

Mark Scharenbroich — Award-winning Keynote Speaker and Student Council Alumnus

Mark Scharenbroich, a former student council president who has gone on to become a successful keynote speaker, has earned multiple awards and honors, including an Emmy, Golden Apple, and Silver Screen award, and induction into the National Speakers Association's Hall of Fame. After leaving a comedy troupe named Mom's Apple Pie that performed at high schools and colleges, Scharenbroich's speaking career kicked into gear when he was featured in the Jostens film, "The Greatest Days of Your Life ... (so far)" which has been shown to more than 10,000 high schools worldwide. His ability to connect with students and educators, and keep them glued to the presentation with humor and life-changing messages, has earned him a reputation for being a top speaker in education. For more information about Scharenbroich, visit www.nicebike.com.



Advise: How would you suggest student leaders get over a fear of public speaking?

Mark Scharenbroich: I have been speaking professionally for more than 30 years, and I still haven't gotten over the fear of public speaking. Number one is to be prepared. Prepared speakers worry less about what they are going to say next and are more connected to how the audience is responding. Number two

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is to have a conversation. Do you remember the last time you told a friend about a great experience? Speaking is the same thing—having a conversation with an audience about something that you are passionate about. Number three is to tell stories. Make sure that 90 percent of your presentation is driven by stories, and you will do great.

Advise: How did the skills you picked up during your time in student council translate

to your current career?

MS: *Everything* I learned from being a student council president translated into my career—make sure that all voices of the student population are heard. Targeting activities for different segments of the school community is a must. [It's] knowing in your heart that a lot of people need a leader to show them the way, and that leader might as well be you. All of these concepts are transferable to any profession.

Advise: When did you know you wanted to be a motivational speaker?

MS: Right after high school, I was a junior counselor (JC) at the summer Minnesota Association of Student Councils leadership

camp. I attended as a student and felt fortunate to be invited back as a JC where I met my future wife, Susan. Dr. Earl Reum—the absolute “Obi-Wan Kenobi” of Student Council—spoke to us, and I had the honor of driving him back to the airport. It was the best 75 minutes of my student council experience. He went on to become my mentor. Earl encouraged me—as he did everyone—to pursue my dreams. Along with Earl, Susan encouraged me to pursue speaking full time.



Advise: During your middle/high school years, was there a particular teacher or adviser who inspired or influenced you most directly?

MS: Ed Johnson was the assistant principal at St. Cloud Tech High School, home of the Tigers. He was also the student council adviser. Ed was the heart and soul of Tech High School, in St. Cloud, MN. He dealt with discipline issues daily, so his bright side was advising and leading our student council. I learned a world about leadership from Ed. For example, in 1971 we didn't have a girls' tennis team. Peggy Brenden, a talented tennis player, wanted to play but she didn't have an opportunity. She asked to join the boys' team, but the Minnesota State High School League (MSHSL) did not allow girls to play on boys' teams at that time. With Ed's support, our student council filed a lawsuit against MSHSL to change their position. MSHSL changed the rules, and Peggy played. Ed taught us that student council can be more than planning dances and canned food drives. Student council should be a voice for those who oftentimes don't have one and a way to take action to make a difference in the lives of others.

Advise: What made you want to speak to a student audience during the first part of your career?

MS: We had talent shows at Tech High School. A buddy of mine and I loved doing comedy bits

during the shows. As we moved from our junior year to our senior year, we added a few more people to our group and formed a comedy troupe. In time, we were doing shows in high schools and colleges throughout the Midwest. After five years of performing together, the group disbanded. With Susan's encouragement, I went out on my own, speaking at schools with my speech titled, “The Greatest Days of Your Life... (so far).” For more than 25 years, I spoke at more than 3,500 high schools internationally. I loved it.

Advise: How do you grab the attention of student audiences and keep it?

MS: Two thousand students are brought into a gym to listen to a “motivational speaker.” Most of the audience had a negative image of the experience before I even grabbed the microphone. I had to get their attention and bring them with me in 30 seconds or less. I started with an unpredictable opening, used humor throughout, told engaging and relatable stories, and ended with a big finish.

Advise: What is one of your most memorable career highlights to date?

MS: I've had so many. Speaking at Columbine High School (CO) after the tragedy stands out. Speaking at the school where Christa McAuliffe,

the teacher from Concord, NH, who died in the space shuttle Challenger, was very moving. Speaking at the very first Canadian Student Leadership Association's conference in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, was a true highlight. But the best highlights were meeting student council advisers in schools who were so remarkable, creative, caring, and giving.

Advise: If you were going to impart advice and guidance to the secondary level students of today, what would you share?

MS: Student council will always be a popularity contest. People vote for people they like. It doesn't make a difference how you get elected. What makes a difference is how you impact the school community in a positive way. Do you build a school where students feel truly connected? Do you create a culture of excellence in academics, athletics, and the arts? Do you recognize the adults from the custodial staff to the school board in a positive way for their contributions? Do you embrace traditions, celebrations, and symbols to create a rich school culture?

Advise: What is your personal motto?

MS: I have two mottos: Leave the campsite better than how you found it; and stop counting crayons—just draw pictures. •