

019 – Before You Get on the Plane

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, this is your co-host, 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. How are you doing today, Ken?

Ken: I'm doing fine. I'm excited about today's podcast because we're going to talk about something a lot of people don't think about. Most people think, when they think of a speaking engagement, they think of that time from just before they walk to the stage until that time they walk off the platform. And today we're going to talk about some tasks that are necessary if you want to maximize those speaking events. Some tasks that are necessary to complete before you even get on the plane.

Brian: And I think it's so important to remember the concept that if you're playing from behind, you're always trying to catch up. Don't get behind in this. Stay ahead of the game. Communicate ahead of time. Make sure we get everything laid out before and know where you're heading before you get there.

Ken: So let's just jump right in and talk about those things, those tasks that you need to think of and complete before you ever get on the plane. And one of the first is this. And you know a lot more about this than I do because it's one of the reasons you manage my career. Matt is also with us, by the way. Matt Brady, who is my road manager and who handles many of the details of what we're going to talk about today. So this is one of the first tasks. Know the expectation of the host.

You're not just going to speak everywhere with your little canned talk. It is so important to know what the host expects. We kind of accomplish that by, when people look to book me, they go to our website, or we direct them to our website, and they click on the little tab there that takes them to a form. Brian, tell them some of the information that's on that form that allows us to see what their expectations are, what they're expecting.

Brian: Exactly. On that form that we have on our booking page, there are some forms that are more extensive than others. A lot of different nuances that we could talk there. But that's not the point of today's podcast. Today's podcast is about what information are you going to gather from them as you start investigating the opportunity to work with them. You want to know all kinds of details. In fact, I try to ask a lot of questions ahead of time. Either that's through the phone, which some people prefer. But I prefer even email because I can do it at midnight, send them a document – I call it the Full Event Details Form – and we're going to make a note to supply you a copy of that. If you go to our Show Notes, we'll provide a link where you can download that form.

And it asks all kind of questions like, how many people do you expect at your event? What's the seating capacity? We'll talk about that at another episode on why that's important. We ask, where's the venue located? Where's the hotel located in relation to the venue? How far is that airport away? We're asking for, obviously, date, for what the audience demographic is. Is it all women? All men? All those questions as well. And there's plenty of other questions we're trying to get clear on so we know how to serve them best.

Ken: So getting back to the specific focus of my question, Brian, how do you discover, from the host, what their expectations are? Sometimes it's just comedy. Sometimes they want comedy with a message. How do you discover that? How do you pull that out of them?

Brian: There's a couple questions, but the one that is probably the one that is most revealing to me is the question that I pose this way. Five minutes after Ken is done speaking, what do you want the audience to experience?

Ken: What's the takeaway?

Brian: What's the takeaway? What's the objective you want to accomplish? And there's a couple questions I ask in there that really get to the heart of the matter. And if they tell me, hey, we want Ken to do a lot of comedy, and with his ability to do a little message in there as well, I know where we need to go with this.

If they tell me, would they want him to preach on a Sunday morning –

Ken: And I do that, folks, sometimes.

Brian: And he does that, too. But if it's a corporate environment they say we have a 20 minute speech, length of talk, and it's got to be in and out, and we want him to cover these topics. I know we might not be able to do that. Because that doesn't fit for Ken. So we don't have to waste a lot of time.

Ken: Or we can modify a little bit what we do to fit that situation. Just so the listeners know, not all of our speaking engagements are the same, and I can guarantee that yours won't be either. We go to speaking engagements where I speak and what I'm doing is a presentation at a fundraising event for a charitable organization. And their expectations can go all the way from, just provide the entertainment for that situation, to, we want you to do the ask. We want you do show people the giving device and really motivate people to give. Really call them to action. And we're happy to do that, because then the organization is free to provide their program, give all of the information. Sometimes they don't want us to do that. Sometimes they just want us to very gently encourage people and thank people for their involvement in the evening and then they'll do the ask.

Brian: You know Ken, it's funny because I was just thinking about the Art and Business. This is almost the art side of it, too. As you're asking these questions, the whole point is to get the expectations of the host down as clear as possible. Because if you are able to do

that, the art of asking the right questions at the right time and getting to that point, you are going to be able to knock it out of the park, as in a home run, Ken, in case the analogy didn't stick there. But you're going to be able to hit a home run with that sponsor because you identified their expectations and you could see how you could serve them best.

