

Great Black Speakers: Building Fame One Phone Call At A Time – with Lawrence Watkins

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Here's your program.

Andrew: Hey everyone. I'm Andrew Warner. I'm the founder of Mixergy.com, home of the ambitious upstart. You know, I usually interview entrepreneurs about how they built their tech companies, but I was I was exchanging e-mails earlier today with Lawrence Watkins, who I invited here to do an interview with me, and found out that he's an entrepreneur who started out with nothing but hustle and a phone and he built up his company, which is called Great Black Speakers, and kept growing it and growing it.

I said, "Hey, you know what Lawrence? Instead of talking back and forth by e-mail and having a private conversation, do an interview with me on Mixergy. Let's learn a little bit about your business and find out how you grew it." So, Lawrence, thanks for accepting that invitation.

Lawrence: Oh, no problem, Andrew. I appreciate you giving me the invitation to come join you today.

Andrew: Hey, Lawrence, let me ask you the question that a lot of my audience hates and many of them love and see what you think. What's your revenue at the business?

Lawrence: Oh, my revenue at the business. So for our speakers, we book about \$60,000 per month in revenue for our speakers through their engagements.

Andrew: \$60,000 a month in speaker-generated revenue.

Lawrence: Correct.

Andrew: Okay. And where do you book your speakers?

Lawrence: Mainly universities, so different campus activity events, multicultural affairs events. But we also book for major events as well, so, for example, this year we helped organize all of the speakers for AT&T's Black History Month campaign who the lead person is the rapper, Common as well as Cookie Johnson. So we do many corporate events as well.

Andrew: Who are some other people who you've booked?

Lawrence: We've booked Donna Brazile. We've booked Tai Beauchamp, who is one of the fashion experts who is a writer for many publications. We've booked Dr. Boyce Watkins. Of course, I have to put a plug out there for my brother as well. So we've booked quite a few different speakers in many different industries.

Andrew: Donna Brazile. What administration did she work for?

Lawrence: She was the Gore/Lieberman campaign manager in 2000.

Andrew: Oh, okay. There's something else with her. Why am I not remembering that? I'm trying to look it up on my other computer.

Lawrence: Democratic National Committee as well.

Andrew: I'm sorry?

Lawrence: The Democratic National Committee as well.

Andrew: That's what it is. Right, right, right, okay.

Lawrence: Glenda Hatchett. We have MC Lyte. We have many different types of speakers.

Andrew: Why'd you decide to focus on black speakers?

Lawrence: Because that's what I knew the most about.

Andrew: Okay.

Lawrence: And also, it was a niche that was unfulfilled, so there was high market potential for the African American speaking audience, but there weren't that many companies that were doing specifically African American speakers and wanted to be experts in that area. So when there's opportunity where you have so much revenue potential and yet not many people stepping up to the plate for the revenue, that's a great opportunity for a young entrepreneur to find.

Andrew: Okay. All right. Where did the idea come from for the business?

Lawrence: That's an interesting story. When I was in college at the University of Louisville, I was an electrical engineering major, and by the time I was a junior, I realized that electrical engineering wasn't really the field for me. I did a couple internships and realized I wanted to do something a little bit different.

Andrew: Why? What's the problem with electrical engineering?

Lawrence: It's good, but I could have been an okay engineer, but it's not something that I could have excelled at. It wasn't something that I was passionate about and that I loved and I could do all day long and not even think about.

Andrew: Okay.

Lawrence: So, you know, whenever I was doing problem sets for calculus, it was okay, but I couldn't imagine myself doing that on a day in, day out type of basis. But I still use those skills to this day with my current company

Andrew: Okay. You use your electrical engineering skills at your current company? At Great Black Speakers?

Lawrence: Yeah, engineering skills, actually. The way I think about processes and the way I think about the flow of how the business should work, I use a lot of the things I learned in engineering school even now.

