

Keynote Speaker and Author Jess Pettitt Inducted into the CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame

The National Speakers Association awards its lifetime achievement honor to five speakers each year. Fewer than 270 people have received it since 1977.

EUREKA, CA (August 26, 2026) — Jess Pettitt, MEd, MBA, CSP, has been inducted into the CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame®, the National Speakers Association's highest and most selective honor. She is one of five speakers ([Allison Shapira](#), [Peter Katz](#), [Manley Feinberg](#), and [Anton Gunn](#)) in the class of 2026.

The Council of Peers Award for Excellence is neither applied for nor campaigned for. Speakers are evaluated by other speakers across five categories:

- message,
- presentation,
- experience,
- professionalism, and
- collateral material.

Fewer than 270 people have received the award since the National Speakers Association established it in 1977. It is the closest thing the speaking profession has to an Oscar, and it is held for life.

Pettitt was inducted on July 27, 2026, joining a roster that includes Ronald Reagan, Colin Powell, Zig Ziglar, Norman Vincent Peale, and Les Brown. As Mike Domitrz (CSP, CPAE) from [The Center for Respect](#) introduced Jess, he shared these words about her work:

Good Enough Now is about building an inclusive world that requires humility and curiosity. It is a challenge to us not to settle, but to declare, to commit to be real—and no one is more real from the stage.

As Jess says in her acceptance speech:

“Disruption shakes things up so the pieces can settle down together. I believe we are all pieces of a whole. I believe we can come together to do good better without minimizing pain, fears, and experiences, because disruption leads to unity. Disruption for disruption’s sake does nothing, but disruption intended to unify a deeply divided country and world means something.”

“I get called brave and courageous a lot. I don’t know if this is a true representation of me; I just got really good at crawling out of holes. There will be more, and you will crawl out of them too.”

“We are living in a very interesting time. I need you to remember that every sentence has a history and history is watching.”

We can come together by doing good better.

Jess Pettitt works with businesses, nonprofits, first responders, healthcare organizations, associations, and federal offices on problems leaders do not put on the agenda: the culture that no longer matches the values statement, the team afraid to tell the truth upward, the manager everyone works around rather than with. She has reached more than half a million people across North America under a banner she has carried for two decades: Tough Subjects. Better Connections.

She came to the work sideways. Before the keynotes, Pettitt was a stand-up comic in New York City. The drunken nights are long gone (sober for 20 years). The timing stayed. So did her willingness to say what the room is already thinking, which is what her clients actually hire her for. Visit <https://jesspettitt.com/advisory-services/> to get started!

Pettitt is the author of *Good Enough Now* (2017) and *Almost Doing Good* (2025). Her third book, *Doing Good Better*, is forthcoming, completing a trilogy whose through line she states plainly: doing the best you can with what you have some of the time, because it is better than nothing never.

The CPAE joins her Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation, held by a small fraction of professional speakers worldwide. Fewer than one percent of speakers hold both.

I would like to take this moment to thank my earliest colleagues, clients, exclusive managers, and bureaus for taking a risk on me and finding no risk at all. I couldn’t have built this business without you. If I am really going to thank those at the beginning of my career, then I need to thank everyone who ever fired me and all those hecklers in dark, seedy comedy clubs for building up both my tolerance and my humility to understand time and place. Thank you to those who have served as a bat signal for me over my twenty years on the road and for those who provide a place I call home.

—Jess

About Jess Pettitt

Jess Pettitt, MEd, MBA, CSP, CPAE, is a keynote speaker, advisor, crisis mediator, emcee, and author who facilitates the conversations organizations have been avoiding. A member of the CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame® and a Certified Speaking Professional, she wrote *Good Enough Now* and *Almost Doing Good*, with *Doing Good Better* forthcoming (September 2026). She gets

better results from leaders by improving workplace culture, leadership alignment, and the practical business of keeping a team honest with itself. She is based in Eureka, California.

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Hall of Fame page: <https://jesspettitt.com/hall-of-fame/>

Official CPAE press materials: nsaspeaker.org/newsroom-presskit-cpae