

Presentation Skills - Fear

Laliophobia is the fear of public speaking, an affliction with which most of us are faced at one point or another in our lives. Here's another thing to consider when it comes to fear: Many believe that public speaking is universally regarded as the number one most common fear. On the other hand, however, we also know that human beings' only *inborn* fears—that is, the only fears they have as newborn infants—are loud noises and falling. Any other fear is *learned*. Think about that for a minute. Any other fear you can possibly think of is learned. Do you realize what a powerful realization this is? I use the term powerful to describe it because if you can learn it, you can also *unlearn* it.

Recall the mental programming we talked about. You have the power to rewire your thoughts and beliefs. You're only afraid of public speaking (or anything else for that matter) if you tell yourself you are. I'm not saying fears aren't real and that eradicating them is so simple that they can just be swooshed away by the wand of "happy thoughts." An in-depth discussion of the intense psychological therapy that may be involved in resolving traumatic, deep-rooted fears is beyond the scope of this manual, but I truly do believe that the basic premise that "what the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve" holds true.

I want you to now focus on what is driving your fear of speaking. Think about the first time you felt fear over getting up in front of a crowd. What triggered this learned fear? The moment you can realize why you feel this fear, you can change your future. Why are you so concerned about what people think? So what if they judge or criticize you. They aren't thinking about you or judging you as much as you think they are. In fact, Napoleon Hill said, "The fear of criticism robs man of his initiative, destroys his power of imagination, limits his individuality and takes away his self-reliance." Focus on a great presentation, not on whether people will criticize you. You will quit caring about what others think of you when you realize how little they actually do think about you.

Understand that you must never plant the seed of nervousness in your prospects. What I mean by this is that you must never tell your audience you feel uneasy or nervous. The

moment you spill the beans, they will start to look for evidence of your nervousness. Ninety-nine percent of the time, your audience has no clue how nervous you really are. Don't expect perfection the first time you speak. In fact, I have never seen a perfect presentation. Nervousness is normal. Everyone feels it before a presentation. In fact, a great presenter once said, "It is OK to have butterflies; you just need to get them to fly in formation." You are the master of your domain.

I remember my very first speaking engagement. I was excited but also a little nervous. You know, I was faced with some of the common fears we just discussed. Even though we may know that many of our fears are most likely not ever going to actually happen, they still have a way of trying to take center stage right before we get on stage. Anyway, back to my first public speaking engagement—the sound crew had put my microphone (lavaliere) on. I was pacing back and forth, with a few minutes still left to go, so I decided to visit the men's restroom. When I came out, I realized that my microphone had been and still was live and that all that business in the restroom had echoed throughout the whole audience. Another time, I had to give a very long presentation. I was getting toward the end without incident but still had quite a bit to go. I was feeling fatigued, so I paused to take a drink of water. Well, to make a long story short, the liquid went down the wrong pipe and in a coughing, gasping spasm, I sprayed the whole front row with water. And yes, in regards to the classic speaker's screw-up, I have tripped and fallen on my face. My point in sharing these personal bloopers with you is to help you see that even when you make mistakes, it's OK. In spite of the momentary mortification, it's a learning experience. You will get past it, and believe it or not, it is something that later you will very likely actually find humorous. Better yet, it provides you with humorous presentation examples the next time you're in front of an audience, just as I'm doing right now.

If you're serious about being the best you can possibly be, you owe it to yourself to really take ownership of where you're at and where you're headed. To accomplish this objective, put yourself in the seat of an audience member. Do you have any irritating body language? How is your vocal projection? Do you need to sound more animated? All

in all, are you someone you would want to listen to for any period of time? Additionally, it is important to read relevant books, attend enrichment seminars, listen to cutting-edge audio programs, etc. In a nutshell, immerse yourself in the world in which you want to excel. This kind of intense focus will yield vast improvement in your persuasive capabilities. Lastly, always remember that improvement is a process. While you will have “aha!” moments, where something will suddenly click, your complete transformation will not happen overnight. Stretch yourself, but be realistic.

Often, honing a new skill is like exercising for the first time after a five-year hiatus. That is, there's some definite discomfort at first. Developing public speaking and presentation skills is no different. After you start mastering those skills, it feels great. But how do you get to that point? You've really got to treat yourself as a do-it-yourself. A simple strategy is to videotape yourself when you speak. As tedious or even painful as it may be to do so, you will gain valuable insights from watching yourself, insights that can be harnessed in no other way. Feedback from any other source will be helpful, but it will always be secondhand.

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