

James Taylor

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Hey James Taylor here and I'm delighted today to be joined by my good friend Denise Jacobs. Denise is a speaker, author and creativity evangelist who speaks at conferences and consults with companies worldwide. As the founder and CEO of the creative dose she promotes techniques to unlock creativity and spark innovation and people teams and workplaces. Particularly those in the tech world. Denise is the author of banish your inner critic, the premier handbook on silencing fears to unleash your creativity which has just come out as well. She is also the founder of rock the web and the head instigator of the creativity revolution as my great pleasure to have her join us today. So welcome, Denise.

Denise Jacobs

Thank you so much for having me, James. It's such a pleasure and an honor.

James Taylor

So something happened for you this week, which I know the speakers is like, it's always a big deal. Your your new book came out and you would you did your book launch event as well. So how was that first of all?

Denise Jacobs

phenomenal so the book came out last last yesterday and it was wonderful because I was waking up in the morning with text messages from friends that are like, I got the Kindle. I got it dropped. I got it, which was really really nice. One friend sent me sent me a picture of the of the Kindle announcement, and then he sent a little gift that said, Hey, boo. And then I was getting like text messages and calls from friends that are just like I'm so proud of you this is great. But all of that I get I won't say his overshadow but I will have to say was even more enhanced by the book launch event that I had at my favorite local independent bookstore called books and books here in Miami, Florida, phenomenal bookstore. And it was great, you know, on Facebook, I think, like 74 people said they were going to attend in 259 people said that they were interested, which I was like, that's not that doesn't suck, right. So and then a friend of mine was like, well, it's Miami so you can count on like half the people who said that they're interested, you know who were going to come coming, but it doesn't matter. It was standing room only for the most

part. All the chairs were filled. They didn't have enough chairs. Everybody We started on time, which is also uncharacteristic for Miami. Everybody was there by seven. And I had a panel. So it wasn't just me doing a standard reading. I had a panel of four friends of mine who were also like do amazing work in the community here. One friend is an author and a professor of creative writing at the University of Miami. And she does a lot of work activism with the Filipino community worldwide. And also with writers of color like mentoring and teaching writers of color for a program a fellowship program over the summer. Another friend started it was a co founder of a company that gives news and events and everything for local communities. There's one in Miami and they just launched one in Seattle, and then they're launching them all over the country. But she also does like entrepreneurship training and mentoring and stuff for the LGBTQ Another one started a startup here that has become incredibly successful doing face recognition. And then he also mentors, other entrepreneurs, young entrepreneurs pitching printers of color. And then finally, the last guy is a professional musician. He started an organization that helps keep at risk youth off of the street by teaching them music and giving them the ability to learn music and to become musicians and to perform phenomenal people. Right and but there are these phenomenal people who all deal with the inner critic, and I'll deal with self doubt. So we had this fantastic conversation based on the structure of the book about the ways that they experienced self judgment, high self criticism, compare themselves to others, denied you know, their creativity, and then how they've overcome all of that to contribute to the world meaningfully with their talents and gifts. It was insane. It was so good.

James Taylor

I didn't know that that whole process was speaking to you as you were going through a writing a book, very solitary process. And I know you're really excited now to kind of get on the road be keynoting about it, be speaking about it do book events about it as well. So before we kind of go into some of the things around the book and how it specifically how it relates to to authors, take us back. How did you get into the world of speaking? How did you start your career as a keynoter?

Denise Jacobs

So, I have a bit of a story, but the short version of it is, is that a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, I started making soap, herbal handmade soaps and people started asking me what's in the soap. And I said, it's super easy. I can teach you how to make it come over to my house. I'll show you how to make it. So I did that a couple times had like five, four or five, six people each time and I thought to myself, if I had like 20 people, that would be like, outstanding, and at the time, it wasn't making much money. So I was like, I could make like \$800 in a day. When that becomes Back in the late 90s, and so I started teaching the soap making class. And so there were a couple of things that happened. The first one was that I had this very strong sense that it was going to be very popular. But the place that was going to be putting the class on said, you know, it's better instead of having like two sessions of the class, it's better to have one than have it be mostly filled then have two that are half filled or not much filled at all. And I was like, thinking to myself, but you don't understand this is gonna, like totally take off and I was like,

