

Relax, You Can Master Stage Fright!

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RELAX, YOU CAN MASTER STAGE FRIGHT!

by

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Mastering Stage Fright is Key!

If you are passionate about personal success and self-fulfillment, you'd care about your power of speech. Stage fright is arguably the No.1 killer of many people's will to advance beyond obscurity or mediocrity in social company and business life. This e-note would help you master stage fright. And by acting on the keys highlighted in this e-note, you could master public speaking anxiety.

Understand the Nature of Public Speaking Anxiety

The thought of having to get up in front of an audience to speak is terrorizing for many people. Many people who would ordinarily converse convivially among a group of friends in an informal setting may feel terrorized to face the same group in a formal setting, just because the physical environment has been rearranged!

Interestingly, public speaking is almost the #1 thing people dread to do: even almost taking the same degree of fear as the fear of death! A general in a formidable army, who later became the Prime Minister of his country, was reputed to have said early in his career that he would readily march up to the execution stage than face an audience. He later turned out to be one of the greatest public speakers of his day. His name? Benjamin Disraeli! So, you are not alone.

Almost every public speaker experiences public speaking anxiety to one degree or another. The problem is when the anxiety becomes paralyzing.

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Everyone else fears public speaking. Believe it, even the most polished speakers get nervous.

Though it can be uncomfortable, public speaking anxiety is somewhat within limits a positive reaction to prepare you for the task ahead. It is your body's natural way to prepare you to speak. In that 'flight or fight' situation your adrenaline begins to flow, your heart rate increases and your breathing steps up a bit. Rather than flee the situation, you decide to master it! This is what good public speakers choose to do. They decided to master it and then learned how to do so.

Many effective speakers battle stage fright to one degree or another. You too can master public speaking anxiety! It is possible that you may experience some negative symptoms. For example: quaking body, wobbly knees, profuse sweating, dry mouth, pounding stomach, jittery hands, wet palms, and blank mind. These negative symptoms need to be mastered. But your determination to master them is critical!

Understand the Importance of Presence

As a public speaker you must develop presence as early as possible because it has a marked impact on your audience. It makes a tremendous difference to the attention the audience gives you and the impression you leave on the audience.

There is that brief, important period between the moment when you stand up to speak and before you start speaking. How you carry yourself and what you project to your audience could make or mar your effectiveness as a speaker. It is during this period that they will have their eyes on you, getting an impression of you— before you have even uttered a word.

The confidence you display, the gusto with which you approach the lectern or get up to speak, and your overall carriage are critical. Stage fright or public speaking anxiety is the #1 killer of presence.

The speaker who is pummeled by stage fright either rushes nervously to the lectern or gets up in a sluggish manner – and without pausing a second rushes into

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their speech with quaking voice or apparent lack of assuredness. Thus, before such a speaker starts they have messed up!

Being relaxed and at ease is important. Interestingly, it is only if you are relaxed that your audience can be.

What the practiced public speaker does:

The practiced speaker pauses upon getting to the lectern, waiting for the audience to settle quietly and prepare themselves to listen. This enables speaker to gain command of the situation.

Be Prepared!

Thorough preparation —thorough rehearsal — builds confidence! Your primary key to mastering public speaking anxiety is to be well-prepared.

Unwholesome public speaking anxiety emanates from fear of ridicule, fear of failure, a sense of inadequacy or an unfavorable comparison of oneself with the audience (somebody in the audience or some other speaker). The plain truth, however, is that each person at one time or the other has learned to be a public speaker, in many cases through hard work.

They prepared themselves, prepared their speeches and practised to overcome their bad habits and weaknesses, - and they do these consistently and persistently until they become accomplished speakers. The lessons they learnt and the success they achieved in the process, embolden them. They become more self-assured.

What do you see when you meet accomplished public speakers?

What you see is their self-assurance. You never knew that they toiled to get to that level! You see, accomplished public speakers learnt earlier in their public speaking career that the best way to stay on top of public speaking anxiety is to be completely sure of themselves and of each speech. And so, they toiled and developed the techniques to achieve this objective. They have mastered the techniques of keeping public speaking anxiety under control. You too can do it if you commit yourself to work diligently at it.

The first step is to work hard to prepare and develop a good speech: a speech that would be interesting,

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enlightening and beneficial to people, - and one that you would feel happy delivering. Then, you must know and master what you are talking about.