Andrew: You know what? I went to Brooklyn Tech where I studied engineering too in high school, and I hated a lot of the classes, the electrical engineering, the mechanical engineering classes, but what I did like is that it taught you how to think in systems, and so I understand what you mean. Okay. So how did it sit with your parents when you just decided that you weren't going to be an engineer?

Lawrence: Well, I guess I should give you the full story.

Andrew: Yeah.

Lawrence: So, I didn't tell them until after I had conversations with my brother, Dr. Boyce Watkins, who is a finance professor in Syracuse University. At that time, about five years ago, his media career was really growing. He was doing a lot of things for MSNBC, CNN and Fox News. He called me up one day and he said, "You know what Lawrence? I know you're not really feeling the engineering thing. Why don't you put all that aside and move up to Syracuse with me and help me find speaking engagements and help me grow my media career?"

At this time, I also had a couple job offers, you know, making \$60,000 from Bank of America and also General Electric from their leadership development programs, and I just wasn't really feeling it. So I thought about it for many days and I thought, what do I really have to lose? I'm broke now. What's being broke another couple of years if things don't really work out? But if things do work out, I could really change the trajectory of my life and do something and put myself in a position to do something that I love for many years to come. So I decided to take that leap and moved up to Syracuse with no money in my pocket really and started to work day in and day out helping to grow my brother's brand and to grow his speaking career.

Now, this decision didn't really sit well with my parents, and I remember the day that I told them. I told them at one of the engineering banquets that I was getting an award at, at the university, and I remember it like it was yesterday. They called my name so I could accept my graduation award,

and I remember going back to my seat and I said, “Yeah, thanks parents. Thanks for all you’ve done for me. By the way, I’m moving up to Syracuse with CoCo to help him grow his speaking career.”

So my brother’s nickname is CoCo. I’m moving up to CoCo to help him grow his speaking career. And at this time, my parents didn’t really understand New York. They had never really been to New York before, so they thought that Syracuse was like New York City. So they thought that I was actually moving to the big city and I was throwing my career away on this pipe dream of helping my older brother.

Andrew: All right. I’m curious about how, in the early days, you got your brother speaking engagements. Can you tell me what you were doing?

Lawrence: Yeah. It was basically by phone and e-mail.

Andrew: Phone and e-mail to whom?

Lawrence: We started out with a very targeted niche, and that niche was multicultural affairs advisors and multicultural affairs organizations and African American fraternities and sororities around the nation.

Andrew: Okay. So all of it was within universities?

Lawrence: Yes, all of it was within the university system.

Andrew: When you were calling to book him, he’s a professor, which is impressive, but they’ve got professors at every university. What’s the lure of having your brother, Dr. Boyce “CoCo” Watkins? What’s the thing that makes people say, “You know what? We’ve got to pay to have him come from the big city of Syracuse to our town to speak at our college.”

Lawrence: At this time, it was fortunate that he had quite a few books already out. He had three books in the educational arena. One was called, “Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About College: A Guide for Minority Students,” as well as “The Parental 411.” On top of that, he had a very controversial book that he released in 2004 called, “What If George Bush Were A Black Man?” That talks a lot about the social and political issues related to race in the United States.

Andrew: And of the three of them, is it that third book, the one that's more controversial, that got colleges interested in at least hearing your pitch?

Lawrence: Yeah, definitely. Well, it depended on who I was speaking with. If I was speaking with an organization that had more of an education focus to where they wanted their students to succeed in college, I would pitch one set of books. If it was an organization that had a potential to be a little bit more radical and a little bit more on the edge of social commentary, I would pitch the "What if George Bush Were a Black Man?" book. So it really depended on the audience that I was pitching at the time. But definitely with the media, "What If George Bush Were a Black Man?" is what really helped him get booked for many different types of media opportunities on the national level.

Andrew: Okay. So did the speaking engagements come first or did the media opportunities come first?

