

**Laylee:** Let's talk about unpaid speaking gigs. Are they worth it? Are they a complete waste of time? Can they actually be a smart move for your business? Now, the truth is, unfortunately, not every single opportunity is going to come with a paycheck, but that doesn't mean that it can't hold value for itself. And we are gonna be talking all about that.

Welcome back to the Laylee Emadi podcast. I am so glad that you're here now as part of my. Sought after speaker system course. I've been interviewing event hosts and speakers to get the realities behind getting booked. And yes, sometimes that includes unpaid speaking gigs and opportunities. Inside the course is where you're gonna find all of these conversations completely uncut, unedited.

But today I have pulled together some of the highlights to share with you here to help you think strategically about whether or not. An unpaid speaking gig is going to be worth saying yes to for you. Now inside this episode, you're gonna hear how different speakers and hosts decide whether or not that unpaid speaking gig is worth their time.

They're gonna be weighing the cost of travel to looking at the audience that they're gonna be getting in front of, and valuing all of the relationships that they can build along the way, and they're gonna be sharing all of that inside information and how they make those. Processes happen with you here, so let's jump in.

First step is Jordan Gill, who had a heavy speaking year, and she's sharing how she decided which unpaid opportunities to say yes to. How do you decide, you know, if a speaker opportunity is worth it, if it's unpaid, because I know that you do. Yeah. Speak as well. And as you mentioned, this year, was the speaker heavy year for you, like

**TBD:** mm-hmm.

**Laylee:** You know, I, if you're comfortable sharing, how did you decide which ones or were they all compensated and if not, like mm-hmm. What was your deciding factors?

**Jordan Gill:** Yes. So there was only, I had 11 speaking gigs this year. I don't think I'll do that again. That's so I don't, yeah. It was, it's been glory. Like it, and they were,

**Laylee:** were they all outside of your city?

Like you had to travel for all of them?

**Jordan Gill:** Only one was in my city. So, yes. Okay. But they all sounded so fun and I would've gone to the vet anyway. It's weird. I've done it. I get it. Okay. I've been there. Yeah. Um, so I'm like, la, la, la, la, la to like all events. 'cause I'm just like, don't tell me because they're fun and I get sucked in.

Um, but, so only one wasn't compensated. Anyway, meaning that my hotel was uncovered, no travel, no stipend, no nothing. I would still do that event again, like even like I knew that going into it obviously and whatnot, but it was really aligned. I know. I knew that the people in my audience were my people, and so I said, okay.

Again, I think of it as a marketing expense. Mm-hmm. So I just think, okay, out of my marketing budget, I'm going to pay to go and be Yeah. At this event. So. So the rest of them varied in like actual compensation, but generally it was travel was covered. Mm-hmm. Meaning that, uh, my hotel was covered and my flights were covered.

Only one that my hotel is covered in flight is not. So again, for me, my whole thing with speaking is just it's marketing. Because it's like, okay, I could spend it on Facebook ads, or I could spend it to, on a flight, to go to an event and be in a room full of exactly who I wanna be in front of, right?

Mm-hmm. So, yeah. But so the actual numbers like vary on the flights, right? I mean, I've, I've been to LA a few times. New York, Boise, Idaho, where was that? 30 B or 30 A or something In 30 Florida. Yeah. I'm like, well, there's numbers in here. It's like algebra again, like I was just like, this is crazy. Nashville, Dallas, Austin.

Chicago. I think that's it. So yeah, been oh, Raleigh, North Carolina. So, yeah, there's like, there's been a lot of flights, which I, I don't necessarily like flying, but I will do it to get to my destination. But yeah, I will do it.

**Laylee:** Yeah, that makes so much sense. Okay, thanks for sharing that. 'cause I always like to get the perspective of what makes it worth it to you and I think it's just super helpful for other people to hear too.

Like all of that. We talk about it in the course, kind of in depth, but I always like to just hear, you know, as somebody who's been in both. Seats like as the host and as the speaker to be able to see, kind of like what goes into your, your thought process. Jordan's perspective is such a good reminder.

Sometimes speaking at the right event can be more powerful than pouring the same money into ads. Next, you'll hear from Elizabeth Henson who breaks down how she evaluates unpaid gigs, especially when travel is involved in your opinion as a speaker. And as a host, what makes that speaker opportunity worth it?

When it's unpaid? Like what goes into your decision making process?

**Elizabeth:** Yeah. For me, if it's local, it's a no-brainer. I will speak to any group of any size, um, if it's local and if it's like my ideal client. Now when travel's involved, it's a little bit more difficult because I kind of need to see proof of concept that these are going to be my buyers, right?

