

SPEAKER

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**MAKE FOOL-PROOF
DECISIONS BASED ON: 10** minutes
months
years

Suzy Welch, speaker
and author of 10-10-10



Road Show

The theme of values is familiar to Welch fans. It runs through *Winning*, a business book that Welch co-authored with her husband Jack (former GE CEO and chairman), as well as their joint weekly column in *BusinessWeek*. "We share the value of wanting to increase joy and authenticity in people's lives," she says. "As a speaker, I often find myself saying, 'Why am I putting myself through this?' It's a moment of complete self-loathing and terror before stepping on stage. In those moments, you need your values. Your life is about authenticity, helping others and connecting. That's why you're standing there."

Welch's trepidation about public speaking reached fever pitch prior to her book tour this summer. "I wasn't scared about going on TV because that's usually one-on-one, and I felt comfortable in that format," she says. "But I was scheduled for three public speaking engagements a day for a month, and I thought that was the hardest thing I would ever do."

As a crutch, Welch prepared a written speech. After surviving the opening day of the national blitz

A 10-10-10 on Speaker Fees

After presenting for a half hour, Welch often goes into a Q&A period, which invariably generates an audience member asking for her to 10-10-10 a specific problem.

Speaker magazine asked: If you're a speaker who's been asked to present for less than your customary fee, how can 10-10-10 help you resolve this common problem?

Answer: "It starts with your values," says Welch. "What are you giving speeches for? If your primary goal is brand-building, you have a different set of answers than if it's learning. So, let's say you're given an opportunity to give a speech for below your fee, and your main value is learning. You don't do it for financial gain, so that's OK in 10 minutes, months or years.

"But let's say you're doing it for brand-building, selling ancillary products and books, and supporting a TV show. Obviously, depressing your fee can hurt your brand. Maybe it's an opportunity to speak in Hawaii and the near-term benefit is that you get to go on vacation." So, with the 10-10, maybe you're fine. But what about the long-term 10?

"You need to consider a lesson I learned from [my husband] Jack, who has a very high speech fee, and who gets requests all the time to do it for much less," she says. "He looks at it with a businessman's eye, that every time he gives a discount, it's unfair to the people who paid full freight. He just won't do it, because of consistency."

in New York City, she headed to Philadelphia for a round of radio and magazine interviews—and a stage presentation. “It had been a fantastic day, and I had talked to a lot of people who had used the idea,” she says. “The room was filled to the brim, and when I walked out there, I saw all of these expectant faces. I put the speech away, and for 40 minutes I spoke directly from the heart. The minute I was done, I knew it was the best speech I’d ever given.”

Tale End

Ironically, the “aha” moment of Welch’s children escaping hula camp had limited utility once she shared the anecdote on *TODAY* and *The View*. “People come to see you because you’ve been on the national shows, but they don’t want to hear the same story again,” she says. “The audience signaled to me that I needed to stop telling it. People would start nodding because they’d already heard it. “Of course, sometimes I’d be on TV and the interviewer would prompt me to tell the story, ‘This all started in Hawaii with your children...’ But I did it reluctantly.”

Even without her signature story, Welch could draw upon more than enough fodder from her own life, as well as stories from the book and those she picked up along the way. “The problem and the beauty of it is that it’s not the same speech for a group of entrepreneurs, working moms, doctors or ministers,” she says. “Each audience has different sets of decisions and pressures. My core message stays the same—living deliberately and authentically, and lowering chaos—but the stories that you tell can’t be the same.”

Not surprisingly, *10-10-10* has guided Welch toward balance during the burst of publicity that follows a best-selling book. “There’s a simple logistical factor with having four children and a husband, and recognizing I can’t be in two places in

Cynics Anonymous

When Welch describes “the hardest speech I ever gave,” it’s enough to make any parent or child cringe. A few years before *10-10-10* came out, she was invited to speak as a distinguished alumna at the boarding school where her son was enrolled.

“You tell me if there’s a worse audience than 1,200 high school students who are being forced to listen to you,” she says. “I also had this added burden of possibly destroying my son’s life. He begged me not to give the speech.”

Welch opened her presentation with guns blazing. “I immediately said, ‘I’m not going to speak about Roscoe,’ and then I asked him to stand up. And then I said, ‘I’m not going to tell you my son is single, and that he would make the greatest boyfriend for some nice girl in the audience.’”

With the ice broken, Welch delivered a series of more serious messages organized around things she wished she’d known when she was their age, with the advantage of having once sat in the very same seats as her audience. “One of the things I wanted to express is how they shouldn’t be so cynical about true love, and that it’s OK to like or love someone in high school—and how the politically correct idea of ‘hooking up’ is so disgusting,” she says.

Welch took a much bigger risk when delving into the importance of sincerity—by breaking into song. “I told them I went through a long period of being a cynical jackass just like all of them before learning that, like [pop singer] Jewel says, ‘In the end, only kindness matters.’ I have a terrible voice, but after I sang that line, there was a pause and the audience sang it back to me.”

The day, which could have ended in disaster, concluded with a raucous standing ovation. More important to Welch, it delivered two valuable takeaways. First, she always incorporates singing for its show-stopping power. “And it was also at that moment I learned a lesson that’s helped me as I’ve gone on the book tour,” she says. “You need to be prepared. You need to know in your bones what your audience cares about, what their pet peeves are, and why they’re prepared to hate or love you.” She applies the same principle whether she’s addressing working mothers or compensation experts, spending advance time talking to the organizers, wallowing in their literature, and chatting with a few audience members.

“I want to talk to them, not give a speech,” she says. “Now my younger son is at the same school, and he always asks, ‘You’re not going to speak at school are you?’ But I think he secretly hopes I do.”

one time,” she says. “When I get an offer to speak, I ask myself, ‘Is this in my wheelhouse? Am I going to add value?’ I like to give speeches where I can learn something new, and I’m always excited to hear the questions people have about *10-10-10* and how they apply it.”



Contributing writer Jake Poinier employed 10-10-10 the same day he started reading the book. (It worked like a charm.) He can be reached at jake@boomvangcreative.com.