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**How Motivational Speaking Can Change to Empower Latina Women**

**CEP 462 Community and Engagement**

**Senior Project Final Write Up**

Abstract

Motivational speakers choose to share their messages to attentive audiences in hopes of uplifting and inspiring listeners to make positive change. However, despite their encouraging spirits, motivational speakers can strive to be more inclusive by acknowledging how women of color encounter certain barriers such as cost, representation, and specificity in programs that may prevent them from feeling the empowerment that is supposed to come along with a speaker's moving message. For my project, I looked at four categories that made up the larger themes of my research: background information on motivational speaking, improving accessibility, focusing on representation, and program specificity aimed for women of color. I analyzed various sources that provided background and additional context for my project question, and then organized that collective information in the form of a literature review. Next, I reached out to motivational speakers, and interviewed three Latina women who are active in the motivational speaking event community, in order to inquire about how cost, representation, and program specificity influences or incentivizes motivational speaking events. In evaluating current literature regarding the motivational business and the importance of representation, I've explored how speaker background, market, and advertising influences tickets cost; how representation in speakers lead to empowerment

and affirmation; and how program specificity for women of color encourages inclusivity and encouragement. Lastly, I combined the knowledge gathered from my sources and interviews to demonstrate how I believe that it is important to change certain factors of the motivational business so that it can positively transform the impact of speakers on women of color.

### Introduction

The world of motivational speaking is far and wide. There are multiple programs, conferences, and events through which speakers choose to share their messages to attentive audiences. However, just how accessible and relatable are these events, messages, and speakers to communities of people who typically aren't engaged with this line of work? For my senior project, I chose to analyze the motivational speaking business in order to help determine how this field can be more inclusive to a broader audience, specifically to Latina women. As someone who is passionate about representation and uplifting marginalized communities, I chose to take on this project because I was interested on how inclusive motivational speaking events actually were. The past couple of years I noticed how my mom and her friends (all of whom are Latina women) began attending motivational conferences and found them to be very inspiring. Still, I was interested on how the speakers at these conferences adapted their practices to fit different audiences from diverse backgrounds. That is why for my senior project I researched **how motivational speakers can empower Latina women by acknowledging barriers such as cost accessibility, representation in speakers, and specificity in their programs.**

### Final Product, Goals, and Significance

For this project, I researched the motivational speaking business. I wanted to better understand what pushes attendees to buy tickets, and also how speakers themselves determine the costs of these types of events. By analyzing the business aspect of motivational/personal development conferences, I learned more about their general impact and the tactics and methods that speakers use in order to become successful spokespeople. I also studied the history of motivational speaking in order to better understand the context in which it started and how it transformed into the business that it is today. Next, I looked at the world's top paid motivational speakers to get a general idea of what the demographic of speakers were. This helped me in understanding the startling lack of representation there was in speakers. I also looked at the positive effect of cultural program specificity in order to determine its impacts on an audience. Then, I reached out to speakers and motivational speaking event attendees so that I could interview them about their personal experiences. Lastly, based off of my findings, I provided suggestions on how to keep motivational conferences accessible to the Latina community.

My final product for this project includes this research paper that outlines all of my findings and processes. This paper includes an analysis of my results and detailed information on the steps I took while conducting my research. In addition to my paper, I developed the list of suggestions, which holds significance because they will be the model for the motivational speaking event that my mom and her peers will be hosting this coming fall.

Overall, this project holds personal significance to me because I grew up in a Los Angeles community which is predominantly Hispanic. Additionally, this past summer I had a lot of recurring conversations with my mom about her experiences attending motivational speaking events. And although she found that she generally enjoyed the events, she found that in some ways they were lacking, especially when looking at cost accessibility and representation in the speakers themselves. She wasn't alone in feeling this, so some of her peers and her decided they would host their own event called "The Power In Me" that would be held in Irvine, CA. The main audience would be Latina-identifying women, whom the organizers had predominantly met and networked with at past personal development events. So, it was initially through these conversations with my mom that I had decided what my senior project topic would be.

I strongly believe that Latina community has a lot to gain by attending motivational speaking events. My main goal is to understand the impacts of these events, while ultimately attempting to bridge the gap of accessibility for Latina women. I think this work is significant because I feel passionate about how motivational/self-help events appear to be inclusive, although they are actually more exclusive. I want an underrepresented group like Latina women to have access to these events because I believe accessibility is the first step forward to bridging a larger gap in the system.

