



SPEAKING BEYOND THE TIC

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO BUILDING A SPEAKING CAREER ON YOUR TERMS

You do not have to make your disability your speech.

YOUR VOICE. A LARGER STAGE.

WELCOME

This guide is for you if you live with Tourette syndrome or a tic disorder and want to build a speaking career without making your disability the subject of every stage you enter.

Your tics may affect how you prepare, travel, communicate with a planner, experience a room, respond to production conditions, or recover after an engagement. Those realities deserve thoughtful planning. They do not diminish the expertise that earned you the microphone.

You may speak about disability because it is part of your work. You may also speak about marketing, finance, leadership, technology, education, law, theology, entrepreneurship, hospitality, or another field entirely. Your expertise gets to be the reason you are on the stage.

This guide helps you build the career and design the conditions around it.

The operating lens is ART™:

- Anticipation - consider what you need before the event begins.
- Remove Friction - identify conditions that make it unnecessarily difficult for you to do your best work.
- Thoughtful Design - work with the planner to create practical conditions that support the presentation.

Do not make “looking nondisabled” the price of professionalism.

1. YOUR EXPERTISE COMES FIRST

Begin with the same questions any serious professional speaker should answer. What do you know? Who needs to hear it? What problem can you help an audience understand or solve? What is distinctive about your point of view?

Define Your Platform

Area of expertise	
Primary audience	
Problem you address	
Point of view	
Topic 1	
Topic 2	
Topic 3	
Desired audience outcome	

Your disability may inform your perspective without becoming your topic. You decide how visible it is in your positioning, biography, stories, and body of work.

A strong platform makes your value legible before anyone begins thinking about logistics.

2. BUILD YOUR SPEAKER PLATFORM

Your materials should make two things easy to understand: why you should be on the stage and how to book you.

- A speaker biography centered on your expertise, experience, results, and point of view.
- Two or three clearly defined speaking topics with concrete audience outcomes.
- Professional headshots and stage photographs.
- A speaker page with a clear inquiry path.
- A concise one-sheet or speaker overview.
- Testimonials from planners, hosts, clients, or audience members.
- Video that demonstrates command of your subject, clarity, presence, and audience connection.
- A speaker reel when you have enough strong footage to make one useful.

Your Reel and Visible Tics

Tics may appear in your footage. You can choose the clips that represent you well without creating an impossible standard in which every visible tic must disappear. A strong reel should show the quality of your work.

Finding Stages

- Corporate meetings and leadership events
- Conferences and professional associations
- Universities and educational institutions
- Virtual conferences and webinars
- Podcasts and interviews
- Panels and workshops
- Retreats and private events
- Your own live experiences

3. DISCLOSURE & THE PLANNER CONVERSATION

You decide what you disclose, to whom, and for what purpose. A planner may need functional information to produce an environment in which you can work well. They do not automatically need your complete medical history.

Communicate the function, then the action.

"I live with a tic disorder, and flash photography can trigger my tics. Please ensure that all photography during my presentation is flash-free and that the photographer and production team receive that instruction before the event."

You can also communicate a need without naming a diagnosis: "Please place my seat near an exit so I can step out if needed without interrupting the program."

Your Speaker Access Rider

- Photography and flash
- Lighting and visual effects
- Sound and audio
- Stage setup and seating
- Backstage environment
- Travel and arrival
- Breaks and recovery
- Food and beverage
- Communication preferences
- Onsite contact and real-time adjustment plan

Disclosure without action is not anticipation.

4. BEFORE YOU SIGN & BEFORE YOU TRAVEL

Access belongs in professional planning alongside fee, travel, AV, recording rights, and schedule. Confirm the conditions of the engagement before you begin spending capacity on the engagement.

Contract & Production

- Speaking fee, deposit, payment schedule, and cancellation terms.
- Travel, ground transportation, hotel, and arrival expectations.
- Recording, photography, licensing, and intellectual-property terms.
- Event schedule, rehearsal, soundcheck, meals, networking, and other required appearances.
- Access Rider or written functional requirements.
- Named planner and onsite production contacts.

Travel & Capacity

- Build margin into your arrival time.
- Confirm transportation and hotel details in advance.
- Avoid unnecessary schedule compression before your presentation.
- Protect preparation and recovery time where you need it.
- Know which social, meal, rehearsal, and networking obligations are required rather than assumed.
- Plan departure with the same care as arrival.

