

012 – Ian Cron

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: Hello everyone, this is Brian Scheer, your 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: And this is Ken Davis, you host. Brian, it is good to be with you again, and we've got a great interview today with Ian Cron.

Brian: Yes we do. Ian has been a friend of yours, Ken, for a long time as well, and he's a phenomenal speaker, writer – he really is a jack of all trades.

Ken: Oh my goodness yes. Let me just read this. This guy is a speaker, he is an Episcopal priest, a psychotherapist, he's a retreat guide. Unbelievable author, this guy. I want to tell you something. For those of you who are listening to this podcast, Dynamic Communicators started out specifically as a coaching, training organization specifically for preachers. My faith background, originally I started out to be a preacher, led me to want to help these men and women become better communicators.

And it wasn't long before the marketplace got wind of this and we started having people – professional athletes. I remember when some professional football players and basketball players came. People who are speaking. And then CEOs from successful companies, Fortune 500 companies.

Brian: Yeah, you've been doing this for 30 years. We're actually celebrating our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

Ken: That's right. And we have, now, a whole variety of people who come. We still have people from faith backgrounds, we have people from business, sales, and I am so excited.

So the reason I say that is there may be some people who go, what would an Episcopal priest have to say that I would want to listen to? And I just want to say this. Good communicators in that field are great communicators. Because unlike us that travel around giving the same speeches all the time, they have to come up with something new and exciting and viable every single week. And this guy had an amazing take on the audience. His focus was not on so much the content, but how, as a speaker, greatness partly depends on how you view your audience.

Brian: I can't wait to hear this. Hey – sit back, relax and enjoy this interview with Ian Cron.

Ken: Ian Cron – what a pleasure to have you with us today.

Ian: It's a joy, man. It's great to be with you.

Ken: When we started this podcast, the Art and Business of Public Speaking, you were one of the people who came to my mind as someone that I would love to interview for two reasons – actually for three. Number one, you are a dear friend. I just really enjoy being your friend. I love what you do. I love being the in same room with you. You're one of those few people on the face of the earth that make me laugh very hard.

Secondly, you are a really accomplished author and speaker. It's interesting, we talked about this before the show came on. You're an author, speaker, Episcopal priest, psychotherapist – which I did not know. A retreat guide, and I would add to that that you are an amazing dad and fun friend and so which of those are you most of? What would you identify, if you had to pick one, which one is the most of you?

Ian: You know, it's funny you should ask that because I've often asked myself the same question around midnight, two in the morning. It actually has been a true source of frustration. And then not long ago I read another of articles, Harvard Business Review and a number of other articles that talk about the difference between generalists and specialists. And this idea that there really are at least two types of people and we fall into one of those two categories.

And as a speaker and a writer and a person I realized I'm such a generalist that it's hard to nail down exactly what I do, and there's a real gift in that. It's just kind of an unusual species of person. So as a speaker it's been difficult to actually sell myself because I don't have a particular brand. I'm a generalist who can speak across a wide array of topics.

Ken: Now you mentioned in one of the things you sent us that as a generalist, you don't have that magic talk or that single talk. I guess I'd have put it this way. Is there any umbrella at all that captures what you do or is it just so broad that nothing, no term or...?

Ian: I get asked a lot, for example, to speak to artists and creatives, in particular because so many of them are generalists at times. I get a chance to speak a lot to pastors at university chapels and retreats. I just did a retreat in New York City for two days and I'm increasingly loving retreats, by the way, versus one off speaking events where I get 45 minutes or something.

But I tend to be a very conversational speaker. I love interaction more than anything else, because then I get to identify patterns and make connections in real time between theology and art and psychotherapy and writing and song writing. You didn't mention that I'm actually a song writer in Nashville. I probably spend at least a day a week co-writing on songs.

And I can draw on my background of literature and poetry. So in real time, as people are asking questions and people are interacting around spiritual themes, I can pull on all of these different wells and come up with new angles and combinations of ideas that help the A-Ha moment happen for people's topics.

Ken: Would you say – you know, we have friends that are speakers that speak on specific skills, who teach you how to get a book published. Our friend Michael Hyatt, teach you how to get a book published or how to build a platform. Would we be the same in this regard, you and I, would we identify in this same way? In a sense as a comedian and a communicator, I don't think of myself so much as someone who supplies people with specific skills, except of course when we teach speaking. That whole idea of our conference on teaching how to speak and how to build a business speaking. But when I perform myself, I don't think of myself as someone who brings skills to people, but as someone who nurtures the human spirit. Would we be on the same level there?

