

PANEL PERFECT

A woman's guide to becoming an expert panellist



ANDREA CARPENTER & MARK DAILEY

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Disclaimer: The information in this book is based on the authors' experience and research. While it is intended to help readers improve their panel performance, results will vary. The authors and publisher make no guarantees and disclaim any liability for actions taken based on the contents of this book.

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Introduction

It has never been more important for women's views to be represented better during business debate and discussion. If we are to accelerate gender diversity, particularly in professions that are traditionally male dominated, then raising women's visibility and their voices is crucial.

For all professions, the conference circuit is an integral part of industry life, and that proliferation of events and seminars provides an excellent platform for more women to take up their rightful place in industry debates. As part of this trend, women are increasingly being asked to take part in panel discussions at events and seminars.

In recent years, more women have taken part in panels and made their voices heard. However, others remain reluctant. They see the format of three or four people being challenged on stage by a moderator as unstructured and unpredictable and, therefore, a higher-risk format of public speaking.

We're here to show you the opposite is true. Panel discussions are an easy, effective and efficient way to showcase your expertise and raise your visibility. In this book, we demystify the panel discussion format and equip you with the right tips and techniques to make an impact on stage. We do this by breaking down how panels work and teaching you how to prepare so you communicate your messages effectively.

We also cover common stumbling blocks such as handling difficult questions and overcoming nerves to give you the confidence, to make the most of panel discussion speaking opportunities.

Why participate in panels?

We believe raising your visibility is crucial for your career progression, and on stage at industry events is a very powerful place to do this.

By appearing on stage at an event you are taking the opportunity to present your expertise, but you are also breaking the ice with every single individual in the room. You will step off stage and people will come to you with praise, business cards, new ideas and shared experiences. You've done a good job and you will be remembered for that, not your gender.

It's also a great way to contribute to better representation of women in your industry. It's paying it forward. By being on stage, you challenge stereotypes about what women do in their chosen fields of expertise.

You are also providing role models for future generations. Imagine being a young woman at a business event and only seeing men on stage. Immediately, your career path feels narrower, and less welcoming.

But why a panel? Surely you could get the same impact from the safe confines of a 15-minute keynote speech (and talk for 20 minutes so there is no time for questions)? Yes, we've heard that one many times. Maybe. But keynotes are few and far between, and take at least a week to prepare. Panels are excellent exposure for limited preparation – we'll cover how to do that later, but we estimate it takes 30 minutes plus attending a panel pre-discussion call.

Also, take a look at the average conference programme in your industry. We bet it's stocked full of panel discussions. Put yourself in the place of the event organiser. They need to find at least three engaging voices for each panel discussion, ideally all representing different perspectives. This spells opportunity for you.

Event organisers are always on the lookout for fresh voices, and are also mindful to represent diversity on stage; they know it just naturally means better debate. They fear the all-male panel as much as we do.

A very insightful attendee from one of our courses (see Where is started for us, *page 7*) pointed out that this is the first generation of women to be routinely asked to do panel discussions. For most male-dominated professions, she's right.

Where it started for us

Diversity Talks Real Estate aims to increase the visibility of under-represented groups in the European commercial real estate industry. We began as Women Talk Real Estate in 2017, to harness the power of the stage for women across the European commercial real estate industry.

In a highly social industry with a full calendar of events, the lack of gender diversity on stage was a clear missed opportunity to improve representation of women. At the time, we estimated that just 14% of speakers were women, with half of all panels having no women at all — the remainder usually had no more than one.

In response, founders Andrea Carpenter and Viktorija Grubestic, supported by industry sponsorship, created a platform of professional women who were keen to speak at industry events. Each speaker is featured on a profile page detailing their expertise and experience.

The database was then opened up to event organisers to identify and invite speakers using an online contact form.

To further support the network, we also introduced a series of training courses designed to help participants feel confident and prepared to take to the stage, including *Become an expert panellist*, on which this book is based.

