How to become a



Speaker

by

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Introduction

Thanks for requesting this short white paper on becoming a TEDx speaker. My name is Patrick Schwerdtfeger and I gave my first TEDx Talk on "Learned Intuition" in August, 2012. Due to some unusual circumstances, I ended up delivering the same talk a second time in June, 2013, and my TEDx video was recorded on that second occasion.

I'm very proud of my experience at TEDx Sacramento and am grateful for the opportunity. It's had a huge impact on my business as a professional speaker. The TED name carries enormous credibility and its inclusion on my website has landed me countless speaking engagements that I wouldn't have secured without it.

This document is broken down into three parts and I recommend you read them in order. **Part I** offers a brief introduction to TED, its history and primary objectives. I'm sure you're well aware of TED Talks already but it's always surprising how many people have some of these facts wrong. And if you're going to try and give a TEDx Talk yourself, it's important that you have the correct background.

Part II provides a step-by-step guide to becoming a TEDx speaker. This is obviously the meat of the document and there's nothing revolutionary about the process. But again, it's surprising how many people approach

this the wrong way so I encourage you to model your efforts based on this approach.

Part III deals with the promotion of your TEDx video once it gets released. This is super important. It's also something I did wrong myself. Well, I didn't do it *wrong* entirely but I could've leveraged the process far more than I did. I'll tell you more about that in that section, but rest assured that I'll share both my victories and my mistakes along the way.

You should know that I compiled this document from about a dozen blog posts that I found online, along with my own experience. It's my best attempt to compile my own lessons learned and the other resources available and put them into one document, not only for your benefit but also for my own. I'd love to give a second TEDx Talk and will use this same information to guide my own efforts.

Part I: Learn about TED

TED is a platform for "ideas worth spreading" where thought-leaders from around the world share insights from business to science to global issues. It's a global community that welcomes people from very discipline and culture who seek a deeper understanding of the world. TED believes in the power of ideas to change the world and the videos on the TED website provide a clearinghouse of free knowledge from the world's most inspired thinkers.

The speeches delivered at TED events are referred to as TED Talks. They're generally a maximum of 18 minutes long; long enough to be serious and short enough to hold people's attention. The very best idea in the world is worthless if it can't be conveyed and shared. Science has shown that 18 minutes is the upper limit of what the average person can digest in one sitting, so TED chose that time limit for its format.

The word TED originally stood for Technology, Entertainment and Design but the scope of TED has broadened out since its inception (see history below). Today, the tagline for TED is "ideas worth spreading." The speakers who share their ideas on the TED stage have their speeches video recorded with multiple camera angles and edited with excellent production quality and then shared on Youtube as well as the TED website.

It's important to understand the difference between TED and TEDx. There are only two TED events each year, but there are over 800 TEDx events each year. That means TED Talks are much more exclusive than TEDx Talks. It's a much higher level. The speakers from TEDx events that accumulate massive attention and buzz for their ideas are sometimes invited to speak on the big TED stage later on, but it's rare.

The "x" in TEDx stands for "an independently organized TED event." Aspiring curators apply to TED to start local TEDx events in their area. There is a fairly extensive selection process and approved curators have to agree to a licensing agreement which includes a variety of stipulations to maintain the quality and professionalism of the TED brand.

The interesting thing is that most people don't know the difference between TED and TEDx videos. As a result, the credibility you get from having a TEDx video can rival that of an actual TED video. I have benefited from that myself. I spoke at a TEDx event, not one of the annual TED events, but it's had a huge impact on my career as a speaker. As such, it is definitely worth your time and effort to get selected as a speaker for a local TEDx event.

Part of the TEDx licensing agreement requires that curators record the speeches with multiple camera angles with professional production quality editing. That means the video you'll get after contributing to a TEDx event will be of sufficient video quality to serve as your primary 'speaker demo video' as a professional speaker.

The most important thing you'll need in order to become a Keynote Speaker is a good speaker demo video. If you get selected to speak at a TEDx event, not only will you get a great video but you'll also get the credibility that goes along with being a TEDx speaker. If being a professional keynote speaker is your goal, speaking at a TEDx event is one of the best steps you can take.

