

FROM  
FREE SPEECH  
TO  
PAID SPEAKER



MARVIN LEBLANC

# **From Free Speech to Paid Speaker**

**AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW  
WITH MARVIN LEBLANC**

**Marvin LeBlanc, LUTCF, CNP**

Marvin LeBlanc is a member of the National Speakers Association and has been named Member of the Year of the New Orleans Chapter of The National Speakers Association. In this ebook, Marvin was interviewed by a graduate student seeking information about how he made the transition to paid speaking. If you are thinking about trying to go from “free” to “paid” speaking, you will learn some of the tools and tricks Marvin used to make his jump into the paid speaking arena.

**INTERVIEWER: What are your major responsibilities as an entrepreneur?**

MARVIN: In the speaking business, there's actually two businesses that combine into one. Initially, it's the business of getting booked. This includes following up with people that are responding to my blog, social media and consistently creating valuable content that I've been honored to provide. So that's all part of the “business” of speaking. And then there is the actual speech. This is when you are in front of your audience. On the platform. I am paid to lead, inspire and motivate the group. I'm expected to also condense information. They want my expertise and it's critical that you are an expert that adds real value.

It's even more critical that you take time to do some old fashioned preparation whereby you interview people that will be attending your talk. Interview people in management positions. Interview customers of that company or group so that you can find out what is the customer's perception of the value they receive. It can be difficult to obtain the information, but not impossible. If you can obtain names of people who are now non-customers, that's critical information to find out why are they no longer raving fans. And so when you diagnose those types of questions, your client—that being a company, group or association—can then look at the information and find out how they can offer better world class service. The fact is, just because a customer has been with you 10 years, that's no indication that you should automatically assume that they're going to be with you another 10 years. Likewise, a speaker (who is essentially is a vendor for the meetings industry) being gets you unemployed quickly. Or should I say, disconnected, from that existing client.

*Therefore, we all have to continuously embrace offering distinguishable and irresistible world class service.* That service and value has to be compelling. It has to be original. It has to be authentic. If you really can't stand out from the crowd, then you really shouldn't expect your customers to stay with you. They will go elsewhere.

**INTERVIEWER: What are your daily tasks and activities as an entrepreneur in your speaking business?**

MARVIN: Number one, the main thing is to sit with yourself, get alone, and figure what your goals are for the year. Then for the quarter. Then for the month. Then this week: what needs to get done? Then on a daily basis. I'm always prioritizing what's the most important projects that should get my attention. I'm very aware of my calendar. I'm obsessed with being on time. I'm obsessed with keeping my commitments. I'm always looking at the dates for the next events so that if there are any books, cd's, mp3's, materials, workbooks to be printed, guides to be printed, anything that might need to be sent ahead to the meeting planner, my team and I need to be on target. I want to be as prepared as possible for the event. Being as relaxed as possible allows me to focus on the client and my message.

I ask all my meeting planners to fill out the pre-event questionnaire. This helps me better understand the audience, expectations and allows me to tailor my discussion to meet their goals. The pre-event questionnaire goes into their file. This document is so important because it's the tool that I use to stay on target. So we have to know our audience and we have to be on target, otherwise we can't expect to be invited back. That goes for any business. There's a certain amount of research and planning that goes into every talk. My speeches are each unique, you won't find the same speech twice from Marvin LeBlanc at Marvelous Performance Systems.

There are two reasons why I don't duplicate my speeches.

1. Boring doesn't sell. The stories must be relevant to the group.
2. If I gave a talk on February 1st, the world is different on March 1st. It moves that fast. So to be a speaker or a trainer or a writer – as I am – you have to embrace being agile and flexible. Really what you have to embrace is, “can I absolutely make a big difference so that the group invites me back?”

You are invited back because of the ideas and the value that you bring to the organization. It can't be about your own financial gain. That's only a byproduct of having done a great job.

