



Authority Magazine

Inspirational Women of the Speaking Circuit: Diane Allen of Eloquent Expression On The Five Things You Need To Be A Highly Effective Speaker



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As a part of our series about [Inspirational Women of the Speaking Circuit](#), I had the distinct pleasure of interviewing [Diane Allen, The ‘Own Your Potential’ Speaker and Violinist](#), an Award-Winning International Speaker, Peak Performance, Leadership, and Flow State Expert. She is known for her Experiential Keynotes that have helped thousands of people around the world to break through their performance gaps and unleash their potential. Her proprietary process helps to increase the bottom line by empowering people to be at their best anytime, anyplace, no matter how high the pressure. She was the Concertmaster (lead violinist) of the Central Oregon Symphony for 15 years, a well sought-after Violin Teacher of 28 years, and the author of Sixteen Music Workbooks sold worldwide. She has been the keynote speaker for Women’s Conferences, Talent Development Professionals, Human Resources Associations, along with many others. Her flow state work has been published on [IDEAS.TED.COM](#), and her [TEDxNaperville talk](#) has been elevated to the main [TED platform](#).

Thank you so much for doing this with us! Our readers would love to get to know you a bit better. Can you tell us the story of how you grew up?

I’m sitting with my family way up high in the balcony of Severence Hall waiting to hear the Cleveland Orchestra. I’m so little that my feet are dangling and the seat keeps folding up on me. The conductor walks out to applause, steps onto the podium, and with a quick wave of his baton the orchestra explodes into sound. The force of the music pins me to the back of my chair and I am riveted.

Fast forward I’m 15 years old, in my bedroom, blasting the music. No, not Rock ‘n Roll. I’m listening to a violin concerto! In my imagination, I’m the violinist. I didn’t want to be in the orchestra. It was as if I was the soloist pouring the core of my soul into every single note.

But when the high school career counselor asked me what profession I was interested in I told her that I was thinking about music therapy. Why was I thinking so small?

After graduating from the Manhattan School of Music with a Bachelor of Music degree in Violin Performance, even though I loved playing in orchestras, I'd get so nervous at my auditions that I'd embarrass myself over and over again. Because of my inability to overcome my audition anxiety, I was at a very high risk of living the rest of my life with my music trapped inside of me.

Ten years of trial and error later, I discovered that the more I got into the music and into my flow state, the more the nerves would go away. Because of this, I finally got a job as a violin teacher in Central Oregon and was then hired to be the Concertmaster (lead violinist) of the Central Oregon Symphony.

This wasn't my imaginary solo career either but it was a leadership role in an orchestra and I loved it!

Can you share a story with us about what brought you to this specific career path?

As a YouTube early adopter, the moment I saw myself on video, I joined Toastmasters. Luckily the club happened to be a particularly good one. People were surprised with my ability to receive feedback. From my point of view, the feedback was gentle compared to my New York City violin training! Between my stage time as a violinist and my training as a speaker, I was on a very fast trajectory of growth and learning.

A few years into my speaker training, things began to change. My best violin students started finding other teachers. I became bored playing music. Then, I became my Mom's caregiver: Alzheimer's. I stopped teaching and retired from the symphony. I sold my music collection, my fine French bow and my beautiful antique violin.

No chance for a solo career now.

I wish I could say that my transition into speaking professionally was easy. I floundered. I competed in contests and tried out different topics with different audiences. Caregiving for my Mom dominated my time and energy. It was very depressing. But all along I knew in my bones that I had to speak.

Can you tell us the most interesting story that happened to you since you began your career?

Along with so many people, I reacted to my Mother's passing as a reason to pursue my dreams — full throttle. Backed by a gorgeous PowerPoint depicting my work with the Central Oregon Symphony, I shared stories and how-to's about how to attain peak performance. I mostly received nice comments from the audience. But every once in a while I'd hear someone say "All she does is talk about the violin. Why doesn't she play it?"

Play the violin and speak? No. These two worlds will never collide.

I remember one speaking engagement in particular. I gave it my all. Instead of leaving the speaking event on a high note, I was drained. I didn't need to wait for the polite audience comments to affirm my own conclusions. I was doing a good job, but it wasn't remarkable.

A few months later, I was at a film festival watching the origin story of a group of counterculture artists in Santa Fe called Meow Wolf. The artists were challenging societal norms. What is art? Where do art standards come from? Who's to say whether art is worthy or not?

The next morning I find myself calling my friend Janet wondering if she had any extra violins in the house. If you knew Janet, you'd know that not only did she have a spare violin, but the one that she had was purple.

That morning I discovered that I wasn't done with playing the violin. I was done with classical music! So I began writing my own music, purchased my Copper Dragon electric violin, and within a few short weeks I made the debut of my first keynote performance interweaving the music with my speaking.

It was a hit!

Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lesson you learned from that?

When I began speaking, I was already a veteran of the stage with over 1,000 musical performances under my belt. Any speaking mistakes were minimal.

