

Taking the Terror out of Speaking in Public

5 Key Ways to Conquer those Nerves

The first thing new and even experienced speakers need to realise is that it is completely normal to be nervous, even experienced performers still get `stage fright`. The actress Helen Hurst put it beautifully “Fear is a familiar friend, a constant companion always nagging me to do my best”. So understand that it is normal and use it to push you on to get better and better.

However you can control `the constant companion` and here is how:

1. Accept that it is OK to make mistakes.

Don't beat yourself up about the occasional slip or mistake. If you have a 15 minute speech or presentation you will be delivering in the region of 2000 words. It would be very difficult to deliver this word perfect, if you did so the speech would be so perfect that your audience may not find you believable. The occasional uhm, ah, slip up or forgotten word will not affect the overall delivery. The audience won't be analysing every word or phrase, it is the overall impression that will be remembered.

2. Build your Confidence.

Easy to say but how do you do this? Well even a speaker delivering their first speech can take steps to build their confidence. A lot of the fear we have is fear of the `unknown`. So here is what we can do:

- Before the day find out everything about the venue. How to get there. Who will be meeting you? Is the venue in an obscure part of the building? Do you need to bring any equipment with you?
- Get to the venue early. Nothing worse than arriving at the last minute in a panic.
- Meet and Greet. Chat to the guests or the audience before hand. Introduce yourself and mingle with everyone. When you come to speak there will be fewer strangers out there and more acquaintances.
- Walk the stage. Before the event go on stage and walk around, make yourself comfortable and mentally deliver your opening lines.
- Technical aspects. If you will be using a microphone or laptop for instance, take the opportunity to test all the equipment.

3. Practise, Practise, Practise.

I know you have all heard the cliché “Fail to prepare, prepare to fail”, however there is a lot to think about when you are speaking or presenting; the words, the audience, the stage, the reaction of the audience, your movement, so the more you have rehearsed the less you will have to think about. If you are going to go on stage and “chance your arm” or “ad lib” then good luck, you may get away with it but it is a huge risk. Here are some tips on practising:

- Word check your speech so you will know how long it is (about 130 words per minute is average).
- Use a Dictaphone and record and play back, or even better if you have a Video Recorder as we use in the SpeakersBank Advanced Workshops.
- Use the mirror to feedback to you.
- Ask a friend or colleague to sit down and listen to you.
- Practise in the car. Now that so many people use car phones, the driver opposite you won't think you are talking to your self and crazy!
- Set yourself a target of rehearsing completely **10** times. Do this and you won't have any problems.

4. Assume a Positive State.

So often when we are nervous all we think about are the negative consequences of our actions. All the things that `could`; `may`; `will`; `probably` go wrong, and then so rarely do. So instead focus on all the positive outcomes of your successful delivery:

- The applause from the audience
- The positive things that will be said afterwards
- How your confidence will have improved
- How you will have expanded your comfort zone
- How your career/employment prospects will improve

If any of the negative outcomes pop up, that is fine, acknowledge them and then let them go.

5. Develop Your Passion.

Speaking on a subject that you feel passionately about is the sure fire method of overcoming your nerves. Have you ever spoken to a shy or nervous person and steered them onto a subject they are interested in and seen them light up? If you are speaking or presenting on a subject you are passionate about then you will find:

- You will be speaking with enthusiasm.
- You will have fewer problems remembering your material.
- Your body language will be animated.
- You will easily develop a rapport with your audience.
- You will enjoy the occasion.

Finally do remember as we say in SpeakersBank “**The more you speak the better you get**” so get speaking now!

Sean Kennedy 2006 *If you would like to comment on this article please email me on seankennedy@speakersbank.co.uk*

SpeakersBank - a trading subsidiary of the Speakers Trust Charity (no: 296823)
Tel: 0845 862 0444 Website: www.speakersbank.co.uk