

# Your Guide to Conquer Fear of Public Speaking



I've heard of all the standard public speaking tips, like making eye contacts with your audience, plan your speech, practice, speak with volume, and standing up straight. Although, they are valuable tips, none of these tips address the real problem underlying my speech delivery. Namely, my fear of failure, and the crippling nervousness I experience when standing in front of a crowd of people.

I'm sure you can relate to the nervousness I'm referring to. Even if you are Tony Robbins or an expert in speech delivery, at some point in your life, you've felt nervous when giving a presentation. I used to hate public-speaking, I would get so nervous that the only thing I heard was the sound of my heart bouncing out of my chest, the only thing I felt was my stomach tightening up as I wipe my sweaty palms on my pants. In the past, I've dealt with this fear by avoiding presenting in front of people, whenever possible. But I've since learned that the best way to deal with any fear is facing it. I started looking outside of myself, then learning and testing out various techniques for dealing with fear. I began practicing advice on giving outstanding presentations. In my experimentation, I have found that several techniques have worked miracles in helping me give effective and fearless presentations.

I am not an expert on public speaking, but I am an avid student on the subject. I've spoken at Universities on recruiting trips for amazon.com and on various topics within the company.

This is my testing ground for the techniques explained below. I am still learning, just as you are. I hope you find these tips useful in preparing and delivering your next presentation.

## 1. Focus on Creating Value Rather Than Your Self

I believe that the number one reason why we get nervous while delivering a speech is because we focus too much on ourselves. We become worried of how we'll look in front of people, and concerned with what others will think of us. We try our best not to look stupid, while in the process this thought is making us more nervous, thus making us look 'stupid'. While we think about appearing incompetent, we fear it more, until all our thoughts are connected to the fear. This forms a downward spiral, and a self-fulfilling prophecy as we experience the failure we feared.

While preparing for your speech, focus on the goal; the reason that your presentation will be useful to the listeners. Change your focus by asking yourself the following questions:

- *What value am I providing for my audience?*
- *What is the most important thing for them to take away from my talk?*
- *How will this talk/topic benefit them?*

I believe that these are the most important questions to ask, for several reasons:

- If we are not providing value, then we are just wasting time. Both our own and our audience's time.
- You will have a clear goal for the presentation. With a single goal in mind, it will be clear what words should be used and which pictures need to be painted. The result will be a simple, cohesive and comprehensive speech design and delivery.
- You will see your presentation from the eyes of the person sitting in the chair listening, instead of the person talking. Many presentations are centered around the

presenter, as this is very easy to do when designing presentations without thinking about the end user/audience.

While giving your presentation, put *all* of your focus on conveying this value to your audience. Since we can really only focus on one thing at a time, we cannot focus on both on giving the most outstanding presentation *and* the worry of what others think of us at the same instant. Focus entirely on giving your audience value, and do this with your whole being. This will shift your point of focus from yourself, and into *giving* something of value to your listeners. In doing so, you will witness your worries decrease.

## 2. Visualization & Affirmations

We feel nervous when we imagine ourselves as a public failure. Our minds become *full* with this unpleasant, mind-created, fearful image of ourselves. Instead, fill your mind with visions of success, confidence and joy.

### **Visualization:**

- On the morning of your presentation day, spend 5-15 minutes calming your mind and centering yourself. During this time, you can try the following visualization exercise.
- Be at a comfortable place without interruptions. Turn off the phone.
- Close your eyes, focus on your breath for about a minute. Breathe deeply and slowly.
- See yourself as a third person in your imagination. (I suggest viewing yourself as if the camera is on the ground and looking up at you. This creates an image of power and strength.)
- In this image, see yourself with complete confidence, strength, charisma and personal power. See yourself standing tall and strong.
- Visualize yourself giving the presentation. See yourself walking in, see yourself smiling at the people in the room. Feel the energy of confidence radiating from your smile, from your voice. See yourself at the front of the room, with an audience of people

smiling back at you. Feel the energy throbbing within you, ready to deliver an outstanding talk to these eager listeners.

- See yourself giving an outstanding presentation in the most ideal scenario. See the confidence already within yourself, expressing your ideas to the audience.
- See yourself after delivering the talk. “It was easier than I thought!” you say to yourself. See the positive impact you’ve made after the presentation.

Positive affirmations about yourself are a powerful tool to boost confidence. When creating an affirmation, you are giving positive suggestions to your subconscious, so that your mind will be filled with positive images of yourself. I practice writing self affirmations during especially nerve racking situations. If you have yet to try creating positive images of yourself, you’re going to think it sounds ridiculous. Essentially, you are tricking your subconscious mind into believing you feeling differently than you do right now. What you need to understand is that you are who you believe you are. Once you release the possibility that visualizing self affirmations will not work , and you believe you are the person that you want to be, then you will understand. Until you believe the affirmations, keep repeating them, and your mind will start to believe it. This belief in yourself will help you in situations requiring self-confidence.