Ken: Right. And you know what's interesting, the conversation that you have with the host is so important, and you go over each of these details. I don't know if it was you that was with me, Brian, or one of my previous managers. When we went to that little tent in the middle of a field –

Brian: That was me.

Ken: And that conversation, if we had had that conversation with this particular event we would have discovered that what was most important to him was that we go a full 30 minutes. Because although we knocked the ball out of the park. It went out of the park at about 25 minutes. We were done and he was angry.

Brian: He didn't get his money's worth. You know what? The truth is, once I experienced that, I adjusted the questions I was asking to make sure that that was, - is this an expectation of the sponsor? So I said, hey, Ken's normal event is 45-60 minutes long. Will that work for you? Oh yeah, we like 60. I then say now, is it okay if he goes 50-55 minutes, or do you need him to go a full 60? And they can tell me. I know exactly what the expectations are, and then I can let you know so you can go into that event knowing I have to go 60 minutes.

Ken: Yeah. And sometimes I'll go 80 or 90 and really cause a problem. So the other task that you have to complete before you get on the plane is, let the host know how you will meet these expectations. And I'll let you speak again to this, Brian, but I want to say that probably the biggest thing that I have learned is that there is a wide variety of expectations that I can fulfill. But it's important that the host know how I'm going to fulfill those. There will always be humor. That's part of who I am. There will always be some kind of motivation or inspirational aspect to what I'm delivering.

But I'm willing to massage that a little bit to fit that. It's interesting. I've had corporate people – and you remember this – come to me. Well, we want a corporate talk. And your response is, here's how Ken will do that. He will make your people laugh harder than they've probably laughed in a long, long time. He'll make them excited about going to work on Monday. And excited about the opportunity they have, wherever they are, to make an impact in your company on the people's lives that you're trying to reach. And they go, that's great!

Brian: You know, Ken, as you're talking here, looking at my notes I noticed something here. These are sequential. These are important that they build on one another. Once you've identified the expectations of the host, now that's the first task, the second task is let the host know how you will meet those expectations.

Let me encourage the listeners right now. If you're taking notes, I want you to write this down. This is a phrase, a catchphrase that I use often when I am in communication with these sponsors, either on the phone or through email. I listen to what they are expecting. What they want. What are their objectives? What do they want the audience to experience? What do they want to experience as the event coordinator? Then I follow it with a simple transitional phrase that goes like this. That sounds interesting. You know, I think Ken can do that, but here's what it will look like. Or, not even but. It's not an exception. And here's what it will look like.

And then I lay out exactly what I know Ken can do and do it well, with meeting as many if not all of the criteria and expectations that that sponsor has laid out. I'm not twisting Ken to be something he's not. I'm not trying to go to Ken and say hey, they need you to be this type of monkey. I know you don't do that, but can you? I'm going to tell them what Ken can do. Therefore, they can go yeah, or no, that won't work for me.

Ken: We haven't received, in my memory, I don't think we've received many "no, that won't work for us." However, there have been a couple of times when we have realized that we might not be able to meet their expectations and we've said no to some events.

Brian: Absolutely. And you know what? Better to find out at that point in the game than after you've negotiated the whole contract, you have it signed, you're about to show up, and they change everything. You're like, oh boy, this is not going to go well.

Ken: Or you're in the middle of a field, in a tent and you go 50 minutes when you were supposed to go 60. Now, there are some other tasks. The next one is to let the host know your expectations. Now, I can't say this strongly enough. And I may have said it in some other podcast. It doesn't matter. You need to hear it again. If you do that ahead of time, before you get on the plane, the host will be excited because you are thorough. If you do it after you get there, and then start communicating what your expectations are, they will call you a prima donna.

And here's some of those expectations. And I'm going to ask Matt Brady, who travels with me, to jump in here. Because every event I go to, he travels with me. He drops me off at the hotel and then he goes to check that these things are taken care of. And by the way, I want you to jump in with one other thing here, Brian. You have another, you have all these little sayings, and you have one about – go ahead, say this.

