

004 – Building Momentum

Announcer: Do you dream of living as a speaker, writer, or performer? Do you want to learn to communicate with clarity, focus, and power? In each episode you will learn the secrets of dynamic communication so you can make a living doing what you love.

Welcome to the Art and Business of Public Speaking with your host, who, for over 30 years has helped men and women build exciting careers, Ken Davis.

Brian: Hey, this is your cohost Brian Scheer, for the Art and Business of Public Speaking, where we peek behind the curtain to discover how to create, grow and maintain a successful career as a communicator.

Ken: Hey, this is Ken Davis and I am your host and, hey Brian, I was sitting here thinking, before we do a great interview today, I want to ask you a question, and I haven't prepared you for this. I'm just asking you not to try and answer the way you think I'd want you to answer. But I want you to really answer truthfully, okay?

What makes you walk away from an event saying, "That was an amazing speaker!"? What happened during that event that makes you say, "That was an amazing speaker!"?

Brian: There are a lot of elements that I'm looking for, probably because, in the line of business I'm in. You do have the dynamics, but I can be impressed with that. But I'm going to tell you where I really walk out the door and go, that has made an impact on my life, is when I have a page full of notes that are actionable. That I'm going to take action on right away. They were very clear in their communication. They had their focus that I needed, and they made a call to action for me to make a change in my life in a positive way. And I have it written down so clear that I know what I'm going to do at the next step. I know what the next steps are.

Ken: Wow. That's pretty much in line with what we teach, so that's really your – you're not saying that just because I'm sitting here?

Brian: No. Not at all.

Ken: Because what was that Sunday School teacher that asked the children – spends all summer gathering nuts and builds a big nest and has a big bushy tail and chirps in the trees – and nobody answered. Everybody looked scared, and then one little boy in the back of the room said, well, I think it's a squirrel, but I'm going to say Jesus.

You're not doing that, right?

Brian: I'm not doing that. Absolutely not.

Ken: Let me tell you what mine is. When I walk away – of course, I love to laugh. If somebody can make me laugh, I'm entertained. But, there's something even in humor about the depth of info. About the quality of humor. About the intelligence that's behind it. I watched a TED talk one time, it was called the Blue Zones. And the Blue Zones was about people who – I use this as one of my research projects for my book *Fully Alive*. And the Blue Zones was about three or four places in the world where

people live into their hundreds on a consistent basis. And just the depth of that information was absolutely amazing.

And I guess the other thing is a great story. One of the stories in there was of a man who was 97. He was a doctor. He was putting up a fence in his back yard, and rather than hire somebody, he tried to save up money and he put it up by himself. Digging the post holes, doing all of the heavy work. And that night he ended up in the hospital doing surgery, like he always did. What a great story. And it talked about the active life.

So that's what I like, and I just wanted to do that. That whole story aspect is one of the reasons I'm excited about today's guest. Carol Kent is a friend of mine. We've been friends for about 30 years. Carol has written 20 books. She's been published in a variety of magazines. She's created study guides, Bible studies and even several DVD teaching series.

She founded, Carol and her family founded Speak Up for Hope, a non-profit organization helping inmates and their families adjust to their – what she calls “new normal.” And oftentimes Carol and her husband actually speak together. And by the way Brian, you know this. I couldn't get my wife Diane – I love her so much – but if I ever brought her up on stage, the next day there would be a memorial for me.

But they speak together. She holds a Masters degree in Communication Arts, but Carol is an excellent communicator. And at the end of this unbelievable interview I'm going to tell you what I think is the most valuable aspect of what Carol does. But you're going to love this. Enjoy Carol Kent.

Ken: Carol Kent. What an exciting day this is, to have you on the Art and Business of Public Speaking. Thank you so much for joining us.

Carol: Ken, it is a privilege to be taping this interview with you. And I respect and love what you do so much. Thanks for being a great example to all of us who speak.

Ken: You are so welcome. Hey, I was trying to think. How long ago – I know it was around the time George Washington ran for President – How did we meet, first?

