



SPEECHWRITERS SPEAK

Speechwriting, and Coronavirus: What Do You Think,
What Do You Feel, What Do You Need?

A Survey by the Professional Speechwriters Association

Dear Professional Speechwriter:

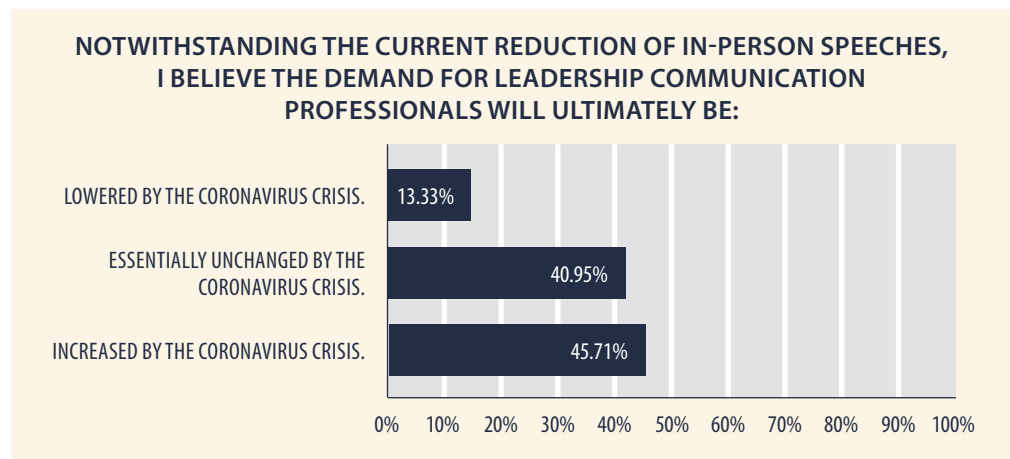
We're about two and a half months into the coronavirus crisis. The Professional Speechwriters Association has been in touch with dozens of our members, but we thought it was time to ask a few direct questions of all speechwriters, to learn what you're feeling, thinking and needing right now.

As of the first of May, 121 speechwriters had weighed in—75 in-house, 46 independent.

The survey was anonymous to encourage candor, and respondents had a lot to say. What they said had an adamant, urgent tone. Their suggestions gave us ideas for how to help in every way our resources will allow.

Ultimately, the survey bolstered our belief that, though speeches and speechwriting have been as profoundly disrupted by coronavirus as any aspect of modern life, leadership communication support is more broadly and urgently needed than it's ever been. We think speechwriters, if they can adapt their skills to meet that need, can be of great help, and in great demand.

And you agree. We asked: "Notwithstanding the current reduction in in-person speeches, I believe the demand for leadership communication professionals will ultimately be ...". The demand will be unchanged or increased by the coronavirus crisis, reported 87 percent of speechwriters, the majority of those voting for "increased."



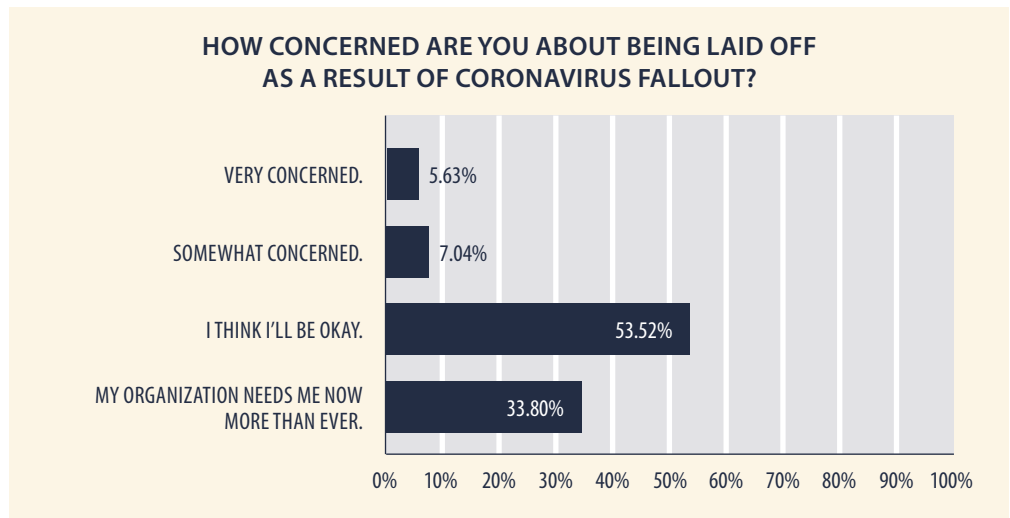
So the future is bright.

