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Anton Gunn Inducted into National Speakers Hall of Fame

Former Obama advisor and Fortune 500 leadership strategist joins fewer than 275 professionals worldwide ever to receive the CPAE® Award, speaking's highest lifetime honor

COLUMBIA, S.C. - The National Speakers Association (NSA) has inducted Anton Gunn, a nationally recognized leadership expert and former senior advisor to President Barack Obama, into its Speaker Hall of Fame. The honor comes with the Council of Peers Award for Excellence (CPAE®), the speaking industry's rarest and most prestigious lifetime achievement award.

NSA formally inducted Gunn on July 27, 2026, making him one of fewer than 275 speakers worldwide to ever receive the honor. NSA awards the CPAE® only after a rigorous, peer-driven evaluation of a speaker's integrity, message, delivery and body of work, placing recipients in the top 1% of professional keynote speakers globally.

“This honor isn't about me. It's a reflection of every leader I've had the privilege to serve,” said Gunn. “From community leaders to the board executives to worldwide audiences, my mission has never changed: help leaders become better for those they lead. Joining the Speaker Hall of Fame is humbling, but the real work continues.”

The induction highlights a career defined by firsts. Gunn became the first African American elected to the South Carolina Legislature from his district and the first African American in the C-Suite at MUSC Health. Later, he served as Chairman of the Columbia Metropolitan Airport Commission. Before establishing his business in Columbia, he served in the Obama Administration and as a Resident Fellow at Harvard University. His leadership in the healthcare sector also earned him recognition as one of the Ten Most Influential Minority Executives in Healthcare by Fierce Healthcare.

Gunn's leadership work traces back to his own football-playing days at the University of South Carolina from 1991 to 1994, where he experienced firsthand what a bad culture and poor leadership does to a team. That experience became the foundation for the leadership and culture frameworks he now teaches to executives nationwide.

Gunn's path to the Hall of Fame includes delivering more than 2,600 presentations across the United States. Real Leaders magazine ranked Gunn *Number 4 on its 2026 list of the Top 100 Impact Speakers* globally. He has written three leadership books, The Audacity of Leadership, The Presidential Principles, and Just Lead, and he is a member of the Forbes Coaches Council and the Aspen Global Leadership Network.

Today, Gunn works with global organizations such as Pfizer, State Farm, KPMG, T-Mobile, SHRM, HCA Healthcare and Mercedes-Benz Vans, helping executives build trust, strengthen culture and lead with confidence in high-stakes environments. TIME, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, Good Morning America, Forbes, NPR and BBC have featured his insights.

With his induction, Gunn joins a Hall of Fame roster that includes legendary motivational icon Zig Ziglar, “Chicken Soup for the Soul” co-creator Jack Canfield, self-made success speaker Les Brown and leadership

author Ken Blanchard. Gunn becomes the 13th African American speaker ever to be inducted. The list also includes two honorary inductees with direct ties to Gunn's own path in public service, former Secretary of State Colin Powell and President Ronald Reagan. NSA established the award in 1977, and fewer than 275 speakers have received it since.

Gunn is available for interviews to discuss the induction, his path from the football field to the White House to the Hall of Fame, and what it means for leaders navigating high-stakes environments today.

About Anton Gunn

Anton Gunn is a leadership expert who equips mission-driven executives to build trust, strengthen culture and lead with confidence in high-stakes organizations. A former senior advisor to President Barack Obama, former Resident Fellow at Harvard University, C-suite healthcare executive, elected public official and board chairman, he has led and advised organizations where leadership decisions shape businesses, communities and lives. Learn more at AntonGunn.com.

About the CPAE® Award

The Council of Peers Award for Excellence (CPAE®), bestowed by the National Speakers Association, is the speaking industry's highest lifetime achievement honor, often compared to an Oscar for professional speakers.

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