



PODCAST #33

Interview with Bob Bevard (BB) by Carma Spence (CS)

This transcript has been edited for readability.

CS: Hello and welcome to *Public Speaking Super Powers*. This is your host, Carma Spence. Today I'm speaking with Bob Bevard. Bob has been a professional speaker for more than 25 years, giving more than 2,500 professional presentations. He has been a lead speaker for some of the premiere seminar companies of the world and has consulted for Fortune 500 companies, governments, universities, associations and small to mid-size businesses. Welcome to *Public Speaking Super Powers*, Bob!

BB: Well, thank you!

CS: Just so listeners can get a feel for your unique expertise, could you tell us a little about your journey to success in public speaking?

BB: Sure. I did it in a way that almost seems natural, yet almost never happens, I believe. I was a hotshot debater in high school and college. And I loved that. I loved the platform and I love the trophies and I love the interaction. So, ultimately it became where I spent my time and energy, instead of on sports and that sort of thing. Then after I graduated from university I went out and put myself into the corporate world and I was working 80 and 100-hour weeks, and it seemed like there wasn't much appreciation for that, no matter how well I did, no matter how far I took the numbers, no matter how great a team I built. So I thought about it for a while and then I said, you know, I think there's something else I can do. I wonder if you can make a living at it. And it turns out that you can. So I was fortunate enough to get hired by one of the first seminar companies in the country, and may be on the planet. Back when I started doing this in the early 80s, there were very few seminar companies, and there were very few professional speakers. There were only probably 500 people in the United States max that were making a living at public speaking, and I'd guess the number was even smaller than that. So it was a wonderful way for me to get my feet and head wet and start to grow my skills and to get significantly better.

CS: Well, given that you had shown promise in public speaking so early, do you believe that public speaking is a learned skill, or something that you are born being able to do, and why?

BB: It's an absolutely learned skill. Somebody may be a wordsmith, somebody may be very comfortable talking, somebody may be very comfortable sharing with their friends or their colleagues, or even standing up in front of classes and giving a report, but for this to be really well done, for it to become a natural activity or event, for it to become something that you're going to be really good at and people are going to want to see and listen to, be part of,

it takes a great deal of practice, and great deal of training. It's like muscle memory for your mouth and your brain. It's sort of like tennis I think, you don't pick up a tennis racket and start hitting the ball and getting them where they belong on the other side of the court, or making your returns in the first couple, three, four days, just because you were born with a good body, or good musculature, or good athletic sense or whatever, it still takes a great deal of practice, and I think that's probably a good analysis.

CS: Now, imagine that you are a public speaking superhero.

BB: Sure!

CS: What do you believe would be your main superpowers?

BB: I would be a lightning raptor. Now, that's a play on the word raptor, but what it means to me is that within the first couple of seconds, the first couple of words, certainly within the first story out of my mouth that the audience has been enraptured, has been captured, has become part of the process, is enthralled, is really wanting to be there and wanting to play, and wanting to have a wonderful time, a wonderful hour, a wonderful day, whatever it might be. And by the way, this lightning raptor is caffeine fueled; while that may be against most of the rules that people would be taught or told about public speaking is don't put caffeine in your throat or something like that. It absolutely makes me fly, and so what I find is that I can drink two or three pots of coffee if I am doing a full day program, and by the end of the day, not only have they had a great day, have I had a great day, but I can probably go to the next city now without an airplane, because I am flying so high.

CS: I think it's accurate to say that caffeine affects different people in different ways, so although it might be general rule of thumb that most people shouldn't have it before speaking, if it works for you, go with it.

BB: Absolutely. And so, I'm not recommending it for anyone either, but I think it's something they'll figure out for themselves as they go, what works for them and what doesn't work for them. And they need to learn about things, like the particular beverages: Do they need room temperature water or iced water? Will lemon in it work? I've found that I have the exact opposite problem with that, when I get something that's acidic like pineapple juice or orange juice or one of those that's very, very hard on my throat. Caffeine just keeps me pumping and flying.

CS: So, basically, you have to find our own personal caffeine, whatever does it for you.

BB: I think that's true. And I think they need to pay attention to that with food too. What some folks will find out the hard way is that their normal eating habits don't work when they're working the stage, or the lectern, or the platform or whatever.

CS: Definitely. I have a friend who does a lot of public speaking and she has to completely change her diet, be very, very careful with it when she is on tour, so to speak.