5. THE FIVE SENSES OF YOUR SPEAKING ENVIRONMENT

The stage is experienced through more than the microphone. Review all five senses before an in-person engagement, then consider how they interact.

SIGHT

- Flash photography, strobes, moving lights, rapid lighting changes, LED walls, and visual effects.
- Spotlights, screen brightness, confidence monitors, audience lighting, and photographers moving in your sightline.

SOUND

- Microphones, monitor speakers, walk-on music, applause cues, sudden sound effects, audience noise, doors, and backstage conversations.
- Whether you have access to a quieter preparation or recovery space.

SMELL

- Fragrances, diffusers, cleaning products, floral arrangements, catering aromas, fog, haze, smoke effects, and ventilation.

TOUCH

- Handshakes, hugs, unanticipated touch, lavalier placement, headset contact, clothing, temperature, seating, crowds, and physical proximity.

TASTE

- Water, speaker meals, ingredients, allergens, food timing, and whether you may bring preferred food or beverage.

6. IN-PERSON PRESENTATION SUCCESS

Walk the environment before the audience arrives whenever possible. The objective is to discover conditions while they can still be changed.

Backstage / Green Room

- Know who will have access to the space.
- Review lighting, noise, temperature, scent, food, and traffic through the room.
- Identify somewhere you can regulate or step away without becoming inaccessible to the production team.

Rehearsal / Soundcheck

- Test your microphone, stage route, confidence monitor, slides, music, video, and lighting.
- Confirm flash-free photography directly with production when it is part of your requirements.
- Identify entrances, exits, seating, water, and your onsite contact.
- Confirm who has authority to change a production condition in real time.

During the Engagement

- Use the stage arrangement you agreed upon.
- Take breaks or sit when that is part of your plan.
- Signal your contact if an environmental condition needs to change.
- Focus on delivering the message rather than performing nondisability.

7. VIRTUAL PRESENTATION SUCCESS

Virtual speaking gives you more control over your physical environment, but it creates a different sensory and production environment. Treat the virtual stage with the same deliberate planning as an in-person room.

Your Virtual Setup

- Position the camera and screen so your setup is physically sustainable for the full presentation.
- Adjust screen brightness, lighting, background movement, and self-view to reduce unnecessary visual demand.
- Test microphone, speakers, headphones, platform sounds, notification alerts, and audio routing.
- Control fragrance, temperature, seating, clothing contact, and other elements in your immediate environment.
- Keep water and any needed food within reach.
- Use a background that supports your professional presentation without creating visual distraction.

With the Host

- Confirm platform, login process, captions, recording permissions, screen-sharing, chat, polls, Q&A, and moderator responsibilities.
- Schedule a technology rehearsal when the engagement warrants it.
- Decide what should happen if you need to turn your camera off, pause, step away, or if your tics increase.
- Confirm whether the host should address audience questions or reactions about visible tics.
- Establish a backup communication channel with the host or producer.

8. VIRTUAL FIVE SENSES CHECK

The five senses still matter online. You simply have more influence over some of the inputs.

SIGHT

- Screen brightness, ring lights, window glare, moving participant tiles, animated slides, chat movement, notifications, and self-view.

SOUND

- Headphones, microphone monitoring, platform alerts, household noise, HVAC, outside noise, audience microphones, and overlapping speakers.

SMELL

- Your room, cleaning products, candles, diffusers, food, nearby cooking, and ventilation.

TOUCH

- Chair and desk ergonomics, headset or earbuds, lavalier or microphone equipment, clothing, room temperature, keyboard/mouse contact, and how long you remain in one position.

TASTE

- Water access, food timing, medication-related timing you choose to plan around, and having preferred food or beverage available.

Your Backup Plan

Internet backup

Backup device

Host contact

If camera goes off

If you need to pause

If audio fails

9. WHEN YOUR TICS INCREASE

There is no single correct response. You may continue, pause, sit, step away briefly, acknowledge what is happening, or choose not to discuss it at all. Your plan should reflect what works for you, not what makes other people most comfortable.

Audience Reactions

Staring, questions, unsolicited help, laughter, imitation, or visible concern may occur. Decide in advance what you are willing to address yourself and what you want the host or planner to handle.