Lawrence: It was a cycle. So before I got there, he was already doing a little bit of media with CNN and Fox News mainly, but what happens is the more times people see you on TV and recognize you, the easier it becomes to book that person for different types of engagements. So when more engagements started to come, the easier it was to really sell that to different media outlets and also to other universities to even find even more engagements. So it was a snowball effect.

Andrew: All right. Let me ask you this. In the beginning, what was he charging to speak at a university?

Lawrence: Oh, gosh. \$1,500.

Andrew: \$1,500. That's basically flight money, cab money, hotel money, break even, essentially, right?

Lawrence: Yeah. Yeah, we worked really hard over the first couple of years to move that fee up, but also, it was really good for him doing small interviews at the beginning and small engagements because it really prepared him for the future to do bigger and better engagements as time went along.

Andrew: Okay. I'm going to come back and ask you about that, about his development as a speaker, but I want to stay focused on how you got him the original speaking gigs. Do you remember the first one that you got?

Lawrence: Actually, I don't. I know it was at a university. I can't remember exactly what university that it was, but I do remember the feeling because I failed so many other times with making all these phone calls and not many of them actually going through to people actually becoming prospects and leads and actually converting to engagements.

I remember getting that first engagement where the person sent the e-mail back and said that they wanted Boyce for their university and the elatement and joy that I felt for actually doing something positive and doing something that actually worked. Because my biggest fear was going back home to my parents and going back home to my friends with my head between my legs and not really succeeding and having to go back and tell them that they were right and I was wrong. I didn't want to do that.

So getting that first engagement really gave me additional confidence to sell him for speaking engagements in the future.

Andrew: So was the secret of getting him booked in the early days, the first, second, third gigs before you got into the cycle, was it just about phoning over and over and over and e-mailing over and over until you got a yes?

Lawrence: Yeah, basically. The follow-up system was the thing that I think that helped us the most.

Andrew: The follow-up system. Tell me about that. What was the original follow-up system?

Lawrence: Basically I would follow up every seven to ten days with every single person that I contacted until I heard a definitely yes or no about whether they wanted to bring in Boyce for an engagement. So if they didn't tell me no, I kept contacting them until they actually said, "Okay, Lawrence, I'm really tired of hearing from you."

Andrew: Okay. This is kind of a minor detail, but I'm always curious about this with people who do sales. What system did you use to stay on top of this and make sure that you were and hold yourself accountable so that you could keep making these phone calls?

Lawrence: Yeah, I used paper.

Andrew: You just used paper? You had a list of all the people who you were going to call?

Lawrence: Yeah, exactly.

Andrew: And then you wrote when to call them?

Lawrence: I had two lists. I had an Excel list of all the people that I wanted to call over time. Then, at the same time, I also had a list of the people that I had actually called and who I talked to, so whether I talked them or not. And I would go through that list every day and see where I stood with each individual person. As time went along, I upgraded to Excel. Then I finally upgraded to 37signals and Highrise and we manage things with that nowadays. But when I first started, I just used pen and paper. I had a notepad, a yellow pad, and I would just go through each person until I heard a yes or no from each individual person that I contacted.

Andrew: I remember my early days when I was making sales. One time I was so frustrated that I just, in the middle of the day, I went and I just tossed myself on the bed feeling like, “What a loser I am,” and this was after I failed to get a customer who eventually turned everything around for me later when I got her. But I hit that low. I just threw myself on the bed and I felt like I could never make this work and I was embarrassed. Did you have a moment like that?

Lawrence: Yeah.

Andrew: Tell me about that in the early days.

Lawrence: I definitely had a moment like that. It was actually after I started working or I had finished working solely for my brother and I had started Great Black Speakers. I remember having an excellent month. We were making thousands of dollars the month before through booking engagements, but what happened is I wasn’t managing my cash flow correctly and I overspent.

Andrew: Ah.

Lawrence: Yeah. So I overspent, and by the time I realized the drastic and the mistake that I made, I went into a state of depression almost. I went from being very elated and very happy about my situation, and I spent way too much money on pay-per-click advertisements and Google AdWords and everything and then I was broke.

