

# How to Build a Lifetime Empire Out of One Speech

Gordon Burgett

If I were to begin again in the speaking world, I would do it differently.

First I would ask myself, what would be an ideal speech? Then, how could I create an ideal speaking business—for me—around that?

So let me share the thoughts that come from my answering those questions, hoping that between you and me there is enough overlap in why we are doing what we do to also benefit you.

An ideal speech for me would do six things:

- (1) **It would be profitable.** If listing money first sounds a bit greedy, I apologize. But that's why I speak rather than fix locks, cook hash, or process data. If my speeches, in general, don't pay enough, I will have to resort to something else. In other words, I'll have to work and the rest of this list would be irrelevant.
- (2) **My ideal speech would say something of exceptional value to its listeners.** Life's too short for me not to use it in the most positive way possible. Given the opportunity, I want to share information that will make others' lives better, more fulfilling, richer. I like that exchange because by doing so my life is also better, more fulfilling, and richer.
- (3) **My ideal speech would position me so that the listeners would want to hear me speak again.** This would happen for three reasons: (a) the content and presentation would meet some vital need my listeners have, as well as excite them, (b) that excitement would make them want to hear more about my subject and related subjects, and (c) they would feel confident that I could bring more good information to them.
- (4) **My ideal speech would be of vital interest to both general and niche listeners.** That is to say, I could take the core of an ideal speech and modify it to meet the needs of many kinds of listeners.
- (5) **The core of my ideal speech could be expanded or modified and profitably sold by other information dissemination means,** such as tapes, books, articles, a newsletter, or consulting. This would allow me to make my life, and my listeners' lives, even better, more fulfilling, and richer by providing more information by more means, and
- (6) **My ideal speech would require, from me, little or no marketing.** The value of the subject discussed, when known and understood by my potential clients, would make them want to request the speech, as well as subsequent speeches and related products by other means, without any or much promotional prodding.

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I admit that what I've said so far sounds like one of those rarified academic games: all theory, unattainable in real life. And why should you care or listen to anything more since you're already earning seven- or eight-digit incomes talking about self-esteem or serving the customer? The last thing you need is another speech!

Please bear with me. The model works so well that you may want to consider rethinking or modifying what you are now doing.

You see:

- (1) The ideal speech would be researched once, written, and you'd be done with probably 60% of the content forever.
- (2) They'd initially come to you to book, which also makes clients much less anxious about fees.
- (3) They'd ask you back, probably on a regular basis, if you're good.
- (4) And they'd gobble up your spin-off products—they'd even ask you to bring them, maybe even help you sell them.

To realize an ideal speech your toughest task would be finding the right core topic, then creating a solid first speech, building ancillary speeches from it, developing products that expand the topic, and setting up the business shell that would keep you accessible, responsive, speaking at the right hour, and staying humble while your colleagues are talking about 12 different things, with 12 videos and 12 brochures and 12 photos....

### The Topic

Clearly, nothing is as important as the topic. If you want to earn happily everafter from one speech it can't be about parakeet grooming or learning to love yourself underwater.

It must come from the basics. The things that people think about all the time and that pervade every aspect of their lives.

Some topics are obvious: love, joy, honesty, integrity, health, happiness, security, prosperity, success, creativity, sexual fulfillment, relaxation, loyalty, dedication.

Others don't limit themselves to one word:

- \* making life count,
- \* using your time/energy in the best and fullest way,
- \* being a positive life model,
- \* making sense of life, people, and the cosmos
- \* positive parenting,

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- \* positive spousing,
- \* making a long-lasting, valuable contribution with your life,
- \* using your mind/body to its fullest,

The hardest thing for most people is to zero in on one topic that is so important to them they want to know it totally, then spend the rest of their days sharing what they know with others, infusing them with their enchantment, their enthusiasm, and their joy.

Yet I think if we really want to make a dent by speaking that's what we have to do. History remembers best those who had one message and spent their lives driving it home. The Martin Luther King's. Jesus, Buddha, Mother Theresa. A good crowd. Never had to make a cold call or do a mailing.

I remember a column by NSA's Judy Sabah in the Colorado Speaker's Association newsletter hit it right on the head: if you define your purpose and pursue it with passion, profit will follow.

In the terms I'm using today, your purpose is finding that one topic that makes you want to leap out of bed eager to get your teeth into the day. With that kind of topic it would be hard to keep passion away. Profit too!

Let's pick out one topic from the list. A rather odd one to better prove the case. Let's say that what turns you on, what gives your life meaning is "dedication." That's the flagpole on which you want to hang your speaking career.

