

# HOW TO PITCH SPEAKING GIGS IN 2023: GUIDE & EMAIL TEMPLATE



# How to Pitch Speaking Gigs in 2023

If you're here, you're likely interested in pitching yourself or someone on your leadership team for speaking gigs. You may also want to get a few questions answered first, like *What should I include in my pitch? Is it better if I pitch myself or have someone pitch on my behalf? What should I charge, if anything? Am I pitching an event organizer or using the speaker submission form?*

In the 17+ years that I've been doing this work, I've landed executives speaking gigs and workshops at events ranging from Davos to SxSW, Emerging Women and the CHRO Leadership Summit. While much about the speaker circuit has changed over the years, the core tenants of great pitching remains: Lead with great content, get specific and clearly articulate how you can be of value.

In this guide I'm going to walk you through:

- 20+ business, leadership, tech and wellness events that take speakers
- The four questions to answer on any speaker submission form
- How to cold pitch an event organizer: email template
- Whether to pitch yourself or have someone pitch on your behalf
- What to know about payment

While this guide covers the more tactical side of pitching speaking gigs, I have an in-depth guide that walks you through how to identify your thought leadership topics and draft compelling speaking blurbs in the **How to Build an Intentional Thought Leadership Strategy: Workbook**. You can download it straight from the library.

Before we dive in, here's an example of my client and friend Narrative Medicine Clinician, Indigenous Bone Healer and Adjunct Professor at Columbia [Ssanyu Birigwa](#)'s three speaking topics so you can see where we like to land with these speaking blurbs:

## 1. What is Narrative Medicine? Unlocking the Power of Storytelling to Heal

Narrative Medicine is a research-backed framework for exploring the emotions, experiences and deep-seeded beliefs that impact our health and vibrancy. In this talk, Ssanyu outlines the three tenants of narrative medicine, compelling research that underlines the link between storytelling and healing and several practices to begin integrating narrative-medicine based into our own personal healing journeys.

## 2. The Intersection of Spirituality and Health: How to Better Understand the Journeys of Illness

Illness is often the site for existential and spiritual exploration of meaning, yet, for too long, clinicians have struggled to know if and how to talk to patients about their faith. This talk explores how healthcare professionals can speak to patients about their beliefs, explore the spiritual dimensions of their illness experiences and navigate the spiritual concerns of patients and their families.

# How to Pitch Speaking Gigs in 2023

## 3. Challenging Existing Narratives in the Workplace: How Narrative Medicine Can Build Healthier Communities

U.S. workers report some of the highest stress levels in the world, with post-COVID employee burnout sitting at 52% of the workforce. In this talk, I share how companies can integrate the three tenants of narrative medicine—attention, representation and affiliation—into their team meetings to create psychological safety, build trust and help employees feel heard. I also share how leaders can facilitate hard conversations around burnout, DEI initiatives and additional company pain points using narrative medicine-based prompts rooted in literature, music and art.

### WHERE TO PITCH: HIGH-PROFILE SPEAKING GIGS

First, to give you a sense of the opportunities that are out there, here are some of the bigger business, leadership, wellness and tech events each year that all take speakers—from main stage keynotes to breakout sessions and workshops:

- [SXSW](#)
- [ForbesLive](#) event series, including [Future of Work Summit](#), [Power Women's Summit](#) and [Healthcare Summit](#).
- [Future Festival](#)
- [TechCrunch Disrupt](#)
- [Women in Tech Global Conference](#)
- [AfroTech Conference](#)
- [WSJ's The Future of Everything](#)
- [Fast Company's Innovation Festival](#)
- [Wisdom 2.0](#)
- [Summit at Sea](#) (Must be a Summit member to attend)
- [World Economic Forum](#) (Davos)
- [EntreLeadership Summit](#)
- [National Diversity & Leadership Conference](#)
- [Wonder Women Tech](#)
- [MediaPost Industry Events](#)
- [TED](#) and [TEDx](#)
- [Wellbeing at Work Summit](#)
- [Women Lead Festival](#)

# How to Pitch Speaking Gigs in 2023

Alongside these bigger events, you're going to want to research the more niche events that take place in your industry. While some may have smaller audiences, they also have a more concentrated number of people actively interested in the topics being discussed because of their narrowed content focus. This often leads to higher conversion rates for things like growing your email list and building out your pipeline.

