

SPEAKER

Speaker, singer
and songwriter
Karen Jacobsen,
aka The GPS Girl®

BUILD A
BREAKTHROUGH
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COMMUNITY
TO PROFIT ON
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CREATE SOLID
SUCCESS WITH
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SKILLS

THE VALUE OF
SOFT SKILLS

IN A HARD WORLD

TEAMWORK
IN A CRISIS

Recalculating Your Life

*Karen Jacobsen trusts her inner GPS to
navigate her life personally and professionally*



RECALCULATING YOUR LIFE

BY BARBARA PARUS



Speaker, singer and songwriter
Karen Jacobsen relies on
her inner GPS to guide her
personally and professionally.

After wrapping up a successful speaking presentation at an out-of-town convention center, you hang around for a while to answer attendees' questions and pack up your gear. It's after dusk when you finally head out to the parking lot, which is deserted except for a few vehicles. You slide into the driver's seat of your car, start the engine and try to remember how to get back to your hotel.

Suddenly, you realize you're not alone.

When you turn on your GPS®, you're greeted by the soothing and familiar voice of Australian singer and songwriter Karen Jacobsen, who is the voice of GPS and Siri® to millions around the world. She will point you in the right direction to your hotel, or anywhere else you want to go.

Her GPS fame has brought unexpected success and celebrity to Jacobsen. People are curious to see the face behind her famous voice, resulting in appearances on *ABC World News Tonight* and the *CBS Early Show*, and in the *New York Times*, *NY Daily News* and *Glamour* magazine. Jacobsen also was named one of *People* magazine's Most Intriguing People.

This isn't exactly the way Jacobsen had envisioned achieving fame.

"When I was a little girl living in Australia, my dream was to hear my songs on the car radio, not a GPS that wasn't even invented yet," Jacobsen says. Yet, she believes that everything she did in her early life prepared her for her successes in the music business, as a speaker and as a voice-over artist.

At 21, she was an original cast member in the Australian version of *The Buddy Holly Story*, playing Peggy Sue and a number of other characters. She sang *The Star-Spangled Banner* 220 times in a six-month period. (At the time, she had no idea this role would lead to something much bigger down the road.)

While attending the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, Jacobsen started singing jingles, which were very popular in the 80s and 90s. She recalls singing about everything imaginable, from food products to hotels. Her voice was heard on television, radio and even at the cinema.

Some friends suggested she try voice-over work, so she decided to give it a whirl. "I was told I was a natural," Jacobsen recalls. "It surprised me because I had no special training in voice-over work." And before she knew it, she had a reel and the best agent in town.

After reviewing her musical training and background as a singer, she realized that she did, in fact, have the necessary training. As she explains it, "I was a singer, so I was able to hear different pitches. I had a good ear and could modulate. And I was a voracious reader." According to Jacobsen, good reading skills are essential for quickly reviewing a script and reading



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it on the spot. Apparently, she has what it takes to be a successful voice-over artist—she's been doing it for 22 years.

Follow Your Inner GPS

Jacobsen has always heeded her inner voice when making major life decisions. So, in 2000, she headed to New York City with a suitcase and a dream to forge a new life.

"I didn't come with the security of a job or a family," says Jacobsen. "But I always had a burning desire to be like Olivia Newton-John, who has inspired me to be a singer and songwriter since I was seven years old. I wanted to get a record deal and tour the world."

At age 31, Jacobsen felt it was now or never. It was time to take a leap of faith.





“When you’re on a quest, the signs are very clear. It becomes a case of following your inner GPS to seize an opportunity, or steer clear of it. In some cases, a seemingly good opportunity can be a disaster. On the other hand, a less appealing opportunity might really pay off,” Jacobsen says.

The move to New York wasn’t easy, but Jacobsen has an instinctive knack for “recalculating.” When roadblocks arise, she steps back, reassesses the situation, and then redirects herself. Not wasting any time, she quickly adapted to life in the Big Apple.