The History of TED

The firsts TED event was organized by Richard Saul Wurman in 1984. He saw the convergence of three fields – technology, entertainment and design – and wanted to showcase the latest trends and ideas at a conference. This first event included a demo of the newly developed Compact Disc, the ebook and cutting-edge 3D graphics from Lucasfilm. Unfortunately, the event lost money and didn't take place again until 1990.

Richard Saul Wurman teamed up with his partner, Harry Marks, to host the second TED conference and it did end up making some money; not much, but enough to begin hosting TED conferences each year thereafter in Monterey, California. Back then, it was an invite-only event and attracted influential pioneers from a variety of different disciplines.

The scope of TED began to broaden out and the roster of speakers included scientists, philosophers, musicians, business leaders, religious figures and philanthropists among others. It gained a reputation for innovation and

thought leadership and became an annual highlight for San Francisco Bay Area and Silicon Valley intellectuals.

Wurman and Marks met Chris Anderson in 2000. Many people believe this is the same Chris Anderson who wrote for *The Economist* and later joined *Wired* as their editor-in-chief in 2001, but they're actually two different people. This Chris Anderson was born to two medical missionaries in Pakistan and founded Future Publishing in 1985 in the UK and then Imagine Media in 1994 in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Chris Anderson ended up acquiring TED from Wurman and Marks in 2001 and he remains the Curator to this day. It was at that time that the focus of TED shifted to "ideas worth spreading" and Anderson used his considerable business acumen to grow TED into what it is today, with well over 500 million views of its videos. Anderson also introduced the TED Prize, the TED Fellows Program, the TED Open Translation program, TED-Ed and, of course, the TEDx program.

The first batch of TED Talks was posted online in June, 2006, and the exposure exploded from there. Three months later, those videos had accumulated over a million views. By 2009, that number jumped to over 100 million views and it's been growing ever since. By 2012, it was over 500 million views and by 2014, it was over one billion views!

The Most Popular TED Talks

TED has attracted the top thought leaders from around the globe to share their ideas on the TED stage. Those speeches have accumulated millions of views and continue to rack up more views every single day. Although the exact list of all-time top TED Talks changes over time, they include the following:

Ken Robinson	How Schools Kill Creativity
Amy Cuddy	Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are
Simon Sinek	How Great Leaders Inspire Action
Brene Brown	The Power of Vulnerability
Jill Bolte Taylor	My Stroke of Insight
Pranav Mistry	The Thrilling Potential of SixthSense Technology
Mary Roach	10 Things You Didn't Know About Orgasm
Tony Robbins	Why We Do What We Do
Dan Pink	The Puzzle of Motivation
David Gallo	Underwater Astonishments
Dan Gilbert	The Surprising Science of Happiness
Susan Cain	The Power of Introverts
Elizabeth Gilbert	Your Elusive Creative Genius
Hans Rosling	The Best Stats You've Ever Seen
Pamela Meyer	How to Spot a Liar
Jamie Oliver	Teach Every Child About Food
Shawn Achor	The Happy Secret to Better Work
David Blaine	How I Held my Breathe for 17 Minutes
Keith Barry	Brain Magic

TED is about ideas, not people. It doesn't matter who you are. You need to have a great idea. A lot of people want to promote their businesses or sell something. That's not allowed. Ask: how can your story add value to others or change the world for the better? The key to becoming a TEDx speaker is to be passionate about a compelling topic.

Be kind and be real. You're nothing more than a facilitator for your idea. Focus on the idea and how it can improve other people's lives. TED is about collaborating and working together to share ideas and improve the world. That's what the curators want, and that's what potential viewers want as well.

Also, just so you know, TED does not pay speakers. There's overwhelming demand to speak on the TED or TEDx stage so don't go into this thinking you'll make money as a result. If you pull this off, you'll get plenty of benefits already but you'll be speaking for free.

Part II: Become a TEDx Speaker

Step 1: Do Your Research

As mentioned above, there are over 800 TEDx events each year and those events are all listed on the TED website. The page features a map of the world with markers for each TEDx event. Zoom in to your location and see which events are taking place in your area. Here in the San Francisco Bay Area, at the time of writing this document, there were 19 events listed. For other smaller cities, there might still be three or four in the area.

Most TEDx events have their own website and the listing mentioned above provides links to these independent websites. Make note of the events near your location and then visit the corresponding websites. They will explain the application process and it will likely be different in each case. Some of have online submission forms. Others encourage prospective speakers to email the curator directly. Be sure to follow their stipulated application process. You don't want to begin the process on the wrong foot.