Carol: I think it was through Youth for Christ in Michigan through an old friend of ours, Ray Clendenen who said, you have to meet Ken Davis and he has to meet you. And as I recall, we met in an old Big Boy and sat in a booth and ate some pretty terrible food, but boy did we have a great connection.

Ken: I remember that...Okay, I have to be honest. I don't remember that, but I am so glad that we did have that chance to meet. I do remember Ray Clendenen. Hey, what a gift. This is so apropos to the whole idea of speaking. What a gift a man has or a woman has when they exercise the ability to bring people together.

Carol: It's so powerful, and Ray was one of my all-time mentors. He hired me to be on a singing teen team for Youth for Christ during my summers in between my college years. And I was the only terrible singer in the group. Everybody else had had international touring experience.

And I went to him one day, Ken, and I said, Ray, I'm dragging the quality of this group down. You need to let me go. I love being on the team, but I'm not good for the group. And he looked at me and he said, Carol, we don't put these groups together so that we can have great music. We put them together so that we can reach kids for Christ. And he said, young lady, you have personality.

Ken: I know you, so I can tell our listeners this. Carol Kent is a very attractive lady. But I was just going to say, I remember when people used to try to get me to date their sisters or something. They would say, well, she has great personality. So you ended up with everything, girl.

Listen, in your bio, or looking at your bio, I saw that you have written 20 books. That is amazing.

Carol: Well, you just keep writing year after years, and if publishers like you, they offer you a little bit of an advance. And that's always an advantage when you're making a living with speaking and writing. And it just turned out that I've lived a lot of years and kept at it.

Ken: Well that's great. Now, do you enjoy writing, Carol?

Carol: I would say I do not enjoy writing. I enjoy having written.

Ken: I love it.

Carol: It's a tough discipline and I sit there until the ideas flow and I'm usually in a gathering mode for a couple of years before I write a major project. And so it's a process for me. A creative process. But it is hard work.

Ken: I have said, and I'm sure there may be one of two of our listeners who say, well I don't think that was appropriate. But I have often said that writing book is what I imagine it would be like to give birth to a rose bush. It's so pretty once it's there, but good night.

Tell me about some of the books you've written. Do you have a favorite?

Carol: Oh, that's like saying, which is your favorite child? My very first book was *Speak Up With Confidence*. I majored in Speech Education and got a Masters in Communication Arts and taught for a couple of years until I realized that public speaking was a whole lot more fun than teaching.

So that book was the first and it has had three different covers and many different editions and has been updated and I didn't write it to be a text book, but it actually has become a book that it is used in many Christian universities and colleges in their classroom experience. So that's been a lot of fun.

Ken: That's great. You may remember this. You and your husband were in our home in Denver, Colorado the day that my first shipment of books. Do you remember that?

Carol: I do. That was so much fun. There's nothing quite like opening a box of your first book and seeing it and holding it and feeling the texture and celebrating.

Ken: I remember I yelled, it's a boy! We've kind of travelled in parallel universes here. My first book was, *How to Speak to Youth and Keep Them Awake at the Same Time*. I think Group Magazine published that. Later, Youth Specialties. So it's very exciting to talk to you because I really believe you have some perspectives that we can offer in the Art and Business of Public Speaking that'll be helpful to our listeners.

Let me get right down to some questions. The reason that we got into this whole teaching thing, and I'm wondering about you to, is the letters that came over and over again, asking you, how did you get started. How do you answer people who ask that question?

Carol: Well I think the most asked question I have ever had as a communications trainer is, how did you break into Christian public speaking? And people are hoping they can get the name of an agent, or they can find out who you used as your designer. And it was so amazing to me to realize that as I got started, it was people telling people that they were challenged, inspired or encouraged, or they learned something. So, my business of speaking for Life's Work was actually people telling people and then momentum began to fly.

First I was in a three state area of the Midwest, and then people who had heard me moved to other places in the country and I started getting involved in women's retreat and conference speaking. And so I did several large events like that, and the momentum was so great that in 1997 I was turning away more speaking engagements than I was able to say to. That was actually when we launched Speak Up Speaker Services – A Speaker's Bureau. Because people would say, if you can't come, who do you recommend?