#### **INTERVIEWER: How do you keep all of these tasks organized?**

Marvin: From an organization standpoint, I break my days down into:

1. People Days
2. Paper/Email/Planning Days
3. 4 R's Days (Reading, Writing, Recreation and Recharging)

Ultimately, I would like to be in front of people on the “People” days from the beginning of the day all the way through the end of the day. Either in front of people, or going to the next appointment, the next talk or in conference calls, (which I also consider a “People” day activity).

“Paper/email/planning” days – which are **not** my most fun days, because that's not my unique ability — I work hard to stay away from people. The reason is simple, the skill sets I use on “People Days” are not the same skill sets I use on a “Paper/email/planning” day or a “4 R's Day”.

On the subject of email:

Email has become a very overrated, highly **interruptive** process. It can be used for good, but the reality is I see myself going back and forth four, five and six times on an email which takes a lot of time and often the problem can be solved much faster if I PICK UP THE PHONE and call and talk to the person! Many times, email is COUNTERPRODUCTIVE and creates more problems than it solves. So we get so locked up in it, and at times we get away from actually communicating in a quicker way.

Remember - email definitely is **not always quicker**. Another sidebar about email is there's a myth out there that email speeds up productivity. The reality is people hide behind email. People often send you some “to-do” task and basically throw their “monkey” on you. In other words, they will delegate you a task via email at a

point where, because you're not on the phone or in front of them face to face, you can't say "no" to their delegated task. Like a "slithering" snake, they're "sliding" it to you electronically. Stop them!

What some of our readers and listeners may not be aware of is that there is a movement in America to "disconnect" and "disengage" with technology and social media. They say things like, "you know what, I embraced AOL, Facebook, Google, Yahoo!, Twitter, Tumblr and LinkedIn and I just don't like it".

I ask them why? Their answer: **Because I'm finding less quality in my life.**

This constant need to be connected is something that we have to address.

**INTERVIEWER: So Marvin, what do you feel is your "secret sauce" that gives you your edge in each of the businesses you own? What are your "inputs"?**

Marvin: I'm an outrageously optimistic, passionate, high energy person. Anyone that knows me will describe me with those same words. When you possess these essential characteristics you are allowing the "Law Of Attraction" to be activated.

From a business standpoint, probably the most important advice I'd give to any entrepreneur is to ask these questions daily:

1. *What is my customer's pain?*
2. *What is my customer's problem?*
3. *How does my offering truly solve their pain or problem?*
4. *Do they have the ability and desire to purchase?*

Now there's a well known sales trainer and colleague of mine that is a National Member with me in the National Speakers Association that disagrees with my "Pain" question. That's their prerogative. Just know it's worked for me since 1978. And it will work for you.

From a speaker standpoint, just remember that if you're speaking on a subject that you really like, *but nobody else cares about*, you're not going to get paid to keep speaking on that subject for very long.

The takeaway here is you won't be hired because you're not adding value that is relevant to that particular group.

You must ask your clients:

1. What is the problem?
2. What issues are you having on your team?
3. How well is the customer service department performing?
4. How well is the sales department performing?
5. What are the real strengths of your company or group?
6. What are the weaknesses of your company or group?
7. Has the management team talked with the front line to figure out what are the next opportunities?

8. Has management and the front line people discussed what are some threats that are on the horizon? (Example: Germany, China, India: what are they doing right now from a manufacturing standpoint? if you're trying to manufacture a product, how are you going to keep pace with those three countries?)

Ultimately, my view is that speakers, trainers and thought leaders are vital to the meetings industry and to the business community. They are *merchants of hope*. Companies need direction, and sometimes – or most times, actually – they're so involved with working *in* the business that they don't spend enough time working *on* the business. So I see my job as a merchant of hope. My focus is to be inspirational. Motivation and inspiration is the motor that drives people. We all can get stuck.

*I believe my responsibility is to help a person, group, or a company get unstuck.*

**INTERVIEWER: What other people do you have to interact with for your business?**

Marvin: Excellent question!