To find the best industry events, start by researching the top trade publications in your industry. What events do they put on each year? If you have leaders in the industry you admire, check out their websites to see if you can find a list of where they've spoken.

## PITCHING BY SUBMISSION FORM

Most of the bigger events will open a speaker submission window several months before an event. (SXSW, for example, opens their speaker submission window the fall before their March events). For any events you're interested in, be sure to get on their email lists so you get notified once this window opens.

Speaker submission forms run the gamut, but there are typically four key questions they want you to be able to answer:

### 1. What's Your Topic?

The beauty of working through your top three speaking topics ahead of time is that you've got some great messaging to pull from here. First, identify the speaking topic that would be most meaningful to this specific event and audience. Then, consider whether the title or description needs to be tweaked to best align your talk with the theme of the event.

### 2. Why Would This Audience Be Interested in This Topic?

Here, share a few sentences about what's happening within your industry that makes this topic especially compelling and timely for this audience. To use Ssanyu's third speaking topic as an example, challenging existing narratives in the workplace is going to look different for a women's conference, DEI-focused conference and general business conference. Help event organizers understand the urgency in having this conversation now.

### 3. Why Should We Consider You as a Speaker?

Focus this answer on sharing your top two - three strengths as a speaker or workshop facilitator. Event organizers want to produce events that people continue to think and talk about when they walk out those conference room doors. What do you bring to the stage that will keep people engaged and inspire new thinking? If you worked through the **Identifying Your Innate Strengths: Personal Branding Workbook**, you can pull some of that language in here.

# How to Pitch Speaking Gigs in 2023

## 4. Finally, Share Previous Speaking Examples.

If you have links to videos of any past speaking engagements or workshops you've led, include them. Otherwise, include a list of where you've spoken in the past and the titles of those talks. If you're brand new to the speaking circuit but have been featured in or written for any publications or appeared on any podcasts, you can include those here, too.

### PITCHING BY EMAIL: EMAIL TEMPLATE

As you begin to pitch speaking opps, you'll find certain events don't always publicize a speaker submission form. When that's the case, you're going to need to track down an event organizer and pitch them by email. To figure out who to pitch, I start by searching the event on LinkedIn to see if any of the event organizers list their work with the event in their profiles (they often do). If your search comes up short, I recommend pitching a senior person on the organizing company's PR and marketing team.

When pitching a speaking opp by email, you want to answer those same four questions we addressed in the speaker submission form. Here's a pitch template:

*Hi Jordan,*

*My name is Amy Parks. I'm an epidemiologist and science professor at John Hopkins and part of the team leading the research on the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on teenage girls.*

*I'm writing to see if you'd be interested in having me co-lead a workshop at this year's Healthcare 3.0 summit on **The Body Keeps the Score: What We Know About Treating Post-Pandemic Depression in Teenage Girls** with my colleague and psychologist Jodie Smith. I'm copying the description below.*

*Jodie and I are high-energy speakers who bring a sense of humor and approachability to this otherwise heavy subject. We believe there is much hope in the research and are passionate about arming clinicians and parents with tools to help their kids thrive post-pandemic.*

*Jodie and I have spoken at [Forbes Healthcare Summit](#) and led workshops at [Soho House](#), [SXSW Education](#) and [Edutopia](#). My own writing has been featured in [Fortune](#) and [MindBodyGreen](#).*

*Please let me know if there's anything else we can send over and thanks for considering us,*

*Amy*

*Session Description: New data from the [CDC](#) shows teenage girls and those identifying as LGBTQ+ are experiencing "extremely high" levels of substance abuse, violence and mental distress. In this talk, Jodie and I outline the key findings from our preliminary research on the teenage body's unique response to pandemic trauma (which differs from adults!); how clinicians can begin to distinguish between long covid and post-pandemic depression in young patients; and the healing modalities showing the most promise in treating post-pandemic depression in young girls.*