Okay, okay, we can do that. So, three weeks after their fire had gone out into the mail, and it's like, you know, distribution of like, 30,000 units all over Seattle, where I used to live and everything. The director calls me up and she's like, hey, Denise, it's Tiffany. I was like, what's up tip? She says, your class is full headspace for 22 people who said it's full. And there's a waiting list of 16 people. Did you want to open up another session? And I was like, Yes. So when I did the class, I hadn't slept the whole night. I had worked so hard on the handout, I got to the venue probably 15 minutes before the class started, I was exhausted. I pulled boxes up three flights of stairs. I mean, it should have been an awful experience. It was one of the best experiences of my entire life up to that point. I was walking on air afterwards, I had an audience I had people who wanted to learn I, I talked for three hours, I led you know, the exercises and everything. And I got to crack jokes and I got to be informative, and I got to share you. It was just it was such a wonderful experience. And after that, I was I was hooked. I kept wanting to do the workshop and then, you know, I was also working in the web industry. And it finally occurred to me after being in a meeting where my man was a project manager, which is the worst thing for me to do ever in the history of ever on the planet. My manager had, like, totally dressed me down in front of like everybody on the team and the team meeting and I was in the room crying, just despondent and everything and I kind of picked myself up, it's okay. I have a, I have a soap making class tomorrow, it's all going to be okay. And that soap making class it was as normal. Amazing, right? Fantastic. But then at the end, you know, I just had the experience the day before of being completely and utterly criticized for my work, even though I was working my butt off, right. Then this day, this class, it's like, it's enjoyable. Everybody's enjoying it like everybody's having a good time. I'm having a good time. I love doing it. So in the class, everybody got to make a box. So, like they actually got to make it by hand, scented by hand and everything poured into a mold and then they take that home. So this woman has the boxes. So she has a handout, and she has her check, because I haven't pay at the end of the thing and she's standing there with everything in her hand and she comes up to me. As she's leaving. She was like, Oh my god, that was so much fun. That was such a great class. You are such a great teacher here and she gives me the check and she kind of flounces off. And I watched her go by and something in my brain said, this is how it's supposed to feel. This is what it's supposed to be like, you're supposed to be happy. You're supposed to enjoy it. And people are supposed to renumeration you for your skill and your talents and your gifts. And from that moment on, I thought maybe I should teach. I started teaching web design and web development classes at Seattle Central Community College. I did that for five years. Then after that, I went to my first conference. And I went to my first conference, after having taught the classes and loving teaching the classes, best job I ever had as a job job, right, like if somebody else paying me, I went to this conference and my mind was blown because the woman who I saw I went to the conference to see this woman I had been teaching from her books. I admired her tremendously. Her name's Molly coach leg, actually, she's like the fairy godmother of the web industry. Or she was because now she's decided to stop doing web stuff. But at the time, she was like, a huge name in the web industry. I went to the conference to see Molly speak. And I sat in the front like the geek that I am, and I was watching her and as I was watching her, basically I saw myself on the stage, she and I were so similar. We had similar content. We had similar deliveries. We made the same kind of jokes. And instead of me looking at her and thinking, that's something I

could never do, I was like, that is totally accessible for me. Like the only difference between me and her is that she gets to go to all of these conferences all the time and stay in fancy hotels and get flown places, and I'm in a classroom. That's the only difference. I want to do that. And that's, that laid the whole foundation for me deciding to become a speaker.

James Taylor

So you you speak about what you speak about now well, if he will know you for is this idea of the inner critic and how dealing with the inner critic. So I'm, I'm wondering, you know, a lot of people go to those conferences and sit there and they see that person up on stage and they think, yeah, I could, you know, I want to do that. I love that and they can see the impact is having on others. It's how people are learning. They're being impacted on it. Then is a big jump from that point to the point of actually doing the work then to kind of even making that mental decision that I am going to do the work to do that and be that person on stage and, and and change the world in that way. So did you have any? Any doubts at that point? Or were you like, okay, now I'm just gonna do this?