Ian: Absolutely. For me, first of all, with Mike and with you, my friend Brennan Manning who sadly is gone now, Don Miller – so many of these folks had or have very specific topics at which they are experts and they present. People know exactly what they're getting when they hire them to come and speak. And for a long time I so envied them. I used to tell people all the time, I wish I had a business card that just said I talk about grace. Or I talk about productivity. Or I talk about story.

And that way I could just have my one thing. And then it dawned on me one day. Ian, that's not what God made you to do. That's just not who you are. And you're going to have to figure out how to leverage the fact that you know a little about a lot. And that's a gift. It doesn't make you shallow. It actually is just who you are.

Ken: I love this fact, too, that in your presentations you involve the audience. It is interactive. I almost can see there, Ian, that as a psychotherapist, you have the ability – part of that training and part of your own giftedness – in the ability to feel what's going on and address those issues as they happen in real time.

Ian: Absolutely. One thing I do have is a fairly good intuitive sense when I walk into a room about what's happening. I can read body language. It's just almost instantaneous. I can smell what's in the air. I don't have a lot of gifts, but that is one of them. And I try in real time to speak into what's happening in the room in that moment, and to find the emotional connection. How do I actually make the spark happen between what's happening in my heart, what's happening in the room so that there is some moment at which somebody, and this is always my hope as I'm sure it is for you, that somebody comes into a deeper knowledge of just how loved they are by God? If I can do that-

Ken: I agree with you 100%. There's something I want to address here. The title of our podcast is the Art and Business of Public Speaking. And you talk about yourself as a generalist, almost as though that goes outside of this topic as a public speaker. And you even talk about the fact that you don't have this magic talk like most public speakers do. I want the people listening to understand that public speaking is more than just getting up, standing behind a podium and delivering.

As a communicator we use all means available to us. Writing and involving the audience. I've seen you use your guitar. I have heard you read from your books which I want to talk about a little bit. I want people out there to not restrict their own gifts and to not put a restriction in their own gifts. In fact, if you move outside of what the

paradigm usually is, often you'll find a wide audience of people who are excited to hear something that is different.

You talked about the fact that you enjoy, like a public forum, where you're sitting with other people answering questions. Talk a little bit about that and that aspect of communication and public speaking.

Ian: I can answer that in two ways. The first is, recently on college campuses and other settings where I've spoken, I've encouraged them to think about using an interview format with me which I love for two reasons. One is, usually the host organization or the company wherever I am, they know their audience better than I do. If I come in with a stock talk and I mean I'm kind of shooting an arrow into a cloud and hoping it hits.

Whereas this person, if they're a good interviewer, can tease out things that they know their constituency really wants to hear about and talk about. Secondly I love it because I'm more inclined to say something dangerous and provocative in an interview than if I come in with a stock talk. Because they tend to me – sometimes they can be kind of beige. You're not going outside the lines. You're not coloring outside the lines. That's something I really love.

The second thing is I find often that when I'm doing a conversational talk, let's say just with 50 people versus 500, that people often know already what it is that I can tell. But if I can tease it out of them and we kind of partner together – sort of a community of collective inquiry, then when they learn it they learn hard and strong. When it's really going well it's adrenaline running because everybody is involved.

More and more I love these retreats for speaking because they afford me that opportunity to conversationally lead in speaking.

Ken: You know, recently I have been using this definition of communication in our communication workshops and conferences. That communication minus the involvement of the audience is really just monologue. Nobody cares what you want to talk about. That's really true. Nobody cares what you want to talk about, and that communication really doesn't happen except where what you're talking about or where your presentation intersects with the needs and feelings and whether they're real needs or felt needs of the audience. And that's why I'm really intrigued by this idea of moving communication beyond just lecture. That you use something that actually brings people into that dialogue and almost – not forces.... I guess it does. It forces that inner connection. It forces that spot where what you hope to do connects with what they need. Do you agree that too often straight lecture just misses? It doesn't really involve the audience.

Ian: Yeah, I completely agree. You know, sometimes if I know where it's going to – if it's a very big crowd and I know I have to rely more on myself and I can be conversational or have interaction, I'll do things like I'll make the sing a song with me. I'll do something

where we're doing something together. We're building a bond together through some shared experience. And I find that to be very, very effective.

