



PODCAST #66

Interview with Michael J. Griffin (MG) 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 Michael Griffin. Michael frequently serves as a keynote speaker at conferences, as well with teachers at the college level, on the topics of branding, marketing, advertising and creativity. Founder of the earliest integrated marketing companies, he has worked with Fortune 500 companies and nonprofit organizations helping them clarify and articulate their brand. Welcome to *Public Speaking Super Powers*, Michael.

MG: Carma, thank you very much. I'm really glad to be here.

CS: I'm glad you're here, too. Now, just so we're listeners can get a feel for your unique expertise, could you tell us a little bit about your journey to success in public speaking?

MG: Yes. I'd be happy to. I have a kind of a bit of a hybrid background. I majored in journalism college at Indiana University and simultaneously also got a degree in education. My educational background got me into teaching and my writing skills got me into advertising. I opened an integrated marketing agency in 1974. And in those days the terms marketing and integrated marketing were not even really ever being used in the industry. We were promoting these concepts like branding and integrated marketing and so forth. And these are now big buzzwords today and it's almost clichéd, today, but in 1974 it was somewhat revolutionary. So, I was asked to speak at a lot of corporate events, seminars, things of that nature. People wanted to know what are you talking about with this whole thing, integrated marketing and branding and stuff like that. So, my career kind of took off from that particular starting point.

I also taught at the college level, as I still do. So, getting up in front of a crowd and talking is not a problem for me. And I really get a thrill out of being able to share my knowledge. I think at heart, I'm really a teacher. And I really get a thrill out of being able to enlighten people and to see the reaction from the folks in the crowd. I want them to walk away with something that they actually can use, that may change their perspective – not only on their businesses, but even on their lives. I'm starting a company called the Griffin Creative Institute, where we're going to be helping business people and other people learn how to tap into their own unique creative personality. And creativity is being demanded in the workplace.

I don't know if you have heard about, but IBM does a survey every year. They interview 1,500 CEOs worldwide. Now these are top guys and women in top corporations all over the world.

They're May of 2010 survey came back and the number one character trait that these CEOs are looking for in people that they hire is creativity. It was mentioned almost twice as many times as the number two characteristic, which is integrity.

CS: Interesting.

MG: Yeah. So, I think that there's such a tremendous desire for people to understand, "How can I be more creative? How can I take my own personality and become more creative?" Not only for their professional lives, because I think it's being demanded in corporations, and in companies, whether they're small or large. But I also think for your personal life. There's a tremendous amount of self-satisfaction and personal growth and enjoyment that you can get out of your creative endeavors in your personal life. So, long answer to a short question, but that's how I got to where I am today.

CS: Well, you know, also what occurred to me, that when times get tough, creativity is what helps you survive.

MG: Well, I think that creativity helps you survive, you're absolutely correct. That's an interesting perspective. And I think that it not only helps you survive, it can literally help you survive in your job.

CS: Right. Really regardless, for example back in the caveman times, it was the creative hunter who was able to find the food when food was scarce.

MG: Exactly. Exactly.

CS: And so, in modern times it's the creative entrepreneur whose business is going to survive a tough economy.

MG: Exactly. And then I also think the other side of that is it also helps you survive emotionally during difficult times.

CS: Basically, when anything's tough, your kind of have to get creative because you can't do what you've done before.

MG: Exactly. You know the old saying that's the cliché that if you always do what you've always done you always get what you've always gotten. I disagree. I think if you always do what you always done, there may come a point where you don't even get what used to get.

CS: Actually, that's probably very true because the world changes around you.

MG: Exactly. The world changes continually. And, as George Bernard Shaw said, there are two types of men in the world – you have to give him a little slack for being a little bit sexist, but this was 1918 or something – but George Bernard Shaw said something to the effect there are two types of men in the world, the reasonable man adapts himself to fit the world. The unreasonable man demands that the world change to fit him. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.

CS: Very true. It's kind of like something we were talking about before the recording on, was with Edison, inventing the light bulb and then he had to change the world to support the light bulb.

