

## 008 – Accepting Opportunities with Eyes Wide Open

Announcer: Do you dream of making a 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: Hi, this is Brian Scheer, cohost of 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, welcome. Good to have you here.

Ken: Well it's good to be here since this is our own studio. I'm just glad to be here too. And at my age, Brian, I'm glad to be anywhere.

Brian: Well, today I'm very excited about our podcast. We have a good friend of yours that you've known for many, many years, Bob Stromberg.

Ken: Absolutely. I think I've known Bob for about 30 years. Way back we did youth events together. He is probably one of the best story tellers I've ever met in my life. We did a video called *Together Again for the First Time*. It took us four days to shoot what we should have been able to shoot in one day, because I just laid on the floor laughing so hard I couldn't even stand it. There's still one little piece of that video that I consider the funniest thing that's ever been put on tape.

Brian: Tape?

Ken: Yeah, I know. Video. Tape. I know. It started out on video and now it's DVD. But you can keep mocking me about my – it's one of the original talkies. Okay? And this is a man who – he has a Gumby face. His face alone, just the change in expressions can make you laugh. And then he does this shadows thing with his hand which is just unbelievable. He can create a whole story by creating shadows. Amazing guy. Did Triple Espresso.

Brian: I knew you were going to say this when we were prepping for this. It's Triple Espresso.

Ken: The Triple Espresso, which was an off-Broadway kind of production that ran longer in Minneapolis than any other thing like it. In San Diego, same thing. Broke all kinds of records. This is an interview you're going to absolutely love. And especially I want you to listen for the part where he talks about being on America's Got Talent and how that catapulted his career.

Brian: Well, at the end of this podcast we're going to share with you how you can get in touch with Bob, because once you listen to this, I know a lot of you are going to want to bring him in or your next event.

Ken: Okay, let's do the interview.

Brian: Let's do it.

Ken: Bob Stromberg, my good friend. So good to have you with us today on the Art and Business of Public Speaking. I feel like I've just opened the door to an old friend. How are you doing?

Bob: I'm doing great. Thank you. It's so great to be talking to you. It's always fun.

Ken: Bob, I was particularly excited to have you involved. You know, we've talked a little bit before the program, before you came to join us, about some of what you've accomplished. But as we were talking about that, I thought, there's some questions I've got to ask this guy based on what he has done. Is it true, or were you just yanking my chain when you said that you were on America's Got Talent. Were you actually on that show?

Bob: I was. I was actually on that show.

Ken: Tell me, what was that like?

Bob: It was a bizarre experience. And actually very fun for me. I enjoyed it. It was just fun. I went to Chicago, they asked me to come down there. I did my performance. As you know, Ken, one of the things that I do and I always tell people who are interested in getting into the art of entertainment, you use everything. You will use every skill you've ever developed in your life. You will use it. And one of the things that I've developed over the years is this ability to make shadows on a flashlight with a screen.

Ken: Yeah, you make that sound so simple. That is absolutely amazing.

Bob: So I thought, I'm going to go on there and do shadows, because America's Got Talent – there's so few people in America or in the world who do that, who do it well. So I went on and auditioned for six people in Chicago. And they all went wow. How did you ever learn that? And I thought, we'll see if they put me on the show or now. So they invited me down to Chicago. There were 25 hundred people there in the theater. I got a standing ovation. They say you're going on to Vegas. And I went to Vegas and it was great fun in Vegas. Oh, that was so great, but I realized along the way at some point, this isn't really a talent show. This is a reality show built around the idea of a talent show. Of a great American talent contest.

Ken: Right. If I can stop you right there, anybody who's watched it for any length of time and seen some of the performers knows this is not really a talent show. I would say you're an exception to that. But go ahead, I'm so excited to hear this story.

Bob: Well, I got to Vegas, and this time, instead of performing for 2500 people who might give me a standing ovation like I got in Chicago, this time they have it set up so the four judges, who are, by the way, four celebrities. Not talent judges, they're celebrities. But it's only them. Four judges and me, and I did my performance, and it was so clear that it was set up so they could have control over the environment there. Nobody can give me a standing ovation. So I got the feeling I think they've kind of decided that I'm not going to go beyond Vegas.

