

## The Top 11 Ways to Annoy Any Client or Meeting Planner

**T**his month, our column could be more aptly called “Worst Practices,” because we’re talking about how to get onto a meeting planner’s “worst speaker” list. So, instead of going over the obvious, the things we should do, let’s talk about those bad behaviors that get noticed—in a not-so-nice light. Hopefully, NSA members aren’t guilty of these appalling speaker behaviors. However, here is a list of some really bad ways to sour your next speaking opportunity:

**1. Show up late.** Walk in five minutes before the session is to begin. Don’t show up as promised for the audiovisual people to check your visuals or microphone. Simply tap or blow into the mic to test it when you arrive. Better yet, show up five minutes after your program is scheduled and ask for coffee.

**2. Refuse to do anything that you didn’t agree to.** Turn down that invitation to the reception the night before your talk, especially if it involves the sponsors or VIPs. Refuse to take pictures with attendees or be available to sign books. You’re the big shot. You deserve to be insulated from the people who made it possible for you to be there.

**3. Make a big deal about things that cannot be changed.** To have an excellent presentation, conditions should be ideal. If there is a pole in your room or the temperature is too cold, demand an immediate room change. If the chairs set to comply with the fire code are positioned differently from your approved layout, have the attendees move them. If your handouts didn’t arrive or the LCD projector is not working properly, announce it repeatedly to the group assembled to let them share in your frustration.

**4. Talk down to the meeting planners, volunteers and professionals on-site.** You have done a lot with your life. Not everyone is

worthy of your best manners or even professional behavior. So what if these folks have spent the last six months planning for the event or even stayed up for the last three nights getting ready? Quite frankly, not all meeting planners are consulted about the speaker selection. Why would you show respect to anyone but the board of directors or the executives of the company?

**5. Don’t call.** Don’t return any calls. If a client asks to speak with you about the group, refuse. If you are asked to call when you arrive at the event, don’t. If you must break a commitment, send a fax or e-mail instead. Keep people guessing about your whereabouts. It’s part of your mystique.

**6. Keep your talk generic.** What works for plumbers works for palm readers. Do not customize any material. Tell old jokes. Ignore examples that relate to your audience. Embellish your credentials, make up statistics, tell another’s tale and flat out lie. Most attendees won’t know the difference.

**7. Brag, brag, brag.** Make yourself the hero of every story. Some of your audience members reside in low-income housing, drive older automobiles and even struggle to make ends meet. They can only bask in your glory as you share your personal turmoil in making the million-dollar mortgage, deciding Junior’s prep school and flying first class on your way to another four-star hotel in some exotic city.

**8. Miss all deadlines.** Timeframes and rules are really for other speakers. Just because you are asked for a description doesn’t mean you should provide it. You have a Web site. Send in the 10-year-old picture that is more flattering than your current one. However, if anything is not accurate when you read the program brochure, make sure you write a letter to the client reflecting your displeasure.

**9. Travel first-class.** You have to travel a lot. At the very least, clients can make it comfortable for you. Wait until the last minute to book air flights. Eat lobster every night. Bill gift shop purchases to the client’s account. Require first-class accommodations, a suite at the hotel and a limo to greet you at the airport. Better yet, don’t tell the client about your spending spree. There is nothing better than a surprise expense statement.

**10. Do not do what you were hired to do.** People don’t really read the descriptions, and actually all of your material is good. You are giving your audience members what they need. People should get over the fact that your language might be considered non-inclusive or even offensive. Once you are in the “zone,” you cannot be expected to monitor everything you say.

**11. Go over your time** Oops, are there more than 10 things here? Well, it proves a point. Make sure you go over. If the meeting is behind, it is not your problem. You are a professional speaker, and they are there to hear you. Go over . . . they will make the time up later.

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