

Laylee: Let's talk money because as a speaker, this is often one of the most misunderstood and intriguing parts of the process. I'm actually interviewing in this episode, multiple event hosts, and they are giving us a real look at how they handle paying their speakers, what's included when. Speaker fees aren't possible and why compensation and payment can look so different from event to event.

And from speaker to speaker, welcome back to the Le Ma Podcast. I am so glad that you're here for another behind the scenes episode. And as part of my sought after speaker system course, I am actually having these full interviews. With multiple event hosts to uncover everything from speaker selection to of course, how they handle compensation.

Now, inside the Sought After Speaker System course, you can access the full uncut conversations. But for this episode, we've pulled together some of the most insightful highlights for you to be able to learn. All about compensation and value, what you can realistically expect when you get booked as a speaker in a creative industry event, and everything in between.

So you're gonna hear a variety of perspectives and I can't wait for you to dive in. So let's get going. In this clip, Elizabeth Henson shares why she doesn't pay her speakers a fee, but still make sure that they walk away with opportunities for revenue, relationships, and resources. Let's talk about compensation and value.

Money is like obviously one of the most intriguing questions for speakers to learn about. So do you pay your speakers, and if so, what does that structure look like?

Elizabeth: So I do not, I do help sometimes with travel or with room and board occasionally, but I let them know that they are allowed to, you know, make a pitch to grow their list.

And, you know, the way I look at it, if a speaker has a working funnel, they know how much money they can make. You know, based on the audience size and being in the room, and most of the time they're gonna make a lot more money than I would pay them in compensation anyways, so, yeah, no, I do not. But we do have a pretty cool, like, package.

They obviously, you know, get a ticket to the event they get. Um, video and social proof and all the things we try to take, you know, really good care of them. We cover their food here and there. It's, it's a whole thing, but yeah, I don't actually pay them money.

Laylee: Yeah. So it, they're not paid a fee. Right. But they are compensated through potentially travel accommodations and then like meals.

Elizabeth: Yeah, but it's kind of like they can either stay with us or they have to get their own place. I'm not necessarily getting them their own hotel room. So what we've done the past two years has gotten a really big, like beach house, and I offer to, you know, pay for their room there, or they can get it at like a super discounted rate.

We've done it both ways, but the way I look at it is like they're. Essentially able to monetize my audience. Like I said, I'm not asking them to promote, so they're not filling the room with their people. I'm rolling out the red carpet, like here's 50 of my really invested human beings, and you know, everyone that's been on my stage has made sales and made money.

Laylee: Hmm. You don't find that it's hard for your speakers. Even though you're selling on the same stage, do you find that there's any kind of like difficulty with selling both?

Elizabeth: That's a really good question. So last year, absolutely not. I did find this year that I think we had, I think I coached my people up to Good.

Laylee: Well, and you go last, so like. What? Yeah. What's the effect on you in that?

Elizabeth: Yeah. Yeah. So this year was a little bit different. Like I did notice a difference and it wasn't that there was competition, but there was so many exciting opportunities. Yeah. That I'm like, okay, I do need to think about that a little bit.

Moving forward. Because even though the offers were wildly different Yeah, there was, they were still getting hit with a lot of decisions. Right. Yeah. So that's something that I'm kind of considering what it's gonna look like next year. But in general, I got, I got the same conversions this year. It just took a little bit more of the follow-ups.

But I did notice at the event that my sales were lower than last year, but Okay. It was the same amount of speakers. But like I said, a lot of them are my community members, so I am like, mm-hmm. Helping them with their pitches at my own, like I did my, my own event, my job too. Well, I was like, two of them literally launched the same week I was doing the follow up and I was like, I should have caught that.

That's funny. But they, you know, its like, I like to see them all win. There's really nothing better than the ripple effect of someone that I've helped with their offer. Like completely nail it, so.

Laylee: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And if, I mean, I, like you said, it's interesting to note too, like. You're not just looking at your in the room sales, you're looking at the funnel afterward and the way that you're setting it up, which we teach in our course as well as like how to get paid even if things are unpaid.

That perspective from Elizabeth shows how even without direct pay speakers can gain significant value from an event. Next up, Jordan Gill explains how she structured both virtual and in-person events with different tiers for keynotes, panels, and even VIP speaker spots. So in the past, have you paid your speakers?

If so, what's that structure look like? Has it been flat fee, travel accommodations, a mix, whatever?

Jordan Gill: Yes. So I. Have a few structures. So virtual. My first virtual conference, I did not pay my speakers only like affiliate stuff. And then the other five, I did pay my speakers, but it was like. I don't know, like two, I think it was like 250 bucks.