How do you achieve this?

Practise your speech several times to the point that the material becomes a part of you. As a rule of thumb, you should give an hour practice to every minute of a speech (approximately 120 words). Thus, for a 10-minute speech (approximately 1,200 words), you should practise for a total 10 hours! The more you feel nervous, the longer you should practice your speech before you finally deliver it. If you are determined to develop effective public speaking skills, join, or form a speakers' circle or club.

Don't embark on 10 minutes speech until you have done a couple of 1 minute introduction of yourself or a few comments among an audience of 5-10 people. Look out for opportunities to do this! Resist the urge to flee such an opportunity.

This preparation – consistent practise and thorough preparation of your speeches – is your greatest weapon to master stage fright, as you will see further emphasized in the next section. Furthermore, when you speak, don't be in a rush – don't hurry yourself. And don't feel you are wasting your audience's time.

Take all the time you need to express yourself clearly enough so that your hard preparation and consistent practice would make you achieve the success you deserve.

Understand these Fundamentals

You learn to speak by speaking. Your ability to speak improves with time if you keep learning and keep speaking.

You master your nervousness by speaking more often. Public speaking is not an inborn gift. Accomplished public speakers are made through hard work and practice. And there are many techniques and skills involved in the control of stage fright. Controlled fear, turned to positive energy makes you more alert and gives you added gusto for new thoughts, facts, and ideas so that you could excel.

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No matter how nervous accomplished public speakers are, they don't show it – they give the impression that they are in control of themselves. You don't have to reveal your nervousness, no matter how jittery you may feel. And **the audience will not know how nervous you are once you appear poised.**

How you perceive the audience often affects the degree of nervousness you experience.

If you expect the audience to be totally hostile, you'd be totally nervous. If you perceive the audience to be friendly and accommodating, you'd be less nervous. **Always assume that the audience will accept you.**

Form a mental image of what you want the audience to see in you—how you want to look to the audience. In no way should you let what you assume the audience is thinking negatively affect the way you visualize yourself and the speaking situation. Never expect that your audience will be hostile towards you. Even when you are dealing with a totally hostile audience once you have a friendly attitude towards them and convey to them the impression that you like them, you'd be able to address them without much anxiety.

See yourself as an interesting, charming, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and determined public speaker.

There is a lot to gain from working on yourself to become what you think you are. So, do all you could to be an interesting, charming, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and determined public speaker. In this you have the germ for success in public speaking.

You can attain a great mileage with interest and passion.

You may start with a topic you are passionate and knowledgeable about. If you speak on a subject, you are passionate about, and that you know a lot about, you'd be less self-conscious. You'd be less nervous.

Beginner speakers are well advised to concentrate on what they know very well and have developed enthusiasm for during the early part of their public speaking career. When you are engrossed in your subject and you are convinced that you have a message that will benefit the audience, you are less likely to think about being nervous. And as you progress, always

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expand your interests and knowledge so that you could have more and more things to be passionate about.

Thus, keeping your nervousness in check. You can bet: Concentrating on giving your audience something vital and exciting gets you thinking less about yourself!

Make yourself more knowledgeable on the subject matter than your audience.

You should so research your subject and so prepare your speech that you are totally confident that you can expertly speak on it. Remember that you are speaking because you can cover the subject matter. Get yourself fully surfeited with more than you require to confidently explore all that your audience needs.

Avoid Hero Worship

Many people who fear public speaking are this way because they place others over themselves.

They feel that somebody is a better speaker than themselves. When they weigh themselves up relative to the audience, they feel that they are inadequate. Fundamentally, they don't believe in themselves! And they inwardly want to be somebody else! It's hard for many people. But if you'd control public speaking anxiety you must be yourself.

You get away from the business of comparing yourself, albeit unfavorably, with other people. Even if there are objective yardsticks people use to compare themselves with one another, in life there is always some people on the faster lane. You stick with what you're doing in your life and make a success of yourself. Leave the worries and the anxieties to others.

Work hard at eliminating, reducing, or controlling whatever speech deficiencies you may have but never feel inferior because of them. Be yourself. And never try to imitate other public speakers no matter how accomplished they are. You may learn how they prepare; you may learn grammar or diction from them but weave your learning into your being.

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Physical Exercises

Learning to breathe properly and to take a deep breath can tone your nerves.