So it was really - I wish I could say I had a ten year plan, and I did proper goal setting to get into this business. But I think when you and I prepare ourselves well, and we do excellent work every time we stand in front of an audience, the people in that audience begin the buzz. And they start telling others. So I just tried to do the best job I could do every single time.

And somehow the word spread, and it spread like wildfire. I never could have imagined I could make a living doing this

Ken: Now, you know, as a speaker, I just heard you say something, and I would love to hear how you address this. As a speaker, you know that there was no one you could go to who could fill your calendar, right?

Carol: No one.

Ken: But you have a booking agency, and certainly some people inquired of you as a booking agent, saying I have an empty calendar, so I want to sign with you. Fill up my calendar. What would be your advice to those people?

Carol: It would be – that does not work. It really never works when somebody has an aspiration of speaking and they simply long to be a communicator. They first need to

work on honing their craft. Are they speaking and articulating their words well? Do they have bullet points and ideas they can convey with dynamic illustrations? I always say, the proper balance in any speech I give is a little bit of laughter and a little bit of tears and some good substance in between. And that seems to work really well for me.

You're incredibly funny, so you can do all funny once in a while. But I like to balance it with illustrations that touch the heart. And then, as you find that you've honed that skill, that's the time to begin looking for people who will book you. And an agency is never going to do it if you're not able to generate anything on your own.

Ken: Right. You own your own market. You build and own your own market. And an agency basically is able to help you do some of the work – basically the agencies that I've worked with, and even the management that I have now, help me take care of the work that I don't want to do. My job basically is to stand up there and do what I do.

It's interesting how parallel our thinking is in this regard. We just might have to, as we get older, and I'm much older than you...

Carol: Oh, so much older.

Ken: We might just have to team up, because we're so much on the same page on some of this. So, speaking of this, and the whole idea of an agency, and bringing on other people to help you, how do you know when you need to bring someone else on? When you should not handle this alone.

Carol: When you're walking around half-dead because you can no longer keep up with the workload. I found that because I was good at the answering of correspondence and I was good on the phone calls – I knew how to ask the right questions to try to figure out how much a meeting planner would be able to budget for an honorarium, I could handle all of that.

Well, some people aren't good at that. They really need the help. But, since I could do it well, I was doing too much of it. And that was robbing me of the time it would take to develop ideas for writing books that would then give me a beautiful piece of product that people could buy at the end of my presentation.

And so I found it was simply, I was coming to the point of, am I going to continue to do all of the correspondence, handle all of the calls or hire somebody who would be good at that, and then I could spend my time developing great material, writing excellent books, and doing the marketing of those books through interviews, and saying yes to more speaking engagements? I tend to love what I do. Ken, I work at my favorite hobby. If I could do anything on any day, I would be standing in front of an auditorium inspiring them and encouraging them, helping them to get over their fears and helping them to hold on to hope in the middle of a crisis.

That makes me weep and pound the table. I get passionate about it. And so I like to hire people to be in charge of shipping the right number of books. And hire people to do the nitty gritty of travel and getting the plane tickets ordered. And it really became a

necessity if I was going to create new material that I would have to bring at least one person on, and eventually several people on board to help me with those things that I shouldn't be spending my time on, to do my best at what I was good at.

Ken: Wow. You know, it's interesting. That is a dilemma, and for our listeners out there who want to learn about the Art and Business of Public Speaking, the dilemma is this. You reach a certain point, and I'm interested in hearing your response to this, you reach a certain point in your career where you realize that you need that. But at the point you make that decision that you need someone else, you also realize that that's going to require an investment.

In other words, you have to pay that person. And I have found, every single time when I felt bottled up, when I felt like I had reached the extent of what I could handle, and then searched diligently for someone who was gifted to help me move further, I hired them. That fell directly into the expense column. But I would be willing to say that it was never more than just a couple of weeks. Sometimes maybe a month or two before that person paid for themselves. What they freed me up to do allowed us to produce more material. Allowed us to be more dynamic and – what would you say? Present, when we were giving our presentations. And you just suddenly realize that that was an investment that was worthwhile. Did you find that as well?