And then I think my later ones, it may have gone up to like 750 for like a keynote spot or something. And this was for virtual? This was for virtual, yeah. Okay. Mm-hmm. And again, I, I've never required my speakers to promote, I've never required my speakers to market because I recognize that's my job. Even though speakers can help, I want.

It's very important for me to like, let them know that like, I chose you because I know you're gonna bring value on the stage. And like, I need that to be like, period. And if you share, awesome. Love it. But, um, that's virtual. And then in person, I did a few different things. So I had, let's see, four keynote spots.

And then I had in the, at the first event I had a panel. Actual numbers are. My keynotes, I wanna say were 1500 pay. And then also their hotels were covered and transportation to and from the hotel. So that was the keynotes package and break. The panel was one panel and they were paid \$750 and their hotel was not accommodated or, or transportation.

And then I also took a, a. Whatever token out of Lay's book. 'cause I spoke at the very first Creative Educator conference and I thought it was brilliant. Your

lightning speakers, isn't that what they called, yeah, lightning. I loved it because again, there's like, my stages are not necessarily. Like, I kind of like the, the short ted talky ish vibe.

And at the same time, I think that's a really good opportunity for a lot of people who have not gotten experience to actually get that experience. And so we had a VIP speaker, so it was like a VIP package where they were speaking on stage for 10 minutes about whatever they wanted. We had like a speaker coach who came in and like helped them.

Develop their talks and all of that. And then they, you know, got their talks videoed and some photos, and then we did like a VIP dinner. So it was like a whole package scenario. And so that one wasn't me paying them, that was them paying me. And so it was like kind of sponsorship, kind of like it was a mix because I liked what you did, but then I also.

Had done a package myself where I worked with a speaking coach and to get a B-roll, what do they call it? Speaker reel. Mm-hmm. And it cost me 15 grand, but I didn't even actually get to speak like to anybody. Like it was to like an empty audience. Right. So, 'cause the point was to get the video footage right.

And so I was like, well. I feel like people would pay less and actually get to speak in front of people. Yeah. So like that's also what I'm gonna do. So, so I had that as like an option too. So a couple different variations of things. It's either I pay you because there's an invitation and whatnot, and or you pay to get the experience on the stage and have that spot.

Laylee: Hmm, that makes sense. Which I know

Jordan Gill: has a lot, again, brings up a lot of emotions with people. Feelings.

Laylee: Yeah. Feelings, yeah. And like, and there's so much nuance between, you know, from event to event, so. Yeah. Yeah. Well, yeah. Um, so, so you had kind of a tiered system, which is not uncommon at all. So you based it on kind of like keynote versus panel versus the other options.

Has there ever been a time that you. Based off of qualification or experience or is it just kind of like flat across the whatever position you've selected them for?

Jordan Gill: Yeah, it's been flat across Okay. Like I haven't done, but again, I don't, I don't go after the people who generally have those types of packages like made up.

It's again, usually business owners who happen to speak versus like speakers. Who speak like full time, like, as like a thing, you know?

Laylee: Yeah, yeah. Which is who, that's who's watching this right now is like, most of them have their own businesses. Their speaking is like for other purposes. Yes.

Jordan Gill: Yeah. For marketing purposes.

Yeah, because I know, and, and I had to like look at myself, especially about the people paying to speak on my stage. I was like, mm-hmm. Okay. Like I see other people's reaction and like, what is my actual reaction? Yeah. And like, would I do that? And the answer is yes. Like I would pay to be on people's stages if it's the right stage.

Like if I feel like my people are in the audience and there's an opportunity there because I, I speak to market and so if I'm willing to put marketing budget behind that as like a marketing expense, then I would do that. So then that let me know. Okay, I feel good. Like I don't feel weird necessarily about that.

Laylee: Jordan's approach highlights the many creative ways event hosts can think about compensation, depending on format and budget. Now let's hear from Amber Housley, who's used everything from flat fees to hotel coverage to coupon redemptions as part of her speaker packages. So let's talk about compensation and value.

So do you pay your speakers and if so, are you open to sharing what that structure looks like? Flat fee, travel accommodations, all the things.

Amber: Yeah, so I've done the whole gamut. So there's times when we have done paid ones, and most of my events, and I'll tell you this too because I know I have friends who are speakers for like corporations Yes.

And things like that who have. \$10,000 speaking fees and budgets and things like that. Yeah, and I am a small business. I'm not a, I'm not a corporation, and so when I have to line up my event budgets, like I can think of the range of like, payments have probably been anywhere from like two 50 to maybe some that were a thousand at one time or another.