The present, less so.

Here's what we learned, what we'll do about it—and how you can help.

SPEECHWRITERS' LIVELIHOOD

We asked in-house speechwriters straight up: "How concerned are you about being laid off as a result of coronavirus fallout?" Happily, 54% answered, "I think I'll be okay," and another 34% answered even more confidently, "My organization needs me now more than ever." Only 12% said they were "very concerned" or "somewhat concerned" about a layoff.



But as we saw throughout the survey, their comments revealed undercurrents of anxiety. A few representative quotes:

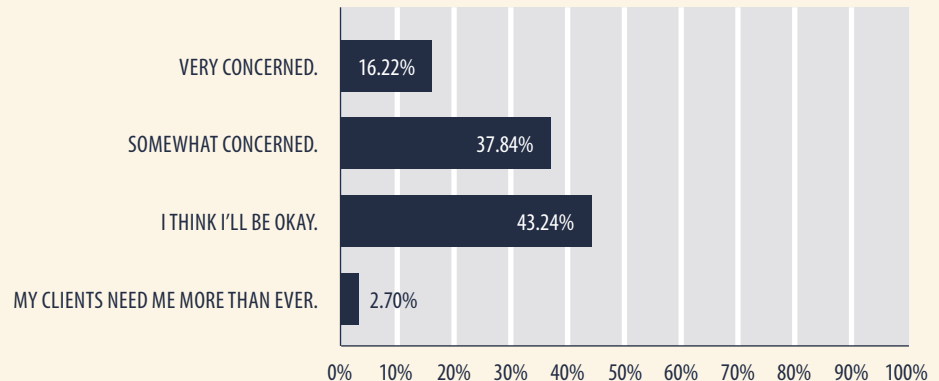
"My organization has runway to keep me on for the next several months. If restrictions begin to lift by then, I should be okay."

"My workload has increased dramatically. Hard to picture them cutting me because the backup is my boss, and he's even more overwhelmed than I am. Anything could happen, though."

"Boss assures me I'm 'untouchable,' but I suspect things can turn on a dime."

And, speechwriterly enough, one speechwriter quoted Charles de Gaulle, "The cemeteries are full of disposable men."

HOW CONCERNED ARE YOU ABOUT THE LONG-TERM VIABILITY OF YOUR INDEPENDENT SPEECHWRITING BUSINESS AS A RESULT OF CORONAVIRUS FALLOUT?



Independent speechwriters are harder-hit, and more concerned about prospects long-term. 56% said they had either lost a significant amount of business or lost all business due to coronavirus, with 35% saying business had stayed the same and only a single respondent reporting having added business during this period. Asked, “How concerned are you about the long-term viability of your independent speechwriting practice as a result of coronavirus fallout?” 54% said either very or somewhat concerned; 43% said, “I think I’ll be okay.” Again, some representative remarks:

“They don’t return calls for scheduled previous assigned speeches. Clearly they will not take place but they refuse to even response. Of course they will refuse to pay for work already completed. To compound problems they even refused to talk to the claims folks at the unemployment office to confirm that I am one of their contractors; thus I’m even losing out on unemployment benefits.”

“Virtually everything I had in progress froze; virtually every prospect for Q2 and Q3 dried up. I’ve seen more work crumble in the past 60 days than in the entire prior 15 years I’ve worked independently.”