In some cases, there won't be a link to their website. Just make note of the TEDx event name (like TEDx Sacramento or TEDx Golden Gate Park) and then search for it on Google. It should be fairly easy to find them online and then research the application process.

Again, TED does not pay speakers and will not pay your travel expenses, so it makes a lot of sense to start with local TEDx events. I suggest finding the closest four or five events and focusing your efforts there. In some cases, they might pay for a hotel room but don't count on it. The details of their submission process and expense-remuneration policies will probably be listed on their websites.

There are different formats for TEDx events. Most are full day events but some are also "salon" events, which are shorter evening-only formats. In Sacramento, they had a main TEDx full-day event but then decided to add a salon event the day before. I spoke during that salon event. Anyway, you should know that the video is the same either way, so be open to any option they offer you.

When you visit these sites, make note of their upcoming event theme. TEDx events always have a theme and you should address it somehow in your proposal. In some cases, your topic might not be a good fit for their theme. Don't try to push a square peg into a round hole. Focus your efforts on those events that complement your topic and check back later on those that don't fit well currently.

You may wish to contact the curator to inquire about future event themes. TEDx events generally plan way ahead and have their speaker line-up finalized months before the event. As a result, the theme listed for their next event may not be available for speaker submissions anyway. They might already be planning their next event with an entirely different theme.

In that scenario, you can apply to speak for an event that is not even listed on their site yet.

Themes vary widely. Of course, there are some topics that come up again and again but curators also try to come up with new ideas along the way. To give you an idea of what themes might come up, here's a list from some past events:

- How We Learn
- Movement
- Rethinking Higher Education
- Africa: The Next Chapter
- Design that Matters
- 10 Years from Now
- How the Mind Works
- Medicine Without Borders
- Bold Predictions, Stern Warnings
- How to Start a Revolution
- A Greener Future?
- Connected Reality
- The Wealth of Networks
- Happiness
- Architectural Inspiration
- Evolution's Genius
- Inspired By Nature
- The Rise of Collaboration
- Smart Mobs

- Rethinking Poverty
- Presentation Innovation
- Is There a God?

Step 2: Make an Introduction

There are basically three ways to get selected as a TEDx speaker. First, you might know the curator or one of their past speakers. If so, that person can make an introduction and help you get the process started. Second, you can submit a proposal either on the website or directly to the curator. I'll cover some tips for submitting a proposal in Step 3 below. Generally speaking, you'll be better off is someone else suggests you as a speaker, rather than you suggesting yourself. More on that later.

Third, you can be discovered by *them* as a result of interesting work you're already sharing in the public domain. This is an ideal scenario. Make yourself findable. Blog about your topic. Share your posts on Twitter and Facebook. Publish articles on LinkedIn's powerful "Pulse" Publisher Network. Make videos about your work and upload them to Youtube. This type of sharing will bring many opportunities your way, not just TEDx events. My "Strategic Business Insights" video blog more than doubled my business as a speaker.

The point is that your online brand is extremely important. Even if you submit your proposal directly through the website, you can bet they'll put your name into Google as they evaluate your proposal. Start building your

online identity and share your work and your passion enthusiastically. It will go a long way to get your proposal into the short list.

It's worth noting that TED and TEDx are not interested in self-promoting speakers who are looking for fame in the TED spotlight. They're interested in ideas. That's why it's beneficial if someone else, ideally an industry leader or a past TEDx speaker, recommends you. That immediately puts you on the short list, so take a look at the TEDx events in your area and ask yourself who you might know that can make a recommendation.

This is an area where being a 'professional speaker' can work against you. If you're already speaking professionally, don't flaunt that too much. Focus on your idea and why it needs to be heard. Show your passion for the idea, perhaps by linking to blog posts or videos you've created on the topic. Demonstrate why you're the right person to present this idea to the world.

Step 3: Submit a Proposal

Whether you contact them directly or have someone else suggest you, you'll eventually need to provide a proposal to outline your intentions. Your proposal is like a 'pitch' letter and it's designed to sell your idea. I suggest your proposal be limited to about half a page and no more. These people are busy and they probably get a ton of pitches. Your pitch should be concise and compelling. So in about 200 words or less, try to answer the following four questions:

1. What is your idea?
2. Why is it a new idea? What makes it different?
3. Who benefits from this idea? How does it improve the world?
4. Why should *you* be presenting this idea? Are you an expert?