And when I got done with my performance, Howie Mandel, this was the greatest, Howie Mandel looked at me and he sort of just sighed and rubbed his eyes and said, Bob, is that the performance you wanted to do for us? I said, yes it was Howie. And he went, well, okay. Thanks a lot.

And then I had to go to exit interviews. And here's the deal. If you go to the first interview and you burst out crying, then you're done. That's what they're looking for. But if you don't emote enough, they send you to the next interview. And then they send you to the next one. And each one gets a little tougher because then they start saying, you understand your career is over. You know that, don't you?

And so my wife Judy said, well, what did you do? I said, I didn't want to go to all those interviews, so I very sadly said, well, you know I'm in my 60s, I'll never get a chance like this again.

Ken: And you started to cry?

Bob: I refused. I didn't cry but I really emoted like, yeah, this is probably the end for me. It's been fun everybody out there... But when you ask me was I on America's Got Talent, they never showed my performance. They never showed my performance in Chicago. They never showed me getting cut. They never showed me except back stage, and they couldn't eliminate me from all those shots so I'm standing in my group back stage getting ready to go on. I'm talking to people back stage, so all of my Facebook friends and in the media out there, they all thought I must have been a coach. Oh, I thought Bob Stromberg was talent, but he's a coach to these people back there.

Ken: So your performance never showed on television, is that right?

Bob: It never showed which was too bad. And of course, as you know, the only reason that somebody with such high integrity as me would do a show like this is for the exposure. You do it because, if you're on one time and ten million see you – I've never been in a situation where ten million people could see me at one time before. So that's why I did it, and ten million people did see me standing back stage talking.

Ken: Well my next question was going to be this. Did this help your career? But since you never made it to television on this thing, and since the greatest thrill or rush of adrenaline you got was Howie Mandel shaking his head and going, well, gee, okay then.

Bob: Actually the biggest thrill was Howard Stern saying, you're going to go all the way. This is what America's Got Talent is all about.

Ken: Here's what fascinates me. And this needs to be an encouragement to some of the people who put all their eggs in that basket who believe that if they can win some comedy contest or something, and for some people that's true. And you and I both know that when that happens, your career is no longer yours. It's controlled by somebody else. If you win, there is a process you go through where they basically determine your future.

But here's what I want people to hear. Here's what I want our friends out there who are listening to the Art and Business of Public Speaking to hear. Not even an appearance on television today guarantees anything. And you can't judge your own ability by not winning one of those contests. And I want to say this and I'll give you just a little bit of history. But I have seen your shadows show. It is mind-blowing. I have been on a DVD with you doing some of that shadow, and you know that I end up on the floor writhing in pain because I am laugh so hard.

I have also seen some of the people who make it through almost to the end on America's Got Talent. And I'll take you every single day. And I want our friends out there to realize that, number one, their career isn't dependent on someone else. Number two, you want to be very careful before you hand your life and your career over to somebody else, particularly if you've got aspirations that go higher than just being famous. And there are aspirations higher than just being famous as you and I know.

So I want that to be an encouragement to them. And I also want to encourage them by saying I was on the first of these. It was led by Ed McMahon. It was called Star Search.

Bob: Star Search – that was a big deal.

Ken: Yeah. I made it, I think it was 12 minutes. I made it 12 minutes. I wasn't edgy enough. That's what they told me. You've got to be more edgy.

Bob: Well, as you know, Ken, our good friend Taylor Mason won Star Search. He won it. He won the grand prize, which at that time, how many years ago that would have been – 20 years, 25 years, was \$100,000.

Ken: I thought it was a bag of potato chips. I worked so hard for that.

Bob: As Taylor says, when he mentions that he won Star Search, \$100,000 – it's all gone.

Ken: There was a time when a single appearance on television made or broke your career. I worked with a young lady by the name of Roseanne Barr.

Bob: She did well.