Carol: Ten times over. I would see it again and again, Ken. And I was on the frugal side. I'm a preacher's kid and we never lived on much money. And so I grew up really knowing the value of a dollar and not wanting to spend anything in an unnecessary way. And the minute I hired someone to help me with all of the basics that we already described in this interview, my production level went up.

When I hired someone to come on board to help with the placing of speakers and Speak Up Speaker Services, we had more gigs to offer people. It was just an amazing formula, how putting up the money, when I thought I couldn't afford it, became the very thing that propelled me toward greater financial success.

Ken: I just can't encourage people enough. It's such an interesting dynamic of how, when you first start, especially if this has just been a dream and you've never acted upon it. You begin to put your work together, and then the phone rings, and you answer the phone and somebody wants you to come. And you go through the process – we teach a process of how to decide what you ask for, and then suddenly you're making a living.

All of that – that is such a wonderful track to be on, and to realize that if you are willing to make the investment, and you're passionate about what you do, it just continues. It just continues to grow. And here's what's exciting. There's only one thing you beat the table over. Changing lives. Almost every interview we have with successful speakers isn't about making as much money as you can possibly make. Isn't about being able to buy an airplane, or whatever it might be, although some of those privileges have come our way. It's about really impacting lives. Making lives better.

I know better that don't share my same faith basis who are successful in the art of public speaking because they're passionate about changing lives. They have something to give rather than to get. Do you buy into that?

Carol: I buy into it 100%. Ken, before we leave the subject of hiring people, I just wanted to give a good piece of advice. Don't hire somebody full time when you're a part time professional speaker, or you really will go under financially. Hire somebody for part time hours where you're not having to pay all of the benefits. That's a mistake I've seen others make, thinking that once they hire someone, they will be tremendously professional and everything good will happen. But just go with part time in the beginning.

But oh how you are right now. We are in the business of changing lives, and igniting the imagination of people and helping them to fulfill their dreams, and in my case, due to a crisis level experience my husband and I have gone through, I discovered, not by choice, but by default, I became known as a communicator who could help people get through the tough stuff, and make life changing choices that would make their lives better, even in the middle of difficult circumstances.

Ken: You know, we had a discussion here before you joined us, and we have already decided that we would like you to come back some time to speak specifically about how this personal crisis has given you a platform for speaking into people's lives who are going through the same kind of crisis. And we'd like to devote the entire time to that. But, can you give in a nutshell – and we're going to talk about this later, too – you tend to go long – nutshells are not your forte, but can you give just a little idea of what happened in your life and how you're encouraging other people now?

Carol: Yes. My husband Gene and I have an only child – a Naval Academy graduate, who had great promise. He met a previously married woman with two children and married her. There were issues involving abuse, and it appeared that a man who had multiple allegations of abuse against him was about to get unsupervised visitation with two vulnerable little girls, our son's stepdaughters.

We got a call one year after they were married telling us at 12:35am in the morning that our son had been arrested for the first degree murder of his wife's first husband. Ken, we went through two and a half years and seven postponements of the trial before Jason was convicted and sentenced to life without the possibility in the state of Florida. Which means he will ever only leave a Florida state penitentiary until he is dead on a slab with a tag on his toe. It is a forever sentence.

And so, out of that came shock, despair, heartbreak, financial crisis, and the need to make some new decisions. And I'm here to say there is life after crisis and you can do so.

Ken: And I'm not trying to promote my own book. I wrote a book called *Fully Alive* and in that book I talked about losing my granddaughter in the mountains of Colorado at 10,500 feet. She was four years old. She walked away from a campsite to follow me

into the wilderness to gather wood, and I didn't know that she had come after me. God gloriously allowed for her to be found. And I wrote the book partly around this experience of her being found, and being rescued. And it's an amazing story.

But my point is this. As I began to talk about that situation, I ran into people whose granddaughter was never found. I ran into people whose son or daughter was never found. I ran into a family who were in an accident on the highway and the mom and dad were thrown clear of the car and all the children were lost in that accident.