In more recent years, not so much, and so in more recent years it's more of like, I'll cover the hotel for when you arrive and then I'll give you the opportunity to go and use like coupon redemptions that that was something I brought back this

year. This was something that I actually did. Years ago, a inspired retreat when I had a full speaker lineup there and it worked beautifully.

There were some speakers that were walking away with like \$2,000 in their pocket because of every re, like so many redemptions because they really went out there and spread it and marketed it and did it on their behalf. And so it kind of becomes an opportunity if the speaker wants to share it, if they have it in their bandwidth or you know, their own time or how important it's to them to be able to do that.

To have a. Opportunity where, so the coupon code, the way it works, just so you can understand what I'm saying is, is that usually we'll go and do like a hundred dollars off as the coupon code, and then it'll be a hundred dollars to the speaker. And so it ends up being \$200 minus off of the registration of like the host itself, right?

Ends up being kind of like a sale ticket. And I find that works like really well right now. My hope always is again, is that speakers, and I, I know this for me as a person who doesn't ask for speaker payments, like when I get asked to things, I don't, I don't ask for that because I look at any room that I go into as an opportunity to really serve and show up.

And I, I'm leading more in service. It's nice if they work with me after, but I'm more interested in my own relationship, building my own connections and really like amplifying that. And so that's me as a. Speaker, like what I'm looking to do when I'm going into rooms, and so I've kind of like taken on that same kind of thought for the speakers as well in my events.

Laylee: Yeah. Yeah, that makes sense. When you did have your, like in the times that you were paying speaker fees Yep. Did you have like a tiered system or was it like all speakers get the same or how did that work?

Amber: Yeah, so the ones that were paid a higher fees had huge audiences. So that was, and so that was really what was leveraged.

It was usually like the tiered one was based on like the amount of reach that they could potentially have. And, and that's what we found actually did happen is the ones that did have larger, I mean just naturally that's gonna happen. They have more reach, they have more eyeballs on their particular things.

And so they were the ones that were getting the higher amounts when they're having like a hundred thousand followers or more. Now granted, this was like

how many years ago? Eight, 10 years ago when vanity numbers were very important, right? Yeah. This is when actually the things got in front of the people, right?

Whereas like now a person who has 50,000 has a hundred thousand. There's like no saying that any of that reach is actually gonna happen, right? And yeah, I do believe in like being fair and balanced like across the board now too, like that it was different like I'd say, you know, eight to 10 years ago. And so now it's kind of like, I like things just to be all even across.

So then there isn't like a weird. Thing happening where some people are like, feel like they're getting something and other people aren't. I just don't like that vibe.

Laylee: Yeah. Yeah. I'm So, I go back and forth because I feel like for me it's like the qualification of being like a really experienced speaker versus somebody who's like, it's their first couple of times speaking that to me.

I could see. I, not that I, I don't do that. I pay all my speakers the same. But if I, if I ever did, I think that's what would probably push me over the edge. So I could see experimenting with all of it. But yeah. That's super helpful to like, hear that outlook Absolutely too. And especially knowing that I think you're so right.

Like eight years ago it was so different on the

Amber: internet. It was, it was so, such a different like ball game in all the ways.

Laylee: Amber's perspective really emphasizes how event compensation has evolved over time and why flexibility matters. Christina Bartold of High Vibe Women events, shares how she distinguishes between professional speakers and business owners who speak and why that changes the way she thinks about paying them.

Do you pay your speakers? If so, can you share what the structure looks like? Is it a flat fee? Does it depend on their experience? Do you cover travel accommodations? What does it all look like?

Kristina: Yeah, I mean, it's, this is a tough one, Lily, because it's, yeah, honestly, like PE. Events are less lucrative than people think they are.

And so, um, uh, yeah, high risk. High risk too. Yeah. Medium reward. No, I'm just kidding. But I've had it where, you know, someone said to me, um, oh, I saw that you made over a hundred thousand dollars on your event and like, blah, blah, blah. And I was like, do you know, I, I spent over a hundred thousand dollars on this event.

Like black cookies tray from the Marriott was not free, my friends. So it really depends on the situation. I sometimes think of it like in two ways. One is this person a speaker? Or is this person speaking? And like for me, and I don't know, like this might be controversial, I'm gonna get canceled on this, so I'm so sorry.

But like for, for, if someone, if that is their livelihood of being a speaker, like if say that's like really how they show up, they're a keynote speaker. That's how they, they, they show up and then I'm actually like pretty happy usually to pay the fee on it. And I, I, I'll work with them on what I think is reasonable.

