



## PODCAST #42

*Interview with Tia Brewer (TB)  
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 Tia Brewer-Footman. Tia served as a state officer for Future Business Leaders of America at the tender age of 16. Since then she has served a spokesperson for her high school, college, magazine business and more. And even served as a voice and face of major TV affiliates such as ABC, CBS and Fox, as well as corporate commercial brands and initiatives. She is currently the COO and Director of Public Relations and Marketing for Footman Brewer Enterprises. Welcome to *Public Speaking Super Powers*, Tia.

**TB:** Well thank you. Thank you. I appreciate it and excited to be here and to be connected with your project.

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

**TB:** Well, Carma, you and I were talking a little bit off the record or off the recording and you were asking about my accomplishments and that I must've started at an early age and 16 was the age that I initially thought that I started going in the direction of public speaking and noticing that there was potentially some skill there. But I think it goes back even earlier than that, because I probably up until the age that, I think, when I was even crawling, I remember my mom placing me in pageants and that certainly began to bring me out and develop me so that I was able to intermingle with others. And I think from there I developed a sense of confidence at a very early age and that helped me to become a well-rounded person which then from pageantry led me into a high school position in which I served as a state officer for Future Business Leaders of America, also known as FBLA. And I had no idea what I was actually getting into by being connected with a wonderful organization like this. I was under the leadership of some very strong and powerful influential people that recognized I had a gift as it related to public speaking and they nurtured that gift. They made sure that during the summer months I was in leadership camps and I was serving as team captain and presenting for my team. You're talking about a young woman that comes from a small town that even today does not even have traffic lights.

So, it's not ever based on where you come from but it's what you do with what you have. And so, there were some people that recognized that early on. They pushed and encouraged me to pursue leadership roles and extracurricular activities from there. I went on to college and served as my senior year college and served as Miss Savannah State University, in which I was, in a sense, the spokesperson and the ambassador for my college. And I represented

the University on a local level, on a national level, and even internationally. From there I entered into the world of television news, where I served as a field reporter, producer, and I eventually worked my way up to Host of my own morning news show. And since that time of transition into my own company, which is Footman Brewer Enterprises, and that is a multicultural marketing, consulting, publishing, and special events company. And outside of my 9-to-5 business, I also do quite a bit of public speaking and appearances and serve as the talent for special documentaries or television and radio commercials and through my public speaking opportunities I've even had the opportunity to have a couple of recurring roles on a sitcom<sup>1</sup> and I even still to this day host medical and health infomercials. So, public speaking is 100 percent of what I do and it is who I am as a person.

**CS:** Well, given your obvious natural ability in public speaking, do you believe that it is a learned skill? Or something you're born being able to do? And how have you come to that conclusion?

**TB:** What a great question. I think that as it relates to public speaking, well, I should say overall I think everyone's born with natural abilities and skills and I think that we are all very blessed with individual gifts. As it relates to public speaking, I do believe that that is a skill set that can be taught and developed over time. So, you may not be the public speaker, but you may be able to develop that ability so that you can serve as the spokesperson of your company or maybe you're in some form of executive leadership. So, I think that over time it can be developed, even if you weren't necessarily born with that natural ability. So, for me I think that was one of my gifts. Now, I could never be a B. Smith or Martha Stewart. I'm just not great at all in the kitchen like that's not my favorite room at all. But I think if someone is extremely patient with me and if I have several cookbooks and just a lot of time to mess up and trial and error, that I probably could boil an egg. But that I was not born with the ability to cook at all and my husband would agree to that 100%. So, I do believe that it is a skill set that you're born with. But I think as it relates to public speaking that's something that you can learn and develop over time.