Tic Suppression

Some people can suppress tics for periods of time, and suppression can require significant effort. Experiences vary. Your speaking career should not be built on the assumption that visible tics must be suppressed in order for you to appear competent, credible, or professional.

Your Real-Time Plan

If tics increase	
What I may do	
What I want the host to do	
What production should change	
What I do not want	

10. AFTER THE STAGE

The engagement does not end when the applause stops. Recovery, follow-up, proof, and referrals are part of the speaking business.

- Protect recovery time where you need it before adding more travel or obligations.
- Request usable photographs and video under the agreed recording terms.
- Request a testimonial while the engagement is fresh.
- Follow up with the planner and thank the production team.
- Ask about future meetings, related divisions, association chapters, or referrals when appropriate.
- Document what worked operationally and what should change next time.
- Track fee, expenses, leads, referrals, footage, testimonials, and repeat opportunities.

Grow the Career

Use each engagement to strengthen the next one. Refine your topics. Improve your materials. Build planner relationships. Create intellectual property from your ideas. Increase your fees as your proof, demand, and market position strengthen.

Your disability may shape how the career is designed. It does not determine how large the career is allowed to become.

11. YOUR SPEAKER ACCESS RIDER - WORKING PAGE

Use this page to identify the functional information a planner needs in order to support your work. Keep it concise, specific, and operational.

Photography / flash

Lighting / visuals

Sound / audio

Stage / seating

Backstage environment

Travel / arrival

Breaks / recovery

Food / beverage

Communication

Real-time adjustment plan

12. SPEAKING BEYOND THE TIC CHECKLIST

CAREER FOUNDATION

- My expertise and audience are clearly defined.
- I have 2-3 strong speaking topics.
- My bio establishes professional credibility.
- I have professional photographs.
- I have usable speaking footage or a plan to obtain it.
- My website makes it easy to inquire.
- I have a defined fee and travel policy.

BEFORE BOOKING

- I understand the audience, format, schedule, and required appearances.
- My contract addresses fee, travel, recording, photography, and cancellation.
- I communicated the functional information the planner needs.
- I provided my Access Rider when appropriate.
- I know my planner and onsite production contacts.

FIVE SENSES

- SIGHT - flash, lighting, screens, visual effects, photography, movement.
- SOUND - microphones, music, applause, sudden cues, room noise, backstage sound.
- SMELL - fragrance, flowers, cleaning products, food aromas, haze/smoke, ventilation.
- TOUCH - greetings, equipment, clothing, temperature, seating, crowds, proximity.
- TASTE - water, food timing, ingredients, allergens, preferred food/beverage.
- I considered the combined sensory load, not only each sense separately.

CHECKLIST - IN-PERSON & VIRTUAL

IN-PERSON PRESENTATION SUCCESS

- Transportation and hotel are confirmed.
- My arrival schedule has adequate margin.
- Backstage / green-room conditions are confirmed.
- Flash and lighting requirements are confirmed with production.
- Sound, microphones, music, and audio cues are reviewed.
- I know the stage layout, entrances, exits, and seating options.
- Soundcheck / rehearsal is confirmed.
- I know whom to signal if something needs to change.
- I know what I want to do if my tics increase.

VIRTUAL PRESENTATION SUCCESS

- Camera, framing, screen brightness, lighting, and self-view work for me.
- Microphone, headphones/speakers, platform audio, and notifications are tested.
- My physical environment works across sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste.
- Captions, recording, screen-sharing, chat, and Q&A; expectations are confirmed.
- I completed a tech rehearsal when needed.
- I have backup internet/device options where possible.
- The host knows what to do if I turn my camera off, pause, step away, or my tics increase.
- I have a backup communication channel with the host/producer.

CHECKLIST - AFTER THE ENGAGEMENT

- I protected recovery time where needed.
- I requested usable photographs or video.
- I requested a testimonial.
- I followed up with the planner.
- I documented what worked and what should change next time.
- I tracked the business results of the engagement.
- I identified the next opportunity created by this stage.

ART™ SPEAKER REVIEW

ANTICIPATION

What do you need to communicate before you arrive or log in?

Notes

REMOVE FRICTION

What could make it unnecessarily difficult for you to do your best work?

Notes

THOUGHTFUL DESIGN

What can you and the planner put in place so you can focus on delivering the presentation?

Notes

Your expertise gets to be the reason you are on the stage.

dis + ADVANTAGE™