Denise Jacobs

No. So I knew inside, I knew that that's what I wanted to do. I had absolutely no idea how I was going to do it, which was the big point of departure. Right? Like, I was like, what how do you? What do you do? How do you become a speaker? What I mean, like, what's the mechanism? And so, you know, I had started like telling people I wanted to speak, but it still wasn't really quite going anywhere. Like I still didn't know how to kind of crack the speaking code. And then I was at South by Southwest in 2009. And I was sharing a hotel room with a friend. And I was lamenting to her about how I really wanted to speak. And I was like, What do I have to do to become a speaker? Like I don't, is like, do you have to sell your soul to the devil like firstborn blood? What is it like, I, I just want to be a speaker. And she says to her, she says to me in her infinite amount of wisdom, well, the other people I know who have done it have written a book. And I was like, Girl, I was like, the only book that I feel qualified to write is a book on HTML. And Lord knows that the world doesn't need another book on HTML. There's plenty of them. Like how many more ways can you can't slice this up any other way? She's like, all I'm saying is, this is my observation. This is what I've seen. Take it or leave it and I was like, Okay. Long story short, couple of days later, I'm at a party and run into a friend who's there with his editor. She works for a technical publishing house. She says, We're Always looking for authors. And I had this idea about a book on troubleshooting CSS, I'm looking for somebody to write it. And I'm like, I could write it me right here. I used to teach that stuff for five years at a community college. And so let's talk. We talked, like, submitted a proposal, she pitched it, I got a book deal. And so I wrote the book. And when the book came out, all of a sudden, this, this thing that had been in my head as a barrier was gone. This thing of like, how do I establish myself as an expert? How do I get people to actually be interested in like, having me come and talk about something like all of a sudden, I that was not all of a sudden after nine months of writing, that was gone. And so then I started, like, I, I had this kind of self confidence and self assuredness that I hadn't had before I had this expert status. from having written a book behind me. And so I just started

reaching out to people, I started reaching out to conferences, the frary first conference that I reached out to, to see if they would have me as a speaker. I saw that they had an announcement for this talk that I had just written my book on. And it said speaker to be determined. And I saw that and my stomach like, James, I'm telling you, my stomach flipped. You know, how your stomach flips when you Yeah, like almost butterflies or just kind of flips when you get excited about so my stomach went. And I was like, and so I actually talked to the conference organizer, the owner of a guy who ran the company that went to conferences like the year before, and they were like, We don't have enough female speakers. We don't have enough diversity, blah, blah, blah. And I was like, I want to speak at your conference. And he was like, what do you what are you talking about? And I was like, I'm, so I wrote him back. And then I also wrote the conference organizers said, Hey, I just wrote this book, it's about this thing that you've got on your website, I would love to do a talk on it. You know? Would you like me to come out and do that? And they were like, We would love that. And then it was like, from there on it was just on. Like after that like that just and that was a conference in London. You know, I'm based in Miami. I was like, what not only is it like my first bit by me after my book comes out my first speaking engagement, but internatia know what's

James Taylor

so funny that you say you see that? It's like it was the first gig I ever got was International. It wasn't in my home country. And I speak to so many speakers, they say that the biggest places that the speaking are not their home territory, you're I keep forgetting that phrase. And that phrase we say you never recognize in your own place, you know where we're from, isn't it and sometimes they could be your own cities and your own country as well. So you started getting on on the road of going and speaking speaking at conferences, but I'm guessing there's a there's quite a big jump from going from the person who's going in Speaking maybe in those kind of those rooms talking about something like, like CSS or HTML, more kind of almost like training going into speaking. And then the person that's up on there that's getting paid to be a keynote speaker, you know, either opening or closing. So talks about, where did that journey go? How did you kind of go get up to the point of actually going and being the person there, you know, you know, opening or closing or kind of keynote on the mainstage?

Denise Jacobs

Well, here's the thing. here's, here's what, at least this is the story that I tell myself and it's a good story, so I'm sticking with it. Um, so part of the story that I tell myself, I've been telling myself or what I've observed, is, when I first started speaking, even though I was talking about HTML, or CSS or whatever, usually CSS, I always told it within the context of a story or within the context of a theme, right? And then when I started going towards other like, you No other topics, but within still within kind of a technical realm, I still had this kind of tendency to do kind of have this like, kind of go through this journey and have like this home full note. When I started talking about creativity, that was even more pronounced that it was within the context of, you know, there was there was this contextualization, this kind of story, this kind of like, here's the problem. Here's the solution. Here's what we can do. Here's the new hope, as Nancy Duarte

