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MASTER WRITING COACH

“But It Sounds Good When I Say It!”

Avoid These 3 Common Traps When Turning Your Keynote Into a Book

By Dawn Josephson, The Master Writing Coach™

Most speakers are successful because they have a gift for being able to connect with an audience. It would make sense then that they should be able to recreate that rapport in their book. Unfortunately, converting a keynote to a book isn't that easy.

Books are static; the only interaction exists between the printed words and the readers' imagination. Once the book is written, the author has no other role (aside from marketing the book, but that's a different article). Keynotes, on the other hand, are dynamic; speakers can gauge if the audience is involved, and can make changes to their presentation on the spot. When writing, speakers no longer have the freedom and artistic license they have on stage. Often, speakers are unaware of this different dynamic until they attempt to write their first book. That's when they inadvertently fall into one of the three common traps of book writing that plague the speaking profession.

When you avoid these traps, you can write your book faster, engage your readers better, and sell books more quickly.

Trap Number One: Writing out the keynote and thinking that's the book.

Speakers often say, “I don't need to actually write a book. I have a keynote. I can transcribe it, and that'll be my book!” While this certainly sounds great in theory, book writing doesn't work that way. Here's why:

Keynotes are typically 60 to 90 minutes in length. If you were to transcribe your keynote, it would amount to approximately 30 to 50 single spaced pages—not nearly enough for a book. Keynotes are only long enough to scratch the surface of a topic. And that's perfectly acceptable for a speech, because audiences don't expect a lot of depth in an hour or so. The old formula of three points and a poem works for speeches, but not for books. Books have different

characteristics—they need to have a more serious tone, contain more “meaty” information, and contain fewer stories to be successful.

Additionally, whether you use funny anecdotes or outright jokes in your speeches, your humor is often what holds an audience’s attention. But the jokes are often physical—conveyed by body language, tone of voice, or timing—or the humor is specific to the news of the day or the audience you’re addressing. Unfortunately, when you write those same jokes in a book, they often fall flat. Not only are they too specific, but you lose the voice inflections or precise timing that makes the jokes “work.” After all, punctuation can only help you out so much. Realize that written humor is usually subtle—it makes readers smile or chuckle, but rarely does it ever make them double over with laughter. For print purposes, you need to adapt your definition of “funny” from knee-slapping humor to lighthearted smiles.

Trap Number Two: Organizing the book the same way as the keynote.

Speeches are organized differently than books. Whether speaking in a formal keynote or just talking to a friend, we all have a tendency to jump from topic to topic. For example, we might be talking about what we did last night, which will trigger a thought about what we want to eat for lunch, which will trigger a thought of something we’re planning to do over the weekend. And that’s okay—our brain accepts that. But when we’re reading, our brains are not that flexible. We need point A to lead to B to lead to C to lead to D. Unlike a keynote, a book needs a very linear focus.

When speaking, you can easily make subtle references and skip around a little. When writing, you need to make your points very obvious and put them in a logical flow. Readers can’t “read between the lines” as easily as a listener in your audience can. For example, during your keynote, you can speak very slow and soft or very quick and loud to make a subtle point or not-so-subtle point. Authors are unable to do that in print.

Once your keynote is transcribed, you can easily see how it jumps around or how your subtle references appear weak in print. Now you can go through your keynote transcript and group all relevant points together. That’s when you can separate information into logical chapters and fill in the obvious gaps.

Trap Number Three: Not changing the examples to ones that are timeless.

When preparing a keynote, you likely research your audience so you can put relevant examples into your speech. While all good keynotes have some element of customization and specification, books are different in that they must be geared toward a more general audience.

Many speakers have a tendency to say, “I gave this wonderful keynote to Company X two months ago. It went so well that I’m going to use that exact speech for my book because that’s the best keynote I ever did.” Unfortunately, the examples made for Company X probably won’t work for a general audience.

That's why you need to take out all the stories that are company or industry-specific and rewrite them for a general audience. Broadening your audience will maximize your readership.

Also realize that bookstores want to stock books that will sell forever (or pretty darn close to forever). You've probably seen some titles that have been on the bookstore shelves for years. If you flip through some of those long-time selling titles, you'll notice they have general examples and stories that appeal to a wide range of people. Bookstores take this into consideration when deciding whether to stock a book.

Another thing to be aware of is the sheer number of stories you include in your book. Keynotes are story-heavy because that's effective. Audiences enjoy hearing stories, as verbal stories make auditory learning easier and fun. Books are different. When people seek out a book, they want "meaty" information that has a heavy "how-to" element.

Finally, everyone learns differently; some people learn through stories, others may learn from bullet-point lists, and others may learn from cause and effect analysis. That's why you need to include several types of learning methods in a book. Break up the stories with other types of writing and spell out the lesson—don't think the story alone will convey it.

"Now It Sounds Great When I Read It."

When you avoid these three common traps, you will have created a successful and engaging book that complements your keynote rather than regurgitates it. Readers will find your writing logical, and they will receive great benefit from your words, regardless of their personal learning style. Best of all, you'll look as good in print as you do on the platform, causing your book sales, speaking fees, and industry recognition to soar.

About the Author:

Dawn Josephson, the Master Writing Coach, has been helping professional speakers and business leaders write better to earn more since 1998. As the author of *Write It Right: The Ground Rules for Self-Editing Like the Pros* and *Putting It On Paper: The Ground Rules for Creating Promotional Pieces that Sell Books*, she empowers leaders to master the printed word for enhanced credibility, positioning, and profits. Contact her at dawn@masterwritingcoach.com.