful of topics to pursue.



Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC, was awarded the trademark, “The Work-Life Balance Expert®,” from the USPTO after a 10-year campaign. His 56th book,

Simpler Living, was selected by four book clubs. His 60-Second Series is popular in China, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Italy, Poland, Spain, France and Brazil. Visit www.BreathingSpace.com.