- BB:** And, in my normal life I virtually never eat breakfast and I almost never eat lunch either. But what I have learned is that if I do either of those activities when I am doing a program, that it can create havoc with my blood sugar and my presence, so I simply don't eat when I am working, that's for later, that's for the next city, so, it's something you have to pay very careful attention to it as a part of the process.
- CS:** Yeah, I know. Cause I mean, I wouldn't survive without breakfast, my blood sugar would probably drop and I would probably faint on the stage.
- BB:** And that's things that people have to know. But what if it puts them to sleep?
- CS:** Yeah. You have to be careful what you eat. Because there are foods that will increase your body heat, and by doing so make your body go, "Oh! Time for a nap!"
- BB:** I can see somebody having a turkey sandwich for lunch too, thinking they are being healthy, and it's early in their career, and next thing you know their audience is snoozing because ...
- CS:** Oh, yeah, with all that tryptophan. Oh my goodness. Now, what it sounded like you were saying, lightning raptor, that's really the power of engagement, getting the audience involved.
- BB:** Absolutely. Here's my ideal for the audience, because it's my ideal for me. They have to have a good time, if they don't have a good time, it doesn't make any sense, it doesn't work. And so I have to have a good time. If I am not having fun, they're sure not going to have fun, so I am going to go there to have fun. And it doesn't matter what kind of mood you're in, or what happened at home, or what happened in the program the day before, or what happened out on the street. None of that is allowed to impact it. You show up and you do a great job, and there's no other thing allowed. It's just that simple.
- CS:** You need to be present in the moment.
- BB:** Yeah, you can't bring anything else. And you got to bring your joy, your stuff, your energy. What I am saying is every program's got to be really, really, really good. And I don't care if you're sick, the audience isn't allowed to know that, and they're not allowed to see that. So even the ones that I know were average, or for me, a mediocre program, it'd still be the best program they've ever seen in their life.
- CS:** Wow. Now what kind of advice would you give someone if they wanted to develop those particular abilities as well?
- BB:** What I would want them to do is to get comfortable. I need them to get comfortable with themselves. I need them to be comfortable with the equipment. And I need them to be comfortable with the room. And I think the best part of that is that they need to own the room. For me that means I'm the first one in there. I make sure it is set the way that I want it. I make sure that I know where everything is and where my eye paths are, and where my walking paths are, and that things are exactly as I want it. The thing that I really dislike the most is walking into a room that's already got half the audience in it and they've been sitting

there waiting or twiddling their thumbs or whatever. Or having to swap out with another speaker. I just, I want to be the first person in the room. I want to take it over. I want it to be my room. And that kind of power comes a little bit with practice, but it comes a little bit simply with being comfortable too, with themselves and with the process.

I would say that they have to know and understand body language, nonverbal cues, because they have to know what they're giving off or what they are doing simply by the way that they stand, the way that they move, the way that they hold themselves, their postures, their arms, everything, so they just have to be absolutely aware of that.

I think that they need to pay attention to their voice and I'll tell you what I mean. I absolutely believe that you can make a good voice better. I was gifted with a voice that most people generally seem to like, but by paying attention to what's coming out of their mouth, by listening to it, they can make it stronger, they can make it better. Some of that is simply practice, but what I'm suggesting is that they think about the lower ranges and tones, like TV broadcasters or radio broadcasters. When they see a female anchor she doesn't have one of those high shrill voices, when they see a male anchor, he's generally got a baritone or a bass or something working for him. And while they're sort of born with that, there certainly also probably a lot of work and a lot of practice built into that.

And whatever somebody was born with, they can pay attention to it. They can pay attention to how they breathe, they can pay attention to where that voice comes from, they can pay attention to how they put it out there. And I will tell you that that's half the battle at the very front end any way. If you have a voice that's pleasing, if you have a voice that people think they're going to want to listen to all day, because it does a range of things, because it moves around, because it's not monotone, because it's easy to listen to, that's the huge first step. And I will tell you that there're some of the famous speakers on the planet that are extremely difficult for me to listen to, because of the voice that they use. We're not going to name their names, but three or four are some of the most famous speakers that have ever lived, that actually have that sort of problem, and they could do something about it if it mattered to them.

I also think they need to pay attention to how they're dressed. They really do need to be comfortable in their clothes and their shoes and their things. So, my rules for me are that everything is first and foremost comfortable. It has to fit perfectly. It has to feel like it belongs on me. And then it's to look really presentable. So, a couple of things about that. My goal is to be dressed at least one step above the best dressed person in the audience. Whatever's going to happen in that room, I need to look like I'm the authority, like I am the lead person in the room. And you can't do that if they say, "Oh, it's business casual, so everybody's going to be in polo shirts," and then somebody, or several senior somebodies come in in suits and ties. That throws things into an incredibly weird situation. But what I've always done, was I've always packed an extra outfit, so that no matter what happened, if something gets torn, if a button comes off, if something turns out to have a stain on it, after it came back from the cleaners or something gets stained over the course of the day - whatever it might be - I've got a backup, so that I can change that tie, or I can change that jacket, or I can get rid of that shirt, or whatever it might be, because I have got to feel extremely comfortable.