Spend about 15-30 minutes each day to practice deep breathing in the open air, perhaps in the evening. Do this while you are standing, and do it when you are seated. A third of the time, breathe in deeply through the nose and breathe out slowly through your mouth. The second third of the time, breathe in slowly counting five as you breathe in and then breathe out slowly through your nose. And the last third, breathe normally.

Engage in such **physical exercises** as jogging, walking briskly for about two kilometers everyday (this may be around your office premises or home), running up taking the staircase a couple of times, swimming, press ups, stretches, or calisthenics. Work a few of such exercises into your daily routine.

Think Positively

Believe that your audience wants you to succeed and that you have it in you to succeed in your speech.

There is power in the ability to speak in public. You can bet, public speaking is a sure route to gaining influence, prestige, power, and wealth; all roll in one.

Many people fear public speaking because they imagine bad things to happen to them. Rather than seeing the opportunity for personal growth and personal success that public speaking offers, they are expecting or assuming that the audience is critical of them or that they would disappoint their audience. Rather than dwelling on your quaking hands and pounding heart, be happy that you have another opportunity in life to move in the direction of personal success.

Get rid of negative self-talk!

Don't tell yourself:

'I'm not likeable.' Or "I'm not a good speaker.' Or 'I'm just too nervous to stand up to speak in front of those

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big guns.’ Or ‘I’m too short in stature to address these people.’ Or ‘I’m not as knowledgeable as Dr. Know-all and Mr. Tough who will be listening to me.’

Replace such negative self-talks with:

‘I’m a likeable person.’ Or ‘I become a good speaker by speaking.’ Or ‘I’m mastering nervousness with adequate preparation.’ Or ‘I’m able to address any audience I prepare adequately to address.’ Or ‘I will so research my subject and practice my speech that my mastery of the subject is not in doubt.’

Visualize yourself succeeding at your speech.

Each time you practice your speech, see it in your mind’s eyes that people are applauding your speech and are generally satisfied with what you offer. In your mind, just before you start to speak, imagine your voice sounding warm, welcoming, and pleasant.

Also, make it a habit to stand up to give a speech even at home or among friends. **The more often you speak, the less you feel scared of speaking.** Then believe that you have it in you to handle whatever

happens during or after your speech. That is a key to success in public speaking!

Act the Part

The great American psychologist, William James, counseled us to act as if we already possess the virtue we lack and want to cultivate.

Everyone gets nervous. Many people you see that are relaxed and self-assured are heeding William James’ counsel. They’ve learned to always strive to appear poised. Thus, the more you practise not looking nervous, the less nervous you are!

You see, even if you are feeling jittery as long as you appear poised, nobody knows. Your audience never knows. So why piling the stakes against yourself?

Always strive to appear calm! Never let your audience see you sweating or wobbling!

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Don't be afraid if you still feel nervous as you approach the venue. There's always an element of nervous energy speakers need to give their best in public speaking. At this point as you enter the room turn that energy to enthusiasm for your audience and your subject.

Arrive early, if possible before your audience. **Get to know and to like your audience as soon as possible.** The more you know your audience the more you'd see them as friends, and the less nervous you'd be.

Get up on your feet to greet some members of your audience. Shake their hands, ask for their names, and share some pleasantries with them. Always maintain a good eye contact with each person you greet. Show that you are interested in them. Let them know that you are happy to know them. Doing this prepares a ground for goodwill towards you and you'd be calm.

Each speech situation gives you an opportunity to grow. While you are waiting to be introduced the audience or before you speak, think less about yourself, enjoy the company of the person seated next to you. When you get up to speak, walk briskly to the lectern or podium. When you get there, pause, look cheerfully at the audience. Your first sentence should attract their interest and attention immediately. You can then follow this up with a smile.

As you continue your speech, never guess at what people are thinking about you or your speech. Don't worry yourself on what inadequacy you may be experiencing. Stick with your prepared speech. And never apologize to the audience for any mannerism, just plan to work on yourself to overcome it by your next speech.

When you get back to your base, review how you performed:

What went well and should be maintained; what went wrong and should be improved upon? Itemize areas you need to improve upon – then decide to work on how you could be a better public speaker next time. But stay humble and focused.

No matter how much progress you are making, but don't get arrogant and cocky – enjoy the process, enjoy your journey, be happy with your progress, keep learning.

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Doing all the above sets you on the course to mastering stage fright. And you will if you persist and are conscientious.

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