### **Research**

You want to build a career and an empire around "dedication." If so, the first thing you must do is learn everything you can about it. Which means research. (The word alone sets most speakers' dainty feet to flight. An hour or two, okay, if it's easy to find. But real research? You gotta be kidding! Anyway, I already have 12 speeches....")

Why research? Because in a larger sense you're not really selling your speech. What is attracting them to you is your expertise. You are the authority on "dedication." Speakers are as common as snapdragons but where are the experts about "dedication"? If a factory owner is reluctantly paying a dozen daydreamers who could care less about producing quality, he wants and needs you. He'll buy your speech because that's how you convey your message. What he really wants is an expert on dedication who can inject some of it into his workers.

So the key word is "expertise." If you want to earn happily everafter from one speech, become an expert about something that others will pay to know. Then package your expertise as one speech with many modifications. Later, sell the substance of that expertise over and over by other means.

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Much of your expertise will come from research, which generally means the library, at least initially while you lay a knowledge base. It means learning everything you can about your topic from every angle.

I start with books. I check the card catalog (or computer equivalent) for every book in print about my topic. I also look on the card catalog to see if anything else appears on microfiche or microfilm. Others begin at the Google search engine on their computer. Both roads go to Rome.

Then I search the larger libraries, usually at major universities, where I seek the master indexes to find what's available statewide or even nationally. I might run a library computer search as well, for books and articles in all libraries, as I do on the computer for Web-accessible information at home. Two other library guides are invaluable as cross-references: the *Subject Index to Books in Print* (to see what is currently available but might not yet be in libraries) and *Forthcoming Books in Print* (to see what will be printed about the subject in the coming six months).

When I find books listed, I go to the stacks and check them out, particularly to see if they contain bibliographies of their respective sources. If somebody else is helping me gather up the best resources, bingo! I gladly accept, with gratitude. (I also look at books stacked nearby. Often books on related subjects will be classified under different terms but address your subject too.)

Let your imagination suggest where else you might find sources. If I'm interested in "dedication," why not the biographies of the best known examples of dedication, to read that person's definition and see how they lived it? Biographies might be book length or they might appear as articles. The *Biography Index* lists every time a famous person is mentioned in print so in this case that would be a good source to check for both.

Articles are excellent sources of both fact and current thought. To find articles about "dedication" in commercial magazines I check either the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* or its computer equivalent. To see what's in print in other journals and magazines I check the respective academic indexes found in most libraries, like the psychology and business indexes.

Through these academic indexes you will discover who is doing the research in that field; what they are seeking to know; the leading institutions, universities, or groups spearheading that research; the past and current theories or concepts about the topic; the future trends or directions, and hopefully their applications to your listeners.... The reference librarian will lead you to other research listings as well.

Don't forget the associations, where they exist. Find the *Encyclopedia of Associations* in your library to see what they produce and their addresses. Very often they have books, booklets, and assorted materials available to the public, as well as public relations officers eager to help even more.

Often your best information comes from following up that library-based research, talking to people in the field who are doing what the researchers write about.

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Sometimes it comes from talking with people who are models of your topic: the Vince Lombardi's and Isaac Asimov's of dedication. If they are no longer living, then from talking to those who saw that dedication in action.

How do you get to those people? Gathering information for an article or a book has worked best for me. You're asking people for their time, so there must be something in it for them. Just having their words repeated in your speech isn't enough. Usually, putting those words or facts into print, with them mentioned as the source, is sufficient. (I have several books in print that shows you how to set up the proper selling basis for the print media, mainly by using query letters to magazines, newspapers, and book publishers. Check <http://www.sops.com>.)

There's one other huge source of valuable, usable information: life itself!

Go back into your own past and note every incidence that touches on your topic. In our example, every recollection of joyful dedication, citing the critical who, what, why, where, when, and how of it to fully encapsulate the memory so you can pull the best parts from it later. Get your mind thinking that way and memories long buried will rise to the surface.

Then look hard at every current opportunity for new examples. Focus on life around you; listen with new ears to the radio, new eyes to the newspaper, magazines, and the TV. Put yourself where dedication will be found: observe it firsthand.

Finally, ask others for examples. Instead of saying, "What's up?", ask "Who was the most dedicated person you ever met? Describe them to me..." Ask everybody: your spouse, kids, parents, casual contacts ...

What are you looking for?

- (1) Anything you can find that will deepen and broaden your understanding about your topic.
- (2) Specific facts, quotes, and anecdotes that you will be able to draw from later.
- (3) Illustrations (photos, graphs, charts, diagrams, drawings, cartoons) you might be able to integrate into your presentation.

What you are doing is creating a pool of information from which you will draw for the rest of your speaking days. Therefore, it's necessary to keep track of each element of information: the fact, quote, or anecdote itself as well as where it came from.

