



MYRA HART

## What a Great Idea!®

Chic Thompson's speaking engagements for the week of February 9, 2001 took him from Amsterdam, to Manchester, London, and Edinburgh. He was both exhilarated and exhausted as he raced to board a plane for the last leg of his trip. Much as he enjoyed it, the current pace was unsustainable. He slid into his seat, buckled up, and closed his eyes. The 53 year-old professional speaker's thoughts turned to the imagined pleasures of an early retirement spent "riding around in a Jaguar convertible—going from golf course to golf course." He pushed his daydreams to the back of his consciousness and focused on work.

Chic Thompson would not be walking away from his thriving business in 2001 or any time in the near future. He believed that he was at the top of his game as an "inspirational creativity speaker." He counted more than 150 organizations among his active clients. (Exhibit 1: Client list) Most of these booked his services on a recurring, though not necessarily regular, basis. (For example: Accenture had booked him 76 times; General Electric, 53 times; Hewlett Packard, 14 times.)

He had conducted more than 2,000 creativity sessions since 1984. He estimated that his message had "touched approximately 500,000 executives worldwide, from Australia to Korea to Europe to South Africa to Canada and Latin America and almost every state in the US." He was also an adjunct faculty member at the University of Virginia's Darden Graduate School of Business, the FBI Academy, the Federal Executive Institute and the Young President's Organization University.

Though he was tired of the grueling lecture-circuit routine that kept him on the road for as many as 200 days a year, he was not ready to abandon the practice he had built. He considered his current lecturing and consulting business an "unfinished work." He also believed that the recent market downturn could provide some new opportunities.

Thompson's thoughts returned to more immediate challenges: Would he have his "voice" for tomorrow's audience? Three full-day sessions in a row had taken their toll on his vocal cords and acute back pain from recently diagnosed osteoporosis was playing havoc with his energy level.

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Research Associate Susan Harmeling prepared this case under the supervision of Professor Myra Hart. HBS cases are developed solely as the basis for class discussion. Cases are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of effective or ineffective management.

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