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THE VALUE OF A GOOD EVENT SPEAKER

by MICHELE COLOPY

Sharing your knowledge, expertise, and experience is a valuable asset in any industry. Whether you are a beekeeper or researcher, or a leader in your local or state association, you have the opportunity to diversify your income by sharing your knowledge, education, and experience with others. However, sales pitch presentations are generally *not* welcomed at educational events; that is why you have a vendor table.

Within some industries, especially beekeeping, conference organizers have too often expected speakers to work for free, thinking that waiving the speaker's conference registration is more than enough "payment." It is not. However, if you are new to an industry, speaking for free is a good way to build your reputation as knowledgeable, good with an audience, and helpful to the organizers. But can you *afford* to speak for free?

- Know the reasons you might speak for free.
- Is the event one you would like to attend?
- Can you reduce costs by staying with relatives in the venue city?
- Is the venue city a place you want to visit?
- What is the value to you of speaking at this event for "the exposure?"
- Are you valued as a speaker at the event? Or, devalued, as speakers are promoted as being "free"? A registration fee promotes the value of an event. Free registration devalues the event for the audience and the speakers.

and entertains. Your level of educational achievement, academic and experiential, adds value to the event, and impacts your speaking fee.

Diversity of thought, ideas, and experience in speakers is key to a strong conference, and one that encourages more people to attend. Diversity includes not only diverse race, ethnicity, and gender, but also geographic location of a beekeeping speaker, size of operation, treatment-free versus conventional, etc. Diverse experiences include young or new beekeepers, as well as urban, suburban, and rural agricultural stakeholders.

Thought leaders come from all walks of life and greatly enhance any educational event. As a speaker, if you are also a writer in trade magazines,

or authored a book, or if you blog, you have developed a following. If you continually create new content, you are expressing your value as a speaker to an event organizer. Too many speakers use one presentation, or maybe five, and have not refreshed their slides or research in five years. Basically, after one round of their presentations they are done as a speaker as everyone has seen their slides and heard their talk.

Requests for Proposals/Papers (RFPs) or Calls for Papers (CFPs) are a good way to diversify your event. However, conference planners need to follow through on RFPs. Conference sponsors should not hold an RFP, collect the proposals, and then schedule all of the old guard and the



Experienced speakers are "performers." A good presentation educates

Michele Colopy speaking at the Blount County Beekeepers member meeting, July 2020

same old presentations. Speakers will stop submitting proposals as it will be obvious the organizers were just giving lip service to diversity through the RFP/CFP.

COST TO SPEAKERS

Let's examine the basic costs of being a speaker. Speaking fees are a product or service just like pollination services, honey, or beeswax. There are costs associated with creating a presentation, traveling to and from a meeting or conference, and even being available online for a presentation. (See box at bottom of page.)

Speakers should not have to incur expenses to speak to your audience, when the speakers are the reason there is an audience. Organizers need to plan better to secure sponsorships or grant funds, and collaborate to ensure quality speakers, paying them for the experience, knowledge and inspiration they bring to an event audience.

Organizers need to expand their budgets, and start paying speakers — all speakers. Create a budget for speakers. If an event only relies on local speakers, you will eventually doom the event as it will become stale and not meet the education needs of your target market.

Low registration fees are a thing of the past. Beekeeping conferences especially have not kept pace with the real world costs of conferences and programs. Free conferences are insulting to speakers. A free conference projects to the audience and the speakers that the event simply has no value. A free conference does not serve the mission of the organization or its members, as it is not generating income to support the work and services of the organization. Even if the organization has the funds to present a free event, that financial decision verges on mismanagement of funds to enact such an event.



Panel discussion at LEAD Conference, Oct. 2020, featuring Michele Colopy, Becky Johnson, Denise O'Brien, Shannon Trimboli, Wendy Mather.

