

An abstract graphic on the left side of the page. It features three large, white, upward-pointing arrows of varying sizes, stacked vertically. Overlaid on these arrows is a network of thin white lines and small circles, resembling a data visualization or a flowchart. Some of the circles are labeled with numerical values: 0.1, 0.2, 0.3, 0.4, 0.5, and 0.6. The background of this graphic is a dark blue gradient with some light blue and green highlights.

SULLIVAN SPECIAL REPORT:

# TOP TEN REASONS WHY CORPORATE SPEAKERS BUREAUS DON'T WORK



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# TOP TEN REASONS WHY CORPORATE SPEAKERS BUREAUS DON'T WORK

By Vickie K. Sullivan, President, Sullivan Speaker Services Inc.

Why have a Corporate Speakers Bureau? To get your message out to your community and target markets.

Yet many company speakers bureaus don't succeed – in fact, they do nothing but suck up staff time and increase administrative costs. After examining a wide variety of corporate speakers bureau operations, I have found the 10 most common reasons why so many don't work. Most fail because of failed process:

## 1. BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME.

This attitude arises after a few speeches. A couple of VP's get invitations to speak and the seed is planted. "If we get calls just out of the blue, then what would happen if we had a corporate speakers bureau?" The PR department is assigned the project, which then sets it up or (more often) hires an agency to do it. The agency does its job, sends out a press release and leaves. Then . . . nothing happens. The phone rings a few times, just like it did before, but now you have a bureaucracy that deals with it. Result: No increase in speaking engagements, and higher administration costs for invitations that would come in anyway.

## 2. IF YOU SAY SO, THEN IT MUST BE TRUE.

This is the opposite of building a bureaucracy. Some organizations act like they have a bureau – they have a web page, buried deep in their company site with one link in and out, saying something like "Ta da! We have a bureau! We'll talk anywhere on anything!" Someone sends out a press release; they may even have a live human being willing to answer the phone. That's not enough. Effective bureaus are more than a contact point to receive calls. You must have a step-by-step

approach to getting more speaking engagements, and then a path to leverage those opportunities into specific results. It's a set of processes, all working together.

## 3. FOCUS IS TOO NARROW.

Many bureaus focus on the warm and fuzzy, such as "exposure," or even "extending our brand." Yes, speaking is great for getting more widely known – but visibility in a vacuum leaves too much money on the table. (Being wasteful in a great economy is silly but tolerable, but it's downright stupid when the economy slows.) Many bureaus focus on incoming calls and invitations, but neglect how the speaking engagements can bring more tangible results.

## 4. MEASURING THE WRONG THINGS.

This one is related to the focus problem. If you are focused on responding, then you'll use the number of incoming calls and invitations to justify the continued existence of the bureau. The truth: Bureau functions can work better if decentralized – so departments get their own calls and handle the invitations themselves. If you broaden your outlook to include what happens as a result of stronger relationships with a community or current clients, or measure the leads the bureau generates for sales, then it's a whole new ball game. Tie the bureau's results to sales, and watch the attention the bureau gets.

## 5. NO PROACTIVE PLAN FOR GETTING SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS.

Because bureaus are focused on the intangibles, sufficient resources don't get assigned to the real task at hand. So staff gets stretched thin and only focuses

on responding to incoming calls rather than increasing speaking engagements. At best, someone prepares a list of goals (such as “50 speeches within the first year”) with no process for achieving them. Staff gets to the real stuff in their spare time.

## **6. GETTING SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS THE HARD WAY.**

This is worse than not having a plan at all. Bureaus in PR departments and agencies assume that the process of getting speaking engagements is just like getting media coverage – research the source, call the contact to pitch to, and keep at it until someone says yes or dies. The reality: This is the worst possible way to get speaking engagements. Professional speakers are now dropping their telemarketing efforts because they know that such prospecting doesn’t work. And when staff keeps doing something that doesn’t work, what happens? They stop doing it, putting the unpleasant task of cold calling and “fishing expedition” RFP’s at the bottom of the to-do list.

## **7. NO STRUCTURE FOR LEVERAGE.**

Getting the speaking engagement and confirming the speakers are just the first steps. Following through to get the benefits from the audience allows for specific results to be attributed to the bureau – which helps at budget time. Again, many bureaus don’t know how to leverage the opportunity, so no structure or process is in place. Opportunities slip between the cracks while everyone is counting incoming calls.

## **8. WRONG SKILL SET FOR STAFF.**

Many bureaus are operated by administrative staff, who do what they do best – respond to calls, send out information, and schedule speakers. Yes, it is important to be detail-oriented, but many don’t have knowledge beyond logistical issues, nor any selling skills. These skill sets are polar opposites, and given a tight labor market, might be difficult to find in one person. (Ever meet a sales professional who relishes paperwork?)  
Idea: Have two people join forces on this project –

front office that is sales-oriented and back office that is detail-oriented. It’s next to impossible to get such resources so long as the measurement is on the warm and fuzzy intangibles (see #4 above).