### Methodology

In deciding how I wanted to approach my research, I developed a methodology that helped me outline what exactly I wanted to do throughout the year. The methodology included the following steps:

1. First, I knew that I had to find resources that would give me a little more background on the motivational speaking business and also some information pertaining to the three components of my research question: cost accessibility, the importance of representation in speakers, and why cultural specificity in motivational speaking programs can be beneficial. So, I started by looking at literature like research papers, journals, statistics, reading and skimming books by people in the motivational speaking business.
2. Then, I annotated and analyzed the readings in order to write my literature review.
3. Next, I wanted to reach out to motivational speakers to ask them questions about the steps they take when hosting an event. However, after a few weeks of no responses from higher profile speakers, I reached out to more local speakers that I met through UW public lectures. I also connected with my mom and some of her peers who have had experience in attending motivational events. We had conversations about what they looked for in speakers and their past experiences at motivational speaking events.
4. I then synthesized all this information in order to being outlining my list of suggestions that I would be sending to “The Power In Me” planning committee. Additionally, I also used this information to draft and write my final research paper.

### Literature Review

For my literature review, I looked at various sources that provided background and additional context for my project question. This section of my final write up is

organized into four categories that make up the larger themes of my senior project: background information on motivational speaking, improving accessibility, focusing on representation in speakers, and cultural program specificity aimed for Latina women. This literature review focuses on the information from sources that I've researched to help shape the progress of my project. With these sources, I developed answers to my question and have gotten a better understanding of how the motivational speaking business works.

### *I. Background*

According to Western legend, public speaking first became popular and considered an art in Greece. In his book *Yes You Can! Behind the Hype and Hustle of the Motivational Biz*, Jonathan Black wrote, "The Ancient Greeks considered oratory an art... You got the job by persuading the citizens with reason and eloquence," (p. 30). Those involved in Athenian democracy used speeches to advance in their political careers, and public speaking during this time was used as a method to progress. Throughout the rest of history, there have been effective speakers (such as Jesus of Nazareth, Savonarola during the Renaissance period, and Daniel Webster to name just a few) who have also used their speech to move others and persuade a crowd into action. However, it wasn't until the nineteenth century that America saw the rise of the professional speaker.

The United States lyceum movement in the 1800s grew very popular for speakers to perform educational lectures to the public. Featured speakers like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Horace Greeley were initially modestly paid to speak at the lyceums.

They would charge about about \$10 to \$20 depending on where they were and who they spoke to. Later, around 1874, a man named John Vincent began giving a series of talks in which he would travel to different towns throughout the U.S. and charge each city a flat fee for his programs. This tradition of public speaking continued to grow strong in and outside of the U.S. as people looked for inspiration in times of war, during religious events, and whenever a crowd needed affirmation.

According to Jonathan Black, it wasn't until the publication of the books *The Power of Positive Thinking* by Norman Vincent Peale (1952) and *Success Through a Positive Mental Attitude* by W. Clement Stone (1960) that modern motivational speakers began growing popular reputations. Particularly, it was during the 1950s that a new generation of speakers started sharing messages of personal transformation. Jonathan Black wrote, "In previous eras, the majority of speakers had tied change to example and imposition... Now we were encouraged to turn inward, to examine ourselves and discover new modes of belief and behavior," (p. 40). This change that influenced listeners that their highest potential lies within themselves began with the book *Motivation and Personality* by Abraham Maslow.

Maslow's ideas in *Motivation and Personality* greatly influenced one of the most successful motivational speakers in the U.S. today, Tony Robbins. With his book *Awaken the Giant Within*, Robbins began mass marketing his weekend seminars and mastery programs. This marketing led people to believe that reading the book was not enough, they needed to buy the program and listen to the speaker in real life. With the success of Tony Robbins, motivational speaking became widely popular and a

business within itself. Today, there are countless successful motivational speakers that charge steep prices to attend their programs. The market for public speaking continues to grow, but I argue that accessibility, especially to women of color, remains limited.

## *II. Cost Accessibility*

Motivational speakers are expensive. Buying a ticket to a motivational event can easily cost more than \$500, and in some cases can even be closer to \$1,000 in order to get in. For example, attending a Tony Robbins conference (who is one of the most popular motivational speakers in the business right now) can cost upward \$800. Even someone like Deborah Doras, a motivational speaker that focuses on the empowerment of Latina women, charges around \$300 for every event. With these prices, the events that motivational speakers host make it hard for people with a lower income to attend.