You also need to include links to at least one video of you speaking in front of an audience. They need to see you in action. They need to see if you can communicate effectively in front of people. If necessary, get a group of friends together in a professional setting and record yourself speaking to them. Nobody needs to know they're just personal friends. The important thing is the video, so find a way to put one together.

There are a number of places where you can get in front of people fairly easily, including Toastmasters, local Meetup groups and local community organizations like Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions Clubs. Call around and ask to deliver your speech for free. Then get a friend to video record your talk for you. Smart phones make this process extremely easy these days.

There are a few different ways to deliver your proposal. You can include everything as text in an email or through an online submission form. You can create a nicely-formatted PDF file which might include a photo of you and perhaps another image to complement your topic description. Or you can create a page on your website with all the information and then just submit the URL when sending your inquiry. Personally, I think it makes sense to do all three.

As I mentioned above, I would love to do a second TEDx Talk and will probably create a webpage with all the details as well as some embedded videos, and then have a downloadable PDF available right on that webpage. Finally, I would have a text message that I could send via email or through an online form with the primary details along with a link to that webpage. That way, I'm providing three different ways for the recipient of my proposal to review the content and potentially share it with other members of their selection committee.

Once again, focus on the idea. Do a search for relevant keywords and the word "TED" on Youtube and see what comes up. You'll quickly get a feel for similar topics that other people have presented at past events. Watch their videos and ask yourself how your idea is different from theirs. Make note of the titles they chose and then think of another title for your own topic that has similar sizzle.

There's definitely a TED style of topic. I spent an entire day brainstorming with a friend to come up with my own title. I called it Learned Intuition: How to be Super Human. I wanted the title to be thought-provoking all by itself. It's not a perfect title but hopefully you get the idea. Think of something that catches the reader's attention and build your proposal around that title.

You may also wish to customize your proposed title to complement the themes of different TEDx events. You might incorporate tiny wording changes that tailor it more to one theme or another. Put yourself in the position of the curator. They're putting a puzzle together around their

chosen title. They need to see that your topic will add substance to their event concept.

You may also wish to purchase an image to complement your proposed idea; essentially a banner image for your proposal. Websites like iStockPhoto.com and BigStock.com and many others have amazing images for sale and they're not expensive. Meanwhile, a visual banner for your idea can add a lot to its appeal. Find ways to make your idea compelling!

Part III: Spread the Word

The most important part of your TEDx Talk is *not* the event itself. It's the video you'll get *after* the event. The video is where all the benefits come from so you'll want to leverage that as much as possible. One of the biggest identifiers of a good video is the number of views it has. Not only does it mean that a lot of people have watched it, but it also makes it far more likely that more people will watch it in the future.

There are a lot of things you can do to promote your video and I suggest you have a detailed plan in place well before it gets released. The first few hours can make all the difference. You need to be ready when you get that notification email. If the video gets off to a quick start, it's more likely to get shared. Everybody likes to be part of the hot new thing. If your video is racking up views quickly, it will get shared much more often.

This is where I screwed up. I did have a promotion strategy in place and aggressively shared it on the social media platforms where I'm active, but I stopped the campaign too soon. At the time of this writing, my video had about 23,000 views. That's not bad but it's nothing special either. I should've kept pushing it to get past 100,000 views. I'm certain it would've increased the impact on my business.

As soon as your video gets released, start spreading the word. Tell everyone. Send emails to your list. Share it on Facebook and Twitter. In fact, use a service like Hootsuit to schedule 15 or even 20 tweets to go out over the first four or five days. The people on twitter aren't online all day long, so they might easily miss one of your tweets. Sending multiple versions increases the chances that your audience will actually see it.

Facebook allows publishers to "promote your post" using their advertising platform. It's very easy to allocate $100 or $250 or $500 to promote your post. If you choose do to this, make sure to actually *ask* people to watch the video in your post. If you don't, you'll rack of ton of "likes" but only a small percentage will actually click play. If they don't play the video, you don't get any additional views on Youtube.

