



helping you design
your business

SPEAKING TOPICS

2020

The following document outlines the variety of speaking topics I've presented at various national conferences and smaller events.

SPEAKER BIO

A brutally honest consultant, Emily Cohen has been honored to consult and work with many leading design firms across the United States and Canada. Through these experiences, she has developed, tested, and curated key business insights and strategies that have helped firms become more effective, profitable, and fun to work at. Emily conducts strategic business planning retreats and provides confidential, best-practice insights and advice on staff, client, and process-management strategies. She loves sharing her expertise through speaking engagements, guest posts, her [Lynda.com](#) and [Skillshare](#) courses, webinars, industry activism, and, most recently, in her new business book for creatives, [Brutally Honest: No-bullshit business strategies to evolve your creative business](#). Emily Cohen is also fast-talker, a designer by degree, an avid reader, a trend-spotter, a connector, and her client's advocate.

"I wanted to send a note on behalf of everyone at Core77 to thank you for contributing to our conference this year. Your talk was such a great addition to our programming, and we got plenty of positive feedback from attendees about how engaged they were. We received a lot of comments on how helpful your presentation was to attendees—people especially appreciated your transparency and honesty. Thanks in part to you, I think every attendee had an awesome time and went away with some critical information to apply to their everyday practices—congrats on that."

– Emily Engle, Core77

PROPOSED TOPICS

For more detailed descriptions of each topic, please refer to the next four pages. This list is meant for inspiration and I'd be happy to develop a new talk or update one I already have.

Strategic Topics

It's Your Fault! Take Back Control of Your Clients
Building the Love into Your Business
Best Practices Any Design Firm Should Know
Rock the Boat, Baby! The Art of Saying No
Where Do We Go From Here? Questions to Inspire You to
 Envision Your Team's Future
Positioning and Specialization
Conflict Management

Staffing Topics

Build It and They Will Come (and Stay)
The Staffing Rule Book
Managing Different Generations and Behavioral Types
You Just Don't Understand: Managing Creatives in a
 Left-Brain Culture

Tactical Topics

Effective Pricing and Proposal Strategies
Advanced Pricing Strategies
Case Studies – Demonstrating Value and Success Metrics
Creating Winning New Business Presentations
 (Capability Pitches)
Creative Briefs – Aligning Expectations and Measuring Results
Pursuing and Qualifying Clients
New Business Development Sucks, Or Does It?
Managing Projects and Clients for High Impact

STRATEGIC TOPICS

IT'S YOUR FAULT! TAKE BACK CONTROL OF YOUR CLIENTS

Do some or all of your clients misbehave? Do you do great work but feel under-appreciated, undervalued, and/or underpaid? Well, perhaps it's your own fault! Yes, clients can be challenging and difficult. Duh! But, if we truly look deeply at ourselves and our industry, the bigger and more important question is: What can we do about? Instead of trying to hit our heads against a brick wall by blaming our clients or accepting the situation as status quo, perhaps we as an industry and as individuals need to step up to the plate and rethink how we engage with, and even train and educate, our clients. This talk is meant to inspire designers, whether they are working in-house or within a creative agency, to take back control of how they manage and communicate with their clients as well as how they position themselves and the industry as whole. What can we all do better to improve the situation? The first step is to own up to our mistakes. This talk will shine a light on those mistakes and provide solutions for how we can all improve so that we can move beyond the blame game.

BUILDING THE LOVE INTO YOUR BUSINESS

Love? In Business? Yes! If your business is lovable, clients and employees will come running toward you with the best projects and great referrals – possibly even arms full of chocolates and roses. But, love isn't a box full of beautifully packaged chocolates or fine wine. It's not a fun poster or even a unique giveaway. It's less tangible and something you give your clients and staff all year long. In this inspiring talk, you'll learn why infusing love across all aspects of your business is important to your long-term success as well as the top 12 strategies I've curated for building and sharing the love.

BEST PRACTICES ANY DESIGN FIRM SHOULD KNOW

Are you curious what other design firms do to succeed? Do you wish you could be a fly on the wall to understand their inner workings? After working with hundreds of leading creative/design teams over the years, I have curated and compiled an evolving list of smart business strategies that define successful firms. This session highlights those top business practices across different areas including organizational structures, staffing strategies, pricing, client and project management, marketing, and new business development. This session provides very practical and actionable strategies that can easily be implemented and are often the foundation of truly great creative teams.