You've helped me today. Because I think maybe the way I should speak about myself is not as a Christian speaker or as a speaker per se, but really as a Christian communicator and thinker. I really like the word communicator better than speaker as it applies to my own life.

Ken: I like that word, and I think that word takes you one step further, deeper into the process. Ian, I find that what you do with song to connect with the audience – maybe have someone sing with you or whatever so that you don't allow them to be passive.

Ian: Right.

Ken: It doesn't allow them to be passive. They are intrigued and invited to be an active participant. What you do with song, I do with humor. Humor requires a reaction. It's why I could never be a musical artist, I don't think, or at least do music in a bar situation or a situation where everybody's doing something else. But humor requires a reaction. And if people react you know not only that they heard the story, but they probably heard the truth that drove the story.

Ian: Absolutely.

Ken: You said you liked this interview format. I loved that. I circled it on the paper you sent in ahead of time. And then you said this. That you wanted to talk about, or you enjoy that whole aspect of learning to trust yourself. And I put a big question mark there, and I just want you to talk about that a little bit. What do you mean trusting yourself? What is that about?

Ian: Well, you know sometimes people say, why do you charge this particular fee for your speaking, right? And I'll say, well it's because it has taken me 54 years to write this talk. And for me, trusting myself is knowing that I, from experience, I draw from a pretty big well of material. From multiple disciplines.

So often, when I get up to speak in front of an audience, sometimes I'm finishing up what I'm going to say as I'm walking up. I'm reading the room, I'm thinking, I'm feeling. What's going on here? Who's spoken before me? Sometimes I arrive at a speaking venue a day in advance, which a lot of speakers don't, just so I can sniff around if it's a large conference and say, gosh, what's the Holy Spirit doing here and how can I get on board with it? Instead of parachute dropping in, doing my thing, going right out the door. That to me is sometimes cheating the client, at least based on my skill set. My skill set requires just a little bit more snooping around to see what I can add to the mix.

And then just trusting that when I get up, I may say all right, I've got a story, I've got a song, I've got five or six points that I want to make, and then I just start and just trust myself. By the way, it kind of works. I keep getting employed.

Ken: I need to interrupt you. It more than kind of works. I won't let you get by with that. You're a great communicator, but that there just took you one step away from the

truth. It works well. Here's a list of the people you wrote that you've spoken for. What a diverse list. Willow Creek, Wild Goose Festival –

Ian: Which is a very progressive kind of place.

Ken: - Yale Divinity School, Pepperdine, and the Gaithers, and I've seen you in other situations. What was that show you did in Denver recently around Christmas time? That beautiful thing down at the Ryman Theater?

Ian: Oh, the Ryman in Nashville. Yeah, that was the Token show.

Ken: The Token show. This marvelous mixture of spiritual inspiration and humor. And you blew the doors off of these places. So I would say this. You are exceptionally gifted at reading those. I watched you among those people at the Gaither audience who is an audience, and the people that run that have become some of my best friends in the whole world. Very conservative. I don't think progressive would be a word that would be used there. And yet you watched what was there and delivered this marvelous message and were received with unbelievable enthusiasm.

And here's what I think is the difference. You had sniffed. You knew who you were talking to, and I'm not saying these people have a particular odor- don't get me wrong – but you had sniffed, you knew who you were talking to, and you not only identified with it, but you showed them that you knew who you were talking to. Do you remember how you opened that speech? I do.

Ian: That was two or three years ago. I do remember – first of all – for example, I got there a day early. I wandered around. I had meals with the musicians. I hung around, and literally what I'm doing is I'm just sort of trying to figure out when I ask the question, why God, what can I bring to the table – what hole needs to be filled here? What opportunity is here that no one else is seizing or is supposed to seize that I'm supposed to get hold of and speak to?

I do remember sitting next to you and basically just saying, probably repeatedly, what the heck am I supposed to say? And by the way, can I just make a plea for one thing on I'm speaking? I find this very, very helpful to be intentional with. I feel like it's important to fall in love with your audience before you get up. To say I really want to get up and love these people in advance of anything that I say to them. That I have fallen in love with them and want the best for them. I don't necessarily want to impress them. But I want them to feel and know when I get up, and it always has to be a God thing, that if nothing else, that I love them. And that I want to say something to them that will matter in their lives.