The first year was filled with extreme highs and lows. Jacobsen needed to create a support network, earn a living as a freelance artist, and exist on a shoestring budget. Life was challenging and exhilarating at the same time.

She recalls moving to midtown Manhattan and renting a tiny room the size of a closet. “I knew the costs would be high, but I had very contained expectations. I felt so

clearly that this was my path, and I was going to make it work.”

Jacobsen also listened to her inner GPS when she embarked on a relationship with the man who would become her husband. “When we met, it took time for me to realize that Tom was ‘the one.’ I was living in New York and he was a production manager traveling the world with major celebrities, like Prince, Mariah Carey and Madonna,” Jacobsen says. “The logistics weren’t right. How could it possibly work?”

Jacobsen’s inner GPS kept her on track in the romance department, and the couple recently celebrated 10 years of marriage. “I’m so glad I listened to my inner GPS,” Jacobsen says. “Tom is the love of my life.” They are the proud parents of Hayden, their five-year-old son.

The Call That Changed Everything

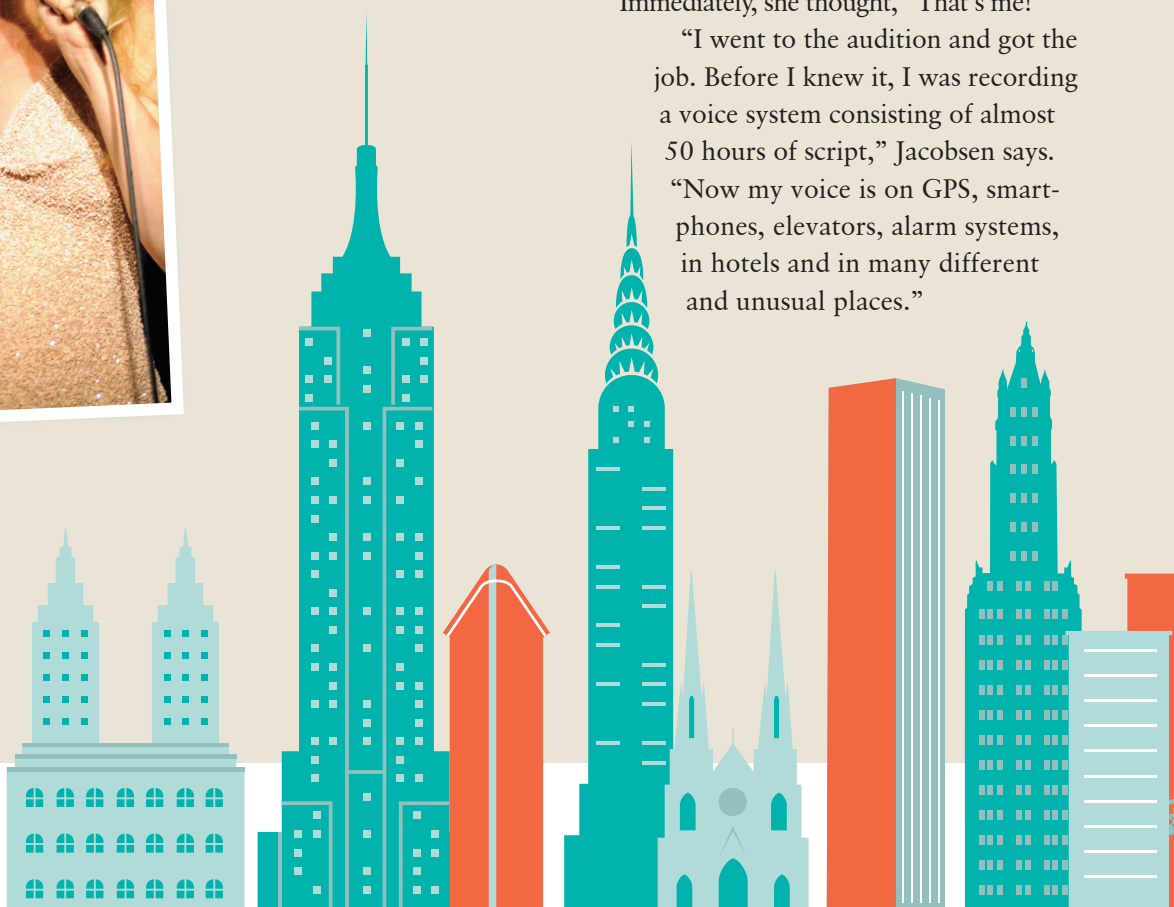
In 2002, Jacobsen received a call from her agent regarding an audition for Garmin, a client who was looking for a native Australian female voice-over artist living in the Northeast United States. Immediately, she thought, “That’s me!”

