



SPEAKER & MEDIA INFORMATION

Stephen Combs

Maxwell Leadership Certified Speaker | Public Safety Communicator | Educator | Researcher | Author

50-WORD BIO

Stephen Combs is a Maxwell Leadership Certified Speaker who has spent 12 years serving as a Public Information Officer across law enforcement, emergency management, and the fire service. Through Firebase Leadership, he translates lessons from high-pressure environments, professional education, research, and adversity into practical insights on trust, communication, resilience, and leadership.

100-WORD BIO

Stephen Combs has spent 12 years serving as a Public Information Officer across law enforcement, emergency management, and the fire service, communicating through disasters, major incidents, and rapidly evolving crises. A Maxwell Leadership Certified Speaker, FEMA Master Public Information Officer, educator, researcher, and published author, Stephen also spent five years teaching TEEX's nationally delivered MGT318 course and later helped revise its curriculum. He contributed a chapter to the 2022 ASIS Security Industry Book of the Year. Through Firebase Leadership, Stephen translates lessons from the field, classroom, research, and lived experience to help people build trust, navigate uncertainty, strengthen resilience, and lead when it matters most.

FULL BIO

For Stephen Combs, leadership has never been an abstract idea. For the past 12 years, he has served as a Public Information Officer across law enforcement, emergency management, and the fire service, working at the intersection of leadership, communication, public trust, and crisis.

During that time, Stephen has communicated through hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, severe flooding, major public safety incidents, mass casualty events, and a school shooting that brought international media attention to a small South Carolina community. He has worked in environments where information was incomplete, circumstances changed rapidly, public concern was high, and leaders were expected to communicate with both clarity and credibility.

Today, Stephen serves as Public Information Officer for the Bluffton Township Fire District in South Carolina, where he leads strategic, crisis, media, and community communications for a public safety organization serving nearly 250 square miles.

Those experiences have reinforced a principle that extends far beyond emergency response: people do not expect leaders to have every answer, but they do need leaders they can trust.

FULL BIO, CONTINUED

A Maxwell Leadership Certified Speaker, educator, researcher, and author, Stephen brings a distinctive perspective to the stage. He combines lessons from high-stakes communication and public service with deeply human insights about trust, resilience, purpose, and the responsibility leaders carry for the people who depend on them.

Stephen is a graduate of FEMA's Master Public Information Officer Program, a credentialed Public Information Officer through the Center for Public Safety Excellence, and a South Carolina Certified Emergency Manager. He holds a Master of Science in Emergency Management from Lander University, where he was also the first recipient of the university's Certificate of Graduate Studies in All-Hazards Emergency Management. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Business Administration in Management, magna cum laude, from Western Carolina University.

For five years, Stephen served as an adjunct Public Information Officer instructor with the Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service (TEEX), teaching Public Information in an All-Hazards Incident (MGT318), a DHS/FEMA-funded course delivered nationally to government leaders, public information officers, emergency managers, first responders, and other professionals responsible for communicating during major incidents. Drawing on his experience teaching the course and working in the field, Stephen was later selected to help revise its curriculum.

Stephen has also contributed to the profession's body of knowledge. His research, A Model to Assist Organizations with the Hiring, Training, and Development of Public Information Officers, examined characteristics associated with high-performing graduates of FEMA's Master Public Information Officer Program and is cataloged in the U.S. Fire Administration's National Emergency Training Center Library collection.

He also authored Chapter 11, "Successfully Navigating Media for the Emergency Manager," in Principles of Emergency Management and Emergency Operations Centers (EOC), Second Edition. The book was selected as the 2022 ASIS Security Industry Book of the Year. His chapter examines how emergency managers can provide timely, accurate, and reliable information that helps communities make informed decisions during disasters and crises.

Stephen's understanding of leadership was not developed solely through degrees, credentials, classrooms, command posts, or behind a microphone. It has also been shaped by life. Personal and family adversity challenged his understanding of success, resilience, purpose, and what it means to lead others while navigating uncertainty yourself.

Through Firebase Leadership, Stephen brings those worlds together. He has practiced it, studied it, taught it, and helped improve how it is taught. His presentations blend compelling storytelling with practical lessons that help people communicate with greater clarity, build trust, navigate uncertainty, lead with purpose, and prepare before the moment arrives.

Stephen does not simply want audiences inspired for an hour. He wants them better prepared for the moment when someone else needs them to lead.

Forged in the fire. Now carry the flame.

SELECTED CREDENTIALS & PROFESSIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

- 12 years serving as a Public Information Officer across law enforcement, emergency management, and the fire service
- Maxwell Leadership Certified Speaker
- Master of Science in Emergency Management, Lander University
- Graduate, FEMA Master Public Information Officer Program
- Credentialed Public Information Officer, Center for Public Safety Excellence
- South Carolina Certified Emergency Manager
- Former TEEX adjunct PIO instructor, five years teaching MGT318 nationally
- Selected contributor to the revision of MGT318 curriculum
- Author of Chapter 11 in the 2022 ASIS Security Industry Book of the Year
- Published researcher on characteristics associated with high-performing Master Public Information Officers