Ken: She did very well with the single appearance on the Johnny Carson show. But you and I can tell people today from our own experience that in today's world, where there are hundreds of channels and there's cable and there's everything else, there are folks that you see on television that will park your car if you go to see that show.

Bob: Absolutely. And we know there are comics who have been on the Tonight Show a dozen times, and you wouldn't recognize them if you saw them. You don't even know their name. It's funny, because we have a friend, I have a friend – Joe Castillo, and perhaps you know Joe as well. He's the sand artist. And he placed fifth in America's Got Talent a couple of years ago. And it's really done just miraculous things. And God has used that in great ways in his career to keep him really busy. And I'm so thankful for him.

But there aren't very many things like that in the world and the moment that I start to think, oh this is going to be the route for me, it's probably not going to be. I can think of lots of those things through the last 40 years of my career that I've thought, this will be the thing. Oh, if I could do that, if I could only do this. And I did lots of those things. And, you know, and here look where I am in my career. I'm talking to you on a podcast.

Ken: You've hit the bottom.

Bob: I've hit the bottom. This is it. I have to sit and act like this is a big deal.

Ken: This is a fascinating discussion. I'm glad this has gone this direction. We might even have to split this interview up into two pieces, because I want to talk some more about this. What we're saying is that you should not take advantage of these showcase opportunities. You should not turn your back on these. But you should go in with your eyes wide open. And with your heart closely guarded. Because there are all kinds of sidetracks that can happen here.

One is to go home after Howie says, oh, that's it, and decide that that determines your worth and your value and the beauty of what you do. And that really isn't so. The other danger is to believe that when Howard Stern says you're going all the way. You're the best I've ever seen – to let that determine your worth. But instead to hang on.

We have another friend, Tim Hawkins, who had some unbelievable opportunities as far as Hollywood is concerned. This guy is extremely talented. A talented comedian, a talented musician. And he had some amazing offers that came from Hollywood. And he determined that instead he would rather go to Peoria and be with the people that brought him where he was rather than to turn his back on all of that and go in a different direction. He decided that he wanted to continue to be with the fans that brought him as far as he was. And look at his career today. He's not on this podcast. He's gone way beyond this. Although we might write his name down and see if we can't have him on. That might be fun sometime.

So here's another question for you. And it goes back also to what we talked about as we introduced you. You were in a show, by the way that is one of those shows that came closer to ending my life than anything else. I came to see your show Triple Espresso – a highly caffeinated comedy was the subtitle – in Florida. I don't know if you remember this.

Bob: Oh, I do. I do remember that.

Ken: This was wildly popular. In Minneapolis, wasn't this one of the longest running off-Broadway shows?

Bob: Technically Minnesota would be off, off, off Broadway. Minnesota's a long way. But in terms of the size of the show it is. It is an off-Broadway sized show. And in Minneapolis it ran for 13 years without stopping here. It ran for 11 years without stopping in San Diego. It ran for 2 years in Dublin Ireland. Obviously I couldn't be in all of those because I'd be too old now, but we had various casts that ended up doing it.

I remember when you came to Florida because that was the retirement community there, and what was the name? Sarasota, Florida down at this little theater. And you came and I remember, oh shoot, I wish Ken had come to San Diego where it was hip and there was big crowds, and instead it was kind of a quiet bunch here, except for you. You weren't quiet. I heard you laughing the whole time.

Ken: There were some sandals and black socks, let's put it that way, in the audience. But, also in the audience was one person, me, rolling on the floor. I mean, that continues to be one of the funniest shows I think I have ever seen in my life. When you turn – that moment when you become the ape – it requires so little of a transition.

Bob: Well people ask me, how do you do that ape thing? And I just explain to them that it's a spiritual gift.

Ken: Okay, we're having so much fun. Here's my real question for you. My real question for you is this. Triple Espresso ran for how long?

Bob: Well, we just had our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and it's been running pretty much non-stop somewhere ever since we started.

Ken: But you've had other people doing it. Here's what I'm getting at, and I really don't know the answer to this, so it's an honest question. When you were doing this for many years, it sort of took you out of the mainstream of you performing yourself for a totally different kind of audience. An audience that would call you and say, hey, can you come and do this.

