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Leading the corporate speaker and trainer (r)evolution

The glib after-dinner corporate entertainer who started most every speech with an admonition for his audience to “please keep eating” is having a hard time finding work.

Gone are the days when corporations are willing to spend money merely to make the troops chuckle, in the hopes that it fires up performance. Instead, most companies today are insisting that keynote speakers and trainers deliver results-based material – not merely entertainment – no matter what the venue.

At the forefront of this change is FIVE STAR Speakers + Trainers. The 18-year-old Overland Park-based firm was purchased in 2005 by long-time company executive Steve Gardner and his partner, Paul Schmidt.

Last year, the company booked more than 1,000 “speaker days,” and both Gardner and Schmidt said the trend was evident.

“Companies made it very clear that they wanted their investment in training to produce results after the excitement from the presentation itself faded,” says Gardner. “Structured follow-up has become more and more important because it helps to ensure that the lessons taught during the training day are being put into use.”

“The commitment to results-focused training is both an offensive and a defensive corporate strategy,” says Schmidt.

“In many industries there are a lot more jobs than there are talented people to fill them,” he says. “This makes it that much more critical for companies to develop the people they have and to show employees how much they are valued by providing them professional development opportunities. The fact is, if people feel valued, they stay.”

Gardner agrees. “The goal of the trainers and keynote speakers we represent is to bridge that gap between employers and employees by developing critical core skills that create a stronger, long-term relationship.”

The other big change for FIVE STAR has been the Internet. “More often now, clients come to us with some specific thoughts about speakers they are considering because of the research they’ve already done,” says Gardner. “This is great because it provides the introduction to our speakers that we used to have



to do through other means. Our account representatives can then really hone in on the client’s specific needs and deliver the right speaker.”

It was that kind of focus that attracted FIVE STAR’s new owners to Missouri Bank.

“They were the only bank that took the time to really understand our business,” says Schmidt. “It wasn’t the cookie-cutter approach that we were seeing from other banks.”

The result: The new owners received the traditional loan they were looking for rather than an SBA loan. Today they count on Missouri Bank for a host of services for their growing organization.

“Just as our speakers seek to maximize the potential in those they train, Missouri Bank is always looking for ways to help us grow,” says Gardner. “It’s a great partnership.”