

# SPEAKER

SOCIAL  
MARKET  
**LEADERSHIP:**  
ENGAGE CLIENTS  
WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

HOW TO  
**MOTIVATE** and  
CONNECT  
with **AUDIENCES**

TURN A  
COLD CALL  
into a **SMART CALL**

## Light Their Fire

ROXANNE EMMERICH'S "BRING IT ON"  
APPROACH IGNITES AUDIENCES

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“I’m all about  
fun with a purpose.”

—Roxanne Emmerich, CMC, CSP, CPAE

# Light Their FIRE



Roxanne Emmerich's "bring it on" approach engages and ignites audiences—with amazing results.

By Barbara Parus

“Kids say the darndest things,” the late Art Linkletter, CPAE, said on *House Party*, his long-running TV show that aired in the 1950s and 60s. Take Roxanne Emmerich, CMC, CSP, CPAE, for example. When she was 4 years old, someone asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up. “A nun *and* a go-go dancer,” she said without hesitation. Her relatives still chuckle about it.

Little did Emmerich know that her response would become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Emmerich has artfully blended the attributes of a nun and a go-go dancer in her illustrious 20-year career as a motivational speaker. She transforms organizational cultures by facilitating programs that teach people how to be good to each other, while having fun doing it.

## IT'S IN HER ROOTS

Emmerich's obsession for transformation is rooted in her childhood, growing up on a dairy farm in Wisconsin. She literally “worked it” by milking cows, plowing fields, baling hay and balancing rations for the cattle. Unfortunately, in those days, all of her neighbors were losing their farms due to bankruptcies and foreclosures.

When the farmers in her community met at the feed mill to discuss a plea for a government bailout, Emmerich, who was only 10 years old at the time, listened intently and wondered why they let the world dictate to them. Why were they resigned to being victims of circumstance? Why didn't they just do something different?

Although this life-changing experience shaped who Emmerich is today, the real turning point in her career came years later when she was offered the presidency of a larger bank “My ego was screaming ‘yes,’ while my gut was screaming ‘no,’” Emmerich says.

At the time, she was attending a seminar by Chris Clarke-Epstein, CSP, CPAE, who passed out Richard Leider's book, *The Power of Purpose: Creating Meaning in Your Life and Work*. In his book, Leider asks readers what they wanted to be when they were 4 years old—which really hit home with Emmerich. When she finished reading the book, she submitted her six-month notice to her employer and immediately began her speaking career.

Today, Emmerich—a four-time Entrepreneur of the Year winner, member of the CPAE *Speaker Hall of Fame*, CEO of The Emmerich Group, Inc., and author of *The New York Times* best-seller, *Thank God It's Monday!*—is praised for her amazing results in corporate “spinarounds.” She teaches people how to become “un-stuck” in dysfunctional behaviors that sabotage an effective work culture. “One person with a bad attitude can destroy a company and take it down,” Emmerich says. “I've seen it happen.

“We (The Emmerich Group, Inc.) go into workplaces and completely transform the results because we transform employees into people who really care about each other and their customers, have a hoot doing it, take the results very seriously—and themselves very lightly,” she says. Emmerich also readily acknowledges that it is impossible to achieve these amazing results without total audience engagement.

## REALLY DO THE HOMEWORK

Emmerich works with the top 5 percent of movers and shakers in their industries. She has a strong presence in the financial services sector, specifically community banking. Before Emmerich accepts a speaking engagement, she always gathers information about the client's organization that does not appear on a basic questionnaire.

“I don’t want the usual stuff that people spit out. I want to know what’s between the lines,” Emmerich says. “I want to know why employees aren’t playing nicely in the sandbox.”

Specifically, she delves deeply into distinctions about the “players” so she can heal them by asking probing questions, such as:

- What do their negative behaviors look like?
- When did those behaviors start?
- How do these behaviors impact people’s psyches and the results of the organization?
- Is the breakdown at the middle-management level or is it a senior leadership breakdown, or both?

Only by getting to the heart of matters can Emmerich help clients

To underscore this point, Emmerich cites her “Kick-Butt Kick-Off®” strategy, which creates immediate culture shifts and achieves tangible results. In the afternoon, she meets with everybody in the organization who manages people, and completely changes the way they relate to each other and their direct reports.

In the evening, she invites everyone in the company, from the board of directors to the workers sweeping the street in front of the building, to a fun-filled, high-energy session, where they commit to eliminating mind games and unacceptable behaviors and make commitments to each other about how they will blow away customers.

“I get them to commit to holding each other accountable for the promises they make at the event,” Emmerich said.

“When attendees walk in the door, there is a small window of opportunity to get them to realize that everything changes from this point on,” Emmerich says. “If you blow it and they just come in and sit down, then you have missed the opportunity of a lifetime and it will be harder to bring them along. I’m all about getting people who are caught up in their underwear to cut loose.”

She advises speakers not to be playful just for the sake of being playful because that just looks goofy and the audience will never take you seriously. “I’m all about fun with a purpose,” she says. “You can’t just be fluffy and fun. You must deliver solid content and tie fun into celebrating massive results.”