# How to Pitch Speaking Gigs in 2023

## WHO SHOULD PITCH YOU?

I know it might seem like having someone pitch on your behalf ups your street cred and your chances of landing the gig, but I've largely found the opposite to be true. If you're working with a PR agency that has a relationship with the event organizers you're pitching, have the agency pitch on your behalf. Otherwise, I recommend you pitch yourself. Over and over, I've found event organizers are more likely to respond to pitches from business leaders vs. admins or PR people they don't know. These initial conversations with event organizers are important—they not only introduce your content and experience but give the people running the event a sense of what you're like to work with. If you can show them you're present, engaged and willing to collaborate, they'll be much more inclined to book you.

## WHAT TO EXPECT FOR PAYMENT

Finally, you're likely wondering if and what to charge for your time and insights. In this [Harvard Business Review](#) article, Marketing Strategist and Keynote Speaker Dorie Clark shares this helpful breakdown of what's possible based on your level of experience:

- *Newbie speakers might earn \$500–\$2,500 for a talk.*
- *Beginning speakers, or those just establishing a brand with their first book, might earn \$5,000–\$10,000.*
- *Those with several books and other forms of “social proof” might draw \$10,000–\$20,000.*
- *Those who are very well-known in their field, such as best-selling authors, can bring in \$20,000–\$35,000 per talk.*

As she notes, many event organizers won't bring up payment unless you do, so it's important to ask the question and come with a rough idea of what you're hoping to charge for your time, travel/accommodations and insights. And while this article was only written a few years ago, I have found more events moving to a no-payment model in the time since, hoping to exchange your time and insights for brand awareness. Finally, there are pay-to-play events that charge you to speak, similar to some of the pay-to-play guest blogs we're seeing.

With each event, consider what you want to get out of it: Are you hoping to casually network or very actively build your client roster? Is it a concentrated audience of high-profile industry peers and potential customers or a broader audience with less clear brand-building opportunities? How important is it to you and your business that you land the speaking role and are you willing to walk away if no payment is offered?

Considering these questions, as well as your background, expertise and how much time and effort will go into preparing for the event will help you place yourself within each price range and clarify which events, if any, are worth doing for free.

# Now It's Your Turn

Now that you know what to consider before pitching a speaking gig, here's how I tackle this process with clients:

First, identify your thought leadership topics and draft your three speaking topics. Again, **How to Build an Intentional Thought Leadership Strategy: Workbook** walks you through this step-by-step.

Next, build your target speaking list, noting the theme or topic of the event; when each event takes place; where the event takes place (i.e. do you need to travel?); their pitching process: speaker submission form or email?; and anyone you might know who works for the company organizing the event.

For speaking gigs 3 - 6 months out, pitch! For events sooner than three months, you'll likely find their speaking roster full, but it never hurts to try. Who knows who might be dropping out last minute or what's happening behind the scenes.

For event 6+ months out, sign-up for the organizing company's newsletter to be the first to find out when their call for speakers window opens.

With that, I'll leave you to it. When you book your next speaking gig, send it my way. I'd love to celebrate with you (and, if it's in NY, potentially come cheer you on!).

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## About Alex



Alex Honeysett is a seasoned Brand & Communications Strategist with 15+ years of experience leading communication and PR campaigns for corporations and small businesses in media, education, finance, fintech, professional services, healthcare and more. Alex has helped dozens of executives and business owners build intentional personal brands and human-centric PR and marketing strategies. She has landed executives guest blogs and op-eds in leading publications including the *Wall Street Journal*, *Entrepreneur*, *Fast Company* and *Inc.com*; speaking gigs at conferences around the world including SxSW, Emerging Women, CHRO Leadership Summit and more; and media coverage in outlets including *The Today Show*, *Mashable*, *BBC*, *NPR*, and *CNN*. Her own articles have been featured in *The Muse*, *Forbes*, *Inc.com*, *Mashable*, *Dailyworth*, *TIME* and *Newsweek*. As the founder of **Human at the Helm**, Alex helps values-driven business leaders more meaningfully promote their businesses and work.

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