I was almost broke and I didn't know what to do. I thought, oh my goodness, I'm broke, what I'm going to do about this company? I remember doing the exact same thing that you did. I just went to my bed and just laid there, and I didn't know what else to do and I was just really tired.

And then it hit me. I realized that I'm actually laying in a bed, and it really made me think about how fortunate that I was to actually have the opportunity to be actually laying in a bed. I could go downstairs and fix me a bowl of Cheerios and some beans and I would be okay.

So I still had all my basic necessities met, so things weren't really that bad. I just felt like a failure at the time, but if I continued to work hard and stay focused on what the ultimate goal is of booking our speakers and shaping minds once speech at a time, I could really make this into a success. And that's what I did, and we eventually rebuilt the company and we got over our short term cash flow issues and grew it to where we are now and I'm very happy with that.

Andrew: How did you do it? How did you bring in more... was it bringing in more business?

Lawrence: Yeah.

Andrew: How did you do it? You know how there's always a little bit further than you think that you really can go, you can always a little bit further than you used to think. I'm not expressing that right, but I think you understand what I mean. How did you find that little bit extra, that extra 10% that grew your revenue?

Lawrence: The basis of that started from me actually doing a lot of reading. I've always been, I guess, a maven and I like to read pretty much everything. Anybody who's ever talked to me knows that my favorite book is "The 4-Hour Workweek," by Timothy Ferriss. Reading that book changed things for me and how I viewed my company, not just working in my company, but starting to work on my company and starting to put systems in place to really make sure that my company can be successful for the long term.

Andrew: For example?

Lawrence: So, for example, I spent a lot closer attention building up my SEO campaigns and my search engine marketing campaigns through Google AdWords. At that time, they didn't have Facebook pages, but setting up Facebook groups for my company and started promoting what we were doing through different social media outlets. Doing a lot more with e-mail marketing and making sure that our e-mail marketing messages were consistent and also they came out on a regular schedule. Little things like that really helped my marketing efforts for a day to day to where I didn't actually have to make as many phone calls on a day to day basis to really book engagements.

Andrew: Okay. All right. Let me go back now, and I understand that the first customers were coming to you, the first schools were bringing your brother in because you kept calling and you kept going over and over until you heard a no or a yes. Then you said the next part of the cycle is getting some press. Tell me how you got press for your brother.

Lawrence: So, the greatest way to get press, or at least for my brother, was to have something of importance to say and also to be controversial in what you talk about. It definitely helped that he had a book entitled "What If George Bush Were a Black Man?" So having that controversial topic always out there and in place for the media to really grab hold of was very helpful in getting him booked for engagements. Also...

Andrew: Okay. So this...go ahead, sorry.

Lawrence: Also, being quick in your responses and staying on top of current news and what's really going on. As soon as a story broke on any of the major networks or Yahoo or CNN or whatever, we would send out e-mail pitches to selected media on that topic.

Andrew: Give me an example.

Lawrence: Hurricane Katrina and all of what that brought.

Andrew: So Hurricane Katrina hits. You guys say there's an opportunity for us to go make a statement, to get our message out there. Do you sit down and say, "What is our message? How do we..." My video just froze on us. It froze with me with my finger up like...

Lawrence: There we go.

Andrew: My gestures are kind of odd. I'm starting to learn a little bit about my gestures here as I do in my interviews. But Hurricane Katrina hits. You guys sit down the two of you and you say, "How can we come up with the message that's meaningful but at the same time has enough oomph in it that people are going to want to listen to us?"

Lawrence: Yeah, exactly.

Andrew: How do you do that? How do you come up with that message? I'd like to come up with a message next time a hurricane happens that will get me some publicity. I don't want to just be here in my office by myself.