#### **Affirmations:**

- Write down a series of positive statements applicable for speaking, and for building self-image and confidence. The following are some examples to help you get started:
  - I am a fantastic speaker and I deliver engaging presentations.
  - I am confident and powerful.
  - I create tremendous value for other people.
  - I am an outstanding person.
  - My work is important. People rely on my excellence.
  - I kick ass. :)

- Repeat these statements out aloud as much as possible. It is important to stay them out aloud, but if you really can't, verbalize them in your mind. Before a sales meeting once, I was repeating similar affirmations to myself as I got ready in the morning, and in the car as I drove to the meeting. I sold with flying colors. That's when I really learned the power of affirmation.
- Write and print them on paper, or tape them on walls. I've seen some people taping these on bathroom mirrors, so that it's the first thing they see in the morning. I have some of my most influential personal affirmations taped to the wall across from my bed, so that I see them and are reminded every day.

### **3. Acknowledging Your Fear**

As with overcoming any negative emotion, one of the most effective techniques I've found is fully facing your emotions. Acknowledge your fear by fully feeling the feelings of that fear. Become the observer of that emotion, allowing it to flow and see the source of that emotion. As you observe it and allow it to happen, you will feel less and less of the fear.

### **4. 'Fake It Till You Make It'**

Choose a mentor, someone who inspires you and excels at giving speeches. You don't have to know or have a personal relationship with this person. Anyone who you admire, whom exemplifies the skills you desire. I like to use Tony Robbins or my friend Richard Greene for this purpose.

Once you have a mentor in mind, put yourself in their shoes and see the world through their eyes. Imagine you are this person.

Ask yourself:

- *What would [mentor] do in this situation?*

- *How would [mentor] present this point?*
- *How would [mentor] engage the audience for this point?*

Carrying their energy, how will they present in this situation? Whenever I tried this technique, I've always felt as if a gust of energy had hit me, and I noticed that I could then articulate points very quickly and clearly.

## **5. Authenticity**

Be yourself. Be honest, be pure, be open, show your vulnerabilities. Share your thoughts with the audience even if it sounds awkward. This will have an endearing quality to touch your audience's hearts, and this will help your audience to understand you. I once saw a girl speak at a timed speech, she screwed up the timing for the auto-slides, and was completely embarrassed. She talked about how embarrassed she was and tried very hard to keep going. The entire audience was sympathizing with her and was rooting for her to succeed. When we see authentic qualities in a person, we can't help but to relate with that person on a human emotional level. You become a friend without having been formally introduced.

Be present in the moment and allow your self-expression to flow freely in that moment. Express yourself beautifully, fully and naturally. Without having to focus deeply on being yourself, you will naturally express yourself in your own unique way.

Does being authentic seem contradictory to imagining you are your mentor (#4 – Fake it till you make it) ? Understand that you can feel the same confidence and energy as your mentor, but express the words as your true self. Even if you are picturing yourself as a mentor, you will naturally convey your own ideas, in your own style and with your own words.

## **6. Engage the Audience at the Beginning**

I've found myself to be most nervous right before giving a presentation and at the very start of a presentation. I can think of few moments more nerve racking than walking in front of a silent

audience all staring at you blankly. Once I realize that I'm not going to *die* from delivering a speech, I am able to relax. I like to start every talk with ice-breakers to *crack the silence* and make the audience aware that they are encouraged to participate. I also like to make them laugh to gain their full attention.

Here are some ideas of ice-breakers and audience engaging techniques:

- **Ask the audience a question.** Simple question that anyone can answer. Encourage shouting of answers. Gently make fun of the audience if no one answers. When people answer your question or throw out guesses, the attention is placed on them rather than yourself.
- **Interact with your audience:** Get the audience to make a **physical movement**, such as raising their hand, giving their neighbor a *high-five*, pointing at some body, or patting themselves in the back. This unexpected movement from the audience will help the audience be more engaged in the rest of your speech, since they've already psychologically invested in you by taking a participating in your request. If people have been sitting for a long time, their movement also helps to get their blood flowing and keep them awake. \*smiles\*
- **Tell a joke.**
- Show a **funny picture or video** that's somewhat related the topic at hand.
- Get the **audience to repeat** what you said. Same reasoning as physical movement.
- Get the **audience to repeat your main points**, which you've reiterated over and over throughout your presentation. Make sure you have no more than 3 main points, and make them easy to remember and repeat. Remind the audience of your main points throughout the talk, so that your audience is familiar with what these points are.