Twitter also allows you to advertise using their "promoted tweet" platform. Similar to Google Adwords, Twitter allows you to bid a dollar amount per engagement along with a daily budget. If you go with this route, make sure your tweet is as enticing as possible. Include "TEDx Talk" as this will immediately increase the perceived credibility of the tweet, and then craft the rest of the tweet to get attention and evoke curiosity.

Hashtags are another great way to reach targeted groups of people. Hashtags are simply words with the # sign at the beginning, making them easily searchable. Examples include #photooftheday or #JeSuisCharlie #popular. There are millions of hashtags being used all the time and it makes sense to include one or two in your tweet if they are heavily followed and pertain to the topic of your speech.

You can also use Google Adwords for Video. This is the platform for promoting videos directly on Youtube, and it might be the least expensive way to accumulate more views. You can also add text identifying you as a professional speaker. If I get another opportunity to do a TEDx Talk, I will allocate at least $500 to this form of promotion and I'll start the campaign immediately after the video gets released.

You should have one or two blog posts pre-written and ready to publish when your video comes out. As soon as it gets released on Youtube, publish the post and email your list with the link. Proactively ask others to write blog posts about it too. Quite often, people are happy to help promote worthwhile content but they simply didn't think of it at the time they saw your video. Just by asking and providing that "call-to-action", you'll put the idea in their head, dramatically increasing the odds that they'll write blog posts themselves and pass them along to their own audiences.

You can also share your blog post on sites like Reddit, DIGG and StumbleUpon. In fact, some of these platforms have advertising options as well. Don't underestimate the credibility that comes with a TEDx Talk. Sharing a TEDx Talk is nothing like sharing an ordinary blog post or an average video. It's special and people are accustomed to watching great content under that label.

With that in mind, ask influential people in your topic area to take a look and share it if they like it. Again, the TEDx label makes this possible.

Everybody knows that TED Talks are generally short and thought provoking. By sending emails to industry leaders as soon as the video is released, you're giving them the advantage of seeing good relevant content before the masses see it. If your video is good, they'll appreciate the advance notice and be more likely to share it with their own audiences.

Depending on your career objectives, I would allocate a budget for this promotional process. When my TEDx video was released, I spent about $800 promoting it, primarily on Facebook and StumbleUpon. Twitter didn't have an advertising platform back then and I never thought about promoting the video on Youtube or sending it to industry leaders. If I get a chance to do another TEDx Talk, I will probably allocate at least $2,000 for promotion and a lot more time and effort to the process.

When planning your campaign, be specific. Make a list of all the platforms you want to use. Identify the industry the thought leaders ahead of time and perhaps even reach out to them beforehand and make an introduction. Write your blog posts and even have them saved as 'drafts' in your WordPress dashboard. Allocate the budget and create all the accounts you'll need when it's time to pull the trigger. The hard word becomes *before* the video's release, not after. Once the video is online, it's show time!

If your objective is to become a keynote speaker, and if you're happy with the video, it's definitely worth the money to promote the heck out of it. I can't promise that it will generate business immediately, but the added credibility of a well-watched TEDx Talk video will increase your closing ratio

with prospective speaking clients for years to come. It's an enormous opportunity. Don't waste it!

Keynote Mastery Program

I have been asked countless times how to become a professional speaker. It's an amazing career and a lot of people, perhaps including you, would love to start sharing their messages with audiences around the world. That's what I do myself and I created the Keynote Mastery program specifically to help aspiring speakers accelerate their progress.

You can learn more about the Keynote Mastery program by clicking here. I recommend you take a look. This program will allow you to develop your own career in *half* the time it took me. Even in this document, there are a bunch of things I *wish* I would've done when I got my own TEDx video. I've learned from my mistakes and am happy to share my experience with you so you can void those mistakes in your own career.

Final Thoughts

There are basically three essential components to building a successful career as a professional speaker. Of course, there are always plenty of details but the core of the business boils down to just three elements, as follows:

1. Good quality video of you speaking in front of an audience.
2. Getting that video in front of the right eyeballs.
3. Social proof.

Becoming a TEDx speaker accomplishes two of those three things. You'll end up with a great quality video and it provides ample social proof, especially if you do a good job of promoting it. With a ton of views, it will serve you well as the validation event planners need to hire you for their conferences and annual meetings. This is a worthwhile cause. So take this information and start working. Done properly, it can literally make your career!

Patrick.