



## PODCAST #38

### *Interview with Eric Gilboord (EG) 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 Eric Gilboord. Eric is a popular speaker, columnist and author who specializes in making marketing easy. He has worked as a marketing executive for more than 30 years and is the author of [\*Just Tell Me What to Do: Easy Marketing Tips\*](#). Welcome to *Public Speaking Super Powers*, Eric.

**EG:** Oh, thank you. Thank you for having me.

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

**EG:** Sure. It started, I guess, about 15 or 16 years ago when I switched from working in the marketing field – I had originally been with large agencies and large well-known national and international clients. And then in '94 I switched over to service the small and medium sized business. I guess, a little bit ahead of the curve when other people came on board and discovered that audience. And the best way to get to know the audience, and the best way for them to get to know me, was to really just start out on the speaking circuit, which meant Rotary Clubs and Chambers of Commerce and little breakfast meetings and basically learn by experience.

**CS:** Very good. So, from your experience, do you believe that public speaking is a learned skill? Or something you are born being able to do? And why have you come to that conclusion?

**EG:** You know what? I honestly think that anybody can do it. I think that a lot of people are pre-determined in their own mind that they can't do it. And the old issue of butterflies and all that stuff. And I'm not sure that there's really a fundamental difference between someone being born to do it and someone learning to do it. I think what happens is, if you would have asked me, many years ago did I ever think that I could do public speaking. The answer would have been no. Because I was the person who sat in the back of the class. I was the person who didn't put their hand up. And I was never the person that spoke up in a group. But things change in one's life and circumstances demand that you start doing other things. And really, I just, as I said, I just started, you know, going to functions and being a speaker. Really one of the first things I learned was that if you actually know what you're talking about, it makes it significantly easier. And you know as you go along you learn tricks and techniques to become a better speaker. But anyone has the capacity to particularly pick something that

they're knowledgeable about and communicate that to other people. I think that we get in our own way. I think that we get scared. And I think we build it up to be significantly more than it needs to be. But I've been in front of very small groups. I've been in front of very, very large groups.

And, as I said before, it comes back to your comfort level in terms of the subject matter that you're speaking about. And I learned over the years to be very competent at taking questions. And answering things on the fly. And running into scenarios where people didn't cooperate the way you thought they might. Or you might ask a question and perhaps no one responds in the audience. And you just have to learn how to rebound from those things. But that comes from experience.

**CS:** It's kind of interesting, there were two points that you made there. One is that a lot of what makes someone successful in public speaking is just the courage to do it.

**EG:** Yeah absolutely. Absolutely. It's getting up in front of an audience. I don't I don't think I've ever met any really good speaker who doesn't admit to having some semblance of a little bit of butterflies before they go out. Because I believe that if you don't have some anxiety, you're either a liar or you're fooling yourself. One or the other.

**CS:** Or you're pathological, I suppose.

**EG:** Because you know you get out in front of a group of people and they have an expectation. And typically, one is perhaps a little bit concerned about two seconds of silence, which can seem like 22 minutes of silence.

**CS:** Oh yeah, definitely.

**EG:** But, like I said, you get used to those things. And I find that sometimes people will speak, trying to get too much out in too short a period of time. And I think that you can say 20 things to a large audience or you can say one or two really powerful things. And at the end of the day, I think that's really what people are looking for. One of the things I found is that, and a lot of speakers understand this today, its story. People want to hear stories. Once you I would never have suggested that in the past that I was a storyteller. Not by a long shot. But what I realized was it was a pretty easy way to get your points across and if there is a story from the real world, something that you've had a true experience with, then it's not that difficult to relay that story. And people relate to it pretty easily.

**CS:** Another thing that you mentioned, which I thought was really interesting, is your story of thinking if someone had asked you if you would be a public speaker, you'd say no. And a lot of the people I'm talking to for the *Public Speaking Super Powers* project, have that same story where public speaking wasn't even in the realm of their consciousness until shortly before they started doing it. It was just so...

**EG:** I was not the kid raising his hand answering questions in class. I was the opposite.

**CS:** Yeah, I mean, I was too. And so were many of the people I've talked to. So, I think that's really encouraging, because it means if you decide that this is something you want to do, the fact that you were introverted or shy is absolutely no barrier to you being successful in this.

**EG:** Yeah. What I've discovered was, is again, if you if you're comfortable with what you're talking about, if you have a passion about what you want to speak about, what you want to communicate, if what you're offering is truly in your heart is important, valuable information for the audience, then you can just go on forever. I mean basically.