According to a study done by the Institute for Women's Policy Research, "women of all major racial and ethnic groups earn less than men of the same group," (2018). Findings show that this is especially true for women of color. In 2017, Hispanic women who worked full-time only earned 62.2 percent (amounting to \$603) of White men's median weekly earning. For Black women, this percentage was slightly higher at 67.7, meaning the median weekly earnings were \$657. In her article "Women of Color and the Gender Wage Gap," Milia Fisher wrote, "For women of color, the explained factors that contribute to the wage gap are often different than those of white women due to the fact that women of color frequently work in



lower-paying jobs, work fewer hours, and experience more substantial caregiving burdens,” (2015). The fact that women of color are specifically susceptible to elements of lower income and additional caregiving responsibilities demonstrates how high ticket prices for motivational speaker events can lead to a dilemma in cost accessibility for these type of programs.

However, what exactly makes motivational speaker events so costly? To begin, ticket costs mainly reflect the price the speaker charged for them to be there. These prices are based on the speaker’s experience, popularity, and the length of the given event. Additional costs that can contribute to ticket figures also include the speaker’s travel expenses such as lodging, transportation, and meals. While all these factors contribute to how much a speaker charges, ultimately they are selling an experience. In his blog *The Speaker Lab*, motivational speaker Grant Baldwin offers advice for speakers who are just entering the motivational business.

In a blog post called “How Much to Charge for Speaking?,” Baldwin identifies three main factors that contribute to speaker cost: market, experience, and marketing materials. He explains that a speaker can charge more depending on the market they are speaking in. For example, he advises that a speaker charges more if they are speaking at a corporate conference versus at a non-profit event. For experience, he wrote, “The more experience you have as a speaker, the more you can charge,” (2017). Lastly, Baldwin describes how marketing materials such as a speaker’s website and demo video influence the cost of a speaker. He advises, “...decision makers judge speakers by their marketing materials... if you’re going to charge

\$5,000, your materials should look as good if not better than other speakers at that price point,” (2017). As Baldwin explains, a motivational speaker is selling an experience whose price is based off of their own personal success in the field and how well they advertise themselves. Factors such as location and audience type also contribute to ticket prices, but if speakers want their motivational messages to be heard, shouldn't they also try to be more conscious of how ticket fees can be limiting in who actually hears their content?

I'm aware that the motivational business is a business for a reason. Speakers are trying to make money off of their messages, it's their job. Although ticket prices mostly reflect the cost of the speaker themselves, other factors such as number of volunteers, food, and materials handed out during the event contribute to the overall ticket fee. Still, at its core, motivational work aims to inspire and provoke positive change into people's lives. I believe that these type of events should not just be limited to those who can afford the steep prices. Motivational speakers, especially those who have already found success, should feel the need to make space for women of color such Latina women.

### *III. Representation in Speakers*

The importance of representation is significant. In the book *Representation Matters: (Re)Articulating Collective Identities in a Postcolonial World*, writers Anette Hoffmann and Esther Peeren explain how representation and identity are intrinsically linked. They wrote, "... representation inevitably influences the way identities are constituted and asserted... 'Those who are relatively powerless to

represent themselves as complex human beings... become invisible and nameless. Identity is shaped, in part, by recognition, absence of recognition, or misrecognition by others' (Weaver 243)," (p. 14). Given this social reality, having representation is essential to reaching empowerment. Representation of women of color in motivational speaking events, therefore, gives power to the Latina community. Seeing themselves represented in the speakers they paid to hear not only allows the speaker to spread their message, but also provides more opportunities for women of color (such as Latina women) to have their identities shaped by the positive messages that motivational speakers share.

Additionally, in the article "Representation in the Classroom: The Effect of Own-Race Teachers on Student Achievement," authors Anna Egalite, Brian Kisida, and Marcus Winters conducted a study in which they measured students' from grades 3 to 10 achievement when teachers of the same race/ethnicity were assigned to their classroom. At the end of their study, they found "small but significant positive effects when... students and teachers share[ed] the same race/ethnicity because such teachers can serve as role models, mentors, advocates, or cultural translators," (p. 44). These findings indirectly address my project question of how motivational speakers can empower women of color through representation. If the speaker herself is a woman of color, she has a higher probability of influencing the women of color in the audience. This representation creates a space where the women of color in the audience can identify with the speaker at a more personal level. As demonstrated by the study, when there is a situation in which the teacher (in this case, the motivational

speaker) is the same race/ethnicity as the students (the women of color in the audience), there comes a level of shared experiences through which the speaker can truly act as a mentor.

