

Creating a Powerful Bio

As a speaker, your bio is a powerful tool for building credibility. It can also communicate your purpose to your divine audience in a compelling and enrolling way. Here are some tips to bear in mind when constructing a bio:

Start with your purpose – Make the first sentence your purposeful marketing statement, or some other powerful statement of what you do and for whom. (This is most important if you are seeking clients. Don't wait to tell them that you're there to serve them!)

Less is more – There are no awards for quantity. Only include things which will explain powerfully what you do, who you are, and why they should listen to you.

Use third person – Write it from the perspective of someone else describing you (“she/he”) rather than you describing yourself (“I”). “She has helped over 500 people achieve their ideal weight.” not “I have helped over 500 people achieve their ideal weight.” There are instances when you may want to address readers about yourself directly, but the most common use of your bio will be to have someone read it before you come on stage to speak. Same for a bio in a brochure or book.

Blow your horn – Find an arrogant, self-important, self-assured voice to say what is really great about who you are and what you've done. This is not a time for modesty and self-deprecation.

Spin honestly – It is appropriate to “spin,” phrasing things in a way that paints you in the best possible light. Paint with a broad brush; leave out caveats and fine details. It is **not** appropriate to say things that are not true. “Sam has been a sought-after executive coach for 12 years.” not “Sam has been coaching executives for 12 years, not counting 2002-2003 when he had no clients during the .com bust.”

Give specifics – Include accomplishments and names of clients that would be impressive, meaningful and easily understood by your audience. “Her consulting clients include IBM and FedEx.” not “Her consulting clients include Sam's diner, Shear Delight, and her local ICF chapter.”

Use numbers – Quantitative results are usually more impressive than qualitative ones. “He grew company revenues by 300%.” beats “He grew company revenues.” or “He grew company revenues a lot.”

Avoid jargon – Do not use jargon, abbreviations or technical language that will not be familiar to your audience. Not “Tim earned his ESWS before being promoted to CWO2, when he qualified for the coveted ATS and NOBC 9212.”

Strip out filler – Remove things that are unimpressive, such as common certifications, college degrees that are inapplicable to your talk or audience, schools that are not top institutions, and results that are produced routinely in your field. Not “Fred has been a paid life coach since earning his B.S. in Hotel Management at Podunk U. in 2007.”

Leave out your small company name – If you are self-employed, don’t start your bio by saying you are “founder of” your personal little company. Filing a fictitious name statement or LLC articles of organization is not an achievement to brag about. If you are a leader in a company, or you founded a company and grew it to an impressive size or some other significant accomplishment, these are worthy of your bio.

Include interesting facts – It’s okay to put in things that have no bearing on your current role and aren’t relevant to the audience, so long as they are distinctive and ear-catching. Some interesting tidbits that make you stand out, like unusual life experiences and notable but irrelevant accomplishments, can work very well. “Sally spends her free time with her 14 wonderful children, 27 grandchildren and 8 great-grandchildren.” “James once spent three weeks at sea, awaiting rescue after his cruise ship sank.” “Before becoming an executive coach, Jane spent five years at NASA training to become an astronaut.”

Customize – Modify your bio to make it more appropriate to specific audiences and presentation topics. Consider emphasizing or downplaying certain education, training and job history to make it more relevant and impressive. For example, your years as a church deacon might be useful to mention to a group of Christian businesspeople, but not to a convention of NASA project managers.

Read it out loud – A primary use of a bio is having someone read it aloud to an audience before you begin a talk. Read it out loud to ensure that it is properly worded for oral communication. Some things look good in writing but sound awkward when spoken.

Get help – Most people do a terrible job selling themselves. Get help from people in your field who know you and want to help you. Ask your trusted source for edits and suggestions.