

*Apply yourself both now and in the next life. Without effort,
you cannot be prosperous. Though the land be good, You cannot
have an abundant crop without cultivation.*

—Plato

7 CHAPTER

10 Strategies to Harness the Fear

Individuals must want to harness their anxiety and have conviction in the benefits of doing so. In order for these strategies to work, you must be committed to following this advice for any improvement to occur.

Before I identify and explain these helpful strategies for harnessing your fear of public speaking, I believe it is very important to precede naming these strategies by sharing with you a sound theoretical foundation of public speaking in order for these strategies to be effective. Let me sum this theory up very succinctly: **Be yourself!**

We all are unique creatures. Use your uniqueness to communicate more effectively. Do not try to be like somebody else. A speaking situation is not a contest. If you think of speaking as a contest, as in all competition, it will inherently make you nervous; there will always be someone better than you and you will always be better than someone else; so what would be the point of making it a contest? Who would determine the winner and how? Do not compare yourself to others. Everyone has her or his own strong points. Use your own strong points. If you are good in one on one communication, then use that same style when you are speaking to many people. Most of us act differently when in front of an audience than we do in front of family and friends because we are in our comfort zones with our family and friends, and way outside our comfort zones in front of groups. The goal is to be yourself no matter who is in the audience. This goal can be realized once you harness your fear of public speaking.

When I first started teaching public speaking, I spent too much time helping students with their delivery skills. I would suggest ways to stand, where to stand, what to do with their hands, how to change the pitch and volume of their voices, strategic use of pauses, strategies using eye contact, etc.

It turned out I was making them all speakers like me. Since they weren't like me, they felt very awkward and it showed. Over time, I came to realize that everyone's speaking style should be as unique as his/her own personality. Behaviors that work for me, don't always work for others, and behaviors that work for others, often do not work for me.

It is conviction in what you are saying that is important. Aristotle writes about character, passion, and conviction being traits that make a speech effective and persuasive. These traits combined with your own communication style often can be powerful. Don't waste your time by concerning yourself with delivery skills similar to what others use. Let your own unique style evolve naturally over time—be yourself.

The following are 10 strategies to use in the days before your presentation. In this chapter, I will give you information that will be helpful in harnessing your anxiety. Again, remember our objective here: we don't want to get rid of the butterflies, we want to get those butterflies flying in formation.

You will not find any silly strategies or bad advice on this list. People with no more knowledge of public speaking than you will always offer advice to "get rid of the anxiety." It is clear that their intentions are honorable and they truly want you to succeed; however, they may not know they don't know. And, that is not a good thing. I have heard advice such as, "Imagine the audience in their underwear" or "Imagine the audience naked" or "Down a couple shots of whiskey." These tips are non-sense. They won't help you at all; in fact, they might hurt your delivery. Besides, we don't want to get rid of the anxiety; we want to use this anxiety because its energy will make us more interesting, vibrant, and exciting. Audiences will like to listen to us.

Don't worry, most of us are afraid of presentations; however, this fear shouldn't stop us from doing them. Fear can only stop you if you let it stop you. You are in control. Step up, reach deep down inside of yourself, and grab hold of your courage. Don't be afraid, I will help you.

You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.

—Eleanor Roosevelt

The following are 10 solid strategies to help you work with the "butterflies" and get them to fly in formation.

1. Focus on the Audience
2. Be Prepared

3. Stay positive
4. Get Realistic
5. List the Reasons causing your Fear
6. Face your Fears and Speak Often
7. Visualize
8. Meditate
9. Maintain a Healthy Diet
10. Exercise Regularly

Focus on the Audience

Focus on the Audience is a very important way to manage speech anxiety. In other words, focus on the audience—not on yourself. When you speak in front of a group, it is not about you. It is about the message and how useful your message is to the audience. As harsh as this may sound, the audience doesn't really care about you, the speaker. They don't care in terms of your nose, your waistline, your hair, your clothes, or if you are pretty, etc. Keep that in mind, they really don't care about you. This is a communication event, not a performance. You will not be judged as an entertainer. The listeners want to know only the following: what's in it for me. So you must research and learn what the audience members want, then give it to them. Your job is to be prepared and organized so they find a benefit in having your information.

It is powerful to know that you can simply focus on listeners and know that they are not sitting in front of you and judging you by your looks. They are not judging your weight, your hair, and the clothes you're wearing, because frankly they don't care all that much about you in this manner. Their time is being spent with you during your presentation; recognize and honor their valuable time commitment to you. You have an obligation to be prepared and give them the information that they need to know.

Speaking of being listener focused, I'm reminded of a story. In my first public speaking class in college, I had an interesting experience. We had prepared hard for our first speech; the day came to give our presentations and we were all nervous. The first student briskly walked up to the front of the class, turned and faced us. The first thing she did was to shake her head and brush her hair back. Then, she said the worst thing a speaker can say when giving any type of presentation.

She said, “You’ll have to forgive me, I’m really nervous and I’ve never done this before.”

Immediately, the professor slammed her hand down onto the table and said, “Stop right there! What makes you think that we care about how you feel? We’ve spent our time to come here and listen to you speak. Your obligation is to be prepared and to give us the information we need. We don’t care about how you feel or any of your personal information. Don’t tell us such things, just give us the information you prepared!”

This visibly shaken student had the courage to go on and give her speech; it was not very good as she was so nervous during the entire time she presented. During the class break time, she left and we never saw her again.

Was the professor right? Yes, the professor was probably right. Presentations are not about the presenter! Presentations are about the audience—period! Therefore, the focus should be on the audience at all times. I cannot stress this enough. It was a bad thing that the professor sacrificed a student to get her point across. I’m not sure I agreed with the method; but, I can tell you that the rest of us in the class got the message; we never did worry about ourselves after witnessing such an outburst by the professor. We simply concerned ourselves about the audience getting the right information and modeling good presentations.