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

**TB:** OK.

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

**TB:** I would say I don't really know how to summarize it in a one word or in a phrase but I think that one of the things that that I've been told I have a strong ability to do, and that is to connect with a group. So, let's say the group maybe five people to 500 to 5000 people and to have the ability to connect with a group collectively while at the same time provide that individual one-on-one attention. It's very unique and I think I probably would have to credit serving as a media personality or a television news anchor because you can imagine you're sitting there in the studio probably has about five or six people in production you're looking at a camera. So, it's almost as if you're giving that one-on-one attention to that one viewer. But in actuality you're speaking to thousands upon thousands of people at one time. I think

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<sup>1</sup> She played a reporter in a couple of episodes of One Tree Hill, according to IMDB.com.

I've been able to take that and utilize it when I'm speaking in an arena of people. And being able to connect with that one-on-one person, but at the same time keep the message moving so that as a whole everyone is receiving the benefit of the message or the information that's being shared.

**CS:** Now something you just said made me think that this is probably the reason why so many people are even more afraid of speaking on television than they are of speaking anywhere else. And it's because they imagine millions and millions of people watching them. And yet, when it comes right down to it on television or in front of a stage you're really just having a one-on-one conversation for each of the people in the audience. That's how they're experiencing it. Your experiencing it as one too many.

**TB:** Right.

**CS:** But if you can think of it from their point of view it's really just a one-on-one.

**TB:** I'm glad you mentioned that, as well Carma, because for me I don't care how many years I've been in television, I always have to keep that in mind that I'm just speaking one-on-one. Because if I were to sit there and to do the math and think about how many viewers and think about the numbers I would mess up. I would make a mistake. I would have to sneeze and something crazy would probably happen all at once. But when you just kind of exhale a little bit just take a deep breath and just recognize I'm talking to a friend, a loved one. I've got some buddies that they've invited me into their living room to inform them about what's going on. So, it turns into more of a conversation versus a speech. And that really helps me. And then what I noticed too, is that over the years of serving as a news anchor, the feedback that I've received from people in the community and viewers is that, "I always feel like you're talking to me, Tia." And because I try to think that I am speaking directly to that person. And what I've noticed – this is also key – whether you're speaking on camera or whether you're speaking to an audience of people, when you deflate or take a deep breath or exhale and you kind of come down on that one-on-one level, people are a lot more forgiving if you were to make a mistake versus if you come across that this is an extremely formal setting. I am perfect. I've got to hit it this one time. I cannot mess up. I'm talking to the masses of people and this is my objective and these are my goals. If you just take it down a notch. Take a deep breath. Relax. And recognize that you know what? I'm speaking to small group of people or one person. If you were to make a mistake it's almost as if that group has become your family or your friends. And they're so forgiving. So, let's say forget your next sentence or let's say you sneeze. You're in such a comfortable place that you can laugh at yourself. You know? And so that has also been something that has been extremely helpful to me. And normally when I'm starting off a message, a speech, or even if I'm doing something on the air, I automatically let people know I laugh at myself. I welcome you to join in with me and then that takes me out of the hot seat.

**CS:** Yeah. And you know a lot of the people that I've been speaking with for this project have mentioned that, in most cases, the audience is actually rooting for you to succeed, which is part of the reason why they give you slack when the heel of your shoe falls off. Or you forget a sentence or whatever. In my case, I have these weird things that happens to me. I have these random hiccups throughout the day. Just randomly, for no apparent reason, I'll hiccup.

And that occasionally happens when I'm speaking in front of a group. And I just have to say well they're the random hiccup and you and everyone laughs...

**TB:** Well, that's neat. That is neat. And I think that's definitely something you can probably build in your message somehow. I don't think you can actually queue that to happen.

**CS:** No, I can't.

**TB:** That's really your dig. I don't think I ever heard that.

**CS:** And you know I also suspect that those who are the most successful in television and in public speaking, are probably those who master that one-on-one feeling when they get up there. They're people. They're speaking to each individual individually.