“I went to the audition and got the job. Before I knew it, I was recording a voice system consisting of almost 50 hours of script,” Jacobsen says. “Now my voice is on GPS, smartphones, elevators, alarm systems, in hotels and in many different and unusual places.”



Top: Jacobsen weaves story, music and songs into her keynotes.

Above: Jacobsen is an accomplished host and emcee.



All told, Jacobsen's voice can be heard on 100 million devices worldwide. Little did this multitalented Aussie know that this particular voice-over booking would change her life.

Her famous voice has given her a unique celebrity. When people hear her speak, whether in a grocery store check-out line or in a restaurant or in a host of other places, it establishes an instant connection. They feel compelled to openly share their stories on how Jacobsen helped them navigate their way to a special event, or prevented them from getting lost in unfamiliar territory.

"I've heard comments like, 'When I landed at LAX, you navigated the way to my cousin's wedding' or 'If it weren't for you, I would still be lost in the mountains of Italy,'" Jacobsen says.

In fact, Jacobsen was approached so frequently by people who recognized her voice and wanted to share their stories, she soon realized it was a sign to pursue opportunities to deliver a unique message on a larger scale. "I wanted to create a brand, empower others in a fun and entertaining way, and be connected to people. That's when I became The GPS Girl®. It was obvious that I could talk about recalculating and share stories from my own life," Jacobsen says.

She admits—laughingly—that not everything she hears is complimentary. Some people find the word "recalculating" very annoying, as if they are being scolded for not following her directions and making a wrong turn. On the contrary, she is not trying to sound critical, but rather reassure the driver that there's an alternate route.

Recalculating drives performance in business, according to Jacobsen, and she advises organizations how they can upgrade to world class. "Many of my clients want to increase the performance of their people and the experiences of their customers," Jacobsen explains. "Recalculating throughout the day when obstacles or roadblocks arise is an effective way to motivate employees to perform better and aspire to the next level."

A Detour Leads to a Speaking Career

Truth be told, recalculating has always been essential to Jacobsen's roadmap for life. In 2009, Jacobsen and her husband experienced their own personal financial crisis, or PFC, as she calls it, on the heels of the global financial crisis. "We rented out our apartment in New York and used our frequent flyer miles to book tickets to Australia. With our then 15-month-old son in tow, we

moved in with my parents for a year until we could get back on our feet."

It was during this time when the Queensland Conservatorium of Music contacted Jacobsen to speak to a group of music students about her experiences in the music industry. "I had no clue what I was going to talk about, but I had built a life and a record label in America and they were thirsty for information," Jacobsen says. "I still remember the special connection I formed with the students."

From that moment on, Jacobsen was hooked on speaking.

In the following year, Jacobsen booked a number of speaking engagements and kept bumping into speakers who belonged to NSAA. While attending the 2010 NSAA Convention on the Gold Coast in Australia, she experienced her first encounter with notable NSA members, including Janet Lapp, PhD,

“I felt so clearly that this was my path, and I was going to make it work.”