**CS:** Yeah.

**EG:** I'm kind of like, I refer to myself as wind me up. Tell me what the hot buttons are that you want to hit and wind me up and I'll go. And I can speak for five minutes or I can speak for two full days in a workshop. Once you get in the groove and once you're in a relationship with the audience, and there's a give and take there, it becomes extremely rewarding. It also becomes, obviously, very energizing and, recording artists will say, in front of a live audience, the time goes by very, very quickly. Same for a speaker. One hour can go by in a flash.

**CS:** Yeah.

**EG:** So, while you may think... see I think what happens is that people write out notes, and they basically try to write over an hour speech or whatever it is, then they try to memorize an hour speech. And I don't know about you, but I'm not that smart. I don't think I could memorize an hour presentation. That's a lot of information. So, they go about it, I think, in a way that sets them up for potential failure.

**CS:** You know I think a lot of that is rooted in how they teach high school. Because I competed in high school and you had – I mean it was only a 15-minute speech – but you still had to memorize it.

**EG:** Yeah.

**CS:** Unless you were doing one of the improv competitions.

**EG:** Exactly. And again, it's kind of this recurring theme that if you know the information, if you're confident in it, it's less about memorizing and it's more about, "OK, what are the key points?"

**CS:** Yeah.

**EG:** Well typically I'll go into a situation and I'll say, "OK, these are the five things that I want to communicate." And I might write them down at the top of the page because I want to make sure I hit all the buttons. And some things you go off on a bit of a tangent. And some things, you know you might forget some of the points, but if there were five overall themes that you wanted to communicate, then, you jot them down and you hit those themes.

**CS:** And that gives you the flexibility to read your audience and in the moment tailor what you're talking about to the needs of your audience that's right there in front of you.

**EG:** I like to make the audience laugh. I think it's fun to get them kind of out of their comfort zone and make them laugh a little bit. Throw them off a little bit sometimes. You can have the best of intentions and you want to be perceived as a very qualified expert. So sometimes there's the risk of being perhaps a little bit too serious. And I think you have to balance that out.

I'd like to pride myself in the fact that I can develop almost an instant level of contact between myself and the audience, and particularly with a small and medium sized audience, which is what I like to speak to. I don't want to come across as this marketing guy from this kind of a big ad agency background and stuff. What I prefer to do is to establish a connection, an eye-to-eye, a same level kind of connection with my audience and then it's just an ongoing conversation. It's a dialogue.

I love getting questions from people and I think that it just makes everything more palatable, more enjoyable, more real. Easier to take in the information. There's nothing better than someone asking you a question or telling their own story and then utilizing that story to know to make your point. One of the things I do in most of my seminars and workshops is that rather than giving the audience examples of something from someplace that they don't know or they're not familiar with I will do everything I possibly can to utilize someone in the audience, their business. And, just off the cuff, say "Look at if you did this this and this." It expresses the point that I'm talking about but I'm actually giving them real world advice on the spot.

And then what happens is that other people sit there and go, "Oh wow. He's giving this person advice and I could actually do the same thing myself with my business."

It becomes very much more real and much more immediate to the audience.

**CS:** And having the interaction helps engage the audience in the presentation.

**EG:** And that's half the battle, engaging the audience. That's absolutely key to what you're doing.

**CS:** Yeah, because without engagement, you get doodlers and yawners and people who fall asleep.

**EG:** Yes. It's a one-way conversation. There's no dialogue, there's a one-way conversation. And then you're just preaching to a group of people and people just aren't interested in that. I don't think they are. As much as I said that an hour can go by very quickly for you, because you're speaking. Boy! that hour should go by equally as quickly for the audience. It should be enjoyable and it's the old leave them wanting more. And that's really important.

**CS:** Now the fun part of the program. If you were a public speaking superhero, what you believe would be your main superpower?

**EG:** Well it's what I like to say to people today that I take the mystery out of marketing. So, I am a kind of a translator and, well, I in simple terms take the mystery of the things and I'll take complex marketing ideas and I'll explain them in a very simple way so that anyone can understand it. I and I actually think that is a superpower. Because a lot of people don't do that. They tend to lecture. And it tends to go over the heads of a lot of people. And in my mind, if the audience isn't understanding it, if you're not speaking on their level, then you're not communicating with them. Yeah, as much as I'd like to fly,...

**CS:** Yeah.

**EG:** The truth is that I think that power that I utilize every time.

**CS:** And that is a very key skill, because I'm trained as a science writer and that is *the* key skill of taking all that technical scientific stuff and then writing about it at the eighth-grade level without losing the meaning of a science.

