

013 – Seth Denney – Getting Your Foot in the Door

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, I'm 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 I'm Ken Davis, and am so glad you joined us today. We have a unique interview today. I was at a program where I saw this young man come up and operate as an MC and captivate a large audience. I just was amazed at his ability to communicate. And then I discovered that he was a TV anchorman. And that he rarely gets the chance – well, not rarely, but his main job is to sit with no audience and speak to a camera. And I thought to myself, wow. There's got to be some folks out there in our audience whose hearts desire is to maybe be an anchorman or maybe be a television host or something like that.

Brian: Or even do webinars.

Ken: Or even do webinars. Absolutely. Which is just so different than what I'm used to. So I wanted to see the art of public communication, public speaking, from a different perspective. And that's what we're going to do today.

Brian: His name is Seth Denney. He is an anchorman for NTV News, which is Nebraska Television News. Not MTV. NTV. He's from Kearney, Nebraska, and I'm looking forward to you hearing his perspective on how to connect with the audience.

Ken: Yeah, you're going to love this.

Ken: Seth Denney, I want to welcome you to our podcast, The Art and Business of Public Speaking. Thank you so much for being with us today.

Seth: Ken, I'm honored to be with you. Thanks so much for including me. I'm not real sure how much I can add, having learned and worked in the minor leagues of television for my entire career, but I'm absolutely ready to step to the plate today.

Ken: Well, I'll tell you something Seth, there are major league players in the minor leagues. Folks, those of you who are listening, I was at an event in Kearney, Nebraska, and this young man was the MC for that evening. And I was just impressed with his presence, with his sense of humor, with the way he communicated. And I thought, how interesting, in the Art and Business of Public Speaking, I just bet there's some folks out there that would be interested in getting into television, the television new business. Perhaps people who might be interested in someday trying to be a news anchor, and so

I thought, this would be great. We will interview Seth, and he was so gracious to agree to come on the program.

So I'd just like to start with this – was this a dream of yours? Is this what you headed for – being a news anchor?

Seth: It's really funny. We pulled out an old program from a basketball deal that I was in when I was in high school, Ken. My kids found it in some boxes. It was from high school, and it said dreams, aspirations after college. That sort of thing. It said, "to be a TV news anchor." So I guess so.

When I was in high school I was always kind of interested in radio and TV, but I always thought to myself, kind of quietly, what do I got? How could I ever be a news anchor? What are the steps that need to be taken? So when I was in high school we visited CNN headquarters in Atlanta. And I was kind of hooked at that point when I was a kid.

And then I went to a small, liberal arts school called Hastings College. And they have a wonderful TV broadcasting program there. I got plugged in as a freshman, Ken, and then just had some great experience through my college years. It kind of got played that way. So it kind of has been in the back of my mind to be in broadcasting. So it's worked out well.

Ken: Tell me what you did in those college years that led you toward this, and then maybe you can share with us a little bit about how your break came so you were able to actually sit behind the desk and do the news there.

Seth: When I was a freshman at Hastings College, again, it's a small, liberal arts school in central Nebraska. They have a TV station within the college like many colleges do. I tried out as a freshman to be the sports guy. And at the time, didn't know really anything about broadcasting. But somehow they saw something in there that they were like, well, let's give this guy a shot for one night a week doing the sports.

From there I did that as a freshman, and I continued to get more experience as a sophomore and junior. By the time I was a junior I was interning at the end of my junior year at a CBS affiliate out of Lincoln, out of their bureau. So I was actually getting stuff on the air at about 20 years old as a report.

And from there I put my tape together and during my senior year I was the weekend anchor at KJAS TV, which is an NBC affiliate in Hastings. So I was really fortunate that I had some opportunities young to get my foot in a door. And then I had some nice references that vouched for me. They basically through me into this weekend spot at this NBC affiliate, and I was able to put a tape together and right after I graduated I became the sports director out west in North Platte, Nebraska. So I did sports for a while before switching back to news.

So to make a long story short, I basically got my foot in the door as an intern, got some stuff on the air, and some folks were good enough to me to say, hey, why don't you give this guy a shot behind the desk a little bit here. And I really felt comfortable right away

behind the desk. There's things that kind of just come to you, Ken. That's one thing that really did come to me. Just the whole anchoring process. I've been fortunate in that respect.

Ken: Well, there's a great lesson to be learned here, and I hope those of you who are listening heard this. The door of opportunity opened and he stuck his foot in there. The first door of opportunity that wasn't actually the position he might have ultimately been dreaming of. But it was something that led in that direction, and he did it, and he recorded it, and he began to get good at his craft. And I guarantee you, you don't just from where you are to your dream, right Seth? You jump from where you are to that little crack in the door that's open. You stick your foot in there, and then another door opens and you stick your foot in there. Did I hear you right on that?