Brian: This is something that I tell my team all the time. I tell my coaching clients all the time. And guess what? I even tell my kids. And even my wife at times. But I say this. People don't do what you expect. They do what you inspect. I wish I could be the person who could take credit for that, and I know Danny de Armas couldn't take credit for it, but he probably would. He was the one that taught me that phrase. And it sunk deep into my soul where I had to remember that and pull that out and remind me.

Ken: And here's what we mean by that. You not only let your host know your expectations when you do that talk, but you follow up with phone calls. Say, where are we with the sound? Where are we with the lights? And some of these items we're going to talk

about in just a moment. And then, of course, these are some of how Matt handles that before he gets on the plane. Let's talk about lighting, sound, stage, product table, and some of the items you discuss with the host before the wheels even leave the ground on the plane.

Matt: Well, I think I've found in my experience previously we reached out in an email and say hey, can we discuss the lighting and sound and volunteers, and for me, as much as I like to do as much as I can by email, sometimes this technical call is something that has to be done on the phone. And very quickly, when you're talking with someone on the phone, you can usually come to the conclusion whether or not this is the person you, indeed, need to be speaking with regarding the technical items.

So if you're talking to the event planner sometimes, they're not always the one that's going to know whether or not there's good lighting. They're not going to know whether there's a good projector. They're not going to know what the sound is like, and you say, hey, you know, is there a tech person? Are you guys working with an on-site AV company, if you're at a hotel? Are you working with a production company that's coming in and bringing in the production? You make sure you get to the right person.

We've been in situations where I'll talk to someone and they act like they have the answers. And they might. But you can tell usually pretty quick that they're not really clued in. So just make sure you're talking to the correct person. And going over how the lighting is going to be set up, get specific on it. Don't just say, hey, do you have good lighting. The answer to that question is always going to be, yeah! You know? So make sure you're getting details of what the lighting actually is and what the specifics of that are.

And then, additionally, with the sound, find out exactly. Hey, do you have good sound? It's always going to be yes, but press a little bit further. Find out what kind of equipment they have. Make sure that it is going to be sufficient for what you're doing. A lot of times we'll go into ball rooms and in many people's minds, particularly when you're dealing with hotels and corporate situations, they say oh, we've got a great house sound system. And then I always will ask the question, would you have a band play and use that sound system, to which they would reply, of course not.

It's usually about the same, particularly with your presentation, Ken, there's a lot of dynamics in your voice, and if you're in a system that's tinny, doesn't respond well to dynamics of your voice, it's going to sound horrible.

Ken: Both of these men will tell you that I have blown the speakers in more hotels than we can count. Rarely is a hotel sound system in the ceiling enough.

Matt: Absolutely. And it's just pressing further for details. Again, make sure you get to the right person to have these questions answered. And then find out what the stage looks like. If you're having a projection screen, if you're using slides during your presentation, where the screen's located. Is it behind the stage? Is it going to be in a situation where

you might turn up and they've decided to put the screen right in the center of the stage so that when you turn on your stage lights you've completely washed out the screen?

Just be mindful of those things on the front end because, like Ken said, it's so much easier to take care of it on the front end than to be there the day of the event and trying to figure out, scratch your head and go, uh-oh.

Ken: Now, can you speak to another element of this? Because as you talk about this, it sounds, maybe to some of our listeners, that it's a pushy thing that you do. But you have a way of doing this that doesn't put people off. Can you talk about how you do that because I've watched you over and over again do this. I don't know if I could do this. What is it that you inject into those that make it work?

Matt: I think for me, my background has been production. Even if it wasn't, the first thing I always try to do when I'm communicating with someone in that situation, when I'm on the ground when I do actually arrive at the event, which I think we're going to talk about at another episode. But I identify with that person and say, hey, this is a great room. Man, I love this room. This is beautiful. And I kind of identify with them and say you've got some great stuff here. Kind of identify with them. Disarm them. Let them know I'm not a guy who's going to come in screaming and be a complete idiot to work with. I'm a guy that's there to work with them, and we're going to find a solution together. If something's not right we're going to work through it and have a great event.

Ken: And you do that even before we get to the event. The wheels haven't left the ground yet.

