

Big Profits for Your Shop When a Visiting Speaker Comes to Town

*Presented by Debbie Caffrey
Debbie's Creative Moments, Inc.*

Increase your sales whether it is you, another shop, or your local guild who hires the pro. Some of these items apply only to the person hiring the speaker, but most of them do not. Obviously, the contract is only the responsibility of the hiring party, but every local shop should be informed. As a traveling instructor, I welcome calls from all shops who want to help their customers be prepared for my workshops.

Be Informed.

Here are some very important questions. Get answers!

- Who is coming?
- When is the speaker coming?
- Where will her lectures and workshops be?
- What is the speaker teaching?
- What else does the speaker do?
- What books and patterns has the speaker written?
- Has the speaker designed or developed any tools or other products?

What do I do before the speaker comes?

Contact the speaker. Request a supply list and a description of class content so that you know what supplies & publications will be required for class. Here are some questions to ask.

- What other products will be mentioned, demonstrated, or promoted during class?
- Which products are necessary to have?
- Which products will be used frequently?
- Which products will be mentioned or demonstrated, but are not mainstream to the class?

Advertise and encourage sign-ups. Do so even if you are not the one who hired the speaker. You will generate sales to your customers.

Acquire models to promote the class and sales of supplies. In all honesty, it is very rare that I can or will part with my quilts to be used as promotional models. However, it would be simple to quickly put together a small attention-getting sample, a block or a few blocks sewn into a table runner, or at least a vignette displaying the speaker's book and a poster or photo of a class model. Ask the instructor what type of model would best advertise the class.

The following items are the responsibility of the hiring party.

Complete a contract. Know what hidden expenses and fees there may be. Does the speaker charge for mileage to the airport, parking at the airport, excess baggage fees, meals while traveling, shipping for handouts, etc.?

Confirm travel arrangements. Exchange cell phone numbers between the speaker and the chauffeur. Recently, a husband of the program director was meeting me at the airport. I received an emailed photo of him so that I knew exactly who he was at baggage claim. If the speaker is driving, provide information for all of the necessary addresses, phone numbers, directions, and meeting places for lodging, teaching, and lectures, and the times for each well in advance.

Discuss the sale of products during the class. My rule is as follows. If a shop owner hires me to teach in her shop or at a retreat that she sponsors, I sell to the shop at wholesale, and she sells retail. If I am hired by a guild, any sales that I make in the classroom or at my lecture are direct retail sales. Do not assume that you and the instructor have an agreement unless you have spoken directly about the sales.

Once in awhile I run into an awkward situation. While teaching for a California guild, I arrived one Sunday morning at the front door of a quilt shop where the day's class was to be held. I had not been told by the guild that the class was in a shop, nor did the shop contact me. The best solution I had for this situation was to tell my students to buy what the shop had in stock, and if they ran out, then they could buy my products directly from me. At the lunch break I spoke with the shop owner and he thanked me. He said that in the past they had been burned by the guest speakers bringing their own inventory so they stopped carrying their products. This does not seem to benefit either of us. Make your space available to the guild, but the speaker needs to know where the classes are located prior to arriving at the door.

Discuss the facility setup.

- What are the speaker's special needs?
- How does the speaker prefer to have the room arranged?
- Does the speaker need access to a design wall, white board, slide screen, projector, etc.?
- How many tables does the speaker need?
- Ask if the instructor would like a loaner machine for demonstration purposes, assuming that you can provide one.
- How many ironing and cutting stations are needed?
- How much space does each quilter need?

Discuss the schedule of events. Full day classes in general are six hours of instruction, not counting the lunch break. Likewise, half day classes are three hours.

Be forthright about other expectations, especially attendance to events like dinner engagements and show & tell. Most instructors need to have evenings free to catch up on work and home, return phone calls, or just rest and recover from travel so that they can be their best in class the next day.