Seth: Yeah, that's exactly right. And sometimes those dreams change a little bit, too. I started, like you said, doing reporting. I'm doing stories at a mall, and I'm doing crazy stuff on the weekend. That sort of thing. And my dream was to eventually become a Sports Center on ESPN. And I thought, by doing this, I was going to get that spot. And then I became a sports director, and I thought this is another step. I had a tape to ESPN when I was a young guy doing sports. They said Seth, you've got to get somewhere first before you get here.

And that whole time Ken, my life kind of changed in the that I'd gotten married, had kids, and then my goals started to change a little bit, where I didn't have to go to ESPN. It was a deal where I wanted to provide for my family the best way possible and extended family became very important. So my dreams changed a little bit in the process as well.

Ken: That is so important to understand, and the success part of it isn't necessarily being in the biggest market and doing the biggest thing. Sometimes the success part of it is being the best that you are right where you are.

Now, you folks can't see Seth, but I'm just going to tell you, he's got an advantage to start with. Tell me how old you are again? Was it 43?

Seth: Yeah, 43.

Ken: 43 years old. He looks like he's 18. They don't even let him walk past bars on the street. There's cops that stop him from walking past bars on the street. He looks like he's 18 years old, and before we came on, we were actually on a little bit of a Skype process here, and he was telling me about the grey in his hair. And I dragged out a magnifying glass. I could not find anything. So you've got to admit you had that going for you, too.

Let me ask you a couple of other questions here. Do you get a lot of requests? Like I saw you as an MC. Do you get a lot of requests for public speaking? Do you give talks as a newscaster? Do you maybe go to colleges and help people understand how they can get into this career? Are you a public speaker other than TV?

Seth: I do quite a few MC gigs. And they will be anything from ranging to the foundation banquet that I met you at, Ken, to Chamber of Commerce events where they will have me MC an event. Or a Fellowship of Christian Athletes event will have me MC. Or, I've spoken at things from a Christian women's club – they might have me as a keynote speaker to last year I was a prayer breakfast keynote speaker. So I would say during a normal year, I get between a half dozen and ten speaking events a year in addition to what I do here at the TV station.

So yeah, between the MC and the keynote speaking, it turns into quite a bit of public speaking.

Ken: I know because I met you personally, that you are a person of faith. So a lot of these speaking requests come because my guess is because they have seen you on television, so a lot of what you do is in the faith area or arena, is that correct?

Seth: It is. And when you do the Foundation – it was the Becker Foundation that we saw you at, Ken. And then the word starts to spread. Well Seth's involved in this. Or he's involved in Fellowship Christian Athletes. Yes, I will get Christian, faith-based events to speak at.

Ken: I just finished doing a, tell me Matt, our producer, online training. We have a conference called the SCORRE conference. And I did four, maybe five hours straight of training for that conference with a camera. I planned, our team said, we've got to have an audience there. They said that for a reason. Because I feed off the audience. Now had I done that conference without a little – I think we only had about 12 people – without an audience, I think I would have been a fish out of water. So here's my question. I get my energy from the response of the people. The immediate response of the people. So my first question is, where do you get your energy from? There's a little light that comes on, I've seen it. There's a little red light. But other than that there's some guy hunched behind a camera and that's it. Where do you get your energy from?

Seth: It's a good question, Ken, and in broadcasting I learned early, and back when I was doing all the shooting, all the editing and preparing a sportscast when I did sports, it was a lot of work behind the scenes producing this whole thing. And by the time you get on camera you're exhausted from a long day of running around talking to coaches and jocks and all this stuff.

But when that light came on, I was told by a mentor of mine, he said, you forget about everything going on behind the scenes. When that light comes on, it's a show. And you have to perform. And so I have never forgotten that. I could be having problems at home or problems behind the scenes. But I've always been able to, when I sit on that desk and anchor the news and that light comes on, like you just said, I come on, too.

So you've got to drop everything. And that's part of a kind of performance mentality, I guess. Well, hey, maybe a monkey could do this thing. When that light comes on, you've got to be ready to do. One of the things, conversely, one of the things that's interesting is I go to an event and be an MC, and I do draw off the audience just like

you're talking about. But at the beginning, when I started doing these MC gigs, it was weird. Because I'm telling jokes and people are laughing, and you need to respond to that. So the ad lib portion of that is a little different. It's completely different being in front of an audience.

Ken: You know, I never thought of that timing aspect before because when you're on television, and you say something that's funny, and there's something that happens between two of you that are sitting at the desk, if you were to wait for your audience to laugh, how uncomfortable that would be if you're sitting watching at home, this moment of silence with you two staring at the camera, nodding your heads.