### Keeping Track

Let me share a system that has worked well for me for years, here slightly modified for quicker access for a speaker.

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There are five parts to the system. Each key fact, quote, or anecdote goes on an index card. The other four parts of the system are noted, respectively, on their own legal pads, which are labeled "References," "Resources," "Expert Biographical Sources," and "Potential Articles/Speeches."

If I find some information about "dedication" that I want to keep, I write (or type) it on the front of an index card. I also post the source of that fact on either the "Reference" pad (these are written sources, usually articles or books) or the "Resources" pad (which are oral sources, usually from interviews, tapes, radio or TV shows, or speeches).

Let's say the first bit of keepable information comes from Ima Fraud's book *As I Remember Her*. On the "Reference" list I would note a letter, the author or editor, title, publisher, and date of publication. In this case: (A) Ima Fraud, *As I Remember Her*, Wee Book Publishers, 2002. Subsequent listings would begin with a (B), (C), and so on.... Then I would also note at the end of the information on the index card the letter and the page number(s) where the material was found: (A), 111-3. That way should the source of that fact become important a week or 10 years later (such as a book editor asking you to cite it in a footnote or a magazine editor wanting to double-check your references), you can quickly provide it.

Imagine that you are driving in your car listening to a talk show when a particularly interesting comment is made about dedication. I would capture that comment on an index card, then record the source on the "Resources" pad, including enough information to be able to specifically recall that source, if needed. This listing would be preceded by a Roman numeral circled and would read like this: KABC Radio, Los Angeles, about 9:30 a.m., Nov. 7, 2002, Edgar Elroy interviewed Willie Mays. I would also note at the end of the comment on the index card both the Roman numeral circled and who made that comment: Willie Mays.

If you are to become an expert on a topic it is doubly important that you know the others who have expertise in that and closely related fields. I keep that information on a third legal pad titled "Expert Biographical Sources." (You may prefer to keep this information in a three-ring notebook, dedicating a page to each entrant. It is easier to insert new names as they are encountered.) My pad runs alphabetically, A-Z, so should I discover a Dr. Bill Bunz who is both the author of an article and a researcher on sports dedication, I would put his name at the top of a sheet under "B", then below that record all I can discover about Bunz as time goes on. I'd list the bibliographical info about each article, any books he's written, where he teaches or works, plus any references made about him in print. If I needed more biographical depth later, I might check the respective *Who's Who in ...*, contact his employer for a detailed fact sheet, see if he's in the *Biography Index*, or ask my reference librarian for other means.

These references are invaluable when you want to write articles or a book and, as you usually do, you need some direct quotes or information. It also primes you properly should you meet the luminaries in person, to establish a solid base for future contacts.

The fourth legal pad is where you jot down ideas about where you might go with your topic. How you might convert your interest and knowledge about "dedication" into new modifications of your base speech, into articles or a book, tapes, or any other means or avenue that

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would allow you to share your enthusiasm (and increase your earnings) more widely. The format is yours. This is where the topic-speaking that I discuss in my book *Empire-Building by Writing and Speaking* works best.

### Converting the Information into a Speech

How then can we convert this mass on information into one moneymaking, empire-building speech? We do it block by block, as you build anything of substance.

Let's think of our index cards as blocks. Remember, they contain facts, quotes, and anecdotes, which are the elements from which speeches are made.

A simple speech might be divided into three points you wish to share with your listener, sandwiched between an opening and a closing.

You might open your speech with a story, an anecdote that gets the listeners' attention and sets the tone and pace. That's block one. Next might be a fact, tying the story to today's setting. Block two. A funny quote might follow, to lighten the tone and set the stage for the three-point body of the speech. That's block three.

If you're speaking at the Athletic Association Banquet to 200 football players, your opening block—the story—will be different from a "dedication" speech at the retirement of the town librarian. But, oddly, the second and third blocks might be the same.

After your three-block opening, the three points you wish to share might require 15 blocks each to develop. But, again, the points might differ mightily between the football and library listeners. Still, within them you might share six of the same blocks: two anecdotes, two quotes, and two statements of fact.

What you have done at the outset through your research, interviewing, memory jostling, and friend asking is create a pool of at least several hundred blocks from which you can choose. Probably 60% of every speech will come from the same 100 blocks; probably 30% more will be from the next 100, and you'll likely need only 10% new material—sometimes none at all!

The beauty of the block-building system is its almost instant adaptability. Let's say your speech can be represented visually by 60 blocks. If, on the way to the presentation, somebody tells you something that is immediately usable, you can simply pluck out block 37 and put the new story in its place.

If you find out that you must trim your speech from 30 minutes to 20, you can reduce it from three points to two, deleting that entire point-three, 15-block segment. Or you can trim an anecdote from each point, cleanly expunging, say, blocks 16, 31, and 44. The listeners have no idea what you did. It sounds seamless.

