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Go for it although the audience fails to appear!

I no longer know where I heard it or where I read it. It's the story about the speaker, whose audience gradually left while he was speaking, some even shaking their heads. In spite of that, this speaker enthusiastically pursued his delivery as if everybody had stayed put with intense alertness. He was well aware of the fact, that his message did not come across very well. When he had finished, the remaining few left, except one woman. She approached him, took his hand, looked him warmly in the eyes and said – "I want to thank you for everything that you have said. It was important to me to hear your opinion and your comforting words and I am very happy that I had the opportunity to listen to you. It helps me in my life". The speaker then put his other hand on hers, looked her equally warmly in her eyes and said – "It was for you I came!"

Sometimes the number of people attending is far less than expected or what we had hoped for. About a year ago, I spoke at a health fair about self confidence, but I had announced the seminar with the title "To speak in public". I was given a room for two hundred people and three came. Only three? Yes, only three!! It felt extremely humiliating and embarrassing and I was about to cancel the whole thing when I came to think of the woman in the story. So I decided to wholeheartedly get on with what I had undertaken to do. Those three people had come to listen to me and, after all, I wanted to deliver. In stead of me standing on stage we formed a small ring in the room and had a really interactive seminar which went extremely well. Afterwards I asked for their opinion about the reason why so few had come. Their reply was enlightening. They thought that people attending health fairs were not interested in becoming speakers. We agreed that it would have been better to announce the seminar with a title like "Improve your health and enrich your life with stronger self confidence". The three were very grateful for the "private lesson" and I could end the session by claiming – "it was for you I came!"

At a subsequent fair I introduced this new title to find out which effect it would have, and yes! This time I was given a room for twenty people by way of precaution. But forty came, of whom, after having collected extra chairs, some still had to sit on the floor along the walls. There was hardly room for me!

Lesson # 1: Well-directed announcements are better than misdirected!

At an other occasion I spoke at a wedding fair four days in a row about speaking at weddings. I stood on one of those fashion show stages which reach far into the room, with seats in rows along each side. To claim that people were fighting for seats would be vastly exaggerated! There were just enough people to call it an audience. It rather felt like an exodus because I spoke immediately after a fashion show that had gone on for an hour with a massive audience who was dying to stretch legs and stroll off. Had I known, I would have asked for an other moment to speak, but it could not be rearranged.

Lesson # 2: To speak at the right moment is better than the wrong moment.

Now that we (Sweden) are approaching elections we come across politicians speaking in public places. Certainly, the party leaders are forceful speakers and they have a given audience. Not so with the unknown, dedicated party functionaries who begin their speeches with zero audience. They serve as a model! There they stand with their loudspeakers, talking and talking. They look around and one wonders who they look at because there is noone – YET! But then, one stops and soon another and another. Until they form a critical mass, i.e. the crowd that makes people stop because there is a crowd. That's exactly how Speakers' Corner works in London.

Lesson # 3: Go for it although the audience fails to appear!

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