VIRTUAL PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Although virtual presentations save travel costs and on-site venue costs (hall rental, food, exhibit tables, etc.), there are still the costs for the technical side of a virtual presentation. Many online platforms are only free for 45 minutes — otherwise organizers must purchase licenses. If you decide to host your own virtual presentations and charge an admission or ticket fee, research the costs of the various online platforms as you will have license fees, possible ticket service fees, tech equipment costs, etc. If you are hosting your own presentations, you as the organizer must be concerned about copyright of your content and the content of any guest speakers. Publication ownership rights for photos, drawings, and research belong to the original creator: Secure written permission for use, especially if you are charging admission. While there is guidance allowing for "fair use," that typically applies to K-college entities. A conference or single presentation may not qualify. See the

Resource List at the end of this article for more information and to protect yourself and your organization from copyright infringement.

VIDEO RECORDING CAN ADD VALUE FOR SPEAKERS

While presentation software supports recording online presentations, this does not mean they should be recorded. There are the costs of:

- Technical support
- Additional royalties to the speaker for additional views
- Protection of the speaker's copyright protected material
- Research or photos which may be embargoed and cannot be recorded

Each time a speaker's presentation is replayed the speaker loses a speaking fee. Online presentations may help to secure additional speaking presentations, but a snippet of a talk will also provide that opportunity. Organizers

Costs Incurred by Speakers		
Loss of work/billable hours (travel time to and from, at the event)	12 hours travel x \$20 per hour	\$240
	16 hours at event x \$20 per hour	\$320
Travel costs (meals, lodging, mileage/airfare)	Hotel 3 nights	\$345
	Meals \$80 per day	\$240
	Airfare	\$250
Your time to create/revise/update the presentation	6 hours	\$120
Cost of time for a customized presentation for a single event	12 hours	\$240
Cost of handouts, etc.	Dbl-sided x .09 x 100	<u>\$18</u>
		\$1533 to \$ 1773

must secure the written permission of the speaker to record their presentation. The speaker has the right to say no, or allow it with caveats. A speaker may allow their presentation to a local member group to be recorded, if only club members can replay the presentation. The organizers should *not* post the recorded presentation to YouTube or the club website for the general public. In doing that you are also limiting the growth of your own local club or your event. When the word gets out you have good speakers, others will join and pay member dues or registration fees, supporting your organization and the event, and the speakers.

Limit time for paid registrants to view a speaker's recording. Obtain written permission of the speaker to record or not (this should be in the contract between the speaker and the organizer/sponsoring group). This is the 21st century; speakers should have a contract they provide to organizers; and event/program organizers should have a contract if the speaker does not.

VIRTUALLY NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Public speaking now fully includes online presentations, through Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, Vimeo, Webex, FaceTime, Microsoft Teams, and other software formats. Virtual events and education can be an opportunity to grow your brand as a speaker, and to expand the audience for a conference or program. Some speakers may not want to travel for the foreseeable future, but would still be a great addition to your conference. So bring them in virtually. More programs and conferences in the coming years will be hybrids of on-site and virtual.

Building your brand as a quality, exciting speaker helps create quality and exciting educational programs and events ... for which speakers should be paid!

This topic was first presented at the LEAD for Pollinators Oct. 24-25, 2020 Virtual Conference, "Becoming 21st Century Leaders: Women in Beekeeping and Agriculture."

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Michele Colopy is the Executive Director and co-founder of LEAD for Pollinators, Inc. She has been focused on honey bees, beekeeping, and pollinator education for more than eight years. Her father was a beekeeper in southeast Ohio on their small apple orchard. She keeps honey bees in the city, and has replaced her crabgrass front yard with pesticide-free pollinator flowers for her honey bees and native pollinators. She was the Program Director for the Pollinator Stewardship Council from 2013 to 2019. She volunteered as Treasurer of The Ohio State Beekeepers Association (OSBA) from 2016-2019, modernizing the accounting, co-managing a USDA grant, administering the Affiliate program, and managing two other grant programs.



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