I need to really feel convinced that I'm going to be able to monetize the audience because I've seen it go both ways. I've done spoken at events that like. I didn't expect to go well, and then it went really well. And then I spoke at an event that I thought these were gonna be my people and like crickets.

So I'm still kind of, you know, figuring out the best way to measure that. But as someone that has a funnel that knows that when I get on stage, I make money, it usually, it's just a matter of is it going to outweigh the cost of the room and board and flights and so forth.

**Laylee:** Yeah. Yeah. That makes sense. Do you have.

Things that you put in place in order to see that funnel work that you think other people potentially don't or miss the mark on. How do you ensure that sale is gonna take place on the back end?

**Elizabeth:** Mm. Well, most of the time if I'm speaking on someone else's stage, I'm not gonna actually make a pitch. Right?

Right. So what I have built into the keynote that I use the most often is just a simple quiz. Mm-hmm. And that quiz, I know has a really good conversion rate based on people in the room. I think it's like about 65% of the room will take the quiz and then. Probably 10 to 15% of that are going to opt into kind of like the next step of the funnel, which then if I get one sale into my program, usually that is at least double what it would, you know, cost me to get out there, depending on where it's, so, you know, it's not, there's not a big, um, barrier there.

It's like if I get one sale from an event, it's usually worth my time. 'cause I do higher ticket offers, so yeah. But I build a quiz in so it doesn't feel like a pitch. It doesn't feel heavy at all. It's built right into my talk. It's a super valuable talk either way and that kind of makes it feel, you know, better for the host too.

So I'm not like some random person up there selling.

**Laylee:** Yeah, yeah, absolutely. We definitely don't teach like the hard sell in our program. It's, it's all about like getting people into your ecosystem and then kind of growing it from there. Yeah, and it's, it's interesting because I feel like. With the speakers that I work with, they don't really struggle to make the sales on the back end, but Right.

And they all take different approaches, which I think is really interesting too. And they sell things at different price points. Mm-hmm. I mean, with yours being such a high price point, it makes so much sense that it would take like. One sale is worth it. Yeah. But a lot of my clients will have anywhere from like a 200 to a thousand dollars offer and they may need to make more.

And so in that respect, it's always interesting to hear like what people use to like lead into that.

**Elizabeth:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, they would just. Hopefully have a good ascension model. So even if they get that \$200 sale, they know six months or a year from now, that's gonna turn into, you know, whatever else, or word of mouth or referrals or whatever it might be.

I mean, the biggest mistake I see, and you know this, is that people just wanna go on podcast tours and they wanna get on more stages, but they don't actually have a sales machine that works. So they're just getting exposure for the sake of exposure and it's not helping them make money. Right.

**Laylee:** Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

I love that you need it. You need it actually built out before you start doing things for, for free, because then it's not actually gonna pay off. Elizabeth makes such a strong point. If you don't have a sales system in place, unpaid opportunities won't ever turn into profit. Amber Hasley is sharing her take on unpaid opportunities and why she often thinks about the long-term relationships as the biggest ROI.

If you were somebody who was trying to make it something profitable, but it was an unpaid speaking gig, like what else? Would there be any other factors that you would take into consideration for deciding, like, is this one opportunity worth it for me to go to, even if it's unpaid?

**Amber:** I, I think so. Like, I think I, I don't know.

I'm a smart business woman, so I don't know. Like I, I, I will take all I. I say that back are the right people in the room. Right? Yeah. Like I wanna make sure that like, if I'm gonna go into the room, I'm like gonna go and make sure that like, is this worth my time? Yeah. Are the right people in there? Am I gonna get the right exposure?

Because also I'm thinking too of who are the other speakers that I'm up there with? Right? Yeah. How can I make connections with them? How can I be like, you know, deepen relationships and friendships? Because then that's an opportunity for me to, you know. Know a bunch of people now that can be on my podcast, right?

There are other people that I can, like, collaborate with on other projects. So I guess I'm, I, I, that may be, I, it's a privilege. I'm gonna say that like upfront, because some people could be listening to this right now and roll their eyes and they're like, no, like, that's not, like, that's not my reality. I need to be paid for every event I do.

So like, I, I under, I respect that. Yeah. I think on the other side is now that I'm a level in my business that I'm looking at every opportunity of like, how can I deepen relationships? How can I connect with more people and be in rooms that I'm not like normally in, you know, around different people and see what happens because I think there, it's so valuable and so powerful that that will be worth my time.

I also think too, is. I am the type of speaker, like if we're, if I'm putting on my speaker hat right now, is that like I am a big believer in like, like I said, serving right? But I am the person, I was just talking with Kathy Olson about this the other day on, um, a live Instagram we were talking about.

