

Presenting at the fee you are worth

Presentation Fees in Dietitian World

There is a common question from dietitians: What should I charge to give a presentation? Tapping into nearly four decades of presenting here is my view.

First, I know that 9 out of 10 of you are not charging enough, based on a 2014 DAA survey. I want you to charge more.

“OK, if I don’t charge enough what should I charge?” That depends.

Charge nothing if:

- You are trying out some new ideas and want to road test them so you can later refine your talk to get it up to a ‘chargeable’ standard. You may even offer your free talk to local associations – they don’t need to know you are doing a practice run.
- You are wanting to generate business or create more appointments at your clinic. This is the classic “Give them two or three useful tips then tell them that everyone is different and if they want specific help then please make an appointment to see you” type of talk.
- You have a manual or book that you want to sell and the free talk is a way of generating sales.
- You are talking to a charity, or your local club, or a group that clearly has no money. That is up to your judgement.
- It is an allied health conference, DAA meeting etc. We are kinda expected to share our knowledge gratis with other health professionals. Sometimes you may be specifically asked to present at a professional conference for your nutrition expertise. I have been asked to present at teachers/insurance brokers/administrators conferences. For these, I charge a professional fee.

Accept the going fee if:

- Presenting at universities or TAFE colleges. They have their set fees. The fee may even seem quite reasonable until you realise how much paperwork they sometimes demand. You may do it just because you enjoy influencing the next generation of students.
- A professional group has a set fee for every speaker. I spoke to many chapters of a CEO association around the country. They paid airfares and accommodation and a set fee of \$500 for a 3-hour workshop, which never changed over a decade. They hadn’t even heard of the CPI. So what seemed a reasonable ‘earner’ at the turn of the century had lost its lustre by 2012.

It’s time to charge a fee when ...

... you have been requested to do a presentation because someone has recognised your expertise. Make sure you agree on the fee before you start to even think about your presentation.

Often there is a game played over the telephone. It goes like this. First they ask how much you charge (because they hope it is less than their budget) and you respond by saying:

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“Well, before I answer that let’s just see if I’m the right person and available at the time you want Ok, yes, I can do Monday the 12th now please tell me a little about the audience and your expectations.” Now you have an idea about what they want, and if it seems a perfect fit you can tell them your fee.

Your fee, your mirror message

Read this next bit really carefully, because I’m going to tell you something super important and I don’t want to hear any arguments. Ready? **Your fee is \$300.** Yes \$300. Because you are seriously worth that amount. I know 9 out of 10 of you charge less because you have told me. So, \$300 is your new fee. I’m dead serious. Write it on the bathroom mirror: “I’m worth \$300 minimum”. Daily reminder.

Practice this for when they ask your fee. You say: “**My professional fee is \$300 for a one hour presentation (or part thereof).**” Note the ‘or part thereof’ bit. Sometimes they want a 45 minute presentation and ask for 75% of your fee. Let me tell you this – a 45 minute talk takes more time to design than a one hour talk and a 30 minute talk takes more time to design than a 45 minute talk. That’s another story. Yep, its \$300 for 30, 45, 60 and, if you are generous, a 75 minute talk. Beyond that, your fee jumps at least \$100.

They may respond with: “Oh dear, that’s outside our budget.”

You say: “So what is your budget?”

They say: “Well we can only go as high as \$200”.

Now, it’s judgement time. You may say: “Ok, look, I think you have a good group and I’d still love to talk to them, so this time I’ll do it for \$200.” You have just given them a 33% discount, but at least they know you are a \$300 speaker. They will love your talk and next time will budget for your full professional fee.

You could also say to them that you are so sorry that they cannot meet your professional fee and you are unable to do the talk. Yes, you can say no. (Keep using the expression ‘professional fee’ – because you are offering a professional service).

I’ve had some say to me: “Wow, that’s a lot for an hour”. I politely explain (and dear reader, please implant this next bit in your brain, forever) that they aren’t buying an hour of my time, they are buying my expertise and x years of experience. I’ll repeat, because so few dietitians have got this concept **when you speak for a fee, the audience is buying your expertise and experience, not your time.**

Prep time does not exist

I often hear people ask whether they should charge for preparation time. My answer is: “No, never, ever.” Why? Two reasons.

