

Overcoming The Fear Of Public Speaking

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To many people the mere thought of having to give a presentation, or a speech, can reduce them to a quivering wreck. We all know that research has told us that fear of public speaking is worse than fear of flying or even dying.

This being the case, it is no wonder that many of us would avoid giving public presentations if at all possible.

Unfortunately it is also quite true that it is a major requirement for many in their workplace; and it then becomes a place of misery.

But there are some simple things that you need to know about how the body creates the sense of fear, and what steps you can take to help overcome these natural fears and make them work for you in your presentations.

Attitude

The well known fight or flight syndrome is at the base of all those symptoms of your fear. The body takes physical action to prepare you to fight for your life or to take to your heels. Either way, adrenaline starts racing through the body to give you that extra kick that you would need if you were facing a sabre tooth tiger.

We are all familiar with the sweaty palms, the increased heart rate, the sense of sickness in the stomach and all the miserable effects that fear has on us. And yet ... if you remember the first time you were waiting to see again that special someone you met at the party last night; what was the sensation like? Didn't your heart start to race a little? Weren't you feeling a little wobbly inside? Weren't you suffering all the symptoms of excited anticipation?

Children have been known to be physically sick from excitement – excitement has a powerful effect on the body. In fact it has the same effect on the body as the other thing we were talking about – the difference is in the way that we view it. It is in our attitude. If we name the symptoms nerves we will produce fear: if we name them excitement we will produce anticipation.

So the first step to overcoming the Presentation Nerves is to change your attitude.

Familiarisation

People fear what that they do not know or understand. The first day in a new job can be quite uncomfortable. We do not know where things are, what the routine is or even who's who. Everything is strange and new and we are nervous.

But within a week we are becoming more comfortable as we have a basic understanding



of what goes on, the routine is becoming familiar and we are learning what to expect. Our fear is reducing, and by the end of one month we are probably feeling like we have been there for ever. We have become familiar with the work and with the work place.

We can also train ourselves to become familiar with public speaking and giving presentations. It is exactly the same principle – by becoming familiar with the process we begin to lose the fear.

So start volunteering to do that next presentation; grab that opportunity to offer a vote of thanks to someone; put your hand up for the next discussion group. If you take every opportunity to become familiar with the process of speaking you will begin to lessen the fear – just as you became familiar with the work process and conditions.

Prepare and Practice

If you are faced with having to give a presentation then putting off the fearful day is not going to help you at all. The rule of familiarisation works here too; we cannot help but feel nervous if we are unsure of what we have to say. If we are not familiar with the information we are opening ourselves up to the inevitability of Murphy's Law – *"If it can go wrong, it will go wrong"*

Preparing and practicing our presentation is the only way in which we will become familiar with the contents, the information, the equipment and the feeling of confidence. Yes, confidence; *'confidence'* as Trischel teaches, *'is the way to success'*.

Knowing that we are confident about what we have to do takes away one of the stress factors which affects our nerves. But it does need a high level of preparation and practice. And we get one more benefit out of sufficient practice – in addition to a good sense of knowledge about our topic we also get an instinct about the time taken.

Since a presentation is given to someone else, we are taking a slice of their time as well as ours; and if we waste their time they will not be sympathetic to our message. If we have been given a 20 minute appointment and, because of lack of preparation and practice, we waffle on for forty minutes, how do you think that busy executive is going to feel about us, our message and our company?

Effective preparation and practice will ensure not only that you are fully familiar with the information and equipment, but also that you can hone it to ensure that it fits in with the time allotted: An essential knowledge that will enhance your confidence.

Relaxation Techniques

Even when you have a good attitude, when you are more familiar with the process of public presentation and you have prepared and practiced your presentation until it is almost a part of you; while you are waiting to begin the symptoms of excitement or apprehension can start to appear. What to do?



confidence brings success

Sit upright, yes now; push the chin up slightly; press the shoulders back a little and feel the rise in the ribcage. Now, breathe slowly in while counting to four. Make sure that you breathe all the way down to the bottom of the lungs by pushing the diaphragm out.

With a lungful of air, pause a moment for the count of four, and then slowly exhale, again to the count of four. Do this twice. How do you feel? Most people will admit to a strange sense of calmness, it's like you have centred yourself and feel back in control.

However, take care not do this too often; as it can cause giddiness. If you start to feel light headed stop and resume your normal breathing pattern until you feel better.

You can also take the time while waiting for your appointment to undertake some discrete exercises to relax those tense muscles that often betray our nervousness.

Hands can shake, so clench them tightly until you are aware of the strain and then release them. The effect is automatic. Stretch one leg out in front of you and place the heel on the ground with the toes pointing up. Push the heel forward (still keeping it on the ground) and pull the toes towards you. This will tighten the calf muscles. Now relax the leg, again you feel a distinct difference in tension. Repeat for the other leg.

Try and repeat these tense and relax exercises for those muscle groups that are beginning to tighten up; it will create a feeling of relaxation which will enhance your confidence.

To relax the facial muscles while sitting in a reception room can be difficult, we do not want to frighten the receptionist – however a broad grin can be effective in stretching the jaw muscles, but keep it in the bounds of suitability! If there is a magazine available, you might try raising it in front of your face and yawning behind it. Yawning is great for full facial relaxation - but remember these relaxation tips need to be discrete or you will find yourself with a bemused audience. If this happens to you the only tip I can give you is to confess!

Undertake Some Training

Like most things in life, public speaking is something that can be learned. So if you have a job that requires you to give presentations, and you are sure that you could really do it properly if only you knew the way – then you should undertake some training. Training which is given by the experts.

Trischel is a training company that specialises in communication training, and their trainers have been engaged in public speaking for over twenty years.

If you have found the ideas and tips here helpful, just imagine what one day spent with the knowledgeable trainers from Trischel could do for you, your confidence and your competency.

Go to www.trischel.com.au and check out the next One Day Public Speaking Workshop – and if there isn't one scheduled in your location, contact us and ask for one and we'll see what we can do. Because with confidence comes your success.