**TB:** You are exactly right. In fact, what I would even recommend to folks, especially those who are looking to venture into public speaking, or maybe they've been placed in a position on their job where they're going to have to do more presentations and speak to groups of people. I would say in order to really connect one-on-one with people you have to first – that whole deflating process – just humble yourself. And recognize that you've been selected or asked or invited to speak because of your position in your job or because of your knowledge base. And they're inviting you or asking you to speak not so that you can sit up there and kind of pump yourself up. Not so you can stand up there in front of all these people and say, "Look at me! Don't I sound great? Isn't my voice awesome? Don't I look fabulous?" It is so never. It's never about the speaker. You've been invited to educate, inform, inspire, motivate. And so, I think that for a lot of speakers we need to be able to humble ourselves and to recognize that we serve a purpose. And the purpose is not fulfilled unless people are walking away inspired, educated, motivated. And to me that's the whole purpose and the whole point. So, if people could recognize it's not about me. I've got a purpose for doing this.

**CS:** Well along those lines, what advice would you give someone if they wanted to develop that super power that you talked about?

**TB:** I think humility goes a long way. Most of the time when I'm invited to speak or to do a presentation, I step back and I try and look at what's the bigger picture. Like what is the purpose? Are they wanting to be educated on a new tool? A new way of conducting this particular type of business? Am I coming strictly because it is a group that needs to be inspired and motivated? So, I think the first thing is to step back and recognize, OK, what is the overall purpose? What are the overarching goals that that need to be reached here? And then I think that in all cases, irregardless of what type of presentation or who the group is. Definitely have to step outside of yourself and say again it's not about me. I've got to make sure that I deliver. And there's a quote by this German author that I absolutely love and it's actually the signature line on my e-mail and I love it. It says, "Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being." There is something magical and amazing when you step into a room, an arena, into a television studio, and you convey a message, and you speak to people as you see them. So, let's say you've been invited to motivate a group of people. And you speak to them on the level that you see them. I see you as this successful group of people. Maybe they're so accustomed to

hearing all of the things they do wrong and what they're not doing and who they're not going to be and that's why you're not like this. What a huge difference it makes. How eye opening if you step into that venue and you speak to people as if you see them in this in this realm. They walk out, I mean tall. Their chest sticking out. It's almost as if they feel as though they can fly and they are now the superhero. I love that particular quote. And I think by stepping back and looking at the big picture what's my purpose of providing this message or this information and how can I can I take people there and make sure that I'm basically the vessel or the tool or the vehicle through my message to get them there. So, a couple of points again is to look at the big picture. Humble yourself. And then to speak to people as if you already see them, at that end level, that ending goal.

**CS:** And you know there's actual research that backs that up. I remember when I competing in high school, one of the speeches I heard which always stuck in my head was this person did a speech on how names affect personality. Apparently, like if you have a pre-conceived notion of what a Raquel is like, you will treat everyone you meet whose name Raquel in that manner. And over time they start embodying Raquel-ness. And so what they found is that people with the same name often have similar personality traits, not because they were necessarily born with them, but because people said, "Oh, your name is Susan. Susans are like this. This is how I'll treat you."

**TB:** Ah! That is really interesting.

**CS:** Yeah. So, basically if you do treat people the way you think they ought to be, over time they will become that.

**TB:** They will become that.

**CS:** They've even done that research with children where they told teachers that OK these kids over here are "A" students but they weren't they were they had been "C" students. The teachers treated them like they were "A" students and they became "A" students.

**TB:** That is wonderful. I have a nonprofit organization, FB Foundation, and one of the programs under my nonprofit is a program called P-Town Girls. And it's an etiquette, leadership development, and public speaking program for young girls. And oftentimes when I implement this program in different schools, the principal will ask, "Well, are you looking to work with our honors students? Or do you want to work with our at-risk students? Or which sets of girls would you like to work with?" And I always ask them to mix up the group. I want a good diverse group. I don't want all of the honors students and I don't want all of the at-risk students because my end result or my goals is to actually show the principal, the teachers, and even community or those that say that it can't happen that these sets of children have deficiencies and they cannot, because of X, Y and Z, I actually show them that all children are pretty much born with the same palette. And it's up to us to build them up, to encourage them.