Lawrence: Right. Well, you come up with a message on where you stand on different issues and what your philosophy is about the way things are handled in society. Boyce, with his book, he felt like there were major inequalities on how both failure and success are looked upon based on race and also socio-economic class. Since he had that basis already in place, it was easy to talk about Hurricane Katrina and how can you have so many people stuck in the Superdome and how can FEMA react so slowly to a city that has a majority of African Americans who are stuck in this area? So given the fact that he had that position and was able to express that position succinctly and clearly made him a prime target for media outlets to reach out to, to talk about it to the world.

Andrew: I see and I can also see how that one book, "What If George Bush Were a Black Man?" how it gives him a point of view that he can then use to see anything in the world. I should probably come out with a book that's something like, "What If the President Was an Entrepreneur?" and then explain how entrepreneurs would be better leaders than politicians, and then the next time any crisis happens, I could go on the air and say, "This is how an entrepreneur would handle it," and I'd get attention for being the guy who understands entrepreneurs. I'd get attention for being the guy who says that all of D.C. and all of politics is a messed up system. You're opening up my eyes to this.

Lawrence: You know what? I think that's a great idea.

Andrew: That is a great idea. I don't even need to write it. I can probably just have somebody interview me here, send it over to my transcriber to transcribe it, go to Elance.com and have somebody rewrite what I've written in a book form, and then boom. For like, what? 500,700, maybe \$1,000 I have a book written and I can start calling up Fox.

Lawrence: Yeah, \$1,000 max.

Andrew: I hope I'm exciting my audience here with this idea and letting their imagination get carried away the way mine did. Now that we have that point of view and we have the book that says, "Look, I didn't just come up with this in my room by myself. I actually put some effort and published these ideas," who do we call? Who do you know how to call at Fox and CNN and even Yahoo you mentioned earlier? Who do you call?

Lawrence: Oh, we didn't know who to call at first.

Andrew: You did not? So tell me about who you called that was wrong or how you found the right person.

Lawrence: Oh, man. First we tried to use Google and tried to find just any inkling of information on who we should really contact in terms of producers for these different shows.

Andrew: So you would say, we want to be on Bill O'Reilly's show, so you'd Google "Bill O'Reilly, producer, Fox."

Lawrence: Yeah. Yeah. Or just any Fox producer to start out with. It was just who do we know at Fox or who do you know at this given area? We also would put press releases out on PR Web at the time and that would also generate a little bit of interest from national media outlets.

Andrew: Ah. You would put out a press release on PR Web.

Lawrence: Yeah.

Andrew: What does it cost? Like, \$650 to get a press release published?

Lawrence: [laughs]

Andrew: No, right?

Lawrence: Right now, I don't know how much it costs now. We stopped doing that a couple years ago. Yeah, it cost like \$150.

Andrew: It's very inexpensive.

Lawrence: Yeah, for the press it's like \$350 now or something like that, so the press can see it. I think there are better ways to get your name out to the media.

Andrew: So tell me about them. What else is there? I can understand Googling, you're searching, you're making phone calls, you're asking who's the right producer. That's like running around like a chicken with your head cut off. You're running around and maybe you'll bump into what you need to bump into. That's better than nothing, but you've learned as you kept going. What did you learn? What's a better way than PR Web?

Lawrence: Yeah. So, the hardest thing to do is get your foot in the door and just finding the right people. There are databases out there that are quite expensive, but if media is something that you really want to push forward with, you can partner with other friends and other individuals out there to go in together and buy the Cision software. It's called Cision.

Andrew: Cision software.

Lawrence: Cision, yeah. It's a database. I forget what it was called before, but now it's called Cision. It basically is a database of all of the different media outlets in the nation, from a national level to a local level, including major blogs, major radio, TV, print, all those people who actually have producers for shows, it's the database of all of those.

Andrew: So then you get the database. You now have contact information. You start cold calling the producers that you want to reach?

Lawrence: Well, not anymore. That type of strategy doesn't work as well anymore. You really need to target who you want to speak with.

Most of the magazines and most of the television companies have producers for lifestyles and producers for business and producers for entertainment,

so you have to make sure you call the right person and give a pitch that's absolutely relevant to their audience.