She's like, Amber, I realized that, 'cause I had gone to your event so many times and you had always been very like, you know, she said it was the rule. I'm like, it's not actually the rule. I'm like, it's, I've always been very encouraging, like, Hey, stay the whole time. Like if you can. Stay the whole time. Like show up, come to the sessions, like, like be a part of the experience.

Don't just like come and leave. Right. Yeah. And that's because that was something that I saw in a lot of rooms that I was going into in my early years of business as an attendee. And I'd be like, wow, they don't even really care. Like they're just here and then they're piecing out like. This was just a check, like a, a checkbox for them, maybe a paycheck, like whatever it is, you know, and they'd leave.

And it was so disappointing, like, because a lot of these people I had followed online for years and had looked up to, and I'm like, oh, they, they don't even really like, care about like, being part of this experience. And so Kathy was like, Amber, I realize like now I go and speak in other places, and, um, like they're shocked.

The organizer and host is shocked that I'm like, I'm gonna be there the whole time. And she's like, I realize that other people don't do that. She's like, I was the last, at a recent event she was at. She's like, I was the only one that stayed the whole time till the very end. And she's like, you know what, it was awesome.

She's like, I then got to have like table conversations with diff different attendees. I could go do deep dives with them on their funnels and they're like, sales stuff. And like she's like, I loved it and I got something out of it too. And I thought, yep, that's exactly like how I'm glad I modeled that behavior for her.

And then now she's seeing the impact of it. Yeah.

**Laylee:** Yeah. Yeah, I agree. I love that. I feel like people, I, I, I love staying the whole time. If I'm gonna show up somewhere and travel, I'm gonna stay.

**Amber:** Right. And like, and because there's something for us to learn. Like, I, like I don't know everything. Yeah. Like I can learn new tricks and Eve, doesn't matter what the topic is, I was like, I can learn a new trick here.

**Laylee:** I love how Amber framed it. It's not just about the stage time. It's about staying present for the entire event and deepening those connections. And finally, Christina Bartold explains why access to other speakers and attendees can make an unpaid gig absolutely worth it. In your opinion, as somebody who speaks and hosts speakers and select speakers, what makes a speaker opportunity worth it to you?

If it's unpaid?

**Kristina:** I would say access to other speakers. So that would be a big thing. It's like, I love like a speaker dinner or like a networking opportunity or something like that, that's actually led to other speaking opportunities for me. So I've been really grateful for that. Um, are they my ideal client in the audience?

So would they join my membership or would they do done for you services? Like that would make it worth it for me. And I like to be involved in the event in some capacity. So like, whether that be, um, I, I, I stay for the event. That's typically like part of it for me. And I'll tell you as a host, like I have had speakers pop in and pop out, especially with like breakout rooms and stuff.

I see a huge, huge, huge decrease in who comes to the breakout room.

**Laylee:** Yeah. Because they're

**Kristina:** not part of the experience. So I like, I like to show up and like be there and like meet people and so yeah, it's really about the like exposure opportunity. Yeah.

**Laylee:** Okay. Yeah, that makes so much sense. Thank you.

Christina's insight is so good. Sometimes the real value is in the doors that open after the event. Now let's hear from Jamie and Heather, co-host, collaborators and two incredible educators who bring a thoughtful strategic lens to speaking opportunities. Now, they've both experienced unpaid speaking gigs from every angle as event hosts and the speakers deciding when to say yes or no.

What makes a speaker opportunity worth it? If it's unpaid, like how do you, not only as hosts, but like how would you recommend that thought process going for somebody who is applying for a speaking engagement that is unpaid? Like how do they determine what's worth it and what's not? So I think a big thing, and I'm gonna say this, we both have

**Heather:** slightly different answers.

**Laylee:** I love that. Yeah. I wanna hear both.

**Heather:** Yeah. Um, so for me, I look on the side of what season of your business you're in education-wise, because I think my answer would be different like when I was first starting versus where I'm at. Now. So for now, I think there's kind of a two part thing that I look for.

One, am I in front of an audience that is full of like my ideal clients so that, not that I'm gonna get paid at that speaking engagement, but can I make connections while I'm there with attendees that they wanna start following me and then potentially get some of my products in my shop or my resources, or work with me one-on-one.

So that's a big one. Like what connections can I make while I'm there? With the attendees to show them who I am, what I teach on, and that they wanna continue a conversation. And then the other side of that is what connections can I make with other educators while I'm there that can push me forward or connect me with someone else that can then grow my business on that side.