So my clothes fit perfect, they look like they're right for the situation, but they absolutely don't bind. They don't hurt. And I think that people probably create some of their own nightmares for themselves with their shoes. If you are going to be standing up, whether it's for 45 min or for eight hours, you better be able to stand there and not have your feet hurt, or you are going to have a problem with the presentation.

CS: Oh, most definitely.

BB: Now, a couple other things I would add if they want to have that superpower is that they need to know their presentation absolutely cold. They need to know their stuff, but they should never ever memorize it. They should know it. I don't have anything wrong at all with they're having notes. And I usually carry a flipbook, and my notes are in acetate, so that I can just follow along. I know what's coming. I know what's where, so on and so forth. But when I'm talking, I can throw that down on the table somewhere and talk, tell a story, do whatever and then when my brain needs to pick the next part I can pick that book up, flip to the next page, do whatever, and people are comfortable seeing me walk around the room, walking around the show with it, too. But if you memorize your presentation – and I don't care if it's 10 minutes or if it's 45 minutes – the first thing is it starts to feel rote, you lose the stuff, you lose the realness. But worse than that, what happens if you forget something? You're basically ...

CS: And I've had that happen.

BB: Oh, well, and if it's memorized and all of a sudden you know that the next sentence is supposed to be there but you do not know what it is, you're lost. Or if somebody asks you a question, and now your brain can't find where it's supposed to go again. That never happens if you have notes, because you can just pick them up and pick up a point and go.

CS: Right. And along the lines of the comments you made about your voice, one of the people I interviewed for this program is a voice coach, and she's actually done a before and after where she's taken someone with a mediocre voice and through training, which I think includes breath, and just understanding how you create the sound that comes out of your mouth, you can actually modulate it so that it becomes much more clear and powerful for making presentations.

BB: Absolutely, no question about that. When I do a bit on non-verbal communications, or I do a bit on voice and sometimes those two fit together really well, I have an exercise that they can go home and do. And so I make it into a kind of a funny story and turn it into a joke, but you give them something that they can actually go do on their own, to find out how to make it work.

CS: And it's amazing how much power the sound of someone's voice can have. There's this one actor who, when I first seen him, in my mind I had an idea of what his voice would sound like. And then he talked. And it was so completely different from what I expected, that it took me several episodes of the series he was in to get used to it.

BB: Because his voice didn't match his face and his body?

CS: Yeah, he had this very strong, masculine face, so I was expecting a nice, deep, resonant voice and out comes this very, almost high pitch whiney voice. And I was like, “No, no, no. That doesn’t work!”

BB: And if it took you several episodes to get used to that, that’s exactly what you had to do, is get used to it. No body is paying you big bucks to stand up and do what it is that we do. You really do have to grab them in the first couple of seconds. You better own the room. You better own the audience. You got to own the show. And your voice is a huge, key part of that.

CS: And especially if it’s a large room where there might be people way in the back, who can’t really see you anyway.

BB: Oh, my!

CS: So all they are is hearing you.

BB: Ah huh.

CS: Well, thank you so much for sharing your knowledge and expertise with us today on *Public Speaking Super Powers*.

BB: Well, it’s my pleasure. Now, I’d like to say one more thing, as long as we’re guiding folks and trying to help them build a speaking career. I’d like to talk about something else for a minute or two yet, if we have the time.

CS: Sure, go ahead.

BB: One of the things that I suggest folks do when they’re learning this business of public speaking is that they really, really spend their time crafting their program, that they find a couple of great stories, that they’re their stories, the things that they hear from everybody else probably. But one of the first questions I’ll ask somebody is if they are going to do a PowerPoint, and they always say, “Yes.” And I ask them, “Why?” And I want to find out what is it that they are thinking. Because if you are like me, and I am sure most of these people are, they have seen very few good PowerPoints, and seen lots of bad ones where somebody flips it up on the screen, there are all kinds of technical problems, and then the next thing you know, you have got a speaker – or let’s not call them a speaker, at that point – you got somebody that’s reading them word-for-word the PowerPoint. Well, my theory is, if you’re going to read it to me, I don’t need you. Just give me the notes and let me read it myself.