Years ago, Emmerich heard two speakers remark that professional speak-



engage their employees to achieve desired outcomes. When booking new business, however, she must be convinced that the organization is committed to having a breakthrough. “I don’t want to just go in and make a speech,” she says. “I want to make an impact on the audience and see a transformation. My calendar is too full to accept a simple speech. I want to work with organizations that are committed to a massive results change. I know I can consistently deliver...but I need their commitment for this to work.”

## THE WOW FACTOR

Emmerich introduces her “wow” factor long before she walks on stage. She works with the event planners to control everything from room setup to music choices and lighting to create a fun atmosphere. Her presentations complement her playful personality. Attendees are welcomed with upbeat music, balls flying through the air, toys and interesting props on the tables and, most important, managers who are acting powerful and playful. “We have to have them at ‘hello.’”

ers fall into two categories: content or entertainment, but not both. Emmerich disagrees wholeheartedly. “That’s a bunch of baloney—you’d better be both if you want results!” she says.

Emmerich also emphasizes that the tone of a speaker’s presentation must align with the audience’s current situation. “You need to shock attendees to get them to sit up and take notice, but you must be careful not to shock them too much or they won’t know how to react,” Emmerich says. For example, balls flying through the air would not

be well received by an organization that experienced recent layoffs. In that case, it would be more appropriate for a speaker to sit down and empathize with the audience.

It takes about 300 programs until speakers have any sense of what really works, according to Emmerich. She is involved in all aspects of producing a successful program, including seating, lighting, promotional copy, program packaging and attendee registration.

In working with meeting planners to promote their events, Emmerich's goals are to help fill seats, do a phenomenal job transforming people's lives when she's there, and ensure the success of future events based on her presentation.

## ENERGIZE THE AUDIENCE



Many people fear speaking in front of groups. But, at Emmerich's events, even the most timid end up grabbing the mic. She uses the following exercise to keep things rolling:

- Teach a point through a story or an analogy.
- Solidify the point.
- Divide attendees into groups and give them very specific instructions.
- Ask them to come up with ideas in a short period of time (two or three minutes).
- When time's up, yell "Who's hot?"

Attendees get so wrapped up in her intense, fast-paced sessions that they will stand atop their chairs, yelling and cheering, totally abandoning their inhibitions while the mic runner scurries from group to group.

"People are so excited and in the moment, they forget their fears," Emmerich says. "It allows them to feel successful at what they do." She adds that the key is making attendees feel brilliant and confident.

After Emmerich delivers a presentation, it is not uncommon to witness attendees crying and hugging each other. They even approach her to laud the impact of her session. "People tell me they've been in therapy for years, and my session was more meaningful to eliminate the drama and self-sabotage

### "Engaging" Presentation Tips

- Don't mimic other speakers. Make your presentation uniquely "you."
- Your presentation must match your personality, whether you're playful or serious. If you try something that's incongruent with who you are, it will look silly.
- Inject humor. If you're not naturally funny, ask someone with comedic talent to write some lines for you.
- Use facial expressions and body gestures to make a point.
- Step out on the skinny branches and try something new. It may be your most powerful material yet.

they have normalized," Emmerich says.

She was particularly touched when a senior-level bank executive who had attended several sessions buried her head in Emmerich's neck and sobbed, thanking her for transforming all areas in her life (job, husband, children).

Not everyone embraces Emmerich at the onset. "I'm used to walking into audiences with people rolling their eyes and crossing their arms. It's the racket they play out daily and I'm there to bust that racket. The tougher they are, the harder the fall," Emmerich says.

Even the toughest corporate audiences in the world are eating out of her hand by the end of her sessions.

"I can't remember the last time I didn't win over 98 percent of the audience," Emmerich says. "Then, I teach managers how to deal with the other 2 percent within 24 hours so those 'energy vampires' won't suck everyone dry and bring things back to the state of 'yuck'—which is their game." Dissension must be dealt with before sundown the next day or companies experience a 'this too shall pass' mindset that brings things back to mediocrity."

### ON A PERSONAL NOTE

Emmerich practices what she preaches. Two of her children have interned in her business, The Emmerich Group, Inc., and attended the Kick-Butt Kick-Off®. They hold Emmerich and themselves accountable to the lessons she teaches.

But even a powerhouse like Emmerich needs downtime to maintain her balance and regroup. She practices rituals, such as running around the lake near her home in Minnesota, relaxing on her screened-in porch with its tinkling chimes, and enjoying Friday night dates with her husband. Although she seldom turns on the TV, she admits to watching HGTV because she loves seeing transformations in all forms, such as redecorated rooms or remodeled houses. It's all about change for the positive—whatever form that takes.

True to form, Emmerich obviously lives and breathes the lessons of transformation she imparts in her audiences.



Speaker magazine editor-in-chief Barbara Parus also is a fan of transformation, HGTV and Emmerich's book, *Thank God It's Monday!* Contact her at [barbara@nsaspeaker.org](mailto:barbara@nsaspeaker.org).