

SPEAKER

A NEW DECADE of
TURBULENCE

THE **LEAKY**
BUCKET LIST

Strategies for attracting
and retaining clients

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**BALANCING
ACT** Peter Sheahan ties speaking
success to smart business

“ The more
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PETER SHEAHAN,
SPEAKER, AUTHOR
AND A "CEO IN THE
TRENCHES"





BALANCING ACT

FOR PETER SHEAHAN, SMART BUSINESS IS ABOUT BALANCING PRIORITIES. HERE ARE SIX SECRETS TO HIS SUCCESS.

Before Peter Sheahan became an entrepreneur and a thought leader on innovation, the young Australian ran a successful bar in Australia. And he observed that the people he hired had no idea about employer expectations.

“I thought, ‘Wouldn’t it be great to go into high schools and talk to students about how to make the transition from school to work?’” He did just that, and as a young person who had excelled in

school, he was able to connect with the students, and schools continued to hire him.

Four years into the endeavor, which had him doing upward of 400 workshops a year, he realized something: It wasn’t just the students who were struggling with change.

“It became clear to me that companies were also struggling with change,” he says. “Companies have to adapt as well—it comes down to the ability to attract and retain the best talent.”

By the time Sheahan began working with companies, he already had plenty of experience on the platform. Soon, he built up his client base and gained a breadth of experience in a variety of industries, including banking, retail and even military.



By age 30 (he turns 31 in March), he had already established two international multimillion-dollar consulting practices and written five books. In a down economy, Sheahan's

speaking engagements and revenues are up.

So, how does he do it?

First, he has a product his clients want.

But beyond that, Sheahan's success is tied to smart

business. Here are six things Sheahan has done to become one of the most sought-after speakers in the country.

1. "I'M A CEO IN THE TRENCHES."

"I'm a CEO in the trenches," Sheahan says. "Clients repeatedly say that's one reason they selected me."

Sheahan isn't just running a speaking business. He runs a company called ChangeLabs, which develops large-scale behavior change programs for companies such as Apple and IBM around the globe.

"I can talk first hand about what it's like to lead people in multi-functions around the world—it's my daily reality," he adds.



The advantage, he explains, is that his clients know he's not just tap dancing, but that he is a businessman who shares many of their experiences. Like the members of his audience, he too is navigating a constantly evolving environment.

"It's what makes me a successful speaker," says Sheahan, who does about 120 presentations a year. "Running a company today is very different than running a company even in 2005. Clients want real and recent experience."

2. ALIGN, ALIGN, ALIGN.

For speakers who are trying to hold down the fort as owner and chief

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executive of a business, plus write books and do speaking engagements (which often means traveling), finding balance can be a challenge.

Sheahan, who set up his U.S. base in Colorado, acknowledges that he doesn't have it all figured out.

"It's bloody hard," he says. "It's my wife's birthday, and I'm in an airport."

But there are ways to balance the various aspects of your professional life.

"One of the ways you can balance it all is to try to find alignment with what you do as a speaker and what you do as a CEO," Sheahan says.

The work he does with clients and the research that goes into his speaking engagements give him ideas for his books, for example.

And while he says 80 percent of his speaking clients have no need for ChangeLabs, some speaking engagements can turn into long-term client relationships.

When an audience member saw him speak as one panelist in a group, Sheahan was asked to do a short video.

"What started as a video became a keynote, and the keynote became a redesign of a global program to develop the careers of their high-potential staff," he says. "Now I work with them on every continent. That is alignment."

Because his speaking, his writing and his company all revolve around behavior change, Sheahan is able to continually build his knowledge base and experience and use it for the next big project.

"Having a strong alignment between my company and my speaking makes things a lot simpler," he says.

3. CHOOSE YOUR OBJECTIVES CAREFULLY.

While some speakers may consider their speaking as an opportunity to sell books or drive future business, Sheahan says that's never the objective of a speech.

"My objectives are whatever the client's objectives are—which might not



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be what the audience's objectives are," he says.

He focuses his time and attention on understanding each client's individual needs.

"I hate signature stories," he says. "First of all, if you're telling a story so often that it becomes your signature story, you need to get a new story. Plus, to try to shoehorn my 'signature' stories or content into a speech would be about serving my own needs, rather than the client's."

