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Meet the Outrageous
Mikki Williams

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MEET *Mikki Williams*

The Speaker that Lifts You Up and Won't Let You Down

Why did you decide to become a speaker?

I am a serial entrepreneur, I built 9 businesses and love the building/growing phase and then it's time to move on. I thrive on new challenges and the creative process. I took time off, traveled, and decided it was time to try something new, but

what? Couldn't figure it out till one day I came up with four. Travel, I had never done much of it, Glamour, I crave it, probably left over from my show biz days, People, I love people and... Money, no glass ceiling, my abilities would dictate my revenues, not the industry.

I spent time trying to figure it out and then went back to college to get my MBA in the hospitality industry thinking I would open a destination spa on the East Coast. It was like the game we played as kids, hot, hotter, hottest. I was getting closer. I loved hotels. It had all my objectives except the financial one so I networked till I found out about meeting planning and went to DC to get certified. Networked again, till I heard about professional speaking and found my home in the New York Chapter.

What launched your speaking career?

I was coming out of the fitness industry; when one day, an aerobics instructor brought her husband to my program and he was a principal with Ernst and Young. He asked me to keynote the INC. Magazine Entrepreneur of the Year banquet that they were sponsoring. I was so excited, accepted before I even knew how much I would be paid or who I would be speaking to. When I called him back to ask, he said, "You will be speaking to 500 of the Fortune 500 CEO's and he rattled off names like Victor Kiam of Remington Rand, Fred DeLuca of Subway, Stew Leonard". I got off the phone and threw up.

I called him back and asked him what I should wear and he laughed and reminded me to be myself. Back then, I was like Dolly Parton on steroids, there were more rhinestones on me than all of Las Vegas. Carpe Diem! So there I was, going from aerobic instructors to CEOs' in all my sequin glory. I spoke for two hours and he beamed as I held this tough audience

captive and finished to the biggest standing ovation they ever gave anybody! Needless to say, that one job launched my career into corporations and associations and it has been on a steep curve ever since.

You've been affiliated with Vistage International (now NSA's sponsor), tell us about that.

Vistage (formerly known as TEC, The Executive Committee) is the world's largest CEO membership organization. I first started with them as a speaker; coincidentally I was speaking for the NSA-NY Chapter when a Vistage Chair from New Jersey came in to hear me talk about presentation skills. He asked me to speak for his group of CEO's and I have now been doing that for 14 years and love it. It is literally paid marketing as you are speaking to decision makers. Vistage is now looking for many qualified speakers; it is a great opportunity for all your readers. When I moved from the East Coast to Chicago, I was nominated to be a Chair and now facilitate and coach CEO's and their KEY employees in two of my own groups. Chairing is another amazing opportunity to consider for speakers with a business background.

You're known in the speaking world for being "outrageous". How did you make that your brand?

My mantra is "be outrageous, it's the only place that isn't crowded". I shamelessly admit that I exploit my uniqueness. I've used it to become a brand, from the Slip 'em a Mikki™ to The Speaker with a Thing for Bling™. Rosita Perez told me when I first joined NSA, "Mikki in a world of apples, you are a kumquat". She always affectionately called me that nickname. I don't look corporate, I don't try to, I'm just me... flamboyant, sparkly me, now a Midwesterner with a NY edge, and I'm so comfortable being me. You'll always be remembered and you'll stand out in a sea of similarities. Unique is what separates us as speakers, whether it's by topic, by message or by persona.

You named your company Mikki Williams Unlimited. What are the different arms of your business?

There is the speaking division, which encompasses keynotes, training, seminars, workshops, facilitating, emceeing, and banquets.

My Vistage speaking to the executives is another component. Another division of my company is Life Architecture; helping to design peoples lives and businesses through a





coaching model in business, life and presentation skills. I run quarterly Speaker Schools for aspiring speakers to hone their skills, for pro's to polish and for everyday employees or people who simply want to get better at speaking. And, I chair two executive think tanks through Vistage in Chicago. All of these fit neatly under the umbrella of Mikki Williams Unlimited.

How do you get all your energy?

It's a state of mind. I've always been a positive person and I believe energy is a by-product of a positive attitude. I also believe in living life with passion and experiencing life, not just living it.

You pride yourself on not being "niched", how does that work for you?

I've chosen to be a generalist. I am simply a sto-



ryteller. Even when I am giving a speech on a business topic like sales or customer service, I am still using my own stories. Yes, I have industries that I have worked in and therefore have more credibility. Yes, I have topics of relevance to some industries more than others. I am primarily a keynoter and bill myself as an inspirational humorist. My signature keynote has been well received by every demographic in many countries, in many languages. I customize and personalize so it doesn't matter if I

am not of their industry.

Multiple Sources of Income (MSI) is a phrase we hear alot in our industry; you've taken that beyond just the obvious product development, tell us about that.

Yes, product is definitely a good thing but so many speakers forget how to leverage their talents into other arenas. My Vistage speaking and chairing gives me a great "base" salary. My coaching and consulting and Speakers Schools fill in more blanks and add to the revenue stream. The beauty of it is that they all feed each other so there is an endless supply of leads, offers, product purchases, referrals and opportunities.

What was one of your most memorable presentations?

Definitely Israel. My international ones hold the most memories but this one in particular. I spoke for the Life insurance Agents of Israel and they invited the guest speakers to arrive early. On the last day, they took all of us out in a caravan of jeeps into the Negev desert. We drove for a long time until it appeared that there was no horizon. Then we came to a large rock formation in the middle of the desert. They stopped and asked us to go around to the other side of the rock. They had a formal table with white tablecloths, crystal and china set for a luncheon that day in the middle of the desert. My departing gift was a photo of that table standing alone in the desert.

You've spoken on every continent (except Antarctica) tell us how that came about? How did you get speaking engagements at The White House and President Mandela's home and being profiled on the front page of The Wall St. Journal?

Networking, networking, networking. Being proactive. Being aware. Reading name badges and proactively introducing myself to all those wearing badges from companies or countries that I wanted to visit or work for.

My networking paid off. I started in Johannesburg with a speech to Liberty Life Insurance then went to a Relais and Chateau Game Lodge on safari and I spoke for the staff and guides.

Then off to Cape Town for a seminar for fitness professionals, put on by Sharon Levin, the unofficial Mayoress who I met at a convention. On to Durban, where Cathy Yuill, another convention networking by-product arranged to have me speak on the great lawn of President Mandela's summer home for all the residents of her province. As the first American speaker after apartheid, it was a momentous occasion. The Premier of Natal and his wife hosted it. There was a choir singing the new South African anthem, the new flag flying and a private tour of his home. This was truly the "privilege of the platform".

What attributes do you possess that helped build your successful career that you think our readers would benefit from knowing?

Networking, being unique, being you, tenacity, marketing and sales, yes, you really do have to run a business.

What are your plans for the coming year as it is your 20th anniversary year?

I have THE most amazing Director of Everything, Samantha. With Sam, I am able to do so many new and exciting projects and we have many planned. My book of quotes will be published shortly, *Mikki Mouth*, quotes I wish I said and some I did say. My signature speech aka my life story is now finally in book proposal format. It is also being written as a potential feature film by the writer of a new John Cusack/Morgan Freeman movie.



Upgrading the website, new product development, new business relationship-s and franchising Speaker Schools are all part of the mix. Oh yes, planning for the next 20!

*Mikki Williams Unltd.
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