MG: Exactly. Exactly. He kind of like invented the end of the process before he even got to the beginning of ... well, now how can I get this in everybody's home.

CS: He invented the cart, and then went, "Oh we kind of need a horse."

MG: Yeah. Who's going to pull this thing now? Exactly.

CS: Right. Well given your experience, do you believe that public speaking is a learned skill? Or something you're born being able to do and why?

MG: Well, I think that like any skill, some people are born with a greater propensity or greater level of talent or maybe more of an ease in the skill. Like whether you're playing guitar or golf or the cello or whether you're an artist or whatever the case might be, I think that it is a skill at a level that is in some cases unteachable. I mean you just can do it, you have a natural talent. However, everybody can talk. And so, I think that you absolutely can learn how to be a public speaker and to be a good public speaker. As a matter of fact, I've taught public speaking and I've been a speech coach. So, I have literally seen it happen. But the reality is that for some for some people it's way easier for a lot of people to do it than others.

CS: Right. And you know some of the people I've been talking to, it was the difference between a good public speaker and a great public speaker. Probably that that essence that can't be taught.

MG: Yeah, you can say that about almost any skill. Now, you can say that the difference between Tiger Woods and a guy who might win the 20 bucks in a golf outing with his buddies, is enormous, enormous gap and no matter what the guy who's not Tiger Woods does, he's never going to be able to play like Tiger Woods. And Tiger plays the way he does because there's an innate inborn skill that he got, and I didn't.

CS: Right.

MG: But I can talk better than Tiger.

CS: So, now imagine that you are a public speaking superhero. What do you believe would be your main super power?

MG: Well, I'll tell you what, I had to think about this for a while. Of course, every boy – and I don't know bad girls when they're growing up – but every boy would love to be able to fly. That's not a public speaking superpower. This is actually a very easy question for me to answer. Because unlike flying or super human strength, I think anybody, we can actually get a lot closer to a superpower in this particular topic than you may think. And here's what I would like, I would like to be able to read people's minds, to understand my audience better. To be

able to tap into what they need. What they want to hear from me. What do they already know? What prejudices may they have? Because every audience is going to be different. Every single audience that you go in front of to speak is going to be a little bit different. And to think that you can write one presentation or one speech, and that's going to fit everybody, I think is a gross injustice to your audience. Because as a public speaker, *the* most important thing I think that you need to understand is your audience. And you need to know them. You need to know, what do they know? What do they need to know? Why are they there? And how do you do that? Well, you do some research on the company or the group that you're there. You try to understand their culture. You try to integrate their buzzwords into your presentation. You tie the content of your presentation into real words real world situations that they can understand.

So, if I could have a superpower it would be mind reading. I sort of can't get that far. But if you take a few steps back and you think about your audience. You think about the business they're in. You think about the challenges of their business. You try to understand what it is that has brought them there that day. You almost kind of can read their minds, or you can certainly conjecture, and you can also talk to ... and I always will ask when a person hires me to come in and to give a keynote speech. I will always say, "Well, what do you want to hear? What are you interested in? What do you want me to talk about? Where's your audience level on this? I don't want to talk about something that they already get and they already understand. I want to give them a new wrinkle or a new little twist. So, mind reading, that's the one.

- CS:** It sounds a lot like ... I guess because public speaking is part of a larger skill set, I guess, which is communication, and whether you're marketing or speaking or writing a book or writing a story or writing an article, all of those things, because you're communicating with an audience, *requires* you to understand your audience. I think the big difference with public thinking is, you kind of are doing it in real time.
- MG:** Exactly. You're doing it in real time. And, you know, I teach a lot about creativity, as we already said, and my class is about advertising and creative advertising and marketing and things of that nature. And one of the things that I say to say to the class is that if you only walk away from here with one thing, I'm going to give you the million-dollar idea right now, that can change your life, and that if you understand it, and if you apply this to your daily life, not only in your professional life, but also in your personal lives, even with your wife or your husband or your significant other or your kids or r your boss or whoever. So here it is, this million-dollar idea. We must always understand that what we want doesn't matter. What we want to happen when we are communicating with another person, what I want to occur should not be my primary motivation. I need to understand what my audience wants. Or the person to whom I'm speaking. I need to I need to know what *they* want. And I will be much more successful in convincing them to do whatever it is I may want them to do, if I understand where they're coming from first. And so yeah, you're exactly right and you're doing it in real time and sometimes you doing it on the fly.