And it just has not failed. My young girls that complete the program, you cannot tell who started out as the honor students who were the at-risk students, because they all are on equal playing field. Because, again, you're speaking to them as the future leaders that they

are, as the public speakers that they are. And it's amazing to me. I think it's definitely important to make sure that your circles are positive because that plays a huge role.

**CS:** Oh definitely. And also, that kind of plays into learning styles. Often when a child is struggling with a topic, it's not because the child is failing, it's usually because the teacher is failing to teach them in the mode that they will learn in, because teachers tend to teach in their own learning style. If they're kinesthetic learner, they'll teach kinesthetically. If they are an audio and not all of their students are going to be audio or visual or kinesthetic learners. So, it's really on the teacher's shoulder to try and figure out what is this child's learning style? How can I communicate what I'm trying to teach in a style that this child will understand?

**TB:** Exactly. Ooh, I think that's a very great point. I know that for me it has always been since I was a little child if you would tell me the reason why it would have to be this way and you're growing up as a as a young child it's not good for you to question your parents or anyone of authority. And I got in the most trouble. All of my report cards would say she received A's in all of her classes but as relates to her conduct with talking, she gets a negative report. And so, my mom would always say you got to quit talking. You've got to quit asking these teachers all of these questions. Because I think the teachers were taking is as if I was being sassy or disrespectful. But if you were to say something to me, I would be so satisfied if you told me the reason why. So, for me, again I go back to that big picture. I'm a big picture person so I never can be told one item. I have to know, how did it start? Or why did this question develop? And that's just how I process everything, which it was not a surprise at all that I would then become a television reporter because, I've got to paint the entire picture and then I'll give you the facts. That's just how I operate. I remember even in fact my mom had said to me one time when I was a little girl she said – and my nickname was pumpkin – she'd say, "Pumpkin, get me an egg." And I said to her, "Did you mean get you *eight* eggs? Or get you *an* egg?" And she thought I was trying to be sassy to her, but I was really trying to understand, "Do you want eight eggs exactly?" Because then in my mind I'm thinking OK well I will pull them out of the refrigerator two at a time. Everything is a big picture process with me. It's always been that way.

**CS:** Details details.

**TB:** Details. Details. And I think it's important to understand again people's learning styles because people could perhaps view that as, "Oh, she's a bit annoying because she has to know everything." But actually, my learning style, I understand better when you explain, when you share with me the why or the big picture. Then I'm totally and completely satisfied.

**CS:** And you know how learning styles relate to public speaking is you need to be aware that your audience probably is a mixture of the learning styles. So, it's always a good idea to sprinkle in your presentation a little audio, a little visual, a little activity. Especially with a longer one, I mean with a keynote you wouldn't need to, but with more training sessions. That way you touch everyone in the audience.

**TB:** You're exactly right. And I think another great point to add to that is when you're in a large arena or have a large group, even if it's not one-on-one breakout sessions with groups, I think in some type of way or some type of capacity beyond kind of the ice breaker if you

could do one quick exercise that would unite the entire group. So that everyone felt comfortable by being that individual. And then at the same time they felt really great about being in that group. It feels, as though they are part of the entire team. And it makes sure that if you cannot reach everyone by providing that that one type of collective exercise it at least shows them that you tried to reach everyone. Because it's a bit challenging to make sure that everybody in the room is going to fully understand or get it. Some people it takes some time. Some people really appreciate it you have handouts or if the information can be provided online or it was recorded. Can they listen to an archive link of that teleconference? Or whatever the case may be, because it takes them a little time to digest it. And so, I think for me beyond icebreakers to have one type of team activity or something that's quick that would unite everybody. I'm at least able to make sure I'm able to touch everybody at one time in that arena or venue.

**CS:** Wonderful. Well thank you so much for sharing your story and your insights with us today.

**TB:** I really appreciate it. It's been fun.

**CS:** It has been. 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 Tia Brewer, visit his profile page at:

<http://publicspeakingssuperpowers.com/featuredspeakers/tia-brewer>