#### *IV. Cultural Specificity in Programs*

Depending on when and where motivational speakers choose to speak, they use different themes to help guide their programs and captivate their audiences. Their leadership styles can influence, motivate, and enable their audience to pursue an idea of success, therefore contributing to the overall effectiveness of the speaker. However, in order to truly impact listeners, I argue that speakers should incorporate cultural specificity in their programs and leadership styles. In the article “Cultural Specificity and Leadership,” authors Angelica-Nicoleta Onea and Maria Tatarusanu inquired whether there are special qualities that some people have that help them influence others. In response, they answered that culture was one of the important variables in influencing others because “the ability to feel, think and act in accordance to what it [culture] transmits can be an advantage in one’s position as a leader of a group,” (p. 746). As with race and ethnicity, understanding or being a part of one’s culture affects how and what an audience takes away from a motivational speaker (ie. the leader of the program).

Motivational speakers implementing cultural specificity into their programs not only impacts the effectiveness of their words, but it also helps create a space where the speaker can act as a cultural decoder for the audience. By changing their leadership style accordingly, they can exhibit a particular style of leadership that may

be more appropriate to the specific cultural characteristics of a certain group. Additionally, in the book *Mixed Methods Research and Culture-Specific Interventions: Program, Design, and Evaluation*, John Hitchcock wrote, “Context and culture matter when one attempts to influence, or assess, the behavior, thoughts, patterns, and perceptions of others,” (p. 2). Culture greatly influences a program’s design, implementation, and evaluation. In relation to motivational speakers and what they choose to share as their message, I believe that evidence has shown how important it is that culture is considered throughout the program development process.

In this section, I provided evidence as to how culture impacts program development and talk about the importance of cultural specificity within programs as a whole. I argued that through program cultural specificity, a motivational speaker (who is acting as a leader) can better impact their audience if they incorporate a more culturally aware lens in their programs. If the listeners are Latina women, then the speaker should try to relay their message by accommodating to their audiences’ unique experiences as Latinas. Although Latina women come from all different backgrounds and cultures, being a woman of color is a unique experience in and of itself. There can be a shared sense of community due to the common experiences that these women face. If programs specifically addressed the unique experiences that women of color encounter, this can help bridge the gap of “ignorance... [that] can lead to generation of barriers or misinterpretation of attitudes and behaviors of the group's leaders,” (Onea and Tatarusanu, p. 747).

### V. Conclusion

In this literature review, I provided some sources that have helped guide my research and have influenced the progress of my project. I have learned how the history of motivational speaking has influenced cost accessibility, representation in speakers, and cultural specificity in programs. I've studied how ticket prices, a lack of diverse speakers, and how adopting a more cultural lense in programs can increase the accessibility of motivational events for Latina women. In conclusion, as I move forward to the analysis of results, I hope to show how motivational speakers can be more inclusive for Latina listeners.

### Analysis of Results

Today, motivational speaking has become a profitable business where speakers can be paid thousands of dollars to share their message. Because the business is highly lucrative, speakers are available on many different platforms (such as conferences or online) and at many different scaled (both big and small). However, according to websites like SpeakersHub, which is an online database and blog that connects motivational speakers, more than half (56%) of the world's top 50 most popular motivational speakers are white men. 20% are ment of color, and the rest are white women.

Despite the high demand for motivational speakers, there is a startling lack of representation. Consistently, those in the motivational speaking industry align with people who hold a level of privilege and positions of power. It is almost always business, political, or tech power-holders that are capitalizing off of this business, sometimes

charging upwards five figures. So, with this information in mind, it's important to me that this industry can grow in a way that makes room for more diverse audiences of all different backgrounds. Especially when I think of the Latina women in my community who are participating more in this line of business, I want to see that they feel comfortable in these spaces, that they can see themselves in the speakers they are listening to, and that they feel a connection to the messages that they are hearing.

When looking at cost accessibility, I used the information from my literature review to further research how the "Power in Me" organizers can keep their event pocket friendly. First, they are not hiring any big-name speakers but are keeping the speakers local instead. They also rented a location that wasn't too costly, and it was even a priority of theirs to keep the event price-friendly in the first place. Additionally, I am suggesting that in order to keep all future event cost accessible to Latina women, organizers learn to adopt the TEDx ticket price model.