What amazed me – two things. Number one, my fear was, what right do I have to talk about the fact that God is good all the time. And you and I both know, that's one of the foundations of what we have to communicate. What right did I have? And so, as these people approached me, I was trembling in fear that they would say yes, you got your granddaughter back. Yes, God intervened and your granddaughter was rescued. But what about us? Just the opposite was true.

I had these people beg me, don't ever stop telling people God is good all the time. Now here's the part I want to address to you. Almost all of those people have found themselves in some kind of ministry. Some kind of work that allows them to share what they have learned having gone through crisis with other people. It is part of their own personal healing. Did you find that to be true as well?

Carol: Definitely. And it also brought credibility. I had been teaching a large Bible study fellowship class, and one of the women who was in my class, upon hearing about our son's arrest said, Carol, I used to think you were perfect, but now I think we could be friends.

And so, along with that came a tremendous credibility because people knew that I wasn't just the face that had the Bible verses and the answers and the teaching points, I was somebody who had known great sorrow, and I had discovered that God is faithful in the middle of the journey, and that we can all choose life and hope and thanksgiving in the middle of it.

Ken: And I really appreciate your willingness to share that part of your story. And will you come back some time so we can talk just about that whole subject and people's lives? Will you do that?

Carol: I would love to do that.

Ken: Thank you Carol. I can't wait to have you back on our show.

Brian: Just being able to take the notes on Carol's story and some of the things she was saying, I couldn't help but make a note of, how did you get started – when you asked that question, and how did it get rolling, she said something about, well, it was really word of mouth. People were sharing my story with others, and more and more people were calling, making an incoming call to her. And I just wanted to make a point here. If you don't give them the opportunity to share your story with others, and make it easy for them to do that, you're missing opportunity right there.

Ken: Right. You know what my take away was, Brian? Her honesty. I have such trouble interviewing people who say, well, it was just an easy road for beginning to end. Basically all of us are either – people that say they've been on the mountain top all their lives, I go well, I was their once, and I didn't see you there. People are either going to enter into difficult times, or their just coming out of difficult times. But everybody goes through this. But I really love her honesty.

Brian: And I think an important point to that, it's the team you have around you, and when you enter those difficult times, how that team can support you and pull you out, and how you can do the same thing with your team as well.

I know that our team, we're always encouraging one another, and when we see something going in a wrong direction, or somebody with an attitude that needs a little check, we're all there. We're all ready to help one another see that from a different perspective.

Ken: I noticed you were looking right at me when you said the attitude that needs a little check.

Brian: Yes.

Ken: And in that same regard of encouragement, because we're just short on time here, I'm going to give today's Road Trip.

Brian: Road Tip.

Ken: Here's today's Road Tip that was inspired by sitting right next to my team member Brian.

Bring breath mints on every event. Bring breath mints. Now you may think we're joking on that. We're not. You will end up talking to people, and it's amazing how, no matter how good your speech is, if you end up talking to people afterwards and they go home, I guarantee you, if you haven't had breath mints, probably on the way home, the one thing they'll remember is, man, that guy had the worst breath, or that woman had the worst breath I think I've ever encountered.

Brian: Ken, I am at least 12 feet away from you. How did I inspire you to tell them to bring breath mints from this far away? And I mean, separate rooms.

Ken: I think the information speaks for itself. If it can bleed through two rooms.

Brian: To learn more about Carol and how to find out about her books, her conference, Speak Up With Confidence, and by the way, she let us know that she's providing a \$50 discount for any of our listeners to go to her conference. You can go to our Show Notes page which is dynamiccommunicators.com and you will find that information available there.

The other thing I wanted to talk about was, this podcast covers a lot of different topics, and one of the topics that I wanted to even bring up at the very end of this podcast is a

book that you wrote many years ago called *How to Speak to Youth and Keep Them Awake at the Same Time*.

Ken: I hope we'll do a whole podcast on that idea of speaking to youth in the future. But I did write that book. It's the first book I ever wrote.

Brian: Absolutely. And we wanted to give you an opportunity to get 20% off that book and all of our materials and resources there at dynamiccommunicators.com.

Ken: 20% off. I'm glad you guys are doing that.

Brian: Thanks for joining us. We'll see you next week.