talks about in her book resonate, right when she talks about, I don't know if you've read this No. So this book by Nancy Duarte is called resonate, and it's about how to resonate with audiences. And she has this structure that she's talked about with speaking called a sparkline. And the sparkline basically looks a lot like basically if you start off kind of at a baseline and then you go up and she calls this kind of like that. area called the new home. And she goes, she actually tracked the most popular talks, the most moving and influential talks of all times, it'd be to perone Martin Luther King, you know, Kennedy, etc. And he said they all have the same structure start off with, here's the problem. Here's the issue. Here's the new hope. Here's the problem. Here's the issue. Here's the new hope. Here's the problem. Here's the issue, here's my hope. And then at the end, you go up kind of a higher level. Here's like, the whole brand new way kind of paradigm shift, paradigm shift, and boom, the end. I didn't realize it but that I was actually structuring my talks like that

James Taylor

even when you were talking about C CSS something which people think is a really like, quite, you know, very technical type of thing. You were still you you still had that kind of some you've got a story arc but you had that way,

Denise Jacobs

a bit. But when I started talking about creativity, like I was saying, it became even more pronounced. And so at the end it like ends up with this whole like kind of new paradigm new worldview. If you make these changes, you can get to this new, better higher place. So, interestingly enough, I spent probably two years talking about creativity. Am I in the inner critic within that and, you know, your brain hacking the creative brain and things like that. When I started doing keynotes. I was basically doing the same talks. And I realized, and this is, again, this is the story that I told myself, but what I realized is, is that I had always been doing keynotes. I just had been doing keynotes in a keynote venue, right, that my speaking style and my way of presenting information and my way of storytelling and everything and what I'm trying to achieve with my talks, right with my teachings with the lessons, is basically a keynote. Right that there that there is this whole thing About Okay, here's the issue, here's what we can do, here's some information to support it. The story are and here's what we can do to make it better we can create a better New World, like a new paradigm. So that's it's been how I how I spoke.

James Taylor

So going on to start speaking on those biggest stages as the keynote speaker, talk about your own inner critic. So you you that's your your subject, the book is around the inner critic as well. Did you was the inner critic there and what was it kind of going for you on? Is it was it going on copy your content? Was it good was it was it was attacking you?

Denise Jacobs

So when I very first started, especially when I was doing the technical stuff, my inner critic was really strong about imposter syndrome. And part of it had to do with not wanting to say circumstantial, I think part of it. I don't know if I want to say cultural I'm not quite sure what word to use to describe it, but part of it was, because in the tech industry, as you probably are well aware, the tech industry is predominantly male and predominantly white. And I am neither of those things, right. And so, you growing up being a woman and being an African American woman, I've always been keenly aware of people's biases, and having to work to undermine and change those biases, even though they may be subconscious. They're there. I've had so many people say, oh, Mike, you're so articulate, oh my God, you're so well spoken. It's a joke in the black community that when somebody says to you, you're articulate and well spoken, it is actually really a jab, because the saying what they what they're saying is, I wasn't expecting you to be smart. I wasn't expecting you to be capable. I wasn't expecting you expecting you to be you know, An expert or have expertise, right? It's, it's like I said, it's like it's a joke. It's in movies and everything. But it's like, that's where it comes from. And so, I'm going into a situation I'm going into an industry where I know people can deny it backwards and forwards. But I know that that bias exists. For some people, it's stronger than others, but I know it's there. So I came in the door feeling like I had to prove that I was not I was not those things. And I also had to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that my work and that might the things that I was presenting were solid, that I it wasn't that I wasn't smart enough to figure it out. It wasn't that I wasn't I couldn't do the research and stuff like that. I was like, Oh, no, you I, I probably done more research than everybody else, because I don't want anybody to try to, like, contest like, you know, challenged me on it. Yeah. And so my inner critic worked, I was really hard I worked really hard at trying like double checking and triple checking and trying to kept keep up with the most up to date accurate information because I didn't, I was terrified of somebody trying to challenging me. And, and saying, you know, basically saying, oh, you're not good enough and see this is this is this is what black people are, this is what women do, you know, women aren't as good at Tech, or people of color aren't as good as tech. And you know, and I was like, Nope, I'm not going to be the poster child for that I'm going to be the poster child for excellence. So my inner critic you work really really hard on that it actually burned me out. So you