But I always say take a couple of steps backwards and just for a minute think about your audience. Think about what they or he or she is coming into this conversation with and approach it from there. Because it's not what you say, it's how you say it.

CS: Right. You know, it just kind of reminds me of, I believe something that Zig Ziglar once said is something to the effect of you help enough people and you'll get what you want. And this is sort of a microcosm of that. It's like, in order to get what you want, you have to help someone else, the person you're communicating with, help them get what they want.

MG: That's exactly right. You hit it right on the head. Exactly what I'm saying. Although you said it better than I did.

It really is, as I said it, what you want to happen doesn't really matter in terms of the way that we the way that we communicate with other people. The only thing that matters is what that person wants to happen because if you look at communication as a loop, as a completion, here I am, I'm a sender. I have a message and I send it to a receiver. I would like that receiver, the person who gets the message, to respond in a certain way.

But there may be all kinds of reasons why they don't respond in the way that I want them to respond. And I need to try to understand where they're coming from, what their arguments might be, what barriers may exist to them to receive and to accept whatever the message is. So yeah, you're exactly right. You have to be able to give them what *they* want in order for you to get what you want.

CS: Right. So now comes the big thing and that is what advice would you give someone if they want to develop that particular super power, as well?

MG: The advice that I would I would give them really, on the very simple side is just to walk a mile in the other person's shoes as they say. But also, the other thing is to ask your audience. As I said before, whenever I go out to do a public presentation or a public speech, I will always look into the company or look into the group. But sometimes I do a lot of work with nonprofit organizations too. And I'll look into what are their missions? What are their goals? What are their values? What challenges are they facing in the world? I recently did work with a nonprofit organization where I was a keynote speaker at their statewide Association event. And the big challenges they're facing are like budget cuts from the state government and so forth. Knowing that makes it easier for me to tailor my presentation to them. And understanding their culture using their buzzwords instead of my culture and my buzzwords, I speak in their language. And so how do you do that? You do it by learning. You do it by taking the time. and You don't need to take a huge amount of time it doesn't take weeks or months to do this but take some time to learn your audience. Do research into them and you will be able to develop instinctively your mind reading powers.

CS: Right. And that's like a big proponent of don't write out your speech verbatim. Because they're going to have to tailor it for every audience anyway.

MG: Exactly. Exactly like I said, if you think you have written the one speech that you think fits every single audience that you will ever be asked to present to I think you're probably going to be mistaken.

85- 90 percent of it might still work. But it's that other 10 or 15 percent that really makes a difference. The difference between 33 degrees Fahrenheit and 32 degrees Fahrenheit is the difference between ice and water. That one degree. That tiny tweak that you put in there is what literally changes the chemistry of the room.

CS: Definitely. Which is why when it rains, you know it won't snow if it doesn't go below.

MG: That's right. That's right.

CS: If it's raining you know it's not colder than.

MG: Yep. Yep. It may feel like it.

CS: Wonderful. Well, thank you for sharing your wisdom with us today, Michael.

MG: Well you're very welcome. Hopefully your listeners will get something out of it and maybe be enlightened or if not enlightened, hopefully encouraged to pursue their dreams and to continue in this crazy world that we live and to continue to learn and continue to expand your talents and expand your mind. And if you're willing to do that there's tremendous success, I think, awaiting anyone who will do it.

CS: Wonderful. Well, that's definitely one of the goals of this program. And 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 Michael J. Griffin, visit his profile page at:

<http://publicspeakingpowers.com/featuredspeakers/michael-j-griffin/>