Traditionally, professional speakers would be a solo speaker and do it all themselves. They speak. They set presentations up. They set the room up themselves. They do their own flight reservations. They do the booking with the meeting planners. They go back and forth with all of the details to get booked. They plan conference calls with meeting planners prior to landing a commitment. That's so 2001.

That's not how I run my corporation. Right now, I am currently embracing having a toll-free 1-800 number that's available for anyone to Google. They can also visit my website or read my blog. Call the 1-800 number and get a real, live person. What a concept! A real, live person that speaks English (or your preferred language) to help with whatever question that you have.

It's unrealistic to think that I can offer world class service without the help of other team members. If I am on a stage in San Diego and someone calls the toll-free number because they are online, they are not going to get me on the phone right then and there. They deserve to have a human being answer the phone, and that human being will process that message. Usually I tell people that I will respond within 24 hours. If you did not get a phone call back from me, I either did not get the call, or I am no longer alive. Seriously. Because that's one of my core values. Prompt follow-up. I will call. I will follow up. If I tell you that I was going to follow up at 3:00pm on Tuesday – if I don't have the answer that you needed at 3:00pm on Tuesday, I'm going to call you and say: "... hey Emilee, this is Marvin. I told you I was going to give you a call at 3:00pm on Tuesday. It's 3:00pm on Tuesday. I don't have the answer that you need, but I did want to call you and tell you I haven't forgotten about you."

You might think this is a waste of time. But quite frankly, it's the way to encourage people to understand that your integrity is consistent and that your word is your bond. In the world of high tech I'm still obsessed with high touch and good, old-fashioned follow-up. Which essentially means do what you say you are going to do. Whether you have what you need for the 3:00pm call is not relevant. **Still pick up the phone and make the contact as you promised.** You may have to say, "Emilee, I have an answer. You're not going to be happy

with my answer. But I still want you to be happy with me.” This type of service and integrity matters in the long run.

**Takeaway: Have a system in place for answering the phone.**

I have a team of people that will promote my events. I have assistants that will come and help or assist with setting up for my event. They'll work the back of the room table and help people with their questions or work with the technology. I use of virtual assistants as well. Virtual Assistants are great for recurring tasks that they can perform for you so that you will stay current. (<http://americanva.org>)

Here is an example. If I go to a Chamber of Commerce and 75 people turn in their forms saying that they would like to get on my free blog, those email addresses should all go to one individual who can make sure that they are added to my marketing list. Those e-mails will have a sequential marketing process in place whereby those people will have an opportunity for me to reach out to them once every 15-45 days to touch them. It's not to get too much in their face, but to touch them and say hey: "I'm here. I'm available. Thanks for talking with Marvin."

They'll always have an opportunity. If they want to rent my brain and have me consult or coach with them, they can do that. If they want me to have a one day workshop, they know that I'm there. If they want to buy some of my books, my materials, they can do that. But if all they want is just to stay in touch through a "free blog" — which is a very good price in America — then I'm happy they love the free blog at [marvinleblanc.com/blog](http://marvinleblanc.com/blog). They can read and know me over months and years. And maybe we never engage in a financial way. And that's absolutely okay too.

**INTERVIEWER: What are the challenges of being an entrepreneur?**

Marvin: The number one challenge of being an entrepreneur is *the cheese is always moving*.

There is no stable target. The speed of change and the need to stay agile is paramount.

In my years, since 1978, I've never seen more change.

Since the advent of the internet and the digital revolution, the competition is fierce. And they have access to your customer. So *maintaining the loyalty of your existing customer is a major gauntlet*.

**INTERVIEWER: And you believe that's because of the internet and email possibly?**

Marvin: Absolutely. We don't live in a world of "now". We live in a world of, "we want it yesterday". "Now" would actually be slower. We don't want it "now". We want it "yesterday: which is faster than "now". It's kind of like that "Back to the Future" movie. That's how fast we want it and if you don't give us *what* we want, *how* we want it, and the *way* that we want to receive it, I have access to find somebody else that WILL.