So I think it's both sides. You don't it, it doesn't always have to be a payment right then, but in the future, how can that make revenue for you?

**Jamie:** So I feel the same way about that portion of it. As Heather, I think at a, at a baseline, those are the things that that need to happen some form of, of compensation, whether it's immediate or later.

But you are doing the work and I think it's really important to remember from both sides. Being an educator or being a host, that it's an opportunity for all parties involved. It's an opportunity for the host to have you same as it is for you to be there. And so additional like considerations that I have aside from the aligned audience and you know, can it serve you in the future, is kind of based off of your current business goals.

And so there are different sections when I think about. What your current business goal is, maybe for that year, maybe for that half a year or quarter. But is it visibility and awareness focused? Like do you want to grow the audience that you're in front of, or educators or hosts? Do you need to, you know, do you need your name to be out there?

And so maybe that holds a higher value than like a monetary compensation would. Is it sales and lead focused? So then you're really going to wanna make sure that everything that you're applying for, whether you're compensated financially or not. Okay, can I make sales? Can I see a direct like through line in this opportunity?

And Heather hit on this too with like connecting with other educators, but I just called it like connectivity focus. So does partnering with this event, can you see strengthening relationships, whether it be with the hosts or the educators? Can you see the future trajectory of your business? Going in a positive way quicker

if you are there, if you are in the room and you're making those connections with them.

Genuine, of course, like this is not be friends with everybody in high power. And then the last one is financial growth. So if you're in that stage where you know you have a bottom line that you are not walking out the door for, then great. That's, you know, that's where you're at. So you're in a financial growth from both the event and future audience.

So that's where, you know, you would have to decline any that are not being paid because that doesn't align with where you are right now.

**Laylee:** Mm-hmm.

**Jamie:** That's so helpful.

**Laylee:** I think one, you gave so many. Thought processes for people to go through when they're deciding. And I love that we had the two different opinions.

And then of course, like, um, for those who are watching this full replay inside, um, the sought after speaker system, I go into my decision making process as well. So you've got plenty to think about there. I love how they framed this. Unpaid does not have to mean unprofitable. When you approach opportunities with clarity around your goals and your audience and your business season, you'll know exactly which stages are worth standing On next step, you'll hear from Amanda Smith, who brings such a refreshing, realistic take on speaker compensation.

She reminds us that unpaid doesn't have to mean unrewarded. Sometimes the value comes in visibility, relationships, or the right opportunities that align with your bigger goals.

**Amanda:** I've had keynotes where like I didn't pay them. Mm-hmm. Because they came to me and they had this idea and I was like, this is a really good fit.

What do you wanna do? And they said, all I want from this is the exposure. The awareness I want, you know, the content is gonna be amazing. That's gonna be great for me. I could sign books afterwards, like I could bring books, things like that, like speakers. Also, you can come with. Hey, for this event, what am I willing to do?

What can I make a really good return for myself? Or like, if I'm approached by someone that I don't know, that they're like, Hey, we want you to come to North Carolina and speak for an hour and dah, dah, dah, dah. Here's my fee, right?

And then flight in hotel like I'm. Now, maybe later on in my journey when I can be a little bit more generous and if I really like, love your mission and like what you're doing, maybe I'll fly out for free.

I don't know. But like, that's really where I've learned so much in the last eight years is like everyone's different. I'll give you another example. Um, and I don't think she would care that I'm sharing this, but Sarah Schultz and I, she lives in freaking Minnesota. Like she doesn't live here. And so we ha we created like a partnership of.

What she wanted to do. She has goals for her brand shift method program and this and that and the other, the content, the X, Y, Z. She uses a, a trip to Dallas as like a little getaway for herself, and we made it to where she got X, y, Z deliverables out of coming. Mm-hmm. And so like, again, everybody is different and that was not my idea.

Like I asked her, Hey, do you wanna come again? What do you want it to look like? Do you wanna get paid? Do you want this? Do you want this? And this is what we, what we said, um, that, I mean, hopefully that's helpful.

**Laylee:** I think it's really helpful to hear all the different options. And it's been really interesting in this series.

What I think is coming to light is that in our like entrepreneurial, creative industry, where we have these events that are hosted by individuals. It's a much different process of payment versus corporate speaking and so I, I think there is a lot of room for conversation, for negotiation, for creative solutions to compensation and we teach that a lot inside the, inside of my programs for speakers, but it is very helpful to hear examples, so I really appreciate that.

I love how Amanda reframed that conversation around compensation. It's not one size fits all, and it doesn't have to be transactional. It's all about knowing your goals and your boundaries and your worth. Tamasha brings a powerful perspective on setting standards as a speaker, especially when it comes to unpaid gigs.