TEDx is a local gathering where live TED talks and performances are shared with a community. However, unlike actual TED Talks, TEDx events are fully planned and coordinated independently, on a community-by-community basis. TEDx event can charge an attendance fee, but according to the organization's rules and regulations, tickets can be no more than \$100 USD, and the money should only go towards event and operating costs. This type of model doesn't allow organizers or speakers to dictate high ticket prices and most importantly provides a cap on how much ticket prices can be, therefore taking cost accessibility into consideration.

Additionally, from my research, I found that representation in speakers and cultural specificity go hand in hand. They are both strongly related because culture greatly influences a program's design, implementation, and evaluation. In relation to motivational speakers, it is important that audience members are able to see themselves in who they are listening to while also knowing that the program will be catered to their experiences as Latina women. I suggest that moving forward, organizers hire locally and perhaps ask some questions concerning demographics when attendees are buying their tickets. I also suggest that speakers ask gauging questions before they go begin delivering their questions so they know and understand who they are speaking to.

In addition to researching the three main components of my research question, it was also a part of my methodology to reach out to motivational speakers and interview them. First, I spoke with Priya Frank, who currently works for the Equity Team at the Seattle Art Museum and has a focus on creating inclusive spaces. I met Priya through a UW public lecture called Memory and Place. She facilitated the event, and I met up with her a couple weeks later to learn more about her experiences as a public and motivational speaker. I learned a lot from Priya, and she stressed to me that one of the most important part of being a speaker is being yourself unapologetically. She said that it was important to be genuine and vulnerable, and that it was best to lead from joy. She spoke of how when speaking at events, it was very important to make the stage feel approachable to the audience, and adding things like a rug, or chair with a small table, makes the space more comfortable.



Additionally, I also interviewed Jaimée Marsh and Leilani Lewis, who are advisors and speakers who work at the Q Center at the University of Washington. When asking about their experiences giving speeches, they each had such unique styles of speaking. For example, Jaimée liked to ask gauging questions to the audience beforehand while Leilani mentioned that she liked to get as much details about the event and research to whom the events she would be speaking at were targeted to. However, they both agreed that it was very important to meet people where they are and that a speaker should not be afraid to discuss identity. All the speakers I interviewed (Priya, Jaimée, and Leilani) believed that identity was an important topic to discuss because it guides how audiences listen to and interpret messages when receiving them.

Next, I interviewed three experiences motivational speaking event attendees in order to ask them about their experiences attending events. I interviewed April Escamilla, Maricela Gutierrez, and Diana Jacquez; all of which are Latina identifying women. These three women had a lot of similar things to say about motivational speakers and events. They all agreed that when they heard Latina speakers, they found themselves to be more comfortable in the audience and they could relate more to what was being said. Maricela and April both shared experiences in which they have heard different women speak at motivational events and felt that although that speaker was sharing a lot of personal information, they just couldn't relate to what was being said. This has only happened to them with non-Latina, white speakers. Diana shared that although it is important to her to hear a message that is coming from a woman's perspective, gender is not the only thing

that she can connect to and she feels more connected to Latina and POC speakers' experiences.

All three of these ladies also shared that although motivational speaking is a popular business right now, they feel that there are some speakers that make a lot of money by selling their own or other people's trauma. Ultimately, they all felt like representation in speakers was the most important part of motivational speaking events because it provides a connection between them (the audience) and the speaker.

Lastly, after doing my literature review and interviews, I compiled, condensed, and synthesized all my findings in order to make the list of recommendations that I will send to "The Power In Me" organizers. The following are six recommendations that I have written based off of my research:

- Get to know your audience beforehand by asking gauging questions to better read the room.
- Follow the TEDx ticket price method/policy in order to keep events cost accessible and price friendly.
- Speakers should plan the stories that they want to tell, drawing from personal anecdotes so that listeners receive a level of authenticity.
- Understand that how the event is being marketed and where it is being held will attract who comes to they event - keep this in mind when moving forward with event planning.
- Understand how the history of motivational speaking has shaped it into the business it is today. Use this history to rewrite what it can be for different

audiences (ie Latina women) beyond those who traditionally hold positions of power and privilege.

- Make the speaker approachable by adding furniture (like a rug or couch) to the stage. This helps bridge the gap between speaker and audience.

### What I Learned

I learned a lot this past year while completing this project. First and foremost, I have increased my understanding on the motivational speaking business. What I especially found to be the most interesting was learning about the origins of motivational speaking because it has helped me better understand how this industry aligns with people who hold a level of privilege and positions of power. Going into this project, I kept questioning why the motivational speaking business was such a white-dominated industry. Now I understand that it was first popularized by white men and its history has impacted the way that it has been shaped today.