ROCK THE BOAT, BABY! THE ART OF SAYING NO

Is your workload constantly increasing and piled high with deadlines and obligations? Do you struggle with pushing back clients, employees, executives, and strategic partners when they have impossible requests or expectations? Do you often take on more than you can chew? The art of pushing back, saying no, and even being honest with your professional relationships are critical skill sets that many creative lack. We worry about what other people want, think, or need and spend a lot of time doing things for others, often at the risk of hurting ourselves and our own team. We love being the nice guy and are notorious conflict-avoiders. This session will focus on the who, when, where, why, and how of saying "no" to clients, staff, and projects. Learn how to identify opportunities to push back and say no more effectively, without damaging relationships.

STRATEGIC TOPICS (CONTINUED)

POSITIONING AND SPECIALIZATION (NEW TOPIC)

This talk will focus on evaluating, defining and landing on a way to differentiate your firm or services within a highly saturated market. During our time together, we will evaluate how you can look at your business from a 30,000-foot view and the questions you should be asking along with and debate the pro's and con's of being a generalist vs. a specialist. Not so subtle hint: this session will make a strong case for specialization and help you navigate all the perceived challenges and concerns you may have of taking a stand on who you are, who you work with and/or what you do. This talk will give you some food for thought as you begin to explore your positioning and what happens next.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT FOR CREATIVES (NEW TOPIC)

Do you avoid conflict like the plague? Is a client or someone on your team difficult to manage and walking all over you? In this talk you will learn how to improve your relationships with coworkers, clients and managers and strategies by embracing and navigating conflict in the workplace. Various effective conflict resolution techniques will be discussed and explored, that will help you better manage your emotions, avoid the blame game, engage more constructively with others and, ultimately, work through conflict in a practical, step-by-step manner. We will also discuss and explore solutions to common conflicts with our clients, coworkers and management.

STAFFING TOPICS

BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME (AND STAY)

Does your team suffer from low morale, a high turnover rate, and/or are you losing potential candidates to “hipper” creative teams? Has your team's energy level and collaboration stagnated? Is your pool table gathering dust? Creating and, more importantly, evolving your team's culture is more than a mission statement or a culture manifesto (although that helps), it's about doing more than saying. Culture is no longer just for millennials, but resonates across all generations. What are you doing to infuse culture? This talk will focus on leadership skills that drive strong cultures as well as various culture-building strategies that having lasting impact and increase profitability, collaboration, and retention as well attract new candidates. The talk will focus on both on the intangibles and tangibles that shape work environments and highlight the quick-wins, the longer-term strategies, and team-wide processes that define dynamic and successful cultures. Ultimately, if you build it, they will come. But it's up to you.

THE STAFFING RULE BOOK

Don't you wish you had a simple, easy-to-follow rule book for how to hire, organize, manage, and review your team? Are you ready to refine or rethink your team and overall team management to take it to the next level? This talk covers the hard and fast rules for staffing and staff management culled from the mistakes and successes of other creative teams. These rules will help you strategically plan your organizational structure and roles, improve how you hire and manage your team, conduct more effective performance reviews, and much more. Some rules discussed will seem obvious but are often overlooked while other rules may be a bit controversial or push buttons. Either way, the rules will stimulate a robust conversation!

STAFFING TOPICS (CONTINUED)

MANAGING DIFFERENT GENERATIONS AND BEHAVIORAL TYPES

Is there a deep divide between the different generations within your team? Do you struggle with managing members on your team that have very different expectations of what “working” is? Managing a team with widely varying ages and experiences doesn’t have to be a communication nightmare. This session focuses on the core qualities of three generations – Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials (or Gen Y) – and explores the inherent challenges of managing each group. The goal of this session is to explain the context in which your employees respond in the workplace, so that you can improve communications and mitigate potential cross-generational conflicts. You’ll leave this session with information on key characteristics and styles of each generation as well as cross-generational management skills and tips on effectively communicating with each group.

YOU JUST DON’T UNDERSTAND: MANAGING CREATIVES IN A LEFT BRAIN CULTURE

Does your team struggle with getting creatives and analytical, operational staff to communicate and work well together? Many right-brained creative types report to, or collaborate with, left-brained operational managers. Learning the necessary skills to work well together is often elusive but nonetheless essential to running a seamless and efficient organization. This session will help you understand the behavioral and personality differences between left- and right-brain types. In addition, you’ll learn best-practice strategies that improve how creatives and operational teams can better communicate, work with, and manage each other.