That doesn't mean you can't be funny or entertaining, Sheahan says—after all, that's often the expectation and objective too. But anecdotes and jokes should be in the context of your topic.

Once he secures a meeting with a prospect, Sheahan estimates he's able to close the deal 90 to 95 percent of the time.

"It's because I'm not saying, 'Here's my view of the world.' Instead, I'm asking, 'What's your view of the world?'"

He recalls a sales call where he listened for 28 minutes—and spoke for just one.

He got the job.

And while he has gotten leads—and, ultimately, new clients—from doing presentations, he says that’s not the objective of any speech.

“The more I meet my clients’ outcomes, the more work I get,” he says.

4. DO THE WORK.

“My objective is the client’s objective,” Sheahan reiterates. “That means a lot of extra work, to be frank.”

Sheahan says he’s often surprised by how little research and customization many speakers do.

“If you were talking to one of my clients, they would say the No. 1 reason they book me is the research I do,” he says.

Research is so important, in fact, that even before he hired marketers in his business, Sheahan hired researchers.

Sometimes, he adds, it’s a matter of asking your client for research they have—and knowing what to ask for.

“They might put it together for me because what would take me 50 hours takes them one,” he says, adding that it’s his responsibility to review it thoroughly, make sense of it, ask smart questions in briefings and then apply it to his presentation.

Because he keeps up on industry trends, understands business in general and has spent hours getting to know the details of his client’s business, Sheahan is able to integrate his messages of change and innovation into a presentation tailored specifically for one business.

“I’m going to talk about their brand and how they can drive change in their marketplace—not generically how to drive change in a marketplace,” he says.

5. DELIVER GREAT SERVICE.

Sheahan says he isn’t interested in nickel-and-diming clients. The goal is to make sure the client’s objective is met. Sometimes that means going with the flow.



**“I JUST DO THE STUFF THAT MATTERS.
THAT’S HOW I STAY SANE.”**

For example, after pricing a speech, he might work with the client and recommend that a breakout session would be more appropriate to meet their objectives.

“When they ask, ‘How much extra?’ I say, ‘None.’”

He knows some speakers might scoff, but says that as long as he can still catch his plane, it’s fine by him. Counting the dollars at a micro-level, he says, is small-minded. It’s important to see the bigger picture: Every breakout, every speech should be customized and well researched so that you can deliver on your promise.

He also believes in serving the bureaus that represent you. When he recently received a call from a bureau that wanted to promote him, he offered to do a custom video for the bureau’s website. The representatives were surprised he’d take the time.

“Treat your bureaus well, respect their relationships with clients, and help build their brand rather than your own,” he advises. “I get at least one call a week from a bureau wanting to represent me.

“The great delusion we have as speakers is that the client is *our* client,” he continues. “Some bureaus have been working with the same client for 20 years. It is their client, and you should respect it as such. Our real client is the bureau itself!”

6. DO THE THINGS THAT MATTER.

When trying to balance all the facets of his life, Sheahan focuses on tasks that add value. As their business grows, some people will need to hire staff and delegate tasks. Sheahan has 50 employees around the world.

“I just do the stuff that matters,” he says. “That’s how I stay sane.”

For example, that might mean writing fewer blog posts and not constantly updating his Facebook status.

“I think people spend a lot of time doing things that add no value,” Sheahan says. “In the time you spend writing blog posts, you could write a book—a good one.”

Sometimes, he acknowledges, his own team gets frustrated with his lack of focus on certain details.

“Instead of updating my Facebook status, I’ll send an industry overview and a synopsis of my experience for a bureau that just placed a hold, and close a \$20,000 speech.”

He knows some speakers have found success using Twitter and Facebook, but for him, every day presents the Choice of Two Goods.

“There might be two good things you can do,” he says. “So, you choose the better good of the two.”

As he goes about choosing the better good for 2011, Sheahan is focused on expanding ChangeLabs’ client base and writing a new book. His most recent book, *Making It Happen*, will be available in the United States in March. But he’s not worrying just about that. Instead, he’s heeding his own advice: “Do the things that actually grow your business and nothing else.”

He is writing his next book already.



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