But that timing becomes something that's very important when you're speaking to an audience that's alive. Let me tell you a trick that I use, and I'd like to have you maybe share some tricks that you use when you know that your primary source of communication is literally a camera. Because all of us at one time or another have to perform, those of us who are at there as speaking as our main careers, have to perform and there's a camera there.

Here's something I do, and I would like to know if you agree with this, or disagree with it. People tell me to look hard enough at the lens as if I'm trying to see my own reflection. But to imagine that you're talking to somebody. See somebody there. To actually picture your wife or one of your children or something like that. Do you buy that? What do you do? Because you have to look at that lens. You can't be looking all around it.

Seth: Completely buy it, and here's why. Basically, I look at the camera as someone who's just in the room with me. We're sitting at this desk, my co-anchor and the weather and sports guy. And we're just telling stories to the person sitting across the desk, is the way I look at it. So I look intently, yes, intently at the camera, because that's either my wife or my friend or my kids sitting across, and I'm telling the stories in a good way, in a strong way. So that's exactly right. It's just another person in the room.

Ken: Right. Now do you interact with – in Nashville we have news anchors. Do you have someone at the desk with you?

Seth: Yes we do. We have a co-anchor, Colleen and I have been together for ten years. So we have a really good camaraderie. I seem to know what she's thinking. She knows what I'm thinking, and we play well off each other, absolutely.

Ken: I'm going to make a suggestion here that that skill, I think, carries over when I watch you perform live. I see that skill live. Again, you really need to know, no that's not true at all, if it's not true at all. But you seem to have an ability to connect with your audience. I've never seen you on television because I don't live in Kearney, Nebraska, but I saw you with this live audience. Do you sense this same thing when you're on television?

Seth: Well you're kind. I've heard so, that I can connect with the audience and they feel like they're part of the family. They feel like they're into the jokes when we have banter and that sort of thing. They feel like they know Kent and Colleen and myself. And that's

what you want. When you're in TV in the bigger markets, they desperately want anchors who will stay there and connect with the audience for years and years to come. Where you're at in Nashville, the highest paid, best anchors are the ones who have been there for years. Because they've got that connection.

Ken: This is a personal question. Let's assume that you got a call from Nashville or you got a call from Denver or Atlanta, or even to another place like Kearney. Suddenly you leave and you step into a new market. Are there steps, or again, little tricks or tips that you would have to re-connect with an audience that doesn't know you? Do you try to just be a part of a bigger team to start with and then take more of an aggressive role? How does that work? I've been so curious about this stuff.

Seth: I think it's a brand new ball game. It would be for me. Let's say I left here and became a reporter in Denver and a fill-in anchor. Did some reporting and filling in. The best thing that that person could do would just be immerse himself into the town. Just become handshaking everybody, meeting everybody they can. In politics, in pop culture – everywhere they go, basically becoming a PR person for yourself and for the TV station that you work for.

It's a brand new thing though, because you go from being extremely well-known, to I may have seen you once or twice on a report, too. So it would be a whole new thing. But the biggest thing you could do is put on your work gloves and go to work and do stand out work.

Ken: I'm going to share something with our listeners. Some of the advice that you've given us, there may be one or two people out there, we have such great listeners, most of them are captivated the entire time during the program, I'm sure. But, there may be one or two out there who say, how does this apply to me as a speaker? I'd like to just address you for a second and say this, folks. What he talks about on a long term basis, what our friend Seth is talking about over a period of time, you immerse yourself in the community, you shake hands, you are visible. You take part and become a part of the community. I want to encourage you who are speakers, who tend more as another friend of ours said in an interview, parachute in, do our program, and parachute out. Never think of it like that.

Seth, this has been so helpful, because I really believe that in whatever time frame we're given, a couple of hours to be at the venue until we leave, it is very important, I think, to build into to that group. Oftentimes I'll walk through the audience and shake hands with people before the show even starts.

You know, stars, the people who are doing the show, aren't supposed to do that. But I love going down and say Hi. I'm so glad that you're here tonight. And even the people that don't actually meet you get to see that you're not tucked away somewhere like a prima donna eating grapes that have been peeled and drinking water at 87 degrees.

Seth: That's right.

Ken: Hey, we always ask our guests to give a tip to the folks that are on the road. And so I want to ask you if you've got a tip, keeping in mind that a lot of people listening are speakers, I'm guessing a good hunk of those would give their right arm to end up as an anchor on TV. But do you have any specific tip that you think would help our listeners?

Seth: Absolutely. I mean, I don't know if this would help them. Maybe they already know this, probably, Ken. But I believe that when we speak, when I go to a speaking event, and again I go back to whether you're having a good day, bad day, average day. Maybe you don't want to, frankly, be there, because you're not feeling all that well. I would encourage your listeners to think, hey, I've got to meet this with enthusiasm and energy. And be ready to perform.