I'll pay the travel and the accommodations I'll do, I'll do the whole thing. If someone is a business owner who is speaking. Typically, I think that there's probably, I think there's probably better ways they can make money than my speaker be and using it to funnel into their business. So we put things in the program for them.

We advertise. There is like, I hate the word exposure, but there is an exposure opportunity, and I can tell you this for myself. Like I have spoken for free, I have been paid and. When I speak for free and you know, I'm like, Hey, am I able to put something in the swag bag and am I able to do this? There is a return on that investment, right, like of my time.

So it is a tough one. So for me it's like, are they a speaker or, or are they are a business owner who's speaking? And typically, a lot of my, truthfully, a lot of the people who've spoken on our events have been business friends of mine. And it's kind of just like a common like. Thing where one of us will speak for another one of us and we, you know, rotate and that's worked really well, but I'm happy to, to pay a keynote speaker.

Laylee: Um, so for the unpaid speakers, do you, do you travel accommodation for them or is it just kind of like. You can, you can sell, you can include, you can be pitching and funneling

Kristina: typically because of where we live, everyone's pretty close, so I don't actually have to pay a ton of travel and accommodation.

But I'll give you an example. There is somebody who is speaking at the event who isn't a speaker, but she's doing a keynote, and I did pay her travel and accommodation because she's, she's flying in. But typically people are pretty close that I wouldn't need to do that. And we do give them a VIP ticket to the event.

I have seen people make hundreds of thousands of dollars off speaking on my stage for free. So I'm, I'm like, I'm, sometimes I'm even like, sick to my stomach about it because I'm like, where's my hundreds of thousands of dollars? Um, but, but what I would say is, yeah, I, I, if, if they travel, I will typically pay.

Laylee: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, we teach that inside the sought after speaker system is a big, a big part of our course is unit five, for those of you watching is about profitability when you're unpaid and like Yeah. How to do that. And so that makes sense. I'm curious, what is your, if you have a professional speaker, which by the way is not an unpopular opinion in, in our.

Into my community because I actually teach on that. The difference between the two. What's like your top budget as a creative, as like an individual person who hosts a conference? What's your top of the line budget for a professional speaker?

Kristina: I think the most I've paid is 5,000. Okay. But I would have pretty high expectations around that, like, to be honest, like just even thinking about how much money we make on an event, like.

Not much. So I, and we use the event, that's another way, and really we are like kind of community minded about it, truthfully. Yeah. I sometimes feel like I run like a little nonprofit, but what I will say about it is that like, my expectation would be that there's a significant amount of promotion at that level and that they're, they are showing up, but I would never pay a speaker in hopes that they would promote.

Laylee: Right.

Kristina: That one, that one come into.

Laylee: It's more like an additional thought. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Or expectation that comes with that. That makes sense. Christina makes a powerful point about how expectations shift, depending on whether speaking is someone's full-time role or part of their business marketing strategy.

And finally, Joanna Waterfall of Yellow co walks us through her journey of moving from no speaker pan in the early days to implementing set structures for both workshops and main stage speakers.

Joanna: At the beginning, I did not pay the speakers, the fir, at least the first year I didn't, 'cause I had no money and I didn't know what to do.

And,

Laylee: um, well, you're an individual, so, um, to just, to like refresh everybody's understanding, and I say this like in every interview we are talking to individual business owners who are holding conferences in our space versus. Corporate entities, which would be their own kind of category of event. So Okay.

Continue.

Joanna: Yes. And that is very important. Yeah. Because a corporate client should always be compensating you and paying you. Yeah, and and I think as much as possible, independent conferences should too, and I always, especially as we grew and as we. Built more of a name for ourselves. We, and we're, you know, attracting larger speakers.

We did pay speakers, so it always looked different depending on the speaker. We also, so how we structured it was we had a main stage and then we, on both days would have like breakout sessions for workshop leaders. So there was a lot over the years of like experimenting with different payment structures and stuff.

But even at that first year, we always paid for lodging. We always paid for flights, and that was always. Always there. And then as, so I'll just talk about our most recent conference that we had. What we did was we offered workshop leaders and speakers a, I think workshop leaders, we said, I just flat out from the beginning told them.

We will pay you a thousand dollars to lead this workshop. We will pay for your flight and your hotel and does that work for you? And I would always wanna leave it open for negotiation because some people that worked fine, some people would charge more, or some people, you know. Would, would charge more.

And I would say, that's great. I, I'm, I cannot pay that. But you have a, like, go get it and, you know, go get your money and like, I'd love to offer you a ticket

to the conference if you wanna come and just see how it is. So, yeah, we, we got to a place where we were always paying speakers, speakers on the main stage, we would pay more.