With the format proving effective, Women Talk Real Estate evolved into Diversity Talks Real Estate in 2021, expanding the platform to include all under-represented groups in the industry. Since its launch, more than 900 people have signed up to be part of the network, and more than 1600 invitations have been issued to 540 different under-represented professionals.

Certainly, in commercial real estate – the sector we specialise in – the clamour for women speakers probably started no more than eight years ago. Before then, women on stage were a nice-to-have, but no one would complain if an event programme was only men.

Suddenly, it has been assumed that a generation of professional women are stage-ready for panel discussions. That's something of a jolt from not making the invite list for the first phase of your career, only to be expected to be a natural once the call comes.

Relatively, men in your industry are likely to have more stage hours under their belt and, if you are mid-level onwards in your profession, they are likely to have started younger. However, we are also confident that you have been in the spotlight before, whether that is for client presentations or internal events, so it's about transferring those skills to panel discussions.

The tips and techniques in this book stem from our careers working in different broadcasting and communications roles as well as our many years of participating on, and moderating, panels in Europe and Asia.

All our advice coalesced when we put together the *Become an expert panellist* training course for Diversity Talks Real Estate. Since then, we've enjoyed training more than 500 women and are pleased to report that many confident and frequent panellists have emerged from those sessions.

The anxieties and questions raised in the training courses were often similar, so we've made sure to cover common potential stumbling blocks such as handling difficult questions and overcoming nerves.

Overall, what we took away from the training sessions is that the confidence to say yes to panel discussions mostly comes from that fact that we demystified how panels work and how to prepare for them. Everything else our attendees needed — the expertise and the knowledge — was already present.

What about men?

While this book is written with women in mind, the advice here isn't gendered. In our work, we've always advocated for women, but we'd like men to know that the same tips, tools, and tricks will help anyone become a stronger, more confident panellist.

So, if you're a man reading this — good for you. We hope you'll find plenty here to help you perform well on stage. And when you're done, why not pass it along to a colleague or friend who might benefit too? We also encourage our women readers to share it with colleagues and friends — including men.

Here's the thing: the more people who take panel preparation and participation seriously, the better the experience will be for everyone — on stage and in the audience — and the more every industry can foster meaningful discussion and progress.

About the authors

Andrea Carpenter is a writer, communications consultant, and Director of Diversity Talks Real Estate, an organisation that raises the visibility of under-represented groups through the stage and media. She has extensive experience in public speaking, event moderation, and training, alongside a career spanning journalism, industry leadership roles, and consultancy in the commercial real estate industry. Andrea is also the author of *High Rise and Fall* (Routledge, 2018), which explores the history and evolution of the modern European commercial property market.

Mark Dailey is the Managing Director of Dailey and Associates, an award-winning international television journalist turned strategic communications adviser and coach. For over three decades, he has worked with leaders at the C-suite level to help them navigate change, articulate purpose, and build trust through clear and authentic communication. Mark is also the author of *A Leader's Guide to Storytelling* (Routledge, 2022), part manual, part memoir, and part call to action on why authentic, effective communication will be the essential leadership skill of the future.

For more information:

diversitytalksrealestate.org

daileyandassociates.co.uk

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Do you shy away from taking part in panel discussions?

**Do they feel unstructured, unpredictable,
or even intimidating?**

Saying “no” means missing one of the best opportunities to showcase your expertise and raise your professional profile. Being a panellist is easier than you think. With the right approach, panels can be one of the most effective and efficient ways to increase your visibility.

This book demystifies the panel discussion format and gives you practical tools to make an impact on stage. You'll learn how panels work, how to prepare so your messages land, and how to handle tricky moments such as difficult questions. We'll also share strategies to overcome nerves and present with confidence.

Packed with tips, techniques, and real-life examples, it will help you turn every panel appearance into a memorable performance and give you the confidence to say “yes” next time.



Andrea Carpenter and Mark Dailey have decades of experience in communications, public speaking, and leadership coaching, working with audiences and on stages around the world.



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