

Reaching a Roomful



Expanding Your
Homeschool Business &
Ministry Through Speaking

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One of the most effective ways to become known among homeschoolers is to speak. Wait! Don't close this ebook! If public speaking makes you queasy, you're in good company. Dr. Paul Witt, Professor of Communications at Texas Christian, says that it is the number one fear reported by people in the United States! There are very good reasons to confront this fear, though.

Because so many are afraid of public speaking, if you can overcome the fear, you can have a disproportionate influence in the world. Just being willing to make a presentation can allow you to share a godly perspective with tens or hundreds or even more. It greatly expands your impact on the world. This is a fantastic opportunity for a Christian and like so many other things, doing a good thing can bless our businesses, too.

Do you think if you were considered the expert in your field, you would sell more? I know that when we speak, our booth is mobbed. I'll never forget when we brought a few boxes of advance copies of our book to a conference. We weren't sure this book would sell, but once we spoke . . .wow! It looked like the Chicago Mercantile exchange around our booth, folks were so desperate for more information.

Do you have a message you want people to hear? There is no better way to win trust than to spend an hour sharing your passion with an audience. When they've heard your heart, they have enough experience with you to feel confident in your ministry.

Sound tempting, but still scared? Here are a few things you can do to get past the fear and on to the ministry and business potential!

Get your eyes off yourself. Melanie is very shy. Hey, stop laughing! It's true, she's just learned how to overcome it. It was revolutionary to her as a Christian to realize that her shyness was all about pride. She was scared to death of what people thought. When Melanie realized that, she made a conscious effort to focus on other people—to notice their loneliness, their fears, their concerns. The way we do that in public speaking is to go early to the venue and to engage the other early people in conversation. Usually folks are early because they are eager to hear what's being said and they'll

share if you give them any chance at all. Once she hears why they need to hear about early homeschooling or building their marriage or raising boys, then she gets excited about helping them. She can just stand up and talk to them!

Be Prepared. When we first started writing workshops, we'd write out every word we planned to say. We'd start out with an outline, a plan, and just think about speaking in our heads while we wrote. Then we'd go back to a fleshed-out outline, but with the transitions often written out. When you plan well, you know you'll never be at a loss for words, a big fear in speaking.

Use Several Channels. Putting together a handout and a PowerPoint presentation to go with your workshop will help to keep the audience engaged and listening. We are so used to multi-tasking these days, checking email while we talk to our family, that people sometimes have a hard time paying attention to just a speaker. Getting your message out on several channels will make your workshop—and your business—more memorable.

Share Your Passion. An enthusiast is irresistible. Only one person can share your story and that makes you valuable! Think of topics that you are expert in, such as those surrounding your business, and figure out what you really wish you could tell people about those topics. Those are your workshops! Make a list of several workshops you would enjoy teaching people. When you speak about things you are passionate about, you'll forget to be afraid.

Now that you are willing and prepared to speak, you need a venue. The best places for a homeschool vendor to speak are at homeschool conferences, but it is unlikely that a conference will ask you to speak if you have no experience. So, you volunteer to speak to your local support group or the one in the next town and get some experience!

To get local speaking engagements, look for homeschool support groups within an easy drive of your home. Contact the leaders and tell them that

you are available to do workshops on your topic and you are so excited about speaking in their area that you can do it very inexpensively.

If we are speaking at a local support group, we'll usually ask them to cover our travel expenses, provide us with a place to stay there if it's more than 2-3 hours away (homes are fine!), allow us to sell our stuff at a book table, and either take up an offering or pay what they are able. Sometimes local support groups will surprise you with great sales and generosity, but regardless, we've never been burned doing it this way. The Lord has always seen to it that we were blessed in some way, though not always financially.

When you speak, be sure to record your session. We use a free program called Audacity and record right on our laptops. This is much, much easier than recording a session by yourself at home. It's amazing how much better live sessions are – even with interruptions. When you get home, export it to CD and to an mp3 file. That will give you something to share with conference organizers. Record every single workshop you give, even those you've given before. You just can't predict when everything will come together to make it wonderful!

Another advantage to speaking at local groups is that more personal speaking engagements let people really get to know you. We've developed some extremely loyal fans who are active on our Facebook page and promote us on their blogs through local speaking. "Don't despise the day of small things" is good advice!

S tate and Regional Conferences

Once you've spoken a few times, feel more confident, and have got some good things to say, you can move on to the next step. We've been speaking for quite a long time, first at the local level and at our own state's conference, then at conferences around the country. We have also served on the board of the North Carolina state organization for many years, so we have experience from the other side, too. There are several different levels of speakers at a typical homeschool conference and each one has different opportunities and expectations. Understanding that

will help you to make the most of your speaking engagement, both in ministry and for your business.

We've usually heard the different levels of speakers referred to with these four terms:

Vendor Workshop Speakers—Vendor Workshops are led by vendors who are already renting a booth at the conference and who usually pay for the privilege of speaking. They are completely in control (under basic guidelines) of the content and usually explain, showcase or demonstrate the use of their products. You can think of these like an infomercial, though many of them are excellent and very helpful. This is a way to get in front of potential customers even if you aren't invited to speak or can be a way to explain the more complex uses of your product and give customers the confidence to buy. This is particularly useful for curriculum vendors.

Unfortunately, it can be hard for conference organizers to realize that a vendor who offers vendor workshops may also offer a workshop that is more general in nature and appropriate for a regular workshop. This can be limiting. One advantage of the vendor workshops, though, is that at conferences that have a bookfair-only registration, often vendor workshops are the only workshops those attendees are allowed to come to, so you have an audience you may not have had otherwise.

