

## 6. CONQUERING FEAR IN PUBLIC SPEAKING

**6.1 CONFIDENCE TO OVERCOME:** Fear of public speaking is the most common of all phobias. It's a form of performance anxiety in which a person becomes very concerned that he or she will look visibly anxious, maybe even have a panic attack while speaking. Over time, people try to protect themselves by either avoiding public speaking or by struggling against speech anxiety. In this way, people get Tricked into making the fear of public speaking more chronic and disruptive.

Some people do this with avoidance. They choose college coursework in such a way as to avoid public speaking, rather than taking the classes they want. At work, they pass up promotions and assignments which would require speaking. The fear of public speaking may even lead people to choose a career that doesn't call for public speaking, rather than one they want. This is often the case with people who have feared public speaking from a very young age.

Others don't go that far, but will go to great lengths to avoid making presentations, or even just having to speak at a meeting. They may deliberately arrive late, hoping to miss the customary introductions ("let's go around and introduce ourselves...").

Many others will gamely accept an assignment and show up to give a speech when it's important to their career. But they try to **get through** those situations without feeling afraid. They focus on what they feel, rather than on the message they've come to deliver. This is often the case with people whose fear of public speaking developed later in life. The more successful they become in their career, the more they are called upon to share their expertise with groups, and the more anxious they become.

### **The Trick**

The fear of public speaking draws upon the same Panic Trick as other fears and phobias. People naturally want to rid themselves of public speaking anxiety before they do any more speaking. But they get Tricked into using methods which actually make the fear of public speaking stronger, and more persistent, over time.

### **Don't Be the Unspeaker!**

Fearful speakers create trouble for themselves when they don't embrace the role of Speaker. Instead, they try to be the Unspeaker. They try to "get through" the experience without committing themselves to the role of Speaker. They read, they

drone, they overlook the audience, and they focus mainly on resisting their fear. The result of this resistance is, typically, that it gives you more public speaking anxiety, not less - just the **opposite** of what you want.

### **Hurrying**

Rushing through a talk requires that you talk fast. Talking fast interferes with your breathing. Instead of breathing comfortably, you breathe in a short, shallow manner, or you might even hold your breath. This gives you the sensation of running out of air and being unable to breathe, a common fear in this situation, and one that greatly increases fear of public speaking.

All this hurrying reduces the chance that your audience can enjoy your speech. It creates a barrier between you and them, which might have been your intention, but this will actually **increase** your fear. The less of a connection you have with them, the more unfriendly they will seem to you, and the more speech anxiety you will experience.

### **Ignoring the Audience**

Fearful speakers often try to ignore the audience, hoping this will decrease their speech anxiety. For instance, lots of fearful speakers avoid eye contact with the audience. This prevents you from noticing any audience reaction. You won't notice when people seem more interested, or have questions.

When you have no audience contact, you focus on your own thoughts. And if you're a fearful speaker, your thoughts are virtually guaranteed to be far more negative, and unrealistic, than anything your audience might think or say. The result? More, rather than less, fear of public speaking.

### **Fighting to Hide Your Fear**

Finally, efforts to hide your fear create the additional fear of being "found out" as a nervous person. This only adds to the public speaking anxiety you already experience.

It has another negative side effect. After you've given a speech, even if it has gone well, you may take no pride in your success because of this thought: "If they knew how afraid I was, they'd think less of me."

I've worked with many successful businesspeople who, despite their speech anxiety, actually presented frequently and did a good job. Unfortunately, because of their desire for secrecy, they thought they were "fooling people" and never felt satisfaction from their work. In order to progress and feel confident, they had to see that they were the ones being fooled - not the audience! You can overcome the fear of public speaking, with a good game plan.

**6.2 EYE CONTACT:** Eye contact is notable for being a fundamental aspect in public speaking. Professional public speakers sometimes even stress eye contact over content management. The main reason why professional public speakers regard eye contact as an integral aspect in the speaking process is due to one significant fact - audience impact.

Eye contact is a very personal approach to any public speaking setting - it provides a passive form of interaction with the audience. This method of increasing audience impact has been efficient in all forms of mass communication. Notably, this nonverbal communication form establishes credibility in the speaker and even confidence in the delivery. Your audience will feel that you really are speaking to them. You will be giving them the benefit of importance. In fact, this form of nonverbal communication has been known to maintain the interest and attention of your audience. It encases with it a symbolic meaning that conveys conviction and even entertainment. It also adds life to your public speaking activity. This form of nonverbal communication determines the public speakers' style because it removes all notion of stage fright.

Professional public speakers maintain this eye contact even with a large audience. It is that versatility to look into the eyes of the audience and deliver a heartfelt speech. When you learn the dynamic property of making contact with your audience, you will find that your public speaking activity will show more fruition. Consider maintaining this nonverbal communication as more than a fundamental aspect. Make it an integral aspect in your public speaking endeavor. The audience, after all, is your most important priority.

*Making eye contact is essential to a great presentation. Here's an easy way to accomplish that.* Making eye contact while speaking to a group may be one of the most difficult aspects of giving a presentation. To many people, eye contact is an intimate act - almost like touching someone. And to reach out and touch a stranger - even with your eyes - can feel particularly uncomfortable.

