

Super Seminar Tips & Tricks[®] by Frank Maselli

Episode 16: Free “Rubber Chicken” Seminars

Getting truly great at seminars takes time and experience. One idea that could help is to start doing some free gigs by getting on the “rubber chicken circuit.”

These are the many clubs and organizations that meet in every community every night of the week. The list is exhaustive and includes groups like the Lions, Moose, Elk, Rotary, Kiwanis, Optimists, Odd Fellows, Civil Air Patrol, Coast Guard Auxiliary, VFW, American Legion, Knights of Columbus, Jaycees, etc.

I’m not suggesting you join these groups unless you have a personal passion for what they do. But instead, offer to do a seminar or a briefing for them.

Not a typical seminar

Speaking to groups like these is different than doing your own workshop. First, your goal is not to set appointments or to convert the audience to clients. That’s way too much to ask as an invited guest. Instead, shoot for something more realistic.

● **Make a contact**

Offer some information that could turn these total strangers into potential prospects. You could drive them to your website or have a simple information request card they could fill out to get a copy of a report, analysis, or a white paper on the subject.

Once they are in your database, you could stay in touch with them for a while and even invite them to more formal events.

● **Get invited back**

Suggest that they have you back for a more in-depth program on the subject. This would be more like your typical workshop and now you can use more of an appointment close.

● **Get other gigs**

These organizations often have a wide range of members including retirees, high net-worth executives, business owners and professionals. They tend to be older crowds and some folks are very influential in the community and in their industry.

Some of my best follow-up events came from folks who had seen me in a “rubber chicken” program and asked me to address their group or their company. After a 15-minute talk at a Lion’s Club, one of the members asked if I would speak to the other partners of his law firm. That led to a full seminar in front of some very important folks. There was no way that I would have gotten that

meeting if we hadn’t first met at his club event.

The benefits to you

Beyond generating some new contacts, these events will enhance your speaking skills at zero cost. You will learn which stories resonate best, what kinds of questions people ask, and how to tighten and focus your delivery to maximize the impact.

You will also learn a lot about using humor — which might be the single most critical speaking skill. I’ve found that people love to laugh while they learn. These groups can be good testing grounds for funny “material” you might want to try in your own events.

How to get started

Begin by researching the clubs in your area. Put together a cover letter and menu of speaking topics that you can send to the club Presidents or program directors.

In the note, stress the timeliness of the topic and the absolute guarantee that it would not be a sales pitch of any kind. Time your talks for 30-minutes or less and include some endorsements from clubs or other groups that you had spoken to already.

You might also offer yourself as an “emergency speaker” in case the group has a last minute cancellation. On short notice you could show up and deliver a great talk. Groups appreciate that.

Do your homework with the Army’s “SALUTE” acronym.

S: Size - How big is the group in case you have handouts?

A: Activity - What are they doing at their meeting besides listening to you?

L: Location - Will the meeting be in the group’s own building or another facility? Do you have space to move around and do people have room for handouts or note-taking?

U: Unit - Know something about the history and mission of the group including any famous members.

T: Time - How much do you have? Will there be other speakers and when are you speaking? Usually it’s best to go last.

E: Equipment - Do they have any or should you bring your own? I would always do that and plan to arrive early to set up.

See Chapter 23 in my book for more detail about “Captive Audience” or “Rubber Chicken” programs.