**EG:** I like nothing better than when people say to me, "Well, no one's ever explained it to me that way before. I get it now." And I used to do that when I was working in ad agencies with actually some very large clients. Where I had a bit of a history working in large agencies where I worked with some very, very, large clients but they were somewhat unsophisticated from a marketing perspective. They were extremely large companies. They weren't sophisticated quote unquote sophisticated packaged goods types of advertisers. These were people that they knew how to make widgets, but they weren't fancy, marketing buzzwords kinds of people. And typically, an ad agency would go in and try and razzle dazzle them with the whole committee of people and using a whole lot of marketing buzz words. And oftentimes it would go over the people's heads.

**CS:** Yeah.

**EG:** I would go in and explain something in real simple terms and I and honestly, I've had people that were running very, very substantial companies turn around and say to me, because it was just a one on one presentation, no committee of people, one little easel back card and I explained to him. And he looked at me and said, "Thank you. No one's ever explained to me that simply so that I just really just get it." And what would have been an hour or two-hour presentation became a 20-minute thank you and where do I sign.

**CS:** Yeah, I think a lot of people forget that these are really, really big companies started off small.

**EG:** Sure.

**CS:** And sometimes when they grew from small to large only the amount of money coming in is what grew, not the sophistication in marketing.

**EG:** Oh, absolutely. And I'm talking major national supermarket chain. I'm not talking about just a large, medium sized company. I'm talking about a major, major company. That what they did was what they did and they've been doing it for decades. And oftentimes the people that

worked there had worked there for most of their careers. So, their only exposure to marketing was what that company did. They didn't really have a whole lot of outside exposure. It just appears that they had had a lot of explanations delivered to them over their heads.

**CS:** Oh, yeah, I'm sure. Now I know that this particular skill is conflatable into many different areas. So, if someone wanted to develop this particular superpower themselves, what is your advice be?

**EG:** I guess my advice would be to understand your audience, understand who you're talking to, very clearly. To be very clear on what they were looking for. There's a world of difference between what they're looking for and what you're trying to give them. And I think that there has to be a meeting of the minds and I think that you have to be very clear on what they're, what they're looking for and what their capabilities are in terms of understanding the information that you would hope that they would take in. It's wrong to necessarily talk about things that aren't what they're looking for. And obviously, it's important to structure a little bit, and to have people think a little bit outside the box. And I think that's great. But, you still have to deliver what they came for in the beginning. I've had many occasions where I've sat in audiences and I've had people at the front of the room talk about marketing. And I'm a pretty experienced marketing guy and I didn't know what they were talking about. No seriously. I sat there going, "Excuse me, but what are they talking about?" Because I actually know this stuff and I have no idea what they're saying.

**CS:** Wow.

**EG:** I followed somebody once. He did his bit, I guess 45 minutes or so, in front of an audience of small business owners and I had no idea. And I looked around the room and nobody else really knew what he was talking about. And it was a polite little hand clap at the end and that was it. And sat down and then I got up. And I spoke English. I explained things in a real simple fashion. And there was a standing ovation at the end. And people were thrilled. And we both talked about marketing. And we both spoke to the same audience. One of us didn't read the audience and one of us tried to force their information upon the audience.

What I try to do was to provide the kind of information that they came to receive and a little more. Clearly you want to do that. And also, if you're talking to an audience and you're relating to them and you can sense that they want to take in more, then you can go a little further. But you have to be able to read it. When there's a wall between you and the audience and it's a one-way conversation, it's never going to get any better. It's only going to go from bad to worse, unfortunately.

**CS:** And it goes many ways. You can talk above your audience and not be understood but you can also talk below your audience and ruin any respect that they may have had for you. So, reading the audience and understanding what level they're coming to the topic at is so important.

**EG:** Well you know it's interesting. Within the world of small and medium size business there's small business. And then there's sort of small medium size business. And the reality is that

it's one of the biggest challenges that large companies have in reaching this audience because an owner of an established business, say five-, 10-, 15-, 20-million-dollar business, does not want to be in the room with a bunch of startup or a bunch of people that are you know doing say under or under a million dollars a year in business.

They're two very, very different audiences. They speak different languages. They have different requirements. And you cannot give the same presentation. I couldn't do the same presentation to those two audiences and do service to either of them, because one would be speaking too high, one would be speaking too low. And again, it's really understanding who your audience is.

**CS:** And in that case, there really is no happy medium.

**EG:** No. It's impossible. You can't win at any at any rate. At one point, you're always saying the wrong thing to half the audience. It's just the way it is.

**CS:** So hopefully whoever gathered the audience did some segmenting. Otherwise, you're just setting up the speakers for failure.