James Taylor

can't you are constantly kind of like double you were you can double checking so often and all these things all the time and I don't know what that feels like. Less so from from the speaking side more. So when I create online courses, for example. I'm almost I'm almost thinking like I'll create them once like for myself. Because I thought if I don't like my course then no words are like very cool. So I create first myself. Then I created for my audience, my ad or reader, my angel person. And then I go back round again. And I read a check for my haters. figures, I know they're gonna be there so and as she was my wife is great at that she's very good at detail. She's my wife is a former lawyer is a lawyer and so she's she's the one that goes up. No, no. And I remember one of the first keynote she had asked me to do, she said, I've got you this booking. And I think you should do it. And she said, it's for some of the top judges and lawyers and advocates in Scotland where I'm from. So these are people that are paid very well. And a

very, very gifted speaking and very gifted at my breaking someone down. And, and yeah, so it's like, okay, and I come from I don't come from a particularly, I come from pretty kind of humble background and there wasn't much money. I found everything so, so that's kind of there's there's also a class thing that gets going on there as well. And so I'm constantly thinking I'm double checking and double J. And then she said to me, at one point, she said, You got to remember the, you know, the, the people in the room, they're going to have those biases against you, they're going to say, He's too young to be saying this, he's gonna be saying, you didn't get to rate school. So these are the biases that I'm getting. And I'm, you know, that's from my side. So you kind of thinking through those things as well. But then at some point, you just have to go, listen, I know my stuff.

Denise Jacobs

You know, and I'm here to like, in a lot of ways, it's like, I'm here to serve, you know, like, I'm here to teach, I'm here to share this information. Like, I have a joy and especially, you know, when I got to the point of not doing the technical stuff anymore, and doing the, you know, really talking about creativity and productivity and the inner critic, and you know how to, like, you know, tweak your brain so that it gets into a creative state more easily and stuff like that. It was like I have, first of all, one of the things I liked about that I was like, nobody can challenge this. I mean, you can challenge this but like, all the research is out there, this is evergreen information, this is not going to change with a new trend or some new technology, like this is the information that's going to be here like all the time. So there's less kind of like, you know, people like checking in like, Well, you know, if you bring in neuroscience, maybe but it's like, you know, less of a place of being challenged. But then I also really was in a place of like, this is my joy, like, it's my joy to share this with you like this. And I'm, I'm like a kid in a candy store with this, like, I'm so excited. And I just can't wait to share with you all the things that I found because I think this is really going to help you you know, and getting to that place so so there was there's definitely there was definitely that element to it. But like I said at the beginning the inner critic imposter syndrome was really was really strong, comparing myself to Other people was really strong, feeling like I wasn't good enough I have for the longest time. So we're talking about humble beginnings and not a lot of money. I made like a major. It was a major learning, like, major learning event for me. But for the first two years, I didn't charge for my speaking. As a matter of fact, for the first three years, I didn't charge for my speaking because I had this unreasonable belief that I never challenged or checked with anybody that getting paid was kind of based on this merit system. That getting paid was based on if people thought you were good enough, then they would start to offer you money. I know it's silly, right? Because I didn't have anybody like mentoring me or anything to be like, Girl, you know, you need to ask to get paid, like quit playing like, you do something. And I actually did finally have a friend who was like, wait a minute, wait a minute. timeout, you're doing all of these speaking engagements and you're not getting paid. And I was like, No, cuz I thought and she was like, no, that's not how it works. You ask for money, they pay you, or they don't. But you always ask for money. So what

James Taylor

do you have, you can send to go get over that guy, Kevin pasta syndrome that was kind of one of the first kind of humps you had to kind of get over. And then you were kind of getting over the thing of not knowing enough and then starting to can, you know, maybe compare yourself to others are kind of getting over there. And then you're going another humps, like, I can charge for this and she's really starting to charge properly. You know, what, what you were you were worth as well, I'm right, I'm wondering, you know, what was what was the kind of language in your head? What were you able to say to yourself in those moments? You know, so you're you had some new mentors as well, but what was going on in your head? The things that you able to kind of say to yourself to say no, I am worth this and and and really, you take that next step up your speaking career.