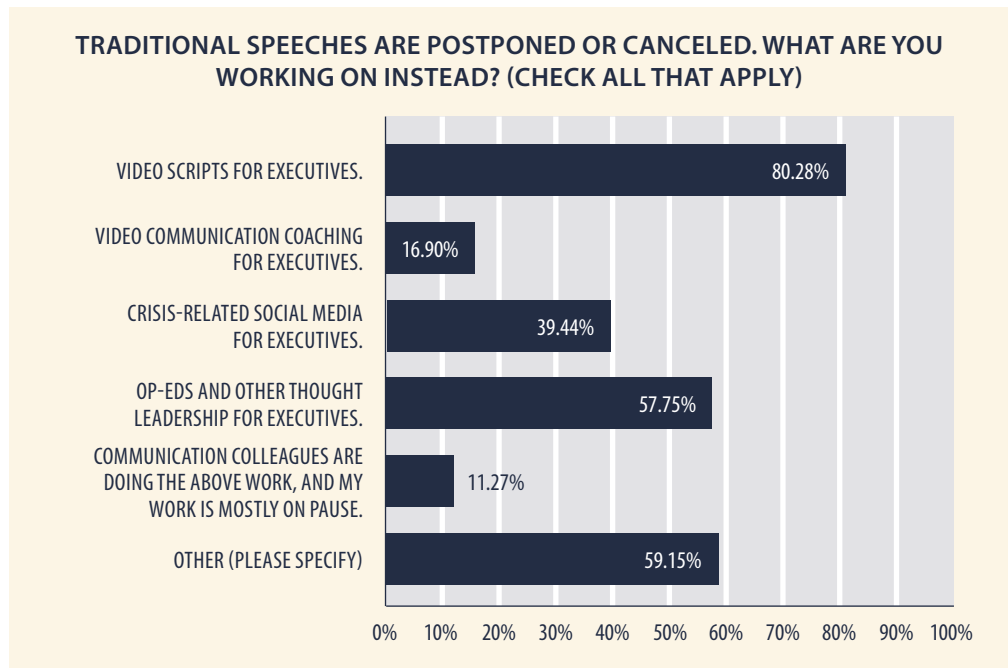
“My consulting projects stayed roughly the same but my only-writing projects (about a quarter of my business) are all on indefinite hiatus.”

“Even if the emergency abates, demand for public events—keynotes, annual meetings, live product launches, college commencements, etc.—will be very muted for a long time.”

WORKLOADS CHANGING, SPEECHWRITERS ADAPTING

Speechwriters who are working, are working harder than ever.

What on? Everything. (With a profound new emphasis on internal communications.)



Video scripts for executives, reported 80% of respondents; 58% said op-eds and other thought-leadership pieces for execs. Another popular category was “Other”: Speechwriters are writing executive emails, daily briefing and press-conference scripts, webinar scripts, fundraising letters, website writing, policy statements, strategy documents. “I am acting as an unofficial comms ‘roamer,’” said one temporarily erstwhile speechwriter, “doing whatever needs doing, whenever it needs doing.”

The most universal change for speechwriters and exec comms pros is a shift from primarily external communications to mostly internal, a typical speechwriter reporting spending 90% of the day working on “employee comms from the CEO—written and video.”

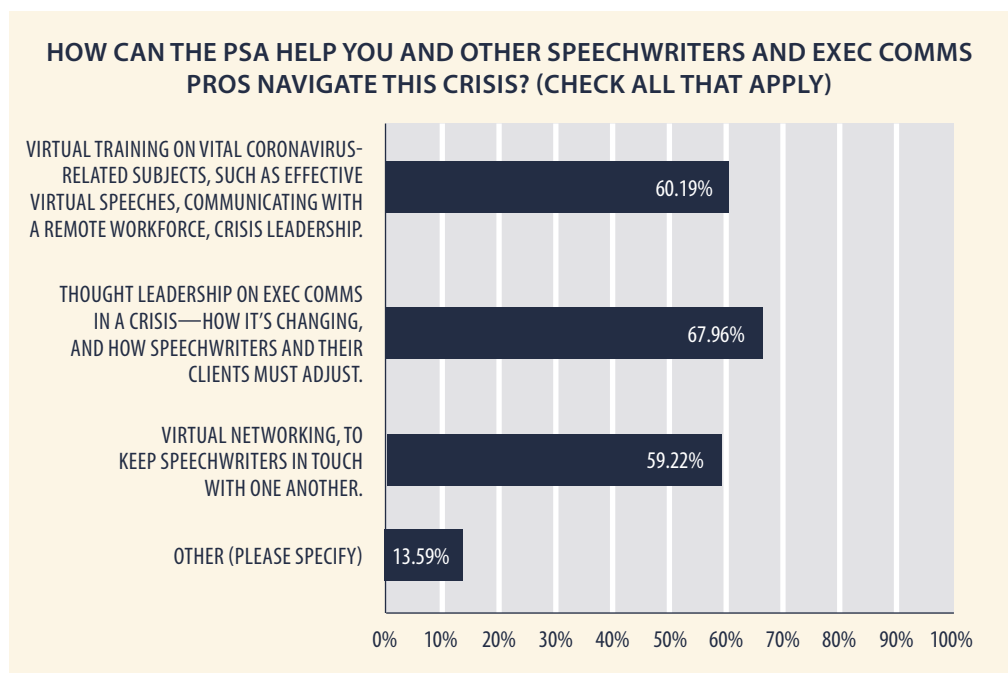
“Leader communications to colleagues has exploded,” said another speechwriter. “Videos, email messages, leadership calls, open letters to clients and colleagues. Monitoring metrics closely and the appetite for information by our internal and external audiences seems to be steady, if not growing.”