You can't really just send the same pitch to everyone at the same time. Now you really have to be very specific about the pitches that you send to different media outlets. And there's also things like Help A Reporter Out, HARO.com, that sends actual media pitches to you that you can follow up on, on a consistent basis and also PRLeads.com.

Andrew: PR Leads is a competitor to Help A Reporter Out?

Lawrence: Yes. It costs about \$100 a month for PR Leads.

Andrew: How did you pitch? What's the effective way to pitch? Once you target the right person at the right show, how do you pitch it?

Lawrence: Let me preface this by saying that I enjoy selling to companies and selling to universities much more than I do talking to media producers on a day to day basis, and the reason is they are really, really busy. They spend all day trying to meet deadlines for their different articles and different TV programs. The biggest thing that you need to make sure that you do is to be quick with your pitches and get directly to the point. No small talk ever.

Andrew: You're doing this on the phone?

Lawrence: Yeah, you're doing this on the phone or by e-mail.

Andrew: Okay. So you get on the phone with them, no small talk. What's a way that you might pitch right away? How do you give a quick pitch?

Lawrence: Yeah, so, let's take Egypt, for example and how Dr. Boyce can speak on Egypt as it relates to finance. I would get on the phone and say, "Hello, my name is Lawrence. I am calling on behalf of Dr. Boyce Watkins of Syracuse University. He's been on CNN, MSNBC, and other major media networks throughout the year. I think he would be a great person to talk about the financial recovery of Egypt after the new regime takes over and here are the main points about what he can speak on."

So then you go through, one, he believes that Egypt needs to do X, Y and Z. Two, here's what the people would need to do to really make this

thing work. If you're interested in this story, just let me know. We can talk about it more now or I can just shoot you an e-mail with what he is actually capable of talking about on this subject.

Andrew: At that point, do you think you would pitch the black angle, or do you think you would pitch the angle of the academic who has more of a learned point of view on the topic?

Lawrence: For that story, I would pitch more of the academic angle and the business angle. You can also pitch the social commentary angle. So what I would do is just test. I would see what works and what doesn't work. There are so many people to call. That's the good thing about business. You always have opportunities out there and opportunities to talk to new people. So you could pitch one person one way and pitch another person the other way and see what worked better.

Andrew: All right. This is interesting. I'm already thinking about the book that I have written on my behalf by Elance for \$1,000. If Egypt comes up, what I would do is I would pitch, "Hey, technology is a solution, not the problem. What you've had is corrupt governments that have blocked technology and have kept their people back. The answer is technology. What if we had a technology entrepreneur as the head of Egypt," or something like that. I'd have to spin it a little bit, but I see what you're doing.

Okay. So now, we've got the next part of the cycle. You get him some more media. You get him more attention. People start to see him differently because he's the guy who was on TV. You now go back to the schools and you sell him as the guy who's been making all these statements on television, right?

Lawrence: Correct.

Andrew: Do schools have any real money?

Lawrence: It depends. There are pros and cons of working with a university audience. A lot of times, many organizations don't have real money. They don't have the \$20,000 and \$30,000 and \$40,000 and even more for engagements. That's reserved for the corporate market for the most part, but that's even changing because since the financial crisis, corporations have been cutting back on training and speaking and cutting back on those types of fees. A lot of speakers are going out of business because they were used to

a certain type of fee before 2007/2008 and now they're getting much, much lower fees.

Andrew: What are the fees that someone who's not very famous, who maybe had an ebook, a book that Elance wrote for them published and was on TV, what kind of fee could someone like that get?

Lawrence: Now we're not talking about, Andrew, are we?

Andrew: No. Actually, I like batting around the ideas by personalizing them, and I hope whoever's listening to me is personalizing it in his head and not going, "Hey, you know what? I'm fawning over Lawrence or I'm rejecting Andrew for not asking the right questions." I hope instead what they're doing is saying, "Hey, you know what? I'll challenge myself and see how can I use what Andrew and Lawrence are talking about in my own business, my own world. What can I do to use this? Even if I never do and I just imagine it and put myself in their shoes and try to play around with their ideas, I know that I become smarter and I absorb the ideas better." So I do this here in the interview, and I hope my listeners are doing it right now while he's running or while she's at her computer working.