RECALCULATING TIPS FOR SPEAKERS

When things don't go as planned, Jacobsen recalculates her day by following these trusty tips:

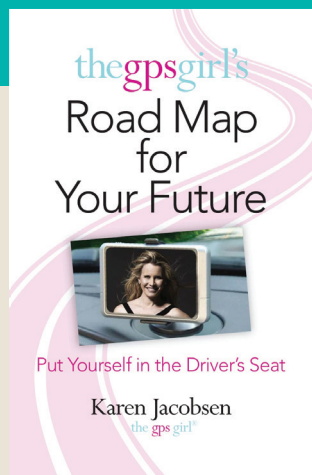
📍 **STAY HYDRATED.** Drinking water all day long keeps your voice in top condition and contributes to your overall wellness.

📍 **CREATE A BREAKDOWN LIST.** Set a timer for 15 minutes and write down everything that is bothering you. This will clear your head so you can move forward.

📍 **PHONE A FRIEND.** Relieve your stress by venting to a speaker buddy, who can help you put things into perspective. Jacobsen reaches out to the Boomerangs, her mastermind group.

📍 **RECALCULATE YOUR BUSINESS GOALS.** Let go of what did or didn't work on a daily basis.

📍 **MEDITATE.** Meditating for as little as two minutes daily can strengthen your decision making and ability to trust that your business is growing as planned.



CSP, CPAE, Mike Rayburn, CSP, CPAE, and Tim Gard, CSP, CPAE. The next year, cosmic forces aligned and Jacobsen and her family moved back to New York, where she joined NSA and became active in the NSA-NY Chapter, where she currently is president-elect.

"Versatility Is My Strength"

Jacobsen notes that speakers are advised to focus on one track to gain momentum fast. But, when she looks at her calendar, it's clear that she's booked for a variety of her talents. Jacobsen is definitely not a traditional keynoter.

"I'm a singer who speaks, plays the piano, writes songs, emcees, hosts and does voice-overs. I have many skills that I tie into my brand and offer to my clients," Jacobsen says.

Sometimes she sings at the beginning and end of her presentation. Other times, she's booked as a concert keynoter and weaves the recalculating theme throughout her presentation while sitting at a grand piano on stage.

For some unexpected fun, Jacobsen might enter at the back of the room and make her way to the stage pretending she's a GPS giving herself directions, and catching the audience completely off guard. She will say, "Continue 50 feet toward the stage. Turn right. Don't fall over the chair in front of you. Continue approaching the stage." The audience always responds with laughter and applause.

Jacobsen is proud that she has been asked to sing the national anthem at many major sporting events in Australia and the United States. She has appeared at Fenway Park, Madison Square Garden and Giants Stadium (which held the largest crowd of 80,000 spectators). In her presentations, she talks about the mindset needed to sing in the center of the field when tens of thousands of

people are focused on you for 90 seconds. Looking back at her life, it's apparent to Jacobsen that singing the national anthem in *The Buddy Holly Story* in Australia many years ago prepared her to rise to this challenge and excel.

Where to Next?

Jacobsen is excited about her new Web TV series called *Navigating New York* at TheGPSGirl.com, which was launched on September 23. Jacobsen will film each of the 13 three-minute episodes on her iPhone®. She also wrote and recorded the series' theme song.

"I love New York passionately. It's the place where I can totally be myself. I thrive on the city's energy and want to hear about other people's love for New York," she says.

Jacobsen is also passionate about her involvement in NSA. She credits the NSA community for supporting, encouraging and counseling her career growth. In particular, she singles out NSA past president Mark LeBlanc for helping her get focused on her goals.

The road ahead looks bright as Jacobsen continues developing her Web TV series in hopes of expanding it to half-hour episodes, and putting the finishing touches on her new book, *How Recalculating Drives Performance*. By all indications, she is continuing to follow her inner GPS and is en route to achieve continued success as a speaker and musical talent.

Now ... how are you going to reach *your* final destination as a speaker?



Speaker magazine Editor-in-Chief Barbara Parus has a new appreciation for her GPS, and plans to follow Jacobsen's helpful recalculating tips to

cope with publishing deadlines. Contact her at Barbara@NSAspeaker.org.