I honestly can't remember what the rate was that we paid each speaker on the main stage. But I did the same thing where I was like, Hey, here's what we pay and then here's what we can include with that. And a lot of the speakers on the main stage would negotiate more than workshops. So. We, you know, some of them, we paid a lot of money and some of them not as much.

And it was tricky. It was hard to determine like, you know, some of these people just speak for a living, and that's, that's how they make their money and they charge a lot. I, there were many speakers that I would've loved to have if we could have afforded to bring them to yellow. I remember, I, I think it was probably like 2017 or 2016, I reached out to Brene Brown's people and they came back with their quotes and it was like.

\$80,000, which now it's probably like triple that, but I was like, oh my

Elizabeth: gosh, I wish

Joanna: I do You wanna do some like community service and just call this a donation? Yeah. Yeah. So, so yeah, I always, and coming from the creative world, my background's in graphic design and digital media. I always, always want to pay people, you know.

For their services. Yeah. I don't like to say pay people what they're worth 'cause you're not worth a monetary amount. Your money is just a tool that we use here on this earth. But yeah, so all that to say, there were many different models that where we experimented with throughout the years. I always wished and wanted to pay speakers more than we could.

Yeah. But being an independently run conference, we just. You know, only could do so much. And even paying the speakers, what we did pay like was tough a lot of times. So, and that's also why we came to this place to say, Hey, here's the flat rate. Here's what we can pay you. Is it a yes or no from you? And just being really upfront with that from the beginning was helpful.

'cause then it allows the speaker to decide if they. Would like to take that or not. And then it allows us to just budget a little bit more versus we, there were some years where we would just say like, Hey, what do you charge? And then have to

kind of deal with that. And that was tough. So that's, that's the place that we got to at least.

Laylee: Yeah. Yeah. That's super helpful to hear. I know. We've had answers that are all over the place, so I appreciate you being so transparent in that. 'cause I feel like this is the information that a lot of people don't get, so thank you for sharing. Yeah, and we

Joanna: always tried to as well, like most all of our conferences, we had professional video.

Mm-hmm. Of each of the speakers. We had professional photographers, we did have a decent sized Instagram, and so we always did try to say like, Hey, we can't pay you what you would normally. Charge, but we can give you a video of you speaking that you can use for, you know, future events. We can give you professional photos, we can be posting about your work and getting your work in front of our community.

And so those things, as much as you know, in the creative world is like, oh, I don't work for exposure. But those things are helpful. Mm-hmm. Especially as you're an up and coming speaker to have some professional photos of you speaking on a stage in front of a large audience and a video of you. You know, your talk that you can then use to pitch to other conferences.

That's, that's really valuable and I think that if you are talking to a conference that maybe can't pay you or pay you what you normally would charge, negotiating some of those things into the contract is helpful for you. That to then just make sure that you're getting value out of it if it's not able to be value in the monetary sense.

Laylee: Yeah, absolutely. And I love that encouragement of being able to negotiate things into your contract. I'm a really big proponent of that and I think just having, my attorney is my husband, so like he has taught me so much about, you know, we as creatives and as entrepreneurs, sometimes we, and speakers, we seek contracts as like black and white, but contract is a conversation.

And so just not being afraid to have that conversation continue, I think is such a big encouragement. I haven't heard that. A lot, so I did wanna just like, just put a little flag there for, for our people watching this Joanna's experience shows how compensation often can grow and change as your events scale, and why clarity and transparency are so important.

I hope that this conversation gave you a clearer picture of how event host. Can really handle compensation and why it's not always as straightforward as we might think or hope that it would be. I think from travel to lodging to flat fees, to creative ways of making sure that people are getting some sort of value for their time as speakers.

The truth is there are so many ways. That speakers can find that compensation and value within that industry, and my hope for you is that you'll be able to kind of take these things and move forward, feeling really equipped as a speaker to know when something is going to be worth saying yes to. Or saying no to.

And we talk about this really deeply inside the thought after speaker system course. So if this is something that interests you, make sure to check that out. It is an amazing resource for speakers who are specifically trying to determine what in the creative industry is going to work for them as a speaker on stage.

You can find all of the information for that chorus linked in our show notes or directly@leilimaori.com. But otherwise, I will see you guys on the next episode. Thanks for tuning in to the Le Li Imadi podcast. If you found value in today's episode, it would mean the world. If you would leave a review or share it with a friend who's on their journey to becoming an industry educator or speaker, want more support as you grow.

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