TACTICAL TOPICS

EFFECTIVE PROPOSAL AND PRICING STRATEGIES (can be tailored to focus only on pricing strategies)

Do you want to write less proposals and win more engagements? How do you even go about pricing a project? Is there a magical number? During this session you will gain insight and expertise on writing winning proposals that effectively communicate your services, qualifications, voice, and vision as well as creating smart pricing strategies that will help you get paid what you and your team are worth. Learn the steps needed to pre-qualify clients, define objectives, communicate project parameters, and customize your proposals. Discover the common mistakes made and ways to structure and communicate project information and pricing structures that capture your client’s attention and interest.

ADVANCED PRICING STRATEGIES

Are you comfortable with pricing, but want to evolve your thinking and take it to the next level? Do you have long-term clients that you want to turn into retainer clients? This session will reveal new insights and important (yet sometimes subtle) strategies and techniques that will improve how you present and negotiate your fees, including retainer relationships and value-based pricing. Learn how to take current efforts to the next level with a focus less on winning all projects, but winning the most qualified and profitable engagements. Learn ways to refocus attention away from price as a key selection criteria and more towards expertise and value.

TACTICAL TOPICS (CONTINUED)

CASE STUDIES – DEMONSTRATING VALUE AND SUCCESS METRICS

How do you sing your team's praises and truly demonstrate your team's worth and value? Case studies! Yet, most case studies, by in large, miss the mark and aren't written in a way that fully leverage their potential or appeal to prospects. They are essentially just a written dog and pony show, with little substance. This session will explore how to frame the value of your design solutions in a way that resonates with potential clients and demonstrates your team's full value. Learn the ideal framework for successful case studies, including an exploration of various formats and different value-based success metrics that can be used to demonstrate your design team's worth. If written well, case studies are one of the most critical tools in your marketing and new business development arsenal.

CREATING WINNING NEW BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS (capability pitches)

Learn the essential components of a successful new business presentation exploring the who, what, where, when, and how of the all-important new business meeting. This session walks you through the step-by-step processes in planning, organizing, and running a successful in-person capabilities presentation. The best practices presented are culled from both designer and client feedback on experiences with the good, the bad, and the ugly of new business presentations. Learnings include: ways to engage with your client, how to avoid common pitfalls, and the best ways to talk about and present your work and your firm.

CREATIVE BRIEFS – ALIGNING EXPECTATIONS AND MEASURING RESULTS

What is a creative brief? Why do you need one? When do you write one? Learn how to improve how you collaborate with your clients to develop smartly-crafted creative briefs that achieve results. Creative briefs are typically repetitive, long-winded, over reaching, and, at worse, a manifestation of corporate politics and insecurities. The best creative briefs provide a clear set of expectations and define measurable objectives to guide the progress and success of a project. As an added benefit, the creative brief and the development process can express and support the value and power of thoughtful, strategic design in achieving creative and results-driven solutions.

PURSUIING AND QUALIFYING CLIENTS

Do you rely on referrals for most of your new business? Are you allowing existing clients to shape your firm's direction? In this session, you will learn tips and tools for pursuing, not only attracting, the leads you want. You will gain an understanding of the step-by-step processes of qualifying prospects and identifying opportunities to ensure they are the right fit for your firm. You will learn to streamline the intake process so that the opportunities pursued fully support and enhance your business model.

NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SUCKS, OR DOES IT?

Do you avoid new business development like the plague? Do you define new business as "cold calling," "sales," "marketing"? Are you ready to transform how you think about new business? This session will focus on strategies for building authentic, one-to-one relationships with prospects that take time, focus, ongoing nurturing, and a change in tactics. But, when done well, can be a fun, challenging, and a rewarding aspect of any successful business. In this session, you'll learn why you need to change your thinking about what new business development really is and better ways to do it.

TACTICAL TOPICS (CONTINUED)**MANAGING PROJECTS AND CLIENTS FOR HIGH IMPACT**

Are you in reactive mode when you manage clients and projects? Are you overwhelmed and constantly fighting fires? In this session you will learn how to move from a reactive management process to a more proactive, planned management process. Whether you work within a creative agency/firm or in-house, this session will explore key communication tools and strategies that result in better managed, long-term, and mutually rewarding client relationships. You will be guided through the entire relationship cycle, from project initiation to project close out, with a focus on high-level best practices that facilitate a more seamless client and project management process. The presentation will focus on common client and project management challenges and you will learn effective best practice solutions for a variety of client-designer relationship challenges.