Denise Jacobs

Well, part of it was you The numbers were kind of in my favor, in a lot of respects. So I, I kind of obsessively keep track of every single speaking engagement I've had, and I have it on my, on my speaking calendar, I have like, back from 2008 all the way to the present, right. And so unlike in 2008, there was one event and in 2009, there were two events. And in 2010, there were 15 events in 2011. There were 18 events, you know, and it's like, every year it gets more so by the time I got to 2015, and I was like, wow, you know, in 2010 I did, what 10 1215 events or something like that. And then in 2012, I did 20 Obviously, I'm doing something like, you know, like I'm doing something right. People are coming to me and asking me to come and speak. Obviously I have value and obviously then that means that I can I can ask for money. Now the funny thing is, is that my first amount of money was very low. And I found that out by my very first keynote talk, or actually, technically, it was the second. I had been booked for a talk in August. But then organization came to me, like at the end of May, and said, We want you to come and speak in July. And I was like, okay, so I had had this number in my head, and I, you know, tried it out with a few people, and they were like, Oh, we can't afford that. And I was just like, Okay, so this obviously is a number that's, quote, high unquote. So when I spoke to this thing, and they were like, we're so excited. We want you to PT No, we can't wait. We've got this other person for the opening. We want you to be closing, blah, blah, blah. And I was like, Okay, great. And they were like, Okay, so let's talk compensation. And then they're like, we can give you a pass and we can we'll do the hotel and just and I'm thinking to myself, Oh my God, oh, Okay, here we go. They don't have much budget that's like the way they're talking. And so then she was like, so I was like, so then I tried to play it cool. Well, for something like this, what I typically charge is this amount. And I'm telling you, James, it was like I said the number and then it was like, beat. Beat. Beat. Okay, well, great. So, listen to the stuff and we'll do this and we're so excited about and as soon as she responded, I was like, daggone it to level there. Yeah. They were like, quoting the breads, like, it's gonna be like, \$20,000 Oh, my God, it's gonna be so expensive. And then I come down with this, like, cute little number. And they were, they were like, probably like, Oh, my God, Christmas came early this year. Right.

James Taylor

But it's so hard. I mean, it's especially when you get so you're going up, you're going up in different steps. I mean, there's, so we hear these different steps. You know, there's the 1500 and then there's the two 500 to 5000 7000 510,000 and 15,000 and 20,000 and 30,000 in your goes up from there. So you hear all these numbers all the time. But no one really tells you like what that like the the differences between and actually this we had one of our other guests named James who was great was just talking about the difference often from the someone that earns the seven and a half to cert and earns the 15,000. And a lot of that is because they have some intellectual property. They're really bringing some contextual models that they're bringing. So like the Stephen Covey that you know, the seven habits and the quadrants and things like that. So they're adding something more than just the speaking is really hard to nose early. I'm the advice I yeah, the advice I got was I got this my first inquiries, and I reached out to to speak a friend and I said, I have no idea what's charged here and it was it was in Middle East. No idea what's charged. What do you what do you suggest? I said, easiest way, just say to them, what do you charge? Listen, I usually charge this, but just pay me whatever you paid last year's keynoter. Anyway, anyway, so I said that anyway, okay, and that's fine. And then the fee was it was a very good fee. And it's like, that's, that's fine. I'll I'll do it until you get a bit of a feel about, you know, where things are sitting.

Denise Jacobs

Hmm. And I might try that. I'm just afraid that the last year's keener there was like, and like,

James Taylor

thankfully, I knew enough about last night's key. He knows that go is fine. I'm sure I think I'll be okay. Yeah.

Denise Jacobs

Yeah. Okay. So. So, after that, after that experience, I was lamenting to a friend of mine who was a very popular keynote and it has done a lot of work speaking and I was just like, Donna, this happened. And she was like, Okay, first of all, this is the amount that you should be charging for what you do. And I was like, that's a much better number and she was like, Okay, and then over the course of the hour, conversation that we had. She basically kind of subliminally coached me. And she kept like, we talked about something. And then she stopped. And she said, so if I were an event, an organization that wanted you have to have you come and keynote, what would you What would you charge? And I was like, that number you just said, and she was like, Okay, and then should we talk some more? And then she said, so I'm an organization, I'm having an internal event. I want you to come and like do a keynote and then maybe, like, do a training afterwards or something like that, you know, but so what's your day rate? And I was like, that number? And she was like, Okay, great. And then by the end of the conversation, she was like, so if I want you to do this, how much would it cost? And I was like,

James Taylor

it was just a repetition. It's like it like any sales thing. It's it's being able to be confident in the build to stand behind the number. And but balter, have said it enough times that you don't do that, and it's theirs. And I think kind of want to quickly say something in order to fill up the space.