Matt: Absolutely. And talking with the folks I say, can I check with the folks, if we're going into a church, can I talk to your tech team. And they'll say absolutely. You need to talk to Jim Bob, and they give me the number and I call Jim Bob and say hey, Jim, tell me about your production. Oh, I saw the pictures on the site of your church. Man, it looks like a beautiful facility.

Ken: Well, Jim Bob lives here in the south. In the north you'd talk to Ralph of somebody like that.

Matt: You approach it with, hey, here's what we're trying to accomplish. Not a, this is what we need, darn it, and you're not going to get us if you don't do it right kind of thing.

Ken: Another item that these guys is that they often ask the host if there's any inside info that will help us. For me, sometimes that inside info, they will just say, there's going to be somebody sitting in the front row and it's their birthday, and we really want you to make them wish they had been sitting in the back row. We want you to use them, have fun with them. They're great sports. Sometimes they will talk about challenges they have. Goals that they've set. The culture of the people you're working with. We just had a downturn in business. A lot of people are discouraged or afraid. You guys get into that, too.

Matt: I'm going to back up here a little bit. Two other questions you had here specifically that relate to you and to a lot of other folks that have product to sell on site, is how that's going to be handled. That's also a conversation that's very well taken care of before the event as you're talking with the folks.

Again, I'll call the people. It's just much easier for me to have this conversation over the phone. If I send them a bullet list and say, do you have good lighting? Do you have good sound? They're going to reply yes, yes, yes. Whereas if I talk to them on the phone I can really flesh out what they're talking about. And then with a product I'll say, Ken has a special package he's going to put together for the folks there at the event tonight. Is it all right if he lets folks know about it? And they say, oh, absolutely. That'd be great. And I'll say, you know, we kind of find it works well if Ken does his presentation, and you come up to close the evening, and you come up and say, hey Ken, we know you have some stuff back there. Come up and let them know, and you will come up and tell them.

Also, with the sponsor being up there and saying, Ken, come back and tell them about it, it grants you permission to do that rather than, oh, here's a guy just promoting his product.

Brian: Let me add something to this.

Ken: Now Matt, by the way, just to remind you, Matt is the guy that travels with me everywhere. He's actually the guy that's with me after the wheels leave the ground. But he does a lot of this front work before the wheels leave the ground. Go ahead, Brian.

Brian: Matt sits in the office next to me, and I hear them calling these people at least a week ahead of time, if not even two weeks ahead of time. But I am the person who is booking the event on the front end. And I have to take care of Matt, which he then will take care of Ken. I'm setting the stage for Matt to be able to do his job well at the very beginning of the booking process.

So when you're talking about product, make sure that you're communicating about that as well as part of what are your expectations. Can he sell product? Can he promote product? If you get those two questions answered before the contract is signed, that'll make it easier for your two week out call to say, hey, we're going to have product. I know Brian talked to you about that, or whoever you have booking you. And this is how we'd like to do it. Is that okay? And they usually say, absolutely. I've already talked to Brian. We're good to go.

So think ahead of time. Set the stage well for you and anybody else on your team down the line.

Ken: Right. Now, some of you are alone. You don't have a road manager. You're the only person that's out there. You're not eliminated from this process. One of the greatest ways to prepare when you have a team is to know what's needed when you're alone. To hear that voice. To be in on that. We are excited to offer you the template that we

use that you can use as kind of a guideline. And Brian, how will they be able to get a hold of that?

Brian: You can just go to our Show Notes at dynamiccommunicators.com. We are going to call it the Full Event Details Form. Now it's not all of the questions you ever need to ask, and you can't possibly modify this document, but it is a document that you can use as a template and it will get you started in the right direction.

You'll notice some questions that don't apply to you. Take them off. Most of them will and it will help get you thinking in the right direction of all the things you need to cover. Now, let me give you a caution here. And bear with me here. This Full Event Details Form was something I thought would solve all of my problems. If I just gave it to them and they just gave it back to me filled out. Guess what? It was too overwhelming for them with all of the questions.

I had to figure out the art of doing this right, which is, only do a few questions at a time. In fact, here's an email thought that I always have in the back of my mind when I write an email. Give them something of great value that they want or need to start off your email before you ask for something in return that you want or need.