Now it's a little short sided because they don't really realize that yes, you can go do that, but eventually you're going to have to find some place that you develop a relationship. There are people that are purely unemotional and purely transactional and do not care about "relationships". Those are not the people that I can build a high-quality business on. I have to build it on relationships if I want to have a sustainable business model.

If someone owned a successful dress shop, what makes that dress shop successful is not because they constantly have new clothes in there. It's not because they are always going to have the best price. It's not because their front door is cleaner than the next door. While all those things are important, what's *really* important is they start getting a vibe either with you or the people that work for you. And whenever they do have a need, and there is an emotional connection that customer will continue to come back. The real brand is not that sexy little logo or a great embroidered shirt or a free refill. No, the real brand is "YOU"! The "people" inside the business is what makes the brand.

**INTERVIEWER: Okay, and what are the best parts about being an entrepreneur?**

**Marvin:** The best part about being an entrepreneur is self actualization. The chance to chase YOUR DREAM. As we said earlier, I've been self-employed and owning businesses since I was 17. It's not for everybody. It's not for the faint at heart. It's countless hours. But I honestly just never saw myself working for someone else. If I fail, I fail on my own terms. I just didn't want to put my ladder up against someone else's wall.

*Owning a speaking business or any business is for people who have ongoing courage and the willingness to dream. It's high highs and low lows. But the intrinsic reward is magnificent.  
Helping someone go down a better path and positively impacting their life is what our true purpose is. I willingly endure the mundane details for a chance to change someone else's life forever.*

Of course, what else would I say. It's all I have ever known.

I have the speaking and coaching business and a successful insurance and financial planning services practice. I have raised cattle and worked in network marketing. I still have almost every product that I have ever purchased through network marketing since 1978. I was a certified emergency medical technician so I worked doing ambulance work. I was an athletic trainer for LSU football and lettered there. So I have a myriad of experiences. My experiences as eight course Dale Carnegie course graduate and Corporate Training Specialist in the early 80s with Dale Carnegie Systems set a foundation for my life's work.

So all of those experiences indirectly serve to add value whenever a meeting planner hires me. Because that's what they want to know, **what can you do for me?**

**INTERVIEWER: What kind of qualifications do you need to have to be an entrepreneur in the speaking industry.**

**Marvin:**

First, you must have the knowledge.

What is your background?

Does it fit with the topic you are an expert in?

Do you have a degree(s), certificates, specialized training that would be meaningful to a meeting planner that is charged with the responsibility of hiring the right speaker?

There are some classically-trained speakers that actually graduated from a university in speech. Rarely, are those people really on the front stage. Most of the people that have mentored me came through the school of hard knocks and were first speaking as an “industry” expert. They were not getting paid or getting paid very little in the beginning. They didn’t wake up one morning and say, “I’m seven years old and I want to be a public speaker”. Most of the time, it just doesn’t happen that way. Slowly they continued to get encouraged and they continued to build on their foundational knowledge.

There’s an association called the National Speakers Association. This is an organization dedicated to speakers and the entire speaking industry. [www.NSASpeakers.org](http://www.NSASpeakers.org) There are local chapters throughout the world that meet regularly to actually work on our craft and develop our speaking skills. We cover a myriad of topics.

1. **What technology we should be using**
2. **How to organize the meeting room for maximum effectiveness**
3. **Working on how can you develop a better presentation so that your presentation is tight and coherent.**
4. **All sorts of specific details that will aid you to offer maximum value to a group**

So that’s where some of the knowledge and skill training comes from for me.