However, the audience is there to see you and to hear what you have to say. They deserve to be included and to be made welcome. Lack of eye contact creates a barrier between you and the audience; it makes you look untrustworthy, shifty or unsure of yourself; it drags down your presentation and sucks the life out of it.

How can we resolve this issue and give our audience the eye contact and personal attention they deserve?

### **1. To scan or not to scan - that is the question.**

You may have been taught to scan the back wall during a presentation; you may have been told that this fools the audience into believing you're looking at them. False! This only makes the audience believe (and wonder why) you're looking at the back wall. Making eye contact with individuals in the room is imperative if you want to build a relationship with your audience.

### **2. Make friends**

Here's a way to create an environment for yourself that allows eye contact to occur naturally. It's called "making a friend."

As you're setting up and preparing for your presentation, some people will begin to arrive. This is a golden opportunity and a low-pressure way to greet some people before you begin your talk.

Say hello as a participant walks into the room. Introduce yourself as the speaker. You can leave it at that, or you can even ask a simple open-ended question, like "how did you hear about the workshop?" You're just making small talk, but you've now made a connection with an audience member that will serve you later.

When you begin your presentation, seek out your "friends" for eye contact. You will feel more comfortable looking at them because you've already met them. It's especially helpful to make your opening remarks while looking at one or two people you feel comfortable with. This sets the stage for the rest of your talk.

### **3. Divide the room into sections.**

Once you feel comfortable with a few individuals, you can start spreading your gaze around the room. Make sure to give each section of the room equal time and energy. Look at someone on the left side for a few seconds, then someone in the middle, then someone on the right. Don't neglect the people in the back!

When looking at the back of a large room, it's okay to focus on a section or a head in the distance rather than try to make direct eye contact with someone far away.

### **4. Seek out the people who are giving a positive response.**

Nobody wants to suffer an insecure moment in the middle of a seminar by catching the eye of an audience member sitting with arms crossed and a defiant expression.

Yes, you'll notice these people, but don't assume they're indifferent. Each person has a unique way of interacting with a speaker, and some people will enjoy your presentation while appearing to indicate otherwise.

If you're too uncomfortable making eye contact with people who don't seem to be giving anything back, look for those who are responding. Make eye contact with the one who's smiling, the one who's nodding, the one who's obviously "getting it." This builds confidence and gives you back the energy you need to continue.

Remember, a presentation is not a one-way communication; it's a dialogue with your audience. They may not be responding in words, but they are communicating with their eyes, their body language and their facial expressions. The more you interact with the audience, the more you look into their faces and receive feedback from them, the more you are engaged in a conversation rather than a lecture.

Eye contact is key to building a relationship that is likely to continue even after your presentation is over.

**5.3 INTENSITY OF VOICE VOLUME:** Proper public speaking volume is speaking loud enough for your objective, your material, your purpose and your circumstances. Without proper public speaking volume your audience will not be able to hear you. Too much will be irritating. There may be circumstances and parts of your speech that are more appropriate to increase how loud you speak. Done effectively, it can enhance the speech. If at the wrong time, it could make the audience uncomfortable.

### **What Public Speaking Volume Needs to Be**

*First rule, how loud you speak needs to be adequate for the audience you are speaking to. A small room with 20 will require different levels than an audience of 2000 with a microphone.*

*How can you know if it is suitable? Learn to discern. While you are talking learn to look at the faces and the heads of the audience. Are they tilting their heads so their ears are pointed more toward you the speaker? You need to increase your volume. Are they hard of hearing? Raising your voice and a slight bit more enunciation will be needed.*

*Watch experienced speakers and how they adjust their public speaking volume to meet the needs of the audience.*

*The **age of you audience** will have an effect on how loud you go. Don't assume because of advanced age, the audience is automatically hard of hearing. The listening style of older ones is no different than those of fewer years. What is different is they tend to react a bit slower.*

***Microphones** make control much easier but **do not eliminate** the need for the speaker to adjust their volume. More at: Use Of microphone.*

*Think of your volume as being on a continuum of soft to scream. Speech mastery requires you not go to either extreme. It also requires you master everything in between. For our purpose that continuum would start at, "I'm sorry about your loss of your mother." The other end of the spectrum would be, "Get out the buildings on fire."*

### **Simple Public Speaking Volume Exercises**

*To learn the dynamics of how it works, try this simple exercise.*

*Think of how you would say to someone you cared for...*

- *Were having a baby*
- *I'm sorry but your mother has died*
- *Get out, the building is on fire*
- *Congratulations, You did it, you invented the wiji.*

*Now think of the different voices and the volume you would use and apply them to the other messages. In the 'I'm sorry voice' say 'Congratulations, you did it...'*

*'**Get out**' will require a commanding voice. Congratulations would be spoken with a smile.*

*If you have a soft voice, you can learn to increase the volume. It will take work and practice.*

*You can master public speaking volume if you learn mastery of your vocal cords, posture, lungs and diaphragm. There is where you will be able to increase the power and thus the volume of your speech.*

*If you are finding it a challenge, find a speech coach to further help in this regard. Make sure it is someone who has experience in helping with the same challenge you have.*

