

Speaking Out...

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The retreat is coming and you need to book the camp, pick a theme and find a speaker. We've been on both ends of the speaker invitations and believe that there are a few thoughts worth considering.

Why a speaker?

There are advantages to having a speaker. They take the pressure off, freeing you up to spend time with your students. But consider whether giving up an opportunity for this kind of extended teaching, shepherding, and vision casting is a sacrifice you should make. Think beyond logistics before you invite the speaker.

What kind of speaker?

Funny, cool, or popular speakers aren't essential and may even confuse students. The "medium is the message" and the speaker's style says as much about their view of the gospel as their words. Value missional fit over a great show.

What kind of message?

The speaker's main mode of communication is beyond the platform. Look for speakers who embrace spending time with your students as much as they do being up front. The best message is an embodied, up-close message.

Ensure that...

- **Speakers know their role.** Those who give altar calls and ask for decisions the speaker can't shepherd beyond the retreat have lost site of their role as a guest. Speakers should set up your youth staff to have great conversations with students.
- **Speakers have a living message.** Recycled messages are fun (like a favorite song), but don't necessarily speak to your community's context. Be as specific as possible about what you want the speaker to accomplish. This is a good exercise for you and gives needed guidance to the speaker.
- **Speakers aren't professional speakers only.** With all due respect to their craft, the best speakers are anchored in their own community, striving to express the gospel in their context.
- **Speakers listen.** Observe what questions potential speakers ask you about the event. Do they have your context, missional goals, volunteers, and ministry in mind? Remember speakers are there to serve your ministry, not the other way around.

And if you do get a speaker...

- Know your budget. Pay them fairly.
- Inviting their family to come along is a nice offer, but it shouldn't count as remuneration.
- Give them feedback before, during, and after the event.
- Ask them for feedback on your event and group as they can bring an outside perspective.

Considering your posture toward speakers will bring clarity to their purpose and may even reframe the Christian speaking industry toward being more missional. We think that's a good thing.

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