**EG:** Yes basically. And that's another interesting aspect. I mean I'm trying to think of whether it's happened to me or not. I don't think it really has. But there's the occasion where someone brings a speaker in and says we want you to talk about X. And the audience just has no idea what you're talking about. Or the audience has no expectations, so you've got to sync up. I mean I'm very, very clear when I agree to a speaking engagement. I want to know as much about them as anyone wants to know about hiring me. Who's the audience? What are their expectations? What are they looking for? What are the hot buttons? And then I can deliver to those points. But unless I'm very, very clear on who the audience is and very clear on what their expectations are. I won't agree.

**CS:** And, you know, that's another point is that you need to tailor your agenda to the audience.

**EG:** For sure.

**CS:** I mean I remember one time I was working at a company and they would bring in speakers for I guess employee encouragement. But they brought in a speaker who was supposed to talk about health care in some way, fitness, that kind of thing and what he ended up doing is trying to sell all of us on some product that apparently, astronauts use to keep their muscles fit in space. And didn't teach us a thing about fitness.

**EG:** Well that's the other thing is you don't stand in front of an audience and sell to them. Because nobody wants to be sold to that kind of environment.

**CS:** It was very clear that he was not clear on what his agenda and his presentation was to the person who hired him. And he didn't want to care about what the audience came there to learn and know. And he just basically stuck to his own agenda and had no respect for the audience or the company who hired him.

- EG:** And then he didn't understand at the end of the exercise why people weren't interested.
- CS:** And we didn't buy. And he was never called back. And I think that's a very important thing. If you're going to be speaking especially if you're trying to get repeat engagements, you really need to understand that audience and what you've been hired to do. And if that's not something you are interested in then don't accept the engagement.
- EG:** You know what? Being the speaker and dealing with an audience is no different than being a plumber or an electrician or a painter. Someone hires you to do something. You clarify. If somebody hired you to paint their living room and you came in and painted the bedroom, how well do you think that would go over?
- CS:** Not very well.
- EG:** Or, you know, you wanted to paint it a certain color. That's what you agreed upon. And they came up with a completely different color. Well, it's nice that you know that they thought it would be better. But there are ways to deal with it. You can stand in front of an audience and you can say, "Look, I'm here today to talk to you about X, because that's what we all agreed upon. However, in learning about your business and your needs and blah blah blah. I have some other information that I would like to share with you. And with your permission, let me give you a taste of it and if you'd like more and we have time then we'll give you more." As long as we take care of business.
- CS:** Yeah. And that's all about respecting the engagement and respecting the audience, respecting the person who hired you or who booked you. You're not always hired, sometimes you're just booked.
- EG:** Right. Right. Well you know from an audience, whether the audience is paying or not paying, they are paying with their time. And if you don't respect a person's time, then I guess you don't deserve to be in front of that audience. I mean if somebody sitting there for an hour, or if they you know they took half an hour to get there in half an hour to get back and they're there for an hour presentation, you want to definitely give them their money's worth. I typically go out of my way. I've done lunch and learns, different kind of things for different kinds of organizations, and I go out of my way, as I said before, to make very specific reference to their business. When they walk away from the presentation, I've communicated what we agreed that I would communicate to them, but I've now also given them value added. Where I said, "Well, you could take this and do this this and this with your business." And they kind of walk away going wow. I mean that's a bonus on top of what they thought they were getting because it was all again applicable to their business. Not just a generic statement of something. I say that I'm great at communicating complex marketing ideas to small business.
- What I also mean is that you don't stand in front of that audience and give them all kinds of examples of what Coca-Cola did, because it's totally unrelatable. And the first thing that's going to happen, is they're going to say to you, "Well if I had a million dollars I'd do that too." And you've completely lost your credibility.

So again, it's eye-to-eye. It's even level of contact. It's gotta be examples and things where someone can say, "Well that's like me. That's my size business. That's my industry. That's what I do. Yes, I can do that." To me that those are important issues. And, at the beginning of the conversation we were talking about learning to do something versus being born with it and I guess that what I just said was a combination of experience. Maybe reading a little bit here and there. Maybe seeing other speakers speak. Because I tend to sit in an audience and I'll observe a speaker. I'll listen to what they have to say. But I'll also observe what they do right and what they do wrong. It's part of my own growth. And to understand what makes a better speaker than one versus another. I've also had the experience of being in an audience and someone was supposed to be a much higher level speaker. And then when you actually saw them live, either they had a really bad day or you know they're just not as good as they were, you know, people had claimed they were. Boy! you can fall off your pedestal really quickly.

**CS:** Yeah. Most definitely. Well thank you so much for sharing your wealth of information with the *Public Speaking Superhero* community. And this is your host, Carma Spence, signing off.

If you would like to learn more about Eric Gilboord, visit his profile page at:  
<http://publicspeakingssuperpowers.com/featuredspeakers/eric-gilboord/>