

An abstract graphic on the left side of the page features three upward-pointing arrows of varying sizes and opacities. A network of thin white lines connects several circular nodes, each labeled with a numerical value: 0.1, 0.2, 0.3, 0.4, 0.5, and 0.6. The background is a dark blue gradient with some light streaks.

SULLIVAN SPECIAL REPORT:

# THE HIGH COST OF BAD ADVICE

# THE HIGH COST OF BAD ADVICE

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

We were sitting at the conference table in my office when it happened. Again. She was calm and professional, especially for someone who had just gone into shock. I spoke gently, watching the color leave her face. I was empathetic but there was nothing else I could do. She had to know. We both sat there for a moment quietly, helpless, nearly hopeless.

What had happened? I had to tell this client why the thousands of dollars she had just spent on printed materials, videos and other promo stuff wouldn't get her any speaking engagements . . . that the information she had received from another marketing consultant was only partially correct . . . that while the ideas from her consultant were indeed clever, they were off-market. Worse yet, all her pain could have been avoided. The good news? Speakers have so many people who can help them—marketing consultants, video producers, copywriters, and presentation skills coaches. The bad news? That video, those colorful brochures, *the wrong advice*—all cost far more than the fee you paid the consultant. It's so easy to choose the wrong person—everyone seems knowledgeable and has great testimonials. When everyone appears to be the same, it's easy to cut corners by deciding on a price basis. Claims can be interpreted in a variety of ways. So how can you tell the difference between an effective consultant and a well-meaning person with a little bit of truth and a whole lot of hype? Let's look at some common claims, along with the translation, the truth, and the actions you can take:

**Claim:** "I've worked with (famous speaker's name)."

**Translation:** Because they are famous and I've worked with them, I can make you famous too.

**Truth:** Not necessarily. This "coattail association" is used all the time, but the assumption is not always

correct. Back in the last century, when the world was different, this person helped a speaker who is now well known. Does this mean that they have continued that track record? Have they kept up to date? Is their information obsolete? Avoid jumping to conclusions about their role. If the speaker is a marketing whiz and the marketing rep was taking orders, can the rep claim to be a positioning expert? You'll find that many will. Not enough people ask the prospective provider specific questions about this. Did a speaker get booked only because of their video or promotional materials?

**Action:** Find out FROM THE SPEAKER what role the consultant played. Don't depend on the letters or quotes – call or email the speaker and ask specific questions such as:

- What role did this person play in your business?
- What was the result of that role?
- Did he/she do (insert your needs) for you? If so, how valuable was that?

**Claim:** So-and-so said: "I know the speaking business inside and out."

**Translation:** If so and so said it, it must be true.

**Truth:** Only according to that particular person. People compare the consultant's work to what they knew before. If a new speaker didn't have any knowledge before, and someone provided them with info that everyone in NSA knows, then to that particular speaker, the consultant is a guru. If you are an NSA member and already know those ideas, then the consultant is just well informed. Does so-and-so believe this because of great writing skills? That's great—but only if writing skills are what you need. Just don't assume that broad claims such as "knows the business" means that you will have a like experience.

**Action:** Call the provider and judge for yourself. Get specific about the role they played. Can they demonstrate their claims? Talk to them about their clients and compare yourself to theirs. Do they work mainly with new speakers or with experienced ones? Humorists or experts? Are their clients all from one group, such as NSA? A wide variety of clients reveals the consultant's willingness to customize and the ability to create credibility in different industries.

**Claim:** "I know what gets engagements."

**Translation:** My tools/ideas are all you need to get bookings.

**Truth:** Depends on what the tools are. Providers who offer specific tools, such as videos and promotional material are usually limited to just that. For example, a video producer can't get you bookings with dazzling graphics on video, because the biggest factor in videos is how the footage demonstrates your positioning, something a video producer usually doesn't know.

**Action:** Ask the consultant about the source of their knowledge with questions like:

- Is it from providing services or actually marketing speakers? How do they keep up on trends and changing markets?
- How do they KNOW what gets engagements? And compare that information with other sources you have explored.

**Claim:** "I am a jack of all trades" (aka business growth specialist or something equally general)

**Translation:** I woke up one day and found that my original area is no longer lucrative, so I'm broadening my scope to include this other thing now.

**Truth:** This happens a lot. The market will change and folks will broaden their scope by moving into an area that they are not expert in. (Which is why you never want to pay Vickie for presentation skills coaching or how to use humor in your stories.) Unless you desire to pay to be their guinea pig, run—don't walk—away

from these people. The pros do innovate and expand but they are always up front about it. Pros experiment with established clients, and usually throw the new stuff in for free so they can get enough experience before billing themselves as an expert in a new line.

**Action:** Don't assume that because they are good at one thing, they are good at another. Get clear about their expertise and make sure you separate the track record from the previous experience. If they were an order taker, how do they know market strategy? How does a humorist become a marketing expert?

**Claim:** "Look at these clever ideas!"

**Translation:** Because these ideas are creative, they work.

**Truth:** The speaking industry is full of creative people, so ideas that sound good exist everywhere. The problem: If the idea isn't tied to market intelligence, chances are that it won't work. Don't pay someone to just think up something—you can get that for free from your NSA buddies!

**Action:** No matter how much you like their creativity, ALWAYS check their references. Have an in-depth conversation. Ask: Was there something that you didn't get? Did you implement the ideas/advice? What happened?

**Claim:** "I'm a very successful speaker/trainer/consultant."

**Translation:** Because I do it for myself, I can teach/coach you how to do it.

**Truth:** This kind of credibility is indisputable. There's a big difference, though, between finding what works for you and figuring out what works for *other* people: The latter takes some patience and willingness to suggest strategies that wouldn't work in your own situation. It also takes courage to go beyond one way of doing things.

**Action:** If these folks are speaking at an NSA event,

check them out. Ask yourself: Would this business model work in my situation? Are they recommending only a couple of things? If so, watch out for cookie-cutter solutions.

I've heard it said that speakers will say anything to get booked. Well so do some consultants and service providers. It's up to you to distinguish fact from fiction—so you can avoid the high cost of bad advice.

## 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 online newsletter The Sullivan Report and bi-weekly market intelligence updates Tips and Trends are considered a top resource for experts and are distributed throughout the U.S. and in 12 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 two "children" (the kind that meow) Tigger and Jaz.



## OTHER RESOURCES

### **VICKIE SULLIVAN'S 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 downloads 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!