Ken: If that's all you had said in this interview for the men and women who are listening to this podcast, if that's the only advice you had given, I would say it's the best advice of all. Because it circles right back to what you talked about before. It gives your own heart, it invites your own heart to invite them into something not for what you're going to get out of it, but for what you can give to them. And that may be why I admire you.

You stood up, and I want to get back to this because I laughed so hard I missed the first half of your speech. You said – let's remind our listeners that this is an audience of older folks, most of them very conservative. Probably  $\frac{3}{4}$  of them Baptist.

Ian: 7,000 of them.

Ken: Yes, 7,000. And do you remember how you started?

Ian: Remind me.

Ken: You said something like, I'm a little nervous today. I know who you are, and I'm an Episcopal priest. And then identified probably they had read your bio and stuff – you said it much better than that. You used much better words because the place just exploded in laughter because you identified what might have been a tension and you said I'm okay with that. I get it.

Ian: You know, it's funny you should say that Ken, because this is something I tell speakers when I'm with them all the time and pastors when they're in talk. Whatever. I say, look. In advance, name the anxieties of your audience. In other words, diffuse it right away. Name their anxieties.

So let's say I'm celebrating – oh, to give you an example, let's say I'm leading a talk on silence and prayer. So right away I'll get up and I go, we're about to do something that will make probably at least 50% of you very uncomfortable. But I just want you to know that it's all going to be all right. Or something like that, you know?

Or I'm going to say, you're going to think this is very odd. You may go home and tell your children that terribly strange things happened to you today, but you will not leave here unaffected. Those aren't great examples, but if you just name the anxiety that people may have about what you're going to say or do in advance, they feel like you empathized and they're going to go, okay, he knows this is weird. I'm going to trust him.

Ken: That is amazing. And I know this isn't lost on our audience because we have a very intelligent audience that listens to this podcast. But everything we have talked about here is not ego centered but audience centered. And of course your own faith in God is part of what does that, and you might even say further than that what you're trying to do is reflect, and I can say this with confidence because I know you, trying to reflect the very kind of love you feel from God to the people you're talking to. And that blows me away.

Let me back up a little bit. There's a couple more questions I have to ask based on what you've done here. You authored two books. I'm going to make a confession that I don't read as much as I should. I don't read as many books as I should. And as a result my brain is filled with a lot of my own experience and I really need to gather more information from other people.

But here's two books I have read. Your first book, *Chasing Francis*, which you and I had a long conversation about the very first time we met. And I have to confess to you that

your care for me during that time was very instrumental in my life. Helping me – it just helped me through some difficult times. And then your other book, *Jesus, My Father, the CIA and Me*.

I'm just going to ask you one question first. Which of those is your favorite book?

Ian: Oh gosh, they're so different because one's a novel and the other one's a memoir. I love both for different reasons, or I appreciate both for different reasons. I think I would say my memoir *Jesus, My Father, the CIA and Me*.

Ken: I loved both of them. *Chasing Francis* was absolutely mesmerizing for me. Of course talking about St. Francis and helping, giving him flesh for people who might not know who he was. *My Father, the CIA and Me* added more flesh to a friend that I was already in love with. You basically. And that's the book that made me realize what an amazing dad you are to these beautiful children that have adopted so many of your principles in their lives.

So here's my next question. Do you see a connection between your success as an author and your success as a speaker?

Ian: Wow. I never really thought about that. Yeah, I sure do. Because they're both forms of communication. And when you're writing you're not supposed to do this, according to some writers, but there's always an audience in your head. You're always thinking there's some faceless crowd in your mind and you're thinking, how can I land this? How can I express this in a way that my unknown, unseen audience - here's how I'd put it. How can I make the bell that rings at the center of my person sympathetically make the bell ring inside of their chest? Do you know what I'm saying?

How do I get both to ring sympathetically? So I'm always thinking about that as I write and as I speak. How can I conjure up to them a shared moment where we feel very, very connected in a way that's very spiritual and rich, but also creates the natural climate in which they're going to bump into God. Where they're most apt to bump into God. That to me is what writing and speaking is about.

Ken: And I do see you – you asked the audience and me in the middle of that, do you know what I mean or do you see what I mean. Yes. I see what you mean. I'm positive my audience sees what you mean. But it makes me so mad that I cannot say it like you say it. Ringing the bell in the chest. When you say those words I can feel the vibrations of the bell. I can hear the tone of the bell. And my heart sings and this little evil spirit comes up and goes why can't I be like him?