The other three levels of speaker invitations usually expect that you will spend no more than 5 minutes talking about your product. If you spend too much time on your products, expect to get unhappy evaluations and possibly not get invited back.

Workshop Speaker or Lay Speaker—These are workshops that may be philosophical or practical in nature, but do not focus on a particular product. You can volunteer to do these or you may be asked, but you will usually have to pay your own expenses and pay for your own booth space. You may or may not receive an honorarium; but if you do, it is likely to be small. Organizations often pay somewhere between \$30 and \$100 per workshop, and occasionally less if you have co-speakers or do multiple workshops. Although only about 5 minutes can be spent on your product,

speaking at a workshop marks you in attendees' minds as an expert, so when you do direct them to your booth, it can be very profitable. When you sign up for booth space at a conference, ask them if you can apply as a workshop speaker and send them a list of topics.

Featured Speakers—These are speakers likely to draw more folks to the conference, although sometimes, if you live in-state, you may be featured in other states, but considered a lay speaker in your own (A prophet has no honor in his hometown!). Featured speakers usually are expected to speak several times, as many as 5 to 10! These speakers nearly always have their expenses covered (both travel and hotel at the conference) and receive a free booth. They may or may not receive an honorarium, but usually do, often substantial.

Featured speakers are invited to speak, though you can let them know you are willing by sending an inquiry or speaker packet. A speaker packet should contain a list of the workshops you are willing to do and sample CDs at a minimum. If you can't provide audios for the organizers to listen to, you are unlikely to be invited, since they are making quite an investment in you and are unlikely to buy a pig in a poke! Featured speakers are expected to be more professional and ministry-oriented, so the 5 minutes per workshop plug should be very strictly adhered to. If you share your passion and really minister to people, though, it is likely to bless you back in a big way as enthusiastic listeners visit your booth.

Keynote Speakers—These are the top level of speakers and usually speak in at least one general session. Some conferences that have no general session, such as CHAP in Pennsylvania, call their top level of speaker something else, such as Guest Speaker. Keynote speakers usually have all their expenses paid, a free double booth, often meals with the board, and a substantial honorarium. They still limit product promotion to 5 minutes per session, if that, but they tend to sell lots because of the exposure. At this level, you have more control, because they want you to come, so you can place some limitations on how many times you'll speak in a row or stipulate when you want to leave to get home. In order to be invited as a keynote speaker, usually you are going to have to be well known enough to draw

attendees to the conference. The Lord does amazing things sometimes, though. We were invited to speak at this level at one of the largest conferences in the country the first year we spoke much nationally. Why? We're not sure. Perhaps the organizers really liked our message, but we think it mostly had to do with the grace of God!

Clarifying Expectations—It's important that you are very open with conference organizers and ask what they are expecting for you to do and what they plan to do. Generally, they will send you a contract, but if they don't you should take the initiative and ask questions until all the terms of your speaking are completely understood. Remember that homeschool conference organizers are often volunteer homeschool parents who may even be new to the job! Most of the conflict we've seen between conference organizers and speakers could have been avoided by prompt and thorough attention to what was expected on both sides.

Getting all these things clarified in advance will make the whole speaking experience go more smoothly, as well as help to make sure you get invited back. I've got to say, though, that the only organization that balked at doing a contract with us, *really* blessed us financially (much more than we would have dared ask), though we were prepared for it to go the other way. We did make sure at least our expenses were covered, so we wouldn't be hurting our family by accepting the engagement.

Speaking is a great way to expand the customer base of your business and multiply the reach of your ministry, though it does take time and commitment in reaching out to conference organizers, preparing in advance, traveling, and following up on contacts. Many speakers have found it definitely worth the investment as they grow their business.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU SPEAK

You need to make sure you understand the things below before you arrive at a speaking location. Of course, for local and one day events, much of this won't apply.

- What is your arrival and departure time?

- Who is being paid, for what, and how much?
- Where are you staying and what nights are covered?
- Who is making travel and hotel reservations?
- When will you be paid? Will you be reimbursed for expenses or does the conference pay any directly (hotel rooms are usually paid directly by the organization)?
- Which workshops are you doing?
- How long are workshops expected to be (They are usually 60 minutes, but occasionally they'll be 45 or 50)?
- How much time are you allowed to use for promotion?
- What audio-visual aids are provided and which will you need to bring?
- What kind of booth do you have and are there any rules for booth space?
- Are there any other events, such as board meals, you are invited to?
- How many people are you allowed to have in your booth? Are your children welcome?
- Are there any volunteers to help for a time in your booth, if you're being flown in without helpers?
- What are the handout procedures? Do you submit them in advance, who prints them, who distributes them?
- Are you allowed to distribute literature or collect sign up cards at workshops?
- Can products be drop-shipped to the convention site? What is the window of time and the terms?
- What are the meal options available during conference?

*Hal and Melanie Young are the authors of **Raising Real Men: Surviving, Teaching and Appreciating Boys, My Beloved and My Friend: How to Be Married to Your Best Friend Without Changing Spouses**, and the owners of Great Waters Press. They have six real boys and two real girls, all homeschooled from the beginning. They live in noisy familial bliss in North Carolina when they aren't traveling the world speaking to homeschool families. <http://RaisinRealMen.com>, <http://Facebook.com/RaisingRealMen> and <http://Facebook.com/halandmelanie>*

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