We have a friend, McNair Wilson, who also was an amazing performer, an amazing actor, probably one of the most creative people I have ever met. He performed his own show for many years. He had a show that he took on the road and then he went to work for Disney. Got an excellent job working with Disney at Imagineering. He was one of those creative people that helped design theme parks and so on. McNair Wilson said that those three years were great, but what they did was they broke the momentum of him doing his own show, and even though what he did was prestigious and famous and all of that, it was very hard to – it was almost like starting over to do his own show.

So my question to you is did you experience any of that as you came back from this very successful program Triple Espresso?

Bob: Well, I experienced that very thing actually, except that I was so aware that to have the success that we had in American, well not only American, world-wide in the theater, to have that kind of success is so unusual. It's such a God thing to even have that happen. We couldn't make that happen. It was such a huge phenomenon world-wide. And I realized I've got to ride this wave. This is too great, and it's too much fun. We really were having a good time.

But I think about myself. I grew up in a very rural community in north central Pennsylvania and it was - we were considered a culturally deprived area and I grew up with no models – I never knew a singer or dancer or actor. I never knew an artist of any

sort. And so it was really tough for me to – I used to listen in my bed – I used to sit in my bed and think, I wonder if it's possible that I could be a performer someday. But I had no models to follow and now, this many years later, 50 years later I find myself in a world-wide hit show and we're just having such a good time. So I just rode that wave.

Now, when I came back in, I did that for 10 solid years. That's pretty much all I did. I could maybe do six or seven bookings a year on my own. And for 10 years I did that, I came back to the market. In my case, I had been out of the market long enough that I came in as the new guy. It's like – have you heard of this guy, Bob Stromberg? I'd already done it for 20 years before I did Triple Espresso, but I came in as the new guy and I actually got busy really quickly.

Now I did realize that I wasn't as good when I came back. It took me a year of working really hard to go, okay, there are my comic chops. Now I can handle it all by myself.

Ken: Okay now, wait. I've got to stop you there. Because I have never looked at you as being anything but good. And I saw in Triple Espresso what you did in Triple Espresso is take people with unique talents and let them use those talents in the context of that show. You did the same kind of comedy in Triple Espresso, which evidently is really hard to say when you've had six cups of it. You did the same kind of comedy basically in Triple Espresso as you did in your own shows – your own one man shows. So tell me about this "not as good." What happened? What atrophied? What happened?

Bob: I had a whole lot of material like you do, Ken. I had a whole lot of material – I had a couple hours of material that, at one time, had been very tight. And I could take one story and, depending upon the audience I was with or how much time I had, they say you had 20 minutes tonight, and you were here last year, so now you have 20 minutes, and we just assume you didn't do the same pieces over again. Do another piece.

I could take any of my pieces and I could make transitions so easily because I knew how one piece of material could flow into another. One story could flow into another and how it would all fit together and it would be meaningful and people would understand what I said and what I did. Now, when you get out of a market for ten years, you get out of practice of doing that and you're just doing a stage play where you don't have to make those transitions. You're not doing it by yourself. You've got two other guys up on stage who are there to help you out during the whole evening.

Then when you come back doing it yourself and you have to flex all the time. Tonight you've got 60 minutes. Now you have an hour and a half. You've got 75 minutes. And you've got to be thinking, how do I put my material together so that I'm providing for my client the way they've asked me to and that everything fits tightly. And that just takes a lot of time to learn how all that stuff works. You certainly understand what I'm talking about here.

Ken: I do from two perspectives. Number one is, I believe that I were to give any advice based on what you're saying to the people who are listening is, don't let yourself get out of practice. If you're not booked, find a place to keep doing what you're doing, because

you can't just go back and get on the bicycle again. Some of it will be there. The other thing I would say is, don't get old. You made a statement earlier that you were sitting on your bed thinking about what you could do. I sit on my bed thinking about what was it that I was thinking about that I could do.

Do you ever find in performance, I'm just curious, because you're younger than me, but you're not young. Do you ever find in your performance where those transitions were in your mind just a moment ago, or a word or a phrase that you wanted to use – it was there just a second ago – but you scared it away or it went somewhere?

