Ex-premier Tony Blair will be in Singapore for a motivational seminar

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GETTING front-row seats at an event to listen to former British prime minister Tony Blair and for a chance to engage in dialogue with him, comes at a hefty price tag of almost $10,000.

Yes, you heard right. VIP tickets to the National Achievers Congress are selling for $9,995.

Mr Blair, 56, who was premier from 1997 to 2007, will be speaking for 90 minutes at the motivational seminar, which will be held here from 27 to 29 Apr.

According to the National Achievers Congress website, VIP ticket holders get to interact with the former British leader over lunch, and have a photo-taking session with him.

It is not known how many VIP tickets are available, and how many have since been sold.

But the next tier of tickets – Gold class tickets which cost almost $3,000 – are sold out.

The high asking price has some academics and business consultants wondering if it’s too much to pay for a motivational talk.

Mr Collin Tan, a business consultant, said: “Motivational talks are good but, at that kind of price, it’s a bit too expensive.”

“There are successful businessmen who give talks at industry gatherings and these talks are sometimes free or at a low price of less than $300.

“Some of these people also talk about their success in media interviews which appear in newspapers and on television and isn’t that more accessible?”

In its 18th year, the National Achievers Congress has featured high-profile speakers such as Mr Robert Kiyosaki, author of Rich Dad Poor Dad, and former US president Bill Clinton.

Each time, the event attracts 5,000 people who want to learn how to make more money or to get a leg up on the competition.

Tickets for this year’s event, which will be held at the Singapore Expo, went on sale late last year and 2,000 tickets have been sold.

At last year’s event, all 5,000 tickets were sold out.

Professor Desai Narasimhalu, director of the Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship at Singapore Management University (SMU), added that attendees thinking that they are paying big bucks to get magic solutions to their business problems will be sorely disappointed.

He explained that such talks do not spoon-feed advice to the audience.

“The audience has to think of how to apply what they’ve heard to their daily experiences,” he said.

“You can learn some things from these speakers, but not everything. Tony Blair would talk about his experiences in leading a country and, in some way, it’s relevant to entrepreneurship.”

Would you pay $10,000 to hear him speak?

“Entrepreneurs must be able to convince people to follow their vision and business model.”

Prof Desai pointed out that certain things, such as what products to develop and how to innovate, can be determined only through research and not from such talks.

He added that attendees should not be there just to hear the speakers.

He said: “Having paid so much, I’m sure the audience would also want to meet like-minded people to seek business partners.”

Another business consultant, Miss Han Ping Ping, said: “I don’t see how someone would be interested to attend as they’d want to mix with like-minded people of a certain standing to share opinions and discuss critical issues.”

Entrepreneur Helkum Tan, 40, agreed.

Mr Tan, who runs several marine offshore companies, has been going to the event annually since it started.

He said: “It gives me the opportunity to meet people from other industries.

“I used to think that working hard alone would earn me a lot of money. But the speakers helped me to understand that I should also diversify into investments to grow my money.”

But Mr Tan admitted that Mr Blair’s fame was also a pull factor.

Rare opportunity

He said: “It’s a rare opportunity for us to sit down to listen to a former UK prime minister. Mr Blair is one of the few prime ministers who got re-elected.”

Mr Blair was first elected in 1997 and was re-elected in 2001 and 2005, enjoying an unprecedented three consecutive terms for a Labour premier.

He is now the Middle East envoy for the United Nations, European Union, the US and Russia.

Mr Blair’s last visit to Singapore was in March last year, when he spoke about the Middle East religious conflicts at the National University of Singapore.

Mr Richard Tan, chief executive of Success Resources, which organises the National Achievers Congress, stressed that attendees come for the event with a real interest in hearing what the speakers have to say.

He said: “Participants come to learn from experts in their field and to support their own personal development.”

He did not want to say how much Mr Blair will be paid for the talk.

But previous media reports have said that some former political leaders like Mr Blair can command hundreds of thousands on the lecture circuit.

Assistant Professor William Tow, who teaches psychology at SMU, said the people who attend such conferences do so out of a desire to meet celebrities as well as to hear what they have to say.

He said: “Celebrities are often celebrities because they demonstrate a skill or talent that people admire or want to emulate.

“So from that point of view, it’s understandable why people would be drawn to the congress.”