I also learned about the importance of representation and cultural program specificity. Beforehand, I feel like these were terms that I had a very surface level of understanding about. However, after conducting my research and reading several sources and case studies, I see and understand the impact of representation and program specificity. It is so important that listeners see themselves in the teachers, because teachers can act like a cultural translator, role model, advocate, and mentor. Representation creates a space where Latina women can identify the important cultural variables that influence them. Seeing representation affects the program being delivered because it not only influences the effectiveness of a speaker's words, but it also helps

create a space where the program's design, implementation, and evaluation is more impactful.

What I've learned while doing this project also goes beyond the research that I've conducted. Personally, I feel as though I have grown in my understanding of myself and others. Having to take the time to intentionally talk to people and put myself out there has affected how I perceive others and myself. Having the opportunity to speak to such inspiring people about topics that I otherwise would probably never speak to them about has opened my eyes. I feel grateful that I have had this opportunity, especially because I feel very passionate about topics of equity and social justice. Seeing firsthand the drive and tenacity of leaders in my community has made me realize that I enjoy community outreach. Moving forward from this project and this final year of my college education, I want to make sure that I enter a career field that gives me the space to grow with others and speak with those who feel passionately about what they are fighting for. Overall, I am glad to have researched this topic because I know that my research will be used for real-life purposes and it has also taught me a lot about time management, self-care, and confidence.

## Appendix One

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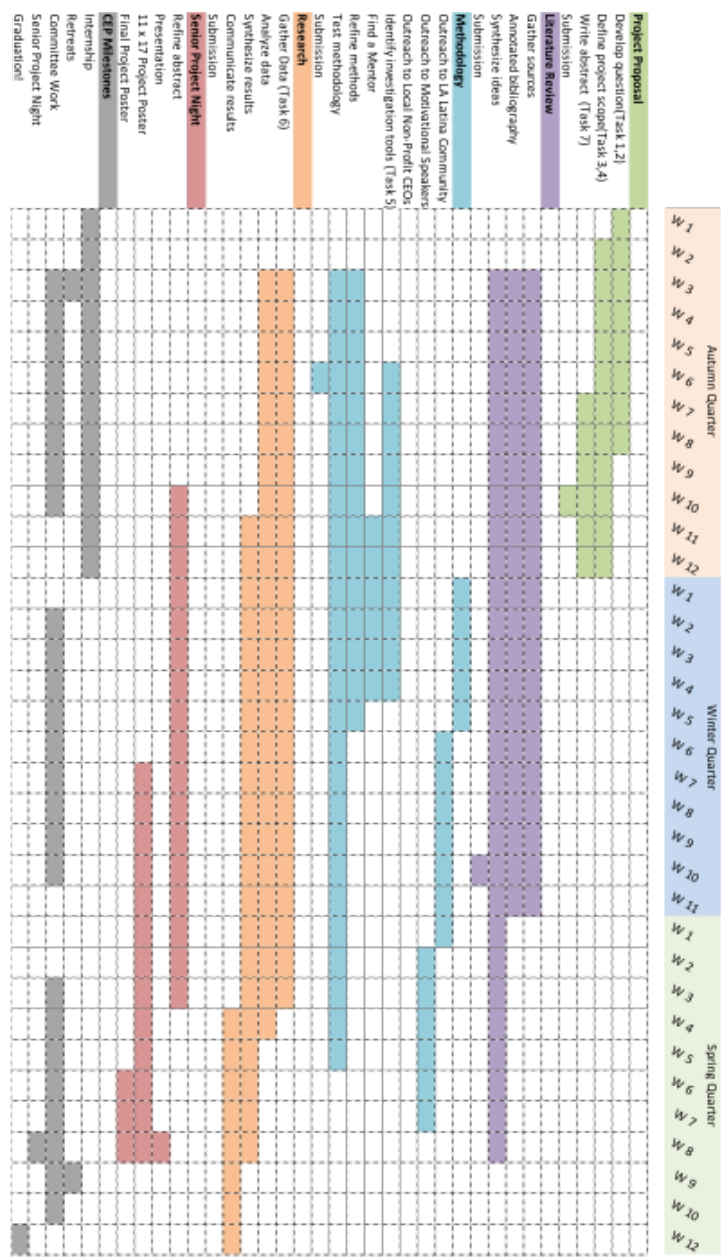
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# Appendix Two - Detailed Methodology



### Appendix Three - Popular Motivational Speakers Demographics Chart

#### SpeakerHub - The World's Top 50 Most Popular Motivational Speakers