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If your audience wants to be rocked with thighslappers, you insert your surefire laugh blocks. But if the group needs firing up, in go the blocks that inspire commitment and devotion.

Your basic research will usually meet your general market needs.

But if you want to spread into related niche markets, you need more research to develop blocks of interest to that niche group. Say you want to focus on dedication and the sports field. You must create a specific pool of blocks that will meet that audiences' needs, like quotes from the dedication greats of the past and present, stories of dedication, and hard facts showing results of those who really gave it their all....

You need additional information for niche listeners. They want to feel that your speech is just for them. It must reflect their view of life, the way they think and speak, their values. You must know how old the median listener is so you know the references they will understand. If they are 30-year-old soccer coaches, references to Johnny Mize and Sam Snead just won't do. If 80% of them are women, they rightly expect about 80% of your examples to be of women. So this requires the creation of new, different blocks to add to the basic blocks that will work for all speeches about dedication.

I suggested earlier that you look for visuals at the same time you fill your index cards with facts, quotes, and anecdotes, whether they are for the general or niche markets. These are photos, graphs, cartoons, whatever illustrates the points you make orally. When you're assembling your speaking blocks, you can then do the same with the visual blocks of those things to be projected behind you or displayed as you talk.

Why will they seek you when they want a speaker?

What I've just been discussing, using your index cards as symbolic blocks, is appropriate to any speaking. Where you differ here is that you singlefacetedly focus on one topic and you create one speech that will be modified, or reblocked, for all of your bookings. And what you are really selling is the expertise, with a speech the way you share that information.

Remember the best of the six elements of the ideal speech? The speech that would require little or no marketing! Yes, and cows can fly!

But it is true that you may not have to market your speech at all. But you will have to create an awareness of you. You must market your expertise and your availability to share what you know with them. You have to prime their awareness pump.

The way you do that is by seizing some vital issue that affects your topic, dipping into your information pool and applying your knowledge to a current, hot issue. Then you write an article, even a book; or appear on TV or radio; or offer a seminar, or send specific releases to newsletters or newspapers that your potential listeners read—leading with the vital issue and working into your field of expertise, to let your expertise shine. You must also let your availability shine. You tell them how to get in touch with you in the bio slug with every article in print, as a footer in



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your emails, in every letter you send, in every release sent to the people, associations, or groups most likely to need your expertise.

The key is to tie your expertise to the potential listeners' need. People long to belong to something, to make their mark, to grab some shred of immortality. That's what you link to dedication, what you put before their eyes and ears.

Businesses always want to increase their profits; some even want to improve their product or their employees' happiness and sense of communal well-being. That's why they need you to tell them about dedication, what you write about for their in-house newspapers and the related professional journals and newsletters.

The goal is to make your name synonymous with your area of expertise. When somebody mentions your name, the other person says, "That's the person who talks about dedication." And when somebody mentions dedication, your name automatically comes up. That's easier than it sounds for one simple reason: almost nobody focuses that tightly. They'd rather have 12 speeches that they offer twice a year than one basic speech, with modifications, that they will offer hundreds or thousands of times throughout their life.

Look at it from another light. You own a company with 65 employees. Like all companies today, the bottom line is a bit wavy, your expansion is on hold, your workers are getting antsy with small raises, and you've all been at the same task, sort of treading water, for a long time now.

You read an article about how dedication can turn a company around and turn humdrum employees into your greatest allies. Even better, the person who wrote the article is a speaker and you need a speaker. What are you going to do? You're going to call that person and probably book them. And if they are as good before a crowd as they were on paper, you're going to tell everybody else you know about them. You become their greatest ally! Why? Because they perceived a need, rooted into it, and are now bringing both expertise and vigor, discipline, and excitement to solving your problem.

I hope I've made the point: expertise can be the heart of a one-speech-fits-all career.

An ideal speech does six things. I want all six from one speech rather than to have to write six or 12 or 20 not-so-ideal speeches.

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My purpose and passion is to make you shine, so you can do fully and often what you do best because, through the spoken word, you can change the world. You should be rewarded mightily for that; you should be recognized as an exceptional person; your listeners should be clamoring to hear you speak again; they should want to buy anything else you offer, and you shouldn't have to pay 50 cents on every dollar and 30 minutes for every hour just to let others know you exist and that they are the poorer for not hearing you.

I think there is a way, there is an ideal speech, that can make some or all of that come true. If any of what I have said gets you closer to doing more fully and often what you do best, then I thank you for plowing through all of these words.

*For specific information about the SNN Teleseminar built around this workbook,  
please see <http://www.sops.com/snnteleseminar.htm>*