For example, if I need information from them, I'm trying to think of something actively to give to them first. Hey, by the way, we have our travel details. Here they are. This is when we're arriving. This is when we're departing. Guess what? We're going to give it to them later, but they were waiting for that. And then I can say, by the way, can you tell me how many people you're expecting at the event, and can you tell me if the product has arrived and/or the product tables available.

Ken: And that might even be a part of that follow up call that you always want to make just to go through some of this one more time before the wheels leave the ground. Hey, we're getting close to the end of this particular podcast, but I want to remind you of a couple of things we've touched on that we're going to cover in depth on later podcasts.

We talked a little bit about product table and whether you're alone or whether you have a team, we are going to have a podcast encouraging you to have product. Not just one product, but several products. We're going to show you how you can develop some of those products that you might not have even thought of yet. This is part of what we talk about at our LAUNCH conference, and we have seen people literally, triple, quadruple their income because they brought product to the events, and they knew how to talk to the host so that they could make those products available.

You may remember, Brian, we used to walk into those afraid, to ask people if we could make our products available. It was the audiences that changed their minds because they wanted to know. And we were able to tell hosts the audience will want the products that we have. And we give some away. We make that happen so we give something and then we ask for the right to do something.

Now, I've got a tip for you today.

Brian: Oh good, I was going to say, I hope you have a good one today.

Ken: I've got a really good Road Tip.

Brian: This is the good Road Tip that you're promising and you're going to deliver.

Ken: Yes. I promise I'm going to deliver this. And this doesn't come from me, this comes from Mat, basically. Matt Brady, my road manager.

Brian: Okay, so it won't be funny.

Ken: Right. It won't be funny, but it's good. Here it is. Make sure you have contact numbers for at least two people who are responsible for the event. If your flight is late, if you get there and there's something you need to know, there's nothing worse than not being able to get a hold of somebody. So make sure you have contact numbers for at least two people who are responsible for the event.

I can guarantee you, am I right Matt, that will save you a lot of headache. Am I right, Matt?

Matt: Yes.

Ken: Matt shouts from the other end of the room. Hey, I want you to know that I am managed by the Frontline Group. Which helps me understand where I'm going. Helps me get the materials together to go where I'm going. They take my vision and turn it into reality. Brian, tell us a little bit about the Frontline Group. Maybe there's some people out there that could use that kind of coaching in their own life.

Brian: Well, you know Ken, it's funny because you and I both get questions all the time of how do you do this? How do you get started? How do you get going? And we give them as much advice as we can, but we have a limited amount of time ourselves. And so, Joy, my business partner, and myself, we started talking one day, and along with Matt Simpson, we said, we need to create a solution for them that can have ongoing – not just once conference like the LAUNCH conference or the SCORRE conference. But ongoing partnership with them.

Ken: Okay, let me ask you a question. Because I don't know how this works. I just know that it works. What role does Joy play in the Frontline Group?

Brian: Joy really focuses on the product creation, product promotion, marketing of products that we create for our artists, or help them create.

Ken: Okay. And what is the major role that you play in the Frontline Group?

Brian: I play more on the booking side of events and on the promotion of events – individual, single events. And also contract negotiations.

Ken: Okay. And what role does Matt Simpson play? I already know the answer to this, but I want our listeners to know that Matt Simpson isn't related to the Simpsons we see on TV.

Brian: Definitely not. No, Matt Simpson, out of Kansas City, is a friend of ours we saw with incredible talent, and we said he is an asset that we needed to bring on our team. He knows how to do branding. He knows how to do marketing. And he also knows the geeky stuff. How to create the website. How to make this widget and that widget work. I don't know any of that stuff and neither does Joy. We'd rather spend our time on the things we do best. Matt Simpson was a welcome member to our Communicator Coaching program.

Ken: How do they get a hold of you?

Brian: Go to communicatorcoaching.com. You can find out all the information about the program we've put together. And also it will show you what you receive as part of that program and how we can come alongside you and help you take the first steps to your career that you've been wanting and dreaming about.

Ken: That's great. Hey, thanks for joining us. This podcast is over, but we're not done. We'll see you next week.

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 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.