The skills and abilities vary based on the subject matter. I have a friend who’s a CPA and he’s an industry speaker and so his speeches and my speeches are totally different. He’s more of a technical speaker. I am known as the “Come Hell or High Water” guy because of the book. In other circles they say that’s the “Katrina Guy”. I don’t prefer the last one. I don’t like the “K” word. It is what it is. All I had to do to get that title was to own an insurance practice in the heaviest hit hurricane area, St. Bernard parish. Just lose all of your customers, go homeless at 43 and then find a way to survive and pay your bills. Write a book, cry 50 weekends in a row while writing it then BOOM! you’re the “Katrina Guy”. (Ouch!)

And then suddenly after about 18 months of recovering from Katrina, I promise you, you will be an adversity expert. And so those are the ways that people rise to the top in their speaking endeavors. All speakers that I know have a signature story. And that’s important. Because those signature stories were defining moments for them. However, speakers that have an enduring career are those that transform audiences and help the audience know how that story is RELEVANT in their life. Early on, it was my passion to “tell my story”.

Now, I’m obsessed with these questions: **Are my stories relevant to the audience, AND did I truly make an impact?**

The competency part – let's talk about competencies for a second. Whether a person is an introvert or an extrovert is not terribly a big deal when it comes to being a professional speaker. The fact is, the greatest orators in the world are introverts. Extraverts have more to process. My unique ability has to do with emotional intelligence and resilience mind mapping. The ability to interpret someone's nonverbal behavior in sales situations is the essence of what my life's work has been built around. The other thing that I offer to the meeting planner hiring me is unbridled passion. And no, not everyone has it.

As mentioned earlier, if you interviewed 100 people that really knew me, the word "passionate" or "intense" is going to come up. Sadly, we live in a world that not all team members or those that lead them really embrace the key ingredient of passion.

So I do take chances on the stage. There are times where my presentation is edgy, and that's intentional.

**"Because until someone is sufficiently disturbed then sufficiently informed, they will not make a change."**

And so essentially I'm hired as a change agent, meaning that I'm hired because someone in your organization thinks that it should be going down a different path. Something different needs to happen. And so I'm there to get movement.

**INTERVIEWER:** Marvin, you've offered some amazing insights, mindsets and strategies that will be huge for the listener or the reader. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

**Marvin:** Well, you're very kind. I would like to remind the reader or listener that none of these insights, mindsets and strategies will work - if you DON'T. Remember that nothing great has ever happened without Massive Action.

Lastly, what I'd like to emphasize is that you have to be extremely flexible. I don't know of any professional speakers that also don't have a healthy Sense of Humor.

Because never, never does a talk or a workshop go exactly the way you envisioned it. So you still have to prepare, knowing full well it's not going to happen exactly as you prepare, right? You have to go with the flow.

Recently, a speaker colleague of mine was in the middle of his talk and everything was going well - until one of the attendees had a heart attack and died.

Wow! I have never went to a workshop that says okay, when someone dies in your workshop, here's how you're going to recover.

So obviously that's an extreme case and I hope that never happens with me. But there are some strange things that happen. Lights fall on you. Stages haven't been put together properly and so you lean one way, your left foot goes 3' down, your right leg is up. You got major pain. I have known ladies that have walked up a set of stairs and their dress completely splits. And it's the beginning of your talk. So what do you do?

Answer: Grab a tablecloth and do your talk!!

You can have a heckler. You hope that your material is engaging but let's say you're in front of 1,000 people. There's a good chance that there's one person out of that 1,000 that absolutely does not agree with you, didn't like you when you walked in the door. Didn't like your voice tone, something. And so how do you handle when the other 999 deserve to still hear your message. That's where the skill part has to come in. So you have to be adaptable, right?

**INTERVIEWER:** Marvin, thank you so much! Your insights will be so helpful to those that read this material.

**Marvin:** I sure hope so. We all drink from wells that we did not dig. Many have helped me and I'm just paying it forward.

Until next time.

I wish you — Peace, Love and Gumbo!

**Marvin LeBlanc, LUTCF, CNP**

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