Bob: No, I've never had that happen, Ken. Never. My transitions always work perfectly and I never forget things. I'm always prepared because I take the time to prepare. It's important, Ken. That's something else we should talk about. Of course I know what that's like! It happens often. Things happen. You're in front of a live audience. You don't know how these – audiences are crazy. And when I say crazy I mean – well, for example, in Triple Espresso, and now I'm doing my one man show as we're speaking – I'm at the Music Box Theater doing That Wonder Boy, which is my one man show.

I'm just amazed. Here, the same audience, the same sized audience comes in seven times a week. It's the same lighting, it's the same sound, it's the same visuals, it's the same script, it's the same actor. It's me. And yet the audience, every time I find myself going, did they get together ahead of time and discuss what kind of audience they were going to be tonight? Because they seem to know they're going to be crazy, laughing out loud from the first word, or another audience, I think they said let's all cross our arms today and just see if he can make us laugh. How is that even possible? I don't know. It's a strange thing.

Ken: I don't know the answer to that either, because I've never had that second kind of audience. It's always been the crazy laughing. Hey listen –

Bob: No, let me say this to you. When I first saw you, and this was way back, ages ago, but when I first saw you I remembered thinking about you and I remembered thinking about other comics I had seen. That guy – how could that guy ever bomb anywhere? How could he ever bomb? That material is so brilliant, it's so funny. I enjoyed myself. How could he possibly bomb? And now, after all these years it's real evident to me that any of us could bomb at any time because there are things outside of our control. And we do the best we can to hold it together, but things happen.

Ken: Hey, listen. I want to do something here. First of all, I want to tell you that I did bomb. And I really believe that it was a God bomb. You know when I bombed the most? The biggest bomb I ever had? An HBO audition. I was auditioning for the kind of fame that I'm not sure back then I could have handled. In fact, I'm positive I couldn't have handled it. I wasn't ready for it. I had a prop – I little mouse with a squeaky thing.

Bob: I remember that.

Ken: You remember that? Made people laugh so hard they couldn't even breathe. I mean, we're talking about Billy Crystal was on that night. Robin Williams was on that night. I



can't remember who else was there. But all these famous people. And I get up and I decide to start with that because it's so great. The whistle flies out of my mouth, so I've got this little puppet mouse and he's supposed to make squeaky sounds so it makes people laugh. But the whistle is gone so it's just "thhhhhpppott." It's like a mouse with gas. It's horrible.

Hey listen. I want to have you, based on what we've talked about – these moments that come to us where we have an opportunity to grab a hold of something like America's Got Talent – the moments that come when you have a chance to do something like you did with Triple Espresso. I would just like you to gather in your brain what we've talked about so far, and if you could just leave one idea with the beautiful people that listen to this podcast, just one tip, one thought, one piece of advice, if I had just said, Bob, you can come on, you can give one piece of advice, thank you, thank you very much, good night, what would that piece of advice be?

Bob: You need to know yourself and you need to know what you aspire to. And you need to evaluate that. And I'm going to elaborate even though I just gave you – well I guess I gave you two. You need to know yourself, know what your aspirations are, know what you want.

I went to a theater school right after college for two years. I studied mime, I studied theater, I studied theater stuff. I studied juggling, I studied circus arts. And after two years my teacher, who was a brilliant, brilliant man, I remember sitting, I was getting ready to leave the school, it was the autumn and I was going to try to become a performer. I promised myself – I was working with another guy and we had said, let's stay together for three years as a partnership, a performing partnership. And let's see if we can make it. And we decided upon three years because two years was too short. You start gliding after one if it wasn't going well. Let's do three years, which we did.

And Tony Montenero, our teacher, came out and said, what are your aspirations? And I remember both of us said, because we were scared to death at that point, we just want to make a living. Which seemed to us to be a worthy thing. In some ways, obviously it is. We've got lots of years on this earth. But, he sort of looked at us like, you're kidding. You must be kidding. You just want to make a living? You've been preparing for two and a half years. I've been teaching you for two and a half years to be really good at what you do and you just want to make a living. That's not even a worthy goal. You need to think much higher than that.