Denise Jacobs

Right? It's like to say the number and then just be silent. Yeah, right. And I still I still have to practice that. So interestingly enough, the next place that I talked to, I said that number and they didn't blink. They're like, okay, ba ba, ba, ba, ba, ba. And I was like, Well, wait, that was too easy. Damn it. So it's been it's been interesting. And then every time I've kind of jumped up a number, interestingly enough, it's like, you know, I'll find like, I'll have like somebody who's like, Oh, great. That's exactly what we had budget for. And I'm like, Oh, okay. Okay. Okay. Okay, I'm not, I'm not fighting it. Yeah, you know, so, I've had good luck, but I you know, I think it's really good like you said to have, it's super important like, having my friend My having my friend Donna. Coach me through that was invaluable. Having somebody who knows better or knows more Or has a better idea of your value than you do is huge. So one thing that I, I warn people that I that I coach speaking with and stuff is that their information is only as good as their experience. Right? So there, there may be a point where they're doing that based on what they would charge. But as soon as you get to a point where you're on par with what they charge or beyond what they charge, then they're not going to be able to give you advice anymore, right? Like if you if you need to uplevel then you need to talk to people who are at a higher level than they can train you. Okay, great. You've got to this part, you know, this Echelon, you want to move up to the higher one. These are the things that you need, like your friend saying, okay, you know, the difference between 70 515,000 is intellectual property, the difference between 15,000 and 20,000 is so and so the difference between 20,020 5000 whatever and it It's always nice to like, be able to identify and connect with and talk to those people who can mentor you to help kind of pull you up to the next level if that's what you want to do.

James Taylor

So, when you you kind of getting into the world of keynoting we always be sure about your, your voice and your style. I mean, sounds like you kind of knew that the keynoting not the start, but you can quickly figured out that actually, I am a keynote I am that's that's that's the best platform for me to do. But as you start to do that was Did you feel you had to do a lot in terms of your your style, the craft or the you know all the things or did it just feel great? It was just been natural. You just happy being up there on stage and it just kind of flowed?

Denise Jacobs

For me. It was the ladder for sure. I felt like Like I said, I felt like I realized that when I had that first keynote. It was for that one was a little cute little keynote fee and stuff like that, but it was a fantastic experience. And it was the first time that I had, first of all keynoted. And it was actually

the first time that I also had done a closing keynote. And I didn't realize at the time that what I was doing was, I won't say completely unusual. But I've heard from even speakers. I'm working with a speaker's bureau. And the woman that I worked with said, Yeah, like, not everybody does that even for closing keynote, that for closing keynote, I will go to the opening keynote, any other keynotes before me, I'll try to go to individual sessions and stuff like that. And I will take notes like a, like the geek that I am, I will take really copious notes. I'll take pictures of the slides and stuff like that. And then I will take that and I will incorporate that into my talk to connect with the points that are the similar points and stuff like that. So I've had people say a lot of times, like, not only was the talk itself good, but it also you know, or was it like really, like amazing but it also was like this kind of retrospective of the whole conference. And so it made me remember these different points of the conference that I had forgotten about and made me feel more connected to the event itself by the end.

James Taylor

That's not I mean, that's that that's a huge I mean, that is not common. I mean, obviously you get those keynotes are very good at kind of the end of getting the energy up, especially when people you know, had a couple of days of something and those kind of folks but to be able to do what you do there, which is going to bring all these different strands together and help help just kind of slowly solidify them so when people are leaving that room, it just kind of it brings a little bit together these different different strands, that that's great. That's a great skill to have. And and that is definitely not that not every keynote, including keynotes does, but I think that's great that you're able to do that because that's that's a real talent to do that.