Going back to person who's a young entrepreneur or a new entrepreneur who's trying to get some publicity for himself and he's learning from what you do and has a book published or maybe a blog published with a sharp point of view and is now going out on the speaker circuit. What could that person, back in the good old days, have earned and what could they earn now?

Lawrence: In the good old days, for a person who was building up their reputation?

Andrew: Yes.

Lawrence: Let's just take the university market to begin with. You'd be looking at \$6,000 to \$8,000 for an engagement.

Andrew: That's like seven times the return on what you spend on an Elance book. Okay.

Lawrence: Yeah. Now, you're talking about less fees. It really depends on the organization that you're reaching out to, because different student groups have different types of budgets and different universities are...you have the University of Michigan that's really big, but then you have Jefferson Community College, which is really small. Even for really small universities, you're still looking at \$1,500 now plus travel to go out on a speech. For the most part, you can still find fees of \$4,000 to \$5,000 from university audiences.

Andrew: \$45,000 universities have to spend?

Lawrence: \$4,000 to \$5,000.

Andrew: Oh, \$4,000 to \$5,000. Okay.

Lawrence: Yeah, \$4,000 to \$5,000. I'm sorry.

Andrew: Oh, that makes more sense. \$4,000 to \$5,000. You put a hyphen not a number. Okay. So this is okay money. Even at the height of \$4,000 to \$5,000, it's okay money. It's not great money, and the money and the audience size I imagine is not really a reason to do this. The reason is, as you said earlier, to develop as a speaker. How did he develop as a speaker?

Lawrence: Right. Let me just add one more point to that. Now that's just your base speaking fee. There are other different things that you can add on to that. So for example, once you know that you're going to a specific location, let's say my hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, you can find other organizations within that area who would want to have you come and speak for a reduced rate. So if you charge the main organization let's say \$5,000, you could go around to these other organizations since you're already going to be in the area and charge \$2,000 or \$2,500 for those types of events.

Andrew: What other organizations are there?

Lawrence: There are non-profit organizations, young presidents organizations, you have rotary clubs, who often have a little bit of money here and there, you have entrepreneurship organizations. You have many different types of non-profit organizations as well as other universities that are within the area who would be interested in having public speakers come in.

Andrew: Is there a list of these organizations somewhere?

Lawrence: We have internal lists that we haven't actually published to the rest of the world. We're actually launching GreatProSpeakers.com, which is a speaker marketing training site that teaches public speakers how to market themselves within the speaking industry. That will be launching in the middle of March, and we'll have different tools that have a lot of these different databases actually published on the Web.

Andrew: Okay. But the way you put it together was just by adding to your list over and over whenever you heard of an organization, networking, asking who else you should be talking to and adding every one of them to your list?

Lawrence: Yes.

Andrew: Okay. So let's get into how he developed as a speaker. And, by the way, I'm focusing on one person because I feel he's your brother and you can be much more open about him than you could about Donna Brazile.

Lawrence: Right.

Andrew: But I'll go back to Donna Brazile in a little bit. So how do you develop as a speaker? What are some of the things that he learned and you learned along the way?

Lawrence: One of the biggest things to do is just look at other speakers out there who are doing what you want to do and who you aspire to be and really read and study their speeches. I can't stress the studying point enough.

Andrew: How do you do that? Do you write it down by hand so you get a feel of what they're saying? Are you looking for stories? Do you do something else?

Lawrence: You look for it all. You look for stories. You look to see what their core message is at any given time. You look to see how they interact with the audience. You look at all those different things and then just take what you like and what you think you can adapt to your own style and disregard what you don't think would fit to where you want to be as a speaker.