I tell my kids, when you walk into a class like a wet bag of hair, and you're just walking in there and you say, I'm just going to sit there, and you're not sitting there in tune to what's going on, that does nothing for the instructor. And I take that with me in life, too. I want to be enthusiastic. I want to be prepared. I want to be as knowledgeable about the topic as I can be and just ready to go.

And that means so much to me as a speaker. There have been events that I'm sure, maybe there are events even for a guy like you, Ken, where you're just not feeling it. Well, I try to get prayed up and get ready to go to do the very best I can be each time.

Ken: That is a great word. And I wrote down these words: "wet bag of hair." That is one of the most descriptive – and you look nothing like that. You're blow-dried. When Seth answered the little questionnaire we sent to him, this was a tip he gave as well, and I have to share it with you because this excites me tremendously: Don't forget your razor and your TV makeup.

Seth, I want to tell you something. I just thought that maybe TV makeup is what I need the most. So I'm going to give that a try.

Seth: Hey, man, you've got to take it on. I've got to take it on. Big time on those bags, with those high-def TV cameras, you know.

Ken: I've got bags you can see from the back row. I can't even get on Delta Airlines because you're only allowed two and neither of mine will fit in the overhead compartment, the bags under my eyes.

Hey Seth, thank you so much for being with us today. We had a little trouble getting started because of our connections here, but you were very patient and definitely today you were not a wet bag of hair. Thank you so much.

Seth: I'm honored. Thanks so much Ken.

Brian: What a unique interview. A very different perspective and Ken, I know you had an enjoyable time talking with him. What was your takeaway on that?

Ken: Well, there was one little piece – sometimes in an interview there's all kind of great information, just like this one. But there's something that just resonates with you – kind

of rings your bell, and this was what did it for me. Seth said that from the time that he was just a little tyke he dreamed of being a TV anchorman. It was part of his DNA. And I just want to say to our listening audience, pay attention to that.

You know, in our LAUNCH conference, when we talk to people about building a career we talk to them about building a career that stems from something they love to do. And one of the ways you tell what that is to pay attention to that little bell that rings.

I remember standing by a radio listening to a comedy show – it's one of my first memories – laughing. I actually got in trouble because my laughter at that time was more like stamping my feet and screaming in delight. But pay attention to your heart.

Brian: And I would even say it this way. It's the passion. Dan Miller who is a friend of ours and speaks at our LAUNCH conference, talks about passion. Passion is kind of the fuel that drives you and keeps the car going in the right direction.

Ken: Absolutely. The other thing that is so common to almost everybody that we interview is they know why they live and perform. Performance is not an end in itself. Money isn't an end in itself. It seems like the people that have that passion, especially to help other people, and deliver quality to other people, that's just it. So you asked me, and that's what I took away. There's a lot of good stuff there, and that's what hit me.

Brian: In addition to that, Ken, let's go to our next segment called our Road Tip. What was the road tip that Seth shared.

Ken: This one was – and it's repetition, if you don't mind that. But it's repeating what he said. When the light comes on, forget everything behind the scenes. He said, when that red light comes on, your job then is to deliver to this audience. So you take whatever stresses you've brought to this community, whatever stresses you've brought to the situation – in his case, whatever stresses he's brought to the news desk – and when that light turns red, your job is to deliver with excellence to those people.

I thought that was an unbelievable tip. People often ask, what do you do if you don't feel humorous. What do you do if you don't feel like going on stage? When the light comes on, do your job.

Brian: Great advice. You can find the Show Notes from today's show and other podcasts at dynamiccommunicators.com. You'll also find a link there to NTV News where Seth does anchor every night.

Ken: Yep, and you can actually see him do a little news show there and see how well he does that.

Brian: Hey Ken, one of the things we haven't talked a lot about in the past is the Secrets of Dynamic Communicators book that you actually – a revised edition that just come out.

Ken: Right. As I've mentioned in other broadcasts, we did the Dynamic Communicators workshop. That's what SCORE used to be called. And we did that mainly for faith-based people. And we found that so many other people were interested in the

principles that we're teaching, and it was helping them to develop their speaking career, that we re-wrote that book and it really is selling as well or better than it did when we first wrote it. So *Secrets of Dynamic Communication* identifies those secrets that separate the mediocre speaker from the one who is not forgotten. The person who just performs from the one who changes lives with what they're saying.

Brian: This book is a powerful book, and if you're just looking to start getting into this, and how to communicate more effectively, this is a great start for you.

Ken: This will show you how to put a powerful talk together.

Brian: In fact, a lot of colleges around the nation are using this book as their curriculum.

Ken: Absolutely.

Brian: 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 where you can find the resources we discussed today, and a downloadable transcript of the podcast.

By the way, if you enjoyed today's episode, we would love for you to rate the podcast in iTunes. This helps us get in front of more people who are interested in our message. Thanks so much for your help, and we'll see you again next week.