1. Nobody cares how much time you spent preparing for this. No-one. In the last 35 years I recall only two people saying “You must have put a lot of time into that talk.” Your audience only cares how useful/interesting/practical your talk was.
2. Let’s say you charged \$50 an hour for four hours preparation and \$100 for the talk, so you pocket \$300. Hey, that’s not bad. It meets my minimum recommended fee. And, of

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course, they loved your talk, it really hit the spot so good, in fact, they want you back next month for the same talk. What are you going to charge now? You can't charge \$300, can you, because you have already done the prep. Now your superb presentation is costed at \$100 and the word is out around town that you do a superb talk and charge only \$100. Bargain, they say. Suddenly you have five talks booked at \$100 a pop, when you have already proven it's worth \$300.

Charge what you are worth, not your prep time. Always.

So, what are you going to do when people offer you way less than your professional fee (which is now \$300 remember)? Say they have offered \$100 or \$150. Time to get brutal. Just say either:

- “No thanks, it is not possible for me to do it at that fee”. I used to tell people that \$300 is my break even fee. Less than that and I lose money. Dead true for the self-employed. And it works because people hate to hear you are losing money to talk to them.
- “I’ll do it for free. Just give me a book voucher or a supermarket voucher as payment if you want”. See the reasons for doing free talks discussed at the beginning of this ‘chapter’. Let them know that they are getting a presentation valued at \$300 at no charge. This is a once-off for this group. You won’t be making a habit of it.

If you charge \$100 then all the world knows that’s all you are worth. What is worse you have just told the world that that is all any dietitian is worth. And that’s just not true. Nor is it fair.

What if the gig is far from home?

You want to do the talk but it’s an hour’s drive each way. Tough, no-one wants to pay travel time. If the travel time is onerous, factor it into your fee. Rather than \$300, your fee is now \$400 or \$500 or more. If you have to travel long distances intrastate or interstate, then there is a whole new fee structure. I won’t talk about that in this ‘chapter’.

Value add

Let’s say you do have to travel a long distance to give a presentation. They are paying a good fee. You might even be away for a couple of days, however they have requested only three talks. There will be some down time and you figure that could be well-spent. Try this (they will love you for it) – offer to talk to the kids at the local school, or to a parents group, or a senior citizens centre, or chat about nutrition myths on the local radio station. The organisers will not have thought of this themselves, and there you are offering even better value for your fee. Winner!

I’ve spoken to mining companies in the north-west of Australia, and even on an oil tanker and gas platforms. In one remote town I offered to speak to parents and another time to the local triathlon group. They were so appreciative because nutrition experts rarely come to town. And you get a better sense of their community. Note: When I am away for days I charge a daily rate, and offers of extra talks are covered by that rate.

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You can think of other ways to value add to your talks, possibly offering free booklets, free skinfold measurements in the first visit at your clinic, discounts for a program/cooking course that you run. You may give a 'free' talk but offer a 25% discount for your 8-week Mediterranean cooking course.

Your future

You start out as a \$300 speaker. And then you get better, more useful, more interesting, more everything, so you start to crank up the fee. You will gasp at this next bit because I know what you used to charge and you are capable of this you will become worth \$1000 (approximately zero dietitians charge this much, sadly) ... and then more and more because that is the value of your expertise and experience, and you now appreciate that people are buying just that – your expertise and experience (not your time). Not possible? I know two dietitians who have charged \$4000-\$6500 for a presentation or half day workshop. Not a typo. You can add a zero to your fee as you excel.

Yes, I know

.... what I have told you doesn't fit your credo because you were put on this planet to help others with no material reward for yourself and it's just not right to charge so much for simple and sensible nutrition information. And it's a little bit icky talking about money. OK, cool. I've done a stack of freebies to community groups, parent groups, clubs etc. It warms the cockles of my heart, whatever they are. Often, my most enjoyable talks have been free.

Yet, there are still a bucket load of people who will gladly pay a fee to listen to your advice. Note this: those that pay actually give you more respect, are better organised and take a greater interest in your words. And that warms those cockles too and helps me to pay off the car, put the kids through school and buy the occasional good bottle of red.

Stop underselling yourself. Next DAA survey I hope to see dietitians charging \$0 or \$300 or more for a talk. No more \$100 chats please. Or \$50! Jeez, you can't even get a haircut for that. OK, I can, but you can't. ***Stop the cheap talks. You are demeaning yourself and your profession.*** Yes, really.

All of the above is based on my experiences as both a free and professional speaker. I truly believe you can all make a modest income from sharing your knowledge at a realistic fee ... which is a minimum of \$300 not sure if I mentioned that earlier.

Note: Add GST to all quoted amounts.

Er, so that makes it \$330 minimum.

Sorry, change that mirror message:

I'm worth \$330 minimum*
*** fee includes GST**