Andrew: Okay. Are there a couple of big lessons you guys learned that helped him become a better speaker?

Lawrence: Yeah. What I teach my audience is, I use the SUCCES framework from the book “Made to Stick” by Chip and Dan Heath and SUCCES stands for Simple Unexpected Concrete Credible Emotional Stories. With those six different tools and those six different strategies, you need to take your core message and really expound upon your core message using the SUCCES framework. That has helped me out even as a public speaker, because before, my thoughts and all the things that I was thinking about wasn’t really cohesive, wasn’t coherent to the listener. What that caused was I couldn’t really effectively get my message across. So it wasn’t until in my articles that I started using the SUCCES framework that people really started to relate to me and it brought out that personal side of what people really like to see in a person who’s giving them advice.

Andrew: Okay. All right. Stories especially are useful. There’s of course one S missing from SUCCES. It’s Emotional Stories at the end there and I forget how they in the book explain that away. I think they had some cute little answer to why there’s only one S at the end of SUCCES.

Okay. Donna Brazile and all those other people on your site, do you actually get permission from them, from every speaker on your site, to include them, or do you just have a sense of who’s out there in the world who’s speaking and being booked and is black and you say, “I’ll just take them, I’ll put them on my website. If a customer wants them, then I’ll find a way to get them because I’ll call the other speaker bureau. But if not, they’ll at least see that I’ve got tons of speakers here.” Is that what it is?

Lawrence: When we first started in ’06, ’07, yeah. We did a little bit of that. Not too much. Our first speakers were actually individuals that my brother would meet while he was on TV. So he would go on TV and do interviews on Fox News, CNN or whatever, and those individuals that he was on TV with, those became our first speakers.

Andrew: Okay.

Lawrence: Now, we definitely get permission from either the speakers directly or their manager to put them on the Great Black Speakers site. Actually, Donna Brazile, she wrote one of my letters of recommendation for grad school, I believe it was either, I forget what grad school she wrote it for, but

she wrote a letter of recommendation. So that's a perk of the job, definitely. You get to meet a lot of cool, interesting people who, because you helped make them money, they are willing to do a lot for you in return.

Andrew: You still working the phones the way you did before?

Lawrence: No. Me personally, not as much anymore. I'm getting back into the swing of things. I took a little bit of time off. I spent the last two years in an MBA program at Cornell University. I graduated in May of last year. Then after that, I went on a 4-Hour Workweek type of vacation, mini-retirement to the Dominican Republic for three and a half months. But now I'm back at work full time. I am working the phones a little bit more, but I'm in product development/nerd mode at the moment, trying to get this Great Pro Speakers product up and running.

Andrew: All right. I think that's all my questions and everything that I wanted to cover in this interview. There is one question that my first question made me think of. Why, Lawrence? Why did you tell me what your revenue numbers were, and why'd you tell my audience what you're bringing in every month?

Lawrence: Because we're always looking to grow. I like to say that number out loud to people because we don't have anything to hide in terms of what types of numbers that we're actually producing for the company. Yeah, so, it really doesn't matter. If our speakers see this and they hear the number, they'll be like, "Great. Can you help me get more engagements?" But if they don't see this, that's fine too. We are a small company. We're looking to grow and we're looking to become even better and better and better as time goes along. It's fine with me that the world knows what our revenue is for GBS.

Andrew: All right. GBS, of course, is Great Black Speakers, and the website is GreatBlackSpeakers.com. Lawrence Watkins, thanks for doing the interview.

Lawrence: And also, one more thing, Great Pro Speakers as well. Great Pro Speakers. You can sign up right now.

Andrew: Is that up and running online?

Lawrence: Yeah, our pre-launch is up and running. But if you sign up now, before we actually launch, you'll get two months free on the website. So sign up now and we look forward to having you as a customer.

Andrew: I didn't even know that you had that. All right. Thank you very much.

Lawrence: All right. Thank you.

Andrew: Cool. Thank you all for watching, and I'll see you on Mixergy. Bye.