That said, it's 6:24pm on November 9, 2019 and it's my turn to take the TEDxNaperville stage. I walk out, up to the red circle, and begin with my music. As I put the violin down and begin to speak, the audience erupts into applause. Ah! They're clapping for my music! I acknowledge the audience with a bow and wait for the applause to die down before I resume speaking. The next thing I know, there's a man standing behind me! *What is going on here? This is supposed to be the talk of my life and I keep getting interrupted!* First, we have a quick whisper session. Then, in front of the crowd, he reaches his hand down the back of my dress!!! The wireless battery pack was hanging on my bra and he had forgotten to turn on the mic!

The biggest lesson? There is absolutely no replacement for stage time experience. Instead of getting derailed, I enjoyed a good laugh with the audience and had a great time.

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?

Without a doubt, that person is Short Talk Expert: Hayley Foster.

Back in my Toastmaster days we were taught this formula:

1. Tell them what you are going to tell them.
2. Tell them.
3. Tell them what you told them.

This method is like doing everything you can to jam information into people's heads.

With Hayley's expertise (she has coached well over 500 TED style talks) she taught me the "art of the reveal". It's about communicating in a way where you walk the audience through a thought journey. By the end, all of the pieces come together and the full message becomes revealed to the listener.

When I first brought the violin on stage with me as a speaker, I thought I had it all together. Nope. By guiding your audience to deduce your message on their own volition, no jamming of information is necessary. Add to that the music and this is how your message becomes indelible.

You have been blessed with great success in a career path that can be challenging and intimidating. Do you have any words of advice for others who may want to embark on this career path, but seem daunted by the prospect of failure?

I had a mentor who once asked me "How do you stay committed during difficult times?" I took a memory journey back to my 25 year old self when I was struggling with my

audition anxiety. That's when I discovered a core principle that I had been living by: My belief in myself is BIGGER than the obstacle.

How do you stay committed during tough times? What core principles do you live by?
Do that.

What drives you to get up everyday and give your talks? What is the main empowering message that you aim to share with the world?

I'm not 15 years old. I'm not in my room blasting a violin concerto. I'm not even in the orchestra anymore. With a microphone clipped over my ear and my Copper Dragon in hand, I now pour the core of my soul into every word I speak and into every single note of the music.

Turns out, I have become the soloist.

What I know now is that my high school flow state fantasy was a glimpse into my true potential. What I do now feels exactly the same as it did then. It's taken me decades to close my performance gaps and live the dream.

How many people live their lives with "their music" trapped inside of them? How many people lose their confidence along the way? How many people end up feeling bitter and dissatisfied?

Through my keynote performances, I reconnect people with the tremendous capacity that already exists within them and give them the tools to close their gaps and unleash their potential.

Can you share with our readers a few of your most important tips about how to be an effective and empowering speaker? Can you please share some examples or stories?

For starters, don't be like me: "Play the violin and speak? No. These two worlds will never collide." Let your worlds collide. The audience can tell when you're not being fully you. Be all of yourself at all times.

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As you know, many people are terrified of speaking in public. Can you give some of your advice about how to overcome this fear?

These are the very tips that I used to overcome my audition anxiety.

Get into your speaking like a musician gets into the music and get into your flow state. The neurobiology of being in flow literally turns off your fight or flight response!

Rub your Achilles tendon and keep it as soft and supple as possible. As you keep your Achilles relaxed, it prevents the stress response from triggering.

The last thing before going out on stage is close your eyes, put your hands on your heart, and breathe. When you are in your heart space, there is no room for fear.

What are your "5 things I wish someone told me when I first started" and why. Please share a story or example for each.

You have such impressive work. What are some of the most interesting or exciting projects you are working on now? Where do you see yourself heading from here?

My biggest focus right now is increasing my visibility. If people don't know who you are, then how can you get your message out there? This is why I am pitching to different media sources as a way of being responsible for getting more visibility and it's already paying off.

Can you share with our readers any self care routines, practices or treatments that you do to help your body, mind or heart to thrive? Please share a story for each one if you can.

In addition to hiking and hot yoga, I practice my goals. As a violinist, I know firsthand the virtues of practice. It never occurred to me to practice my goals until a friend shared with me how she had been practicing her goals. She wrote them on a note card which she kept in her pocket! So I came up with my own practice. The last thing before I go to sleep and the first thing when I wake up, I write about my goals in a journal. Instant results! This has been and continues to be a total game changer!

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

“If you can dream it, you can be it.” Only I like to modify this quote to “If you can dream it, you ARE it.” My 15 year old self already knew what ended up taking me decades to believe and become. What if I had owned that vision from the start?

You are a person of huge influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be?

Getting into the music and into my flow state as a means of calming my nerves, being in my confidence, exuding my leadership, and not only being at my best but exceeding what I thought I was capable of, is something that exists within each and every one of us. Discovering how you personally get into your flow state is to know what makes you tick. I will show you how.

The movement that I envision is creating a culture that supports people to be in their flow state so they can enjoy being in their greatness on a daily basis. That includes showing teams how to achieve group flow and access creativity, innovative thinking and outstanding performance.

Is there a person in the world whom you would love to have lunch with, and why? Maybe we can tag them and see what happens!

Mel Robbins is my speaking shero! I'd love to have lunch with her and talk shop!!

Are you on social media? How can our readers follow you online?

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This was so informative, thank you so much! We wish you continued success!