WHAT SPEECHWRITERS NEED

We asked speechwriters what they need. The short answer is: a lot—and fast—and on a shoestring.

Asked about their training budgets, only 30% said, “Unaffected.” Another third said, “Frozen,” and another third didn’t know. (With one respondent demonstrating a resilient sense of humor: “Wait, what? I had a training budget?”) And several respondents added that professional membership renewals are also frozen.

Meanwhile, speechwriters have real needs, for thought leadership during this time, for professional development, for networking—in that order.



Specifically:

“Evolving trends in online keynotes and panels.”

“It would be helpful to understand which speechwriting techniques come across best in a ‘virtual’ rather than in-person presentation, and which do not.”

“Future talk—how we position the CEO as credible in the face of so much uncertainty.”

“Technology tools and options—in plain English!”

“Best practices and actual examples of what others are doing to assist execs at this time.”

“I’m interacting with the press much more during covid. I’d love a webinar on Media 101.”

“I would be interested in hearing about the experience of independents who’d applied for Pandemic Unemployment Insurance. How long had it been between jobs? What happens if you get an assignment?”

“How to avoid burnout and stay fresh. The muscles in my brain that I use to write speeches feel like a Major League pitcher’s arm at the end of the season—only the season never ends.”

“Host a cocktail party or two 😊. Be nice to catch up with friends.”

WHAT THE PSA IS DOING FOR YOU—AND WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR THE PSA

Since the founding of the Professional Speechwriters Association seven years ago, we have frequently paraphrased a famous speechwriter, “Ask not what the PSA can do for you. Ask what you can do for the PSA.”

At this moment, we all need to do everything we can, for one another:

- **Making the daily *Executive Communication Report: Coronavirus* free for any PSA member who wants to subscribe.** Published by the PSA and its sister organization, the Executive Communication Council and graciously subsidized by founding subscribers, this enewsletter is a \$95/mo. value—and it’s an invaluable resource that will keep you up to speed. [Click here to start getting ECR: Coronavirus tomorrow, gratis.](#)
- **Offering a six-month membership extension to any PSA member temporarily unable to afford renewal.** Though membership revenue is an important part of the PSA’s financial picture, we will not terminate any membership for an inability to pay. Just respond to our renewal notice with an email requesting an extension, and you’ll receive a six-month extension with full benefits, no questions asked.
- **Hosting free, monthly Happy Hour Zoom-style calls,** where PSA members can report on what’s happening in their work lives and connect with their peers. First Thursday of every month; first call June 4.

• **Convening a series of hyper-relevant virtual professional development events**—live webinars, on-demand courses and virtual conferences, culminating in a virtual 2020 PSA World Conference, in October. These stellar sessions will keep you connected to your colleagues and up to date on crucial best practices in this high-stakes moment in leadership communication. By registering for as many PSA events as your budget can afford, you not only benefit your career, you support your professional association, which of course has revenue requirements of its own. Look for details very soon, and ongoing.

And above all—*be in touch*, and let the Professional Speechwriters Association know what you need.

We're here.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Murray". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Murray, Executive Director
Professional Speechwriters Association