But what I suggest for the folks is that they make this presentation about them. So, I’ll ask, “Well, how long do you think it will take to create that PowerPoint?” And they’ll make up some sort of number, and they’ll tell me 20 hours, or 40 hours, or whatever it turns out to be. And I go, “Well, that’s really very nice, and I hope you can do a great PowerPoint in 40 hours, but my guess is it’s going to take you at least twice that time. But here’s my question for you. If instead of you spending 40 hours on a PowerPoint, what if you spent that 40 hours really crafting your presentation? Really practicing your presentation. Really getting good at

your presentation. What if you walk into the room and you were a show and they just wanted to see and hear you? And it didn't matter if there were flashing lights behind you with bullets and arrows, and segue ways and those sorts of things. You be really good."

And the other thing that I want somebody that's brand new or trying to learn this to know or understand is, you really don't get to practice with the audience. Your job is to be really good. And your job is to get better every single time you work. So, yeah, for *you* it's practice, but for the audience it's not. They should always get a great show, and that's your responsibility. So the first and foremost craft a great presentation. Get really comfortable with that. Get really good with that. And then if you need some support for it, either have a great workbook or if you were going to do PowerPoint, use PowerPoint to do pictures, to do graphics, to do some charts if you need. But don't put something up there behind you and then read it to me.

CS: Oh yeah, that's probably the most egregious error that people make with PowerPoint.

BB: The question I really like to ask people is, "How many perfect PowerPoints have you seen in your life?"

CS: Well, the ones I do are perfect.

BB: Well, and that's how it should be, but truth as I know it, and truth as I see it, is almost always, there's some sort of difficulty or problem with it, and they're comfortable blaming it on the technology, and they don't know what that laptop is going to do, they don't know what's coming next, they haven't fixed it right. It's just not well done and it's not comfortable. So, if they're going to do it, do it really well. But the primary purpose, in my mind, for it is to illustrate your point. So use illustrations. Don't read me the PowerPoint.

CS: I like using a white board, or one of those big easel things, if the room's small enough, or even one of those overheads where you have the little overhead pen, because then what you are showing people becomes interactive.

BB: And, I agree. In fact, when I began in this business, the state of the technology was so high, that I was using a chalkboard.

CS: Yeah. I don't miss chalkboards.

BB: Yeah. But flipcharts are really very easy to get them involved in, and so, too, if you're making your squiggles and arrows, and things on an overhead, wow obviously you can make PowerPoints and laptops dance, but it's much more difficult.

And anything you do, you need back up for it anyway. Always, always, always there should be a backup. So there should be a second set of notes. There should be a thumb drive some place, or another CD. Whatever it is. If you're using workbooks there should be a set of originals somewhere, whether it's on your computer, whatever, so they can give it to Kinko's and do new ones. Whatever you need to do. Everything, everything, everything should be backed up, because if I haven't learned anything else, what I have learned is that if something can go wrong, it will.

I've run into every kind of weather on the planet through my travels. I showed up at one hotel on a Sunday afternoon that I was supposed to do a Monday morning show, and the hotel wasn't open, because the hurricane had just taken out the front of the building. I've been at a show where the tornados took out the city the day before. If you can name it, I've had to dance through it and work it. I've been in two hotels that have been hit by a lightning, and one that caught fire. I've been in a hotel where area's town had its electricity turned off for the day, and nobody knew it was coming.

CS: But, you know, if we didn't know that you had to do more than 2,500 presentations, we'd think you were bad luck.

BB: Actually, one of the things that happened when I worked with Sumner's International, their sales manager nicknamed me Lightning and it stuck. Because, honestly, I got sent into every single kind of weather situation that you can imagine, or anything that could happen, literally it did. The only one that I can think of that I've skipped is I haven't had to deal with volcano and the air traffic thing stopped. But other than that... But it's part of the deal!

CS: You missed out on that one, huh?

BB: I missed that one. I was fortunate enough. I was where I belonged at my own place. But that's exactly the point. If it can go wrong it likely will. And they need to have a back up. They need to have another answer. They need to have a way to fix it. And, most important of all, if they are really comfortable with themselves, in their own skin, with their program, no matter what happens, they can do a great show, and people are going to love them. And that's the whole deal. They're supposed to give everybody a great show. They're supposed to walk out of there thinking like they saw something, that they got something, that they can put it to work tomorrow, and that it will make a difference. That's what it's about.

CS: Well, thank you so much Bob, for sharing your wonderful experience and stories and expertise with us today on *Public Speaking Super Powers*.

BB: Well, it's my pleasure. I really look forward to seeing this book and the other cool things that you're going to do with it.

CS: Well, this is the end of today's episode of *Public Speaking Super Powers*. This is your host, Carma Spence, signing off.

If you would like to learn more about Bob Bevard, visit his profile page at:
<http://publicspeakingssuperpowers.com/featuredspeakers/bob-bevard/>