



celebrating culture - improving clarity

Master your Fear

What is it about standing up to speak in front of a group of people that makes us so afraid? How can it be that we are quite comfortable sharing a story or a joke in a social setting, but when asked to deliver a formal business presentation or to address family and friends at a wedding reception, our mouth dries up, we shake uncontrollably and our ideas and speech become muddled and confused?

Public speaking terrifies us. We feel vulnerable, exposed, scrutinised! ACCENTS has trained thousands of people in Public Speaking and Presentation Skills over the years and the need to learn how to manage and control nerves has been a top priority with most clients.

Facing our fear is the first step, so let us examine what makes us so afraid.

The Topic

Is the topic controversial or complex?
How familiar or comfortable are you with the content?

The Audience

Is the audience size overwhelming or intimidating?
Are you expecting an antagonistic or aggressive audience?
Perhaps you feel they know more about this topic than you do?

The Situation

The environment may be strange and very formal.
You may not be familiar with the equipment or you fear that the equipment will fail.

Self-doubt

You start to question your own knowledge and ability.
You lack experience in public speaking

The area of self-doubt is the most common cause of our fear. There is an important mind-shift that needs to take place as we realise that communication is a very generous art. We are giving of ourselves and sharing ideas with others. Yes, there may be people in the audience who do know more than we do, and that's OK. The point is that we have been brave enough to share what we know and the experts might be interested in hearing whether we understand things in the same way that they do.

If we are excessively nervous, we are being selfish! Think about this statement for a moment. Who are we thinking about when we are nervous? We are thinking about ourselves. How will they see me? Do they like me? Am I making a good impression for my manager? Try to concentrate on the message and the focus moves away from you and onto your content. Your main purpose is, after all to share something of worth with your audience.

Feeling slightly nervous is to be expected, it shows that we care, that we want to do well and give of

our best. Nerves also serve to increase our energy level and sharpen the mind. The trick is to channel nervous energy into passion and enthusiasm. It is when the nerves overwhelm us and disable us, however, that they are destructive and need to be controlled.

What can we do to control and manage our nerves? Here are a few practical tips:

BEFORE THE EVENT

Prepare

It is a known fact that the more prepared you are, the less nervous you will be. We have a tremendous advantage in being prepared. Never, never, never learn the speech or presentation off by heart! You will set yourself up to fail. Rehearse to remember ideas and the sequence of ideas not words. Practice with a live audience if you can - family members are usually the most difficult audience. If you can survive them, you can survive anything!

Cultivate a Positive Mind-set

It is important to prepare psychologically for the event. Your attitude directly affects the attitude of the audience. If they sense that you resent being there or are wanting to get the presentation over and done with as quickly as possible, they will resent having to sit through your presentation and listen to you. If you think your presentation is boring, they will find it boring. Instead of torturing yourself with all the possible negative scenarios, use visualization techniques and positive affirmations. See yourself succeeding and being able to answer all their questions with ease! Say to yourself, "I will be enthusiastic and energetic", "I'm going to enjoy sharing this information with them."

Warm up your Voice

A quick, but thorough voice warm-up will reduce vocal strain and will energise your delivery. It prevents sluggish speech and ensures vibrant expression. In this way your voice is ready for action and you won't need to clear the 'frog' in your throat unnecessarily. Singing is a wonderful way to warm-up your voice!

DURING THE EVENT

Breathe

When we are anxious or uptight, we tend to hold our breath or top up on breath that is already there. This will result in a feeling of breathlessness and you will sound as though you have just been running the Comrades Marathon! Remember to exhale. Try to use deep, abdominal breathing instead of shallow, chest breaths.

Move

Movement gets rid of excess adrenaline and will help to control trembling, shaking muscles. Dare to use some gesture and change your stance. Avoid standing completely still throughout your presentation. Movement is visually exciting as long as it enhances and compliments the content and is not repetitive and distracting.

Pause

This has numerous benefits. It gives you time to think of your next thought and provides the audience time to absorb the information you have just given them. Pausing will also assist you to slow down if you tend to race and will help to eliminate fillers such as 'um' and 'er'

Finally, with the onset of technology and e-mail, we seem to be able to store more information faster, but we seem to talk less and our communication becomes big on quantity but small on quality. Keep a sense of humour about you and don't lose the ability to laugh at yourself. Enjoy

communicating! After all, you may just have the power influence a decision that makes a whole lot of difference!

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