And he was talking about art. You guys are capable of creating some great performance art. That's what you need to be thinking about. Don't be thinking about making a living. And I think people need to decide, what do you want and what are you willing to do to get that? What are you willing to do to prepare to become really, really excellent at what you do, because you've got to be prepared. Or you fail. You can't possibly succeed.

Ken: Well Bob, I know we're going to have you back. You've got so much more to tell the people who are listening to the Art and Business of Public Speaking. We've just got to

continue on a little different vein and bring you back for another podcast. Will you do that with me? Can you stay with me for a little while here?

Bob: Sure.

Brian: You can really tell, Ken, that you had a great time interviewing Bob, and so much so that we actually have to hold him over for part 2 of the interview.

Ken: I know. The guy just goes on and on and on. Just like I mentioned when we recorded that DVD, *Together Again for the First Time*, I mean, we had such a great time. And he is such a consummately wonderful communicator that we held him over and we're going to do our next episode with Bob as well. You know, I want you to remember this from what he said. Don't get out of practice. If you don't have shows booked or if you're not speaking, find some place you can speak. Do it for free. Do it somewhere but keep in practice.

I thought of this while we were doing this interview. Great improvisation. In every presentation something can happen. A fire alarm can go off. Somebody sneezes real loud in the audience. There's some distraction. Good communicators improvise. But great improvisation is a by-product of great preparation.

The quarterback who knows exactly how a play is supposed to be run is able to make a great play when he's got a 290 pound linebacker coming at him at 200 miles an hour because he knows the basics. Because he has practiced over and over again he can improvise. So I want our speakers to remember that. Practice to keep in shape.

Brian: If they don't have the opportunity to go out and speak, what would you encourage them to do during that month off or two months off?

Ken: Work on their talk. Look over the notes. Write out some things. Practice on their feet out loud. Do it out loud. Do it a couple of times when you're running or walking. Do your own show. Just don't allow yourself to get lazy.

Brian: Great. Well, we're going to post the Show Notes on [DynamicCommunicators.com](http://DynamicCommunicators.com) so you can find out more about Bob. How to book him for your next event. And, to refer back to some of the things he said. We're going to go into our next segment, which is a fan favorite, called the Road Tip. Ken, what did you find from the Road Tip from Bob?

Ken: Well this is Bob's Road Trip.

Brian: Road Trip or?

Ken: Road Tip. I think I said Road Tip. Did I not say Road Tip?

Brian: We can review the tape.

Ken: Okay.

Brian: On 8-Track.

Ken: From the professional communicator, this is Prob's Robe Prip. This is Bob's Road Tip. Don't take anything you don't need on the road. And he gave an example. He said, shampoo – the hotel shampoo – works great for washing socks and underwear. And a hotel hair dryer can dry a sock in 90 seconds. But he said don't overdo it, because the smoke detector in the bathroom will work.

Brian: It will work. Yes. Again, I'm going to repeat this, you can do to [DynamicCommunicators.com](http://DynamicCommunicators.com) for all of the Show Notes and again, to find out more about how you can bring Bob in for your next event.

Our next event that we're doing in regards to Dynamic Communicators is going to be this October, October 26-29 at the Park Hyatt Beaver Creek in Colorado.

Ken: Right. That's the SCORRE conference.

Brian: That is our SCORRE conference.

Ken: Where you learn how to prepare with focus and deliver with clarity and speak with power. This has changed lives. And Beaver Creek – wow. That is one of the most beautiful places on the planet.

Brian: Especially during October. The Fall colors.

Ken: The Fall colors are absolutely great, and the conference is a life changer. From the feedback that we get back from people, it is an absolutely life changer for speakers to help them design that kind of speech that sets them apart from the crowd.

Brian: Great. Well, thank you for joining us today. We look forward to seeing you next week on our next podcast and remember, go to [DynamicCommunicators.com](http://DynamicCommunicators.com) for all the Show Notes from all of our podcasts.