## **9. MESSAGE NOT CUSTOMIZED.**

I was program chair for an international conference when a proposal came in from a PR firm representing a Fortune 100 company. I immediately rejected it. Why? Because the content was not even close to being relative to our audience and their environment. The PR firm was shocked, thinking the name alone would get the invitation. This is what happens when the material gets generalized in the name of consistency. Many organizations spend big bucks for the “message,” but don’t build a process for flexibility and customizing. Result: Most speaking proposals go into that big round file.

## **10. WEAK INTERNAL SUPPORT.**

Support for a speakers’ bureau is highest in the beginning, during the big rollout. The powers-that-be are on board intellectually, because everyone knows the benefits of visibility and exposure. But that support can quickly disappear once budgets get cut. Some bureaus link media coverage to their efforts, which is a great talking point. When leveraging systems are in place, the bureau can be linked to “dollars in the door,” creating stronger champions for the bureau.

## **BOTTOM LINE:**

Corporate speakers bureaus are like any other tool – how well they work depends on how you work them. Success comes when you use a successful process.

## **ABOUT VICKIE SULLIVAN**

President Sullivan Speaker Services Inc.



Vickie Sullivan is known worldwide as being the foremost expert on generating revenue for high-end experts. Since 1987 she has worked with thousands of experts in a wide variety of industries to launch their big-fee speaking, professional service and book/ product empires in highly lucrative markets. How does she do it? Through customized solutions created with market analysis and research. Vickie's clients report that her market assessments and intelligence gives them a two-year heads-up on the marketplace.

She has been quoted in national publications such as The New York Times, Investor's Business Daily, and Fortune.com....Her articles have been published in Professional Speaker Magazine, Lawyers Weekly, Presentations Magazine and others.

Vickie helps experts find outlets where their messages will sell for the highest fees and get speaking engagements, book deals and professional services assignments that extend their brand and increase revenue and market share in a wide variety of markets and industries.

Vickie speaks internationally on marketing trends and strategies and is the author of *Springboard Marketing™*, *Talking to Strangers™*, *Speak to Sell™*, *Speaking in the Strike Zone™*, and *Your Position of Power™*. Her bi-weekly market intelligence updates *Tips, Trends & Tirades®* are considered a top resource for experts and are distributed throughout the U.S. and in 17 countries.

Vickie graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a BA in Journalism/PR and a minor in Marketing. She and husband Larry Miller reside in Tempe, Arizona, along with their four-legged "child" (the kind that meows) Tigger.

## OTHER RESOURCES

### **VICKIE SULLIVANS SPEAKER SUCCESS KIT: AN EXCLUSIVE THREE CD SET**

Your ultimate, need-to-know source to start playing the speaker's game. In these three CDs – jam-packed with winning content and offered together for the first time – you'll get the pre-eminent scoop from Vickie on the common mistakes and pricey pitfalls you can avoid in starting your speaking career. The CDs include Get Those Bookings: Marketing Strategies for Professional Speakers, Speaking in the Strike Zone: How to Get in Front of a Buying Audience, and Speak to Sell: Using Public Speaking as a Marketing Tool.

### **YOUR POSITION OF POWER: PACKAGING YOUR EXPERTISE FOR HIGH-FEE MARKETS**

Ready to make yourself P.O.P. in the marketplace? You can with Vickie's four CD set that shows you how to flex your own unique Position of Power. Here, she provides a strategic, step-by-step approach to positioning – and communicating – your expertise in ways that will make you a must-have speaker...and draw in your most profitable customers.

### **TALKING TO STRANGERS: EFFECTIVE SALES CONVERSATIONS FOR EXPERTS WHO SPEAK**

In this amazingly comprehensive 7-CD set Vickie down-loads the info to make every conversation count so you can turbo-charge your success...right now. She breaks down – CD by CD – how to make every phone call more effective, how to communicate how valuable you are, how to respond to budget-blues excuses, and how to implement top-tier closing strategies. Vickie's masterful approach will have you summoning your innate courage to speak to strangers...and

command the highest fees possible.

### **SPRINGBOARD MARKETING**

Looking to create currency with a business that prominently plays up your intellectual capital? In this CD set, Vickie enthusiastically unspools a winning consultant program previously revealed only in pricey one-on-one sessions. It plots out the plan to build an infrastructure – driven by speaking – that sets your expertise apart, fine-tunes message development and turns a single speech into a powerful, revenue-generating machine.

### **GET THOSE BOOKINGS: MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR PROFESSIONAL SPEAKERS**

In this CD, you'll find out what to know before you market yourself, how associations and corporations select speakers they pay for, and how you can influence the committees that decide which speakers get hired.

### **SPEAKING IN THE STRIKE ZONE: HOW TO GET IN FRONT OF A BUYING AUDIENCE**

This fast-paced CD features Vickie giving the very latest on market expectations and how you can tailor your format for the highest return.

### **SPEAK TO SELL: USING PUBLIC SPEAKING AS A MARKETING TOOL**

Specifically targeted to those who want to give presentations to sell products, procure clients or promote their ideas, this CD offers a tested, systematic approach to create captivating topics that sell.

All of these products are available for purchase through the Sullivan Speaker Services online store. Visit <http://www.sullivanspeaker.com/products.htm> today!