What are the speaker's meal requirements and special dietary needs? Would the speaker prefer to leave for a lunch break or have lunch brought into class? Most speakers are on the road so much that they prefer a simple, healthy meal and a quick return to their hotel room instead of an event with a large group.

The bottom line is to prepare so that the classes and lectures are flawless in appearance to those who are attending, but be ready and willing to adapt. Here are three examples to illustrate this point.

- I was teaching multiple classes for a state guild, traveling from town to town for a week teaching for various chapters of the guild. I did not know where the classes would be until I arrived for the kick-off meeting and lecture. The first class was in a shop. There was not enough space for the guild's class. The shop was not prepared with the necessary supplies, and the class area was not set up prior to start of class. We had just finished speaking to the shop manager about selling books and patterns. We gave them the price list, laid out the inventory, and told them we would bill them for the wholesale cost of what was sold. All seemed fine until we began class. The class required an Omnigrid 96 triangle tool, as clearly stated on the supply list. Twenty-five students had arrived for class. Few of them had the tool. The store had no tools. We ended up selling tools at wholesale cost to the store (an assumption on the shop's part that was not worth the argument) so that they could sell them to the students at a profit. We made nothing on the sale of the tools, but the students had what they needed and the class went on!
- Days before a trip to a large conference, I was informed that the thirty-five quilters in my 6pm to midnight class were going to be split into two banquet rooms at the hotel. Evidently, the hotel had a corporate party that would buy more food and liquor, so the quilt class got bumped. The rooms were not adjacent or even across the hall from one another. The conference organizer said she would continue to work on the situation. I told her that it was more of her reputation riding on the facility than it was mine. During the night of the class I spent six hours up and down the hall popping in and out of both rooms, apologizing to the students many times over. The next morning, one of the conference staff members who was in my class the night before complimented me on the professional way I handled the situation. I asked, "What was the alternative? Whine and complain?" Her reply was that I could have, but in my mind, that was not an option. At least I had a few days warning to get used to the idea and figure out how to make it work.
- Another time I was surprised to find that a guild class was being taught in a shop. Dan saw that there were none of my books and patterns in the store, so he spoke with the shop owner while I got the classroom set up. He offered the shop owner our usual deal. We will bring in books and patterns. We will count the inventory before and after class, and bill you for what was sold. Her initial reply was a refusal! Patiently, Dan explained to the shop owner that we wanted to give her money! The really ironic part is that another shop in town was setup with great displays and ready for sales because they knew I was coming.

What do I do during the speaker's engagement?

Have a staff person(s) attend class. The education of your staff is very valuable. Your staff person will not only learn new tips, techniques, how to use tools, information about products (threads, books, etc.), but she will learn things such as organizing and teaching a class, how to deal with questions that are not relative to the task at hand, how to handle a difficult and demanding student, soft-selling (promoting other tools and publications that are relative to, but not necessary for, the class or project), and countless more.

What do I do after the speaker leaves?

Help quilters complete their projects. Point them in the direction of classes that will add to what they have learned.

Employ the information that you and your staff learned into future classes and sales. Check with the speaker about how to do this. Some are very protective of their information.

- I tell instructors to teach what I have taught them, but do not copy my handouts or pages from my publications. I have books and patterns that can be used as bases from which to teach, and the students are required to purchase them for classes taught by other instructors.
- Another approach is to demonstrate a technique that the instructor has taught, then show the quilter where to purchase the book or pattern for complete instructions.

Engage another speaker.

Finally, do not forget this final important point!

Just because you have hired speakers and hosted your retreat for years and know your routine, do not expect that the speaker knows what is going to happen. Each of our events is unique, and we rely upon you to tell us what to expect and what is expected of us. A good dialogue is imperative.

We are happy to answer questions!

Debbie and Dan Caffrey

Debbie's Creative Moments, Inc.

PO Box 29418

Santa Fe, NM 87592-9418

Phone: 505-992-1414

Fax: 505-992-8013

Email: debbiesquilt@aol.com

Visit us on the web at www.debbiescreativemoments.com.