Ian: You do beautifully and I've seen your work. Here's what we would and I think it can be... Ken does this very, very well... but this is what I try to do which is to say clearly what other people feel vaguely.

Ken: He just did it again.

Ian: Because when you do that, people feel understood, and suddenly you've given them language for something they've always known but they've never been able to find the



language. And if you can get the key in the door that they've been trying to find, and you hear the tumblers drop, and you realize they've had a moment of spiritual insight, or insight about who they are and what the nature of life is, and you can hear the tumblers drop. You know that moment when a great joke or a great insight happens? And suddenly everyone kind of goes "ahh!" And you see the lights go on in their eyes and I don't care if you pay me \$50 or \$50,000. I'm just telling you, that's worth the trip. When you see that light go on in their eyes and you realize I just did what I was built for and I had a moment where I moved the needle in their spiritual lives for the better. It's a great moment there.

Ken: Wow. Well the tumblers just dropped in my heart. This is the kind of interview that really is a defining moment in the lives of people who care about communication. People who are trying to build a business in communication. Because it helps us realize that perhaps if we do these things you're talking about, if we care about the audience in the way that you're talking about, if we seek to communicate and touch that string in their lives – ring that bell, all those things you said – then we indeed will probably experience some success in the business part, too.

But it's got to come in the right order. Thank you sir.

Ian: What a joy, Ken. I love speaking to you. Love to everybody.

Ken: Ian Cron. What a great friend. And what a fascinating guy.

Brian: I was intrigued with everything he was saying, but I specifically wanted to point out something he said about tensions.

Ken: Oh yeah. You know, most of us try to ignore tensions. We see somebody that's in the audience that may be against what we're saying or you see somebody that's not responding. I loved what he said about the importance of naming the tensions in his audience. That's part of what he wants to be there so he can walk around and identify them, name them, and then in his presentation, because he's well-prepared by the way, he uses the first part of his presentation to diffuse those tensions away.

Brian: You know, you can almost see that he's a psychotherapist.

Ken: Absolutely. He sits there and analyzes the audience and then supplies the answers. He wants the audience to feel like you've empathized with them and if you do that, if you say, I know where you're coming from, then they're much more inclined to listen to you. I thought that was great.

And I'll tell you why I thought it was so great. I've watched him do this in person. He's a master at it. I've watched him stand in front of an audience that could have been antagonistic and make them his friend.

Brian: Obviously there's a wealth of information here, and we've actually written it all out for you. You can go to the Show Notes at [DynamicCommunicators.com](http://DynamicCommunicators.com). Learn more about Ian and how to find his books. Now he has two that I want to specifically mention. *Chasing Francis*, and his other book *Jesus, My Father, the CIA and Me*.

Ken: I've read them both. They're in my top ten books that I've read.

Brian: Great. I didn't know you even read ten books.

Ken: I colored in both of them.

Brian: All right. Ken, today's Road Tip – whatcha got for us today?

Ken: Okay, this was from Ian and I love it. I'm going to make it short. He said bring lots of books when you travel. He said, use travel apps. They're everywhere. Use them. He said, and I love this one, walk airports for exercise. Don't just sit there waiting for your flight. Walk them. Bring your own food and then he said this. Never stay in people's homes unless they don't mind seeing you in boxers.

And I would say to shorten that, never stay in people's homes. Someday we'll have to do a podcast on that. And then finally he said exercise or die. It doesn't get any better than that.

Brian: Absolutely. I also wanted to tell you about our live SCORRE conference in Colorado this October, October 26-29 in Vail, Colorado. Ken, tell us a little bit about what they'll experience at SCORRE.

Ken: Well what they'll experience at SCORRE according to the students who have been there before is unique educational experience that will rival just about anything they've had. But specifically designed to help them prepare the kind of talk that impacts people's lives and literally sets them apart from just the mediocre speakers that are out there everywhere.

This is something that can change a speaker from good to great, as they say.

Brian: Hey, thanks for tuning in to another episode of the Art and Business of Public Speaking. Be sure to check out the full Show Notes at [DynamicCommunicators.com](http://DynamicCommunicators.com) where you can find the resources we discussed today and a downloadable transcript of the podcast.

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