Denise Jacobs

I love and I love doing it. Like for me it's it's um, you know, I study I have studied improv, I've done improv and for me, it is It's kind of like this active. No, really, first of all, it's like active listening. Like, I could go to a keynote, I could just sit there and hang out, but I'm really, really paying attention and really listening. And so it puts me into the conference, it puts me into the mind frame of a conference attendee. Right. And then it helps me deliver something that's really unique, and really valuable that other people don't do. And so I also feel like then I give the conference organizers something that they that is like, above and beyond what they even expected. And then, you know, hopefully then that will endear me to them, and you know, make them feel like wow, that was really something very special. Like I didn't even think it was going to be like that. And that was amazing.

James Taylor

As you start to finish up here, what is in your speaker bag, what is in that bag that you carry with you to all of your speaking engagements that you never leave home without?

Denise Jacobs

Wow, well, one of the things that I learned very early on is to always have the adapters for I have a Mac. And to always have an adapter and to not only have the adapter but make sure you like a kid with tags and your clothes for camp. Make sure that you personalize the adapter. I always have my my name and my address my phone number and my email on there so that if I lose it, people can find me and get it back to me. But I did a talk at South by Southwest. This was before I did the adapter thing. I did a talk at South by Southwest and I didn't have an adapter and I had to ask the audience if somebody had an adapter they didn't have one was in a small room and ask the audience if they had an adapter so I could connect my computer to the screen to the to the projector and I was like okay, I'm never doing that again. So I have one for an HDMI connection and I also have one for VGA connection and the other thing that I always come with that I know never rely on the conference for is a presenter. Here I have my own clicker that I really like I like the way it fits in my hand. It's a Kensington presenter, it's the one that's kind of shaped like a like an eight like a figure eight. It fits in your hand really well it's got really nice ergonomics and and it also comes with if you get the like higher end one It comes with a USB like thing that you can actually store on. So if you need to put your presentation on a USB and give it to the, the organizer of the conference, you can do that. So I feel like just having those kind of those little bits of those little gadgets just makes things a little bit a bit easier. And I think it also makes you look like you really know what you're doing. You're like I do this all the time. I got all my own gadgetry. If you if you guys have stuff that you want to use, that's fine, but I've got my own things you don't have to worry about it.

James Taylor

So do me a favor. Final question for you. Let's imagine you woke up tomorrow morning. And you had to start from scratch as a speaker. So you have all the skills or the knowledge or the information you have acquired over the years as a speaker as an expert in your field, but no one knows you, you know, no one. What would you How would you restart things?

Denise Jacobs

One of the things so this actually goes back to my the inner critic thing, which I didn't talk about before, but I want to mention really fast. One of the things that one of the ways my inner critic kind of held me back and a lot of ways is that I didn't ask for help. When I needed it, that I, I was so busy trying to look like I knew what I was doing, that I stumbled through things in ignorance, when I could have asked for help or I could have asked for guidance or mentorship. So if I were starting over again, I would suck it up and not try to look like I was super smart. And I would ask as many people for help and I would ask as many people for guidance and you know for help for how to structure things, how to structure my business, how to do outreach, all of that stuff the things that I I you know like I said I got lucky I chance happened chanced upon and all that stuff I would ask for help

James Taylor

desperate I mean it's a mental mentors are so important in this business aren't they? Because so, so much of this you can't go to college for this you can't go to there's not a course for obviously, doing things like this summit is going to we want to bring as many people together to people and get different ideas and things but there's not I think anything really beats having that mentor that person you can pick up a phone or Skype or you know, connect with in some way have a have a coffee with you can just ask all those those those unspoken questions about the speaking business. So yeah,

Denise Jacobs

and no judgement, you know, and that that person is genuinely interested and, you know, interested in potentially invested in helping you succeed and again, like helping you learn, you know, Avoid the hard things that they went had to go through so that you know that you can potentially go and that you can shine as well. I don't know if you've heard of this but a friend of mine last night in the panel was talking about shine theory and shine theory being that you know, when you're around other people and they're succeeding and stuff like that and they're shining, then that actually shines a positive light on you and it helps you shine as well.

James Taylor

I think today in his comments as you've had you have shine you shine your light on a lot of people and I think for many people are starting off in the speaking business. Just having that human comes on like yourself who is very successful as a keynote speaker and as an author as well, telling your story that you know, the imposter syndrome all those things, all those things that went through your head so thank you so much for coming on. Thank you for just making it okay for people to realize that there is this inner critic and and some giving some strategies and tactics or ways of dealing with it.

Denise Jacobs

Excellent. Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate it.

James Taylor

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