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THE AUTHORITY GAP

The gap between mid-tier and premium keynote speakers isn't caused by the quality of your presentation skills. While you certainly won't gain traction in the industry without a powerful stage presence, that's your starting position.

What Mid-Tier Speakers Typically Do: Most speakers in this range focus on delivering excellent presentations based on their personal understanding of industry expertise. Their value proposition centers on sharing knowledge and motivating audiences. Great.

It takes significant talent and a whole lot of hard work to reach the mid-tier of business speaking. But what happens when you've reached this level and you feel stuck here? How can you move to the next level?

How Premium Speakers Bridge the Authority Gap: Premium speakers operate as "transformation architects" rather than information deliverers.

They develop proprietary frameworks that become their intellectual property—think Adam Grant, Brené Brown, Dan Pink, Susan Cain. Some position themselves ahead of trends rather than following them. Most importantly, a few elite speakers create annual flagship content that establishes ongoing authority—like Amy Webb's [Tech Trends Report](#), which is downloaded more than a million times every year.

The strategic difference: Mid-tier speakers sell speaking services, while premium speakers sell exclusive access to transformational insights that can't be found elsewhere.

They become the *authority* that organizations must have, rather than just another excellent speaker. **Crossing the authority gap means evolving from someone who knows something valuable into the definitive source others can't access anywhere else.**

THE AMY WEBB MODEL

Amy Webb exemplifies how speakers bridge the authority gap through systematic authority building. From her bio: "Recognized as the global leader in strategic foresight, Amy Webb advises leaders through disruptive change" and "was recognized as the #4 most influential management thinker in the world by Thinkers50."

Webb's Authority Gap Strategy:

Proprietary Research Methodology: Rather than merely commenting on existing trends, Webb developed evidence based work, drawn from mapping and modeling quantitative and qualitative data collected in the present to understand what's coming (5-20 years from now). This methodology creates an authority gap that competitors can't easily bridge.

Annual Flagship Content: Her Tech Trends Report, creates ongoing demand and positions her as the definitive source for emerging technology insights. This systematic content creation (every year!) widens the authority gap between her and other futurists.

Cross-Industry Authority: As CEO of the Future Today Institute and professor at NYU Stern School of Business, she combines academic credibility with commercial authority, appealing across multiple sectors and further expanding her authority advantage.

Forward-Thinking Positioning: Becoming a specialist speaker rather than a generalist is crucial for securing higher-paying opportunities. Speaking clients who pay the most are looking for the highest levels of expertise.

Webb's success demonstrates that bridging the authority gap requires creating unique intellectual property that organizations can't access elsewhere. The annual research report becomes her calling card—making her indispensable rather than just excellent.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

I know, I just gave you an intimidating example of excellence. Amy Webb is amazing (I mean, her hair alone...). But then, if you're reading this newsletter, you're not interested in doing it the easy way.

Key Takeaway: Bridge the authority gap by developing proprietary frameworks, and maybe even annual flagship **quality** content that establishes you as the definitive authority in your area, not just another knowledgeable speaker.

There's a pattern of building premium speaker positioning. It's done through:

1. **Proprietary Research:** Create unique, data-driven frameworks
2. **Annual Flagship Content:** Publish consistent, quality research
3. **Cross-Industry Application:** Translate specialized expertise into broad business applications
4. **Academic + Commercial Credibility:** Maintaining scholarly rigor while serving Fortune 500 clients isn't required, but it helps

These are paradigmatic examples for speakers looking to move from earning \$20K to \$50K+ per keynote. Build your own authority gap and you become unparalleled.

Until I see you here again next month, I'm available for a limited number of strategy sessions in June. Reply directly or [schedule a call](#) to connect about how I can help.

→ Don't forget to share this newsletter with a colleague if you find it useful. We need community in challenging times.

GET ON THE RIGHT PATH

Thought leaders turn to Shelley Dolley when they need to build and grow their brands. She draws her insights from managing the career of speaking legend Tom Peters.



MORE ABOUT SHELLEY



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