Now she's been on both sides of the mic as a speaker and as an event host. And what stands out most about her approach is the balance between generosity and boundaries. Tamasha reminds us that clarity is kindness, both for the speaker

and for the host. When you're determining what events to take or not to take if they're unpaid, because like you said, you know it is.

It's hard to leave our houses and to like travel and it, it, it is, it gets harder and harder, I think the more established you get in your business. Yeah. What makes a a speaker opportunity truly worth it, even if it's unpaid?

**Tomasha:** Ooh. Oh yeah. I don't take many of them now, but I would say if I were to consider it number one, like it just can't cost me anything.

Right. So I think, um. The flight, like I, I prefer to be approached with like, Hey, like if you don't have the budget, I'd like to know upfront. So I think that's my number one rule. If there is no pay, but it wasn't established upfront that there is no pay, I'm likely gonna deny it. And I think a lot of hosts need to know this.

There's this thing where like, we get the application, but we have no idea. What the pay is or like what the compensation's gonna be. And then you find out it's nothing. And I think that it helps both people so that people know going into it and you kind of know what to ask for. So that's my number one.

I'd say two. What makes it worthy? It's like really good communication. I feel like you've been speaking to for a while, you know, like it just could turn into. A circus. And so as long as we are clear, I know what I can get. If I can get the recording of my stuff, like I think that's important too. Like if I can get a recording of it, maybe get a little bit of social content, small things like that, transportation to and from the airport.

It's the small things for me that like takes that burden off of me and my team. That makes it worth it because I'm always open to serving, willing to be there. I just think that it's a small considerations for me.

**Laylee:** Yeah. I feel like a lot of the people that we've interviewed for this series have, have said kind of similar things of, of getting the content and at least like trying to make, trying to make up for anything that somebody couldn't financially afford to give.

Like where can they kind of meet you halfway, which I love.

**Tomasha:** Absolutely. I, I think it's big, uh, when you look at that, like finding a way to collaborate more, I feel like it's turning around. We've still got some work to do in our industry, but I can feel it turning around right now.

**Laylee:** Yeah, I, you know, I say that every year.

I'm like, I feel like this is like, people are getting it. Yeah. It is hard. I feel like it ebbs and flows. I don't know if you agree with that, like

**Tomasha:** Yeah. I think across, yeah, I think across, across the board it definitely does ebb and flow. I feel, I feel like I have developed a reputation of, I just think that I don't get much of that on my end anymore because people know I'm.

Probably not gonna, you're

**Amanda:** like not gonna take it.

**Tomasha:** Yeah. And so like I think people know how to approach me if it is gonna be something that's not that. Yeah. Um, and I encourage other speakers to do the same. If you have an expectation or you have a standard like I do, and I'm sure you do as well, I'm pretty open about that.

And that's very helpful to host.

**Laylee:** Yeah, it is. I definitely think that's like such a two. I'm glad you shared that. I feel like showing both sides, because we are on both sides, so it's nice. Mm-hmm. To know that like. There's, I, I think a big message that I struggle to get across to my students and that I try really hard to like put into all of my content is like, conversations are good to have.

Like you can just have the conversation, open the line of communication. Like, don't be afraid to stand for what you want and what you need. And it's also like, it's okay to say no.

**Tomasha:** Yeah. And it's okay to say yes. Yes. It's, it's, it's okay to say no. It's okay to say yes, and I feel like every time I say no, I give someone an opportunity who may not have as much visibility as me, who may not have had the opportunity to be in front of that level of a crowd, right?

And so I feel like I'm serving whether I say yes or no. Someone else is getting an opportunity being, and I used to be that person hoping that like the person they want and I was like number two or three on the list. Yeah. And so we have to see that there is power in the Yes. And there is impact in your No as well.

**Laylee:** I love how Tamasha reframes what it means to serve, whether she's stepping onto the stage herself or passing the mic to someone else. Her decisions come from a place of integrity and intention. I hope that this conversation gave you a new perspective on unpaid speaking gigs. The truth is that they're not automatically good or bad.

It's all about having a clear strategy, knowing your goals, making sure that opportunity aligns with your business and with your priorities. And if you wanna go deeper, the full interviews for all of these speakers and event hosts. Are available inside of my course, these sought after speaker system. I teach you all about how to evaluate these opportunities, how to craft pitches, how to build talks that make you the obvious, go-to choice as a speaker.

You can find all the details@leilimari.com or in the show notes. Thanks for tuning in and I will see you guys in the next episode. Thanks for tuning in to the Le Li Ima 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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