*Give me six hours to chop down a tree and
I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.*

—Abraham Lincoln

Be Prepared

This is an effective strategy to harness your fear. I strongly stress preparation in all of my classes. When you look at professionals in any field, they are prepared. Preparation is how people get good jobs, get recognized, get promotions, get pay raises, and for students, earn good grades. In business, if you want to keep up with the competition, you must prepare. Actually, you must prepare better than the competition. In life, so many opportunities come to us; but, we are not prepared for them; thus, we don’t even see them. Luck has been defined as the intersection of preparation and opportunity. We cannot control opportunities; however, we can control preparation. Be ready when an opportunity comes your way. When you know you must do a presentation, make sure you are prepared.

The 6 P's suggests the importance of preparation. The six P's are taught in the U.S. Military and the military must be prepared for any scenario or event that can threaten the country. This is how it goes:

Prior

Proper

Planning

Prevents

Poor

Performance

Keep in mind the six P's for all your presentations. By following this advice, you will not give a poor presentation; therefore, it will help you reduce and manage your speaking anxiety.

Many people wait until the last minute to prepare for their presentations; unfortunately, they even wait to prepare until the night before the presentation is scheduled. Preparation should start as soon as possible. The people who wait until the last minute end up with a poorly organized presentation. Then, the problem is magnified when they discover there is no time for practice. Without the careful and thoughtful preparation needed, and no practice time, they get up in front of an audience and deliver a terrible presentation. In this scenario, everyone loses. The listeners have wasted their time and the presenter looked incompetent. The worst part is the presenter often loses self-confidence from this bad experience and ducks out on any future opportunities. This could all be avoided by working with the six P's.

The normal, self-talk, thought process of the unprepared presenter is "I'm no good at public speaking, I just can't do this; I'll never try again." Consequently, the unprepared presenter feels s/he is not good at public speaking, when in fact, s/he is really not good at preparation.

I had a student a couple of years ago who danced in the half time show at the Orange Bowl in Miami. The Orange Bowl is a college football game that is usually played January first, pitting two "top twenty" teams in the nation against each other. She was invited to dance with a group of other young ladies.

Orange Bowl officials sent her a tape of the routine so she could practice it. She practiced that routine for about three months for several hours every day. She went over it and over it. In October, she traveled to Miami. All the invited girls from around the country got together and practiced this dance routine together for two, ten-hour days. After meeting and practicing with the other dancers, she went home and spent the rest of the winter practicing every day.

On New Years Eve, they gathered one more time at the Orange Bowl for another all day practice. On New Year's Day, at the halftime of the college football game, these dancers performed a flawless routine. Of course they were all nervous beforehand, who wouldn't be nervous in front of all those people? However, the practicing paid off. What I found interesting is that these dancers dedicated many hours of practice for a mere five minute performance!

When we look at almost anyone who is a professional, they're preparing all of the time. Actors/actresses, athletes, accountants, doctors, lawyers, bridge builders, scientists, sales people and all successful people always prepare before their performances. We must too.

I will prepare and some day my chance will come.

—Abraham Lincoln

Stay Positive

Understand that the biological feelings we are having, such as a nervous stomach, are natural and we all feel it. We are all outside of our comfort zone and it makes us uneasy. What we want to do is to use these biological feelings to our advantage. They will make us sharp and animated. We want to have the self-talk like, "Yes, I can do this." Other people have done this. Hang in there and be positive that you will be successful. People will like what you have to say, and you will be interesting. You have prepared for this presentation, and you want to do a good job. Who wouldn't be nervous?

Pop psychologist's talk about a thing called "Positive Self Talk," or "Positive Mental Attitude," or simply "Positive Thinking." Mainstream psychologists use the terms Cognitive Therapy or Cognitive Restructuring. Whichever term you wish to use, it is still positive thinking and it is always a good thing. It makes life so much easier and fun. To apply positive thinking, think in the following ways: tell yourself that you can do this. You are worthy of this task. You were chosen to speak because somebody believes you have something important to share. You are prepared; you are focused on the needs and interests of the listeners, etc.

I had a high school homeroom teacher who taught us to think in this way. He called these positive thinking sentences, affirmations. He was also the football coach and he had terrific results in coaching winning teams by teaching the players to correctly use these affirmations. Simply put, they are declarative sentences that affirm positive actions. The idea is to write positive statements down on little note cards, and put them in your pocket. You read them a few

times a day, and touch them even more often. They can be sentences such as the following:

- I am an excellent public speaker.
- I am prepared to share helpful information with the audience.
- I deserve this honor to help the audience get the right information.
- I worked hard for the benefit of my audience.

Write down these positive thoughts and carry them with you. This concept of affirmations is grounded in Social Learning Theory and has been very effective for many people. Keep those positive thoughts going; they will help you accomplish many meaningful goals in addition to helping with your speech anxiety.

Get Realistic

Think of the worst things that can happen. When I ask students about the worst thing they think can happen, they talk about all kinds of outrageous things such as they will forget what they are going to say. So what, the audience won't know. The listeners have not seen your speech outline; therefore, they won't know if you left something out. Plus, if you have prepared, you will have note cards.

Some students say they are afraid they are going to fall down. So what if you do fall down, it would be a great attention getter; it would wake everybody up and they will all become instantly interested about what just happened! I must say though, in seeing thousands of presentations, I have only seen one student fall. She tripped over a backpack as she was walking to the front of the room and slammed onto the floor completely horizontal. She broke out into laughter, got up and delivered an excellent presentation. She had everyone's attention.

Some people are afraid they will pass out; I have never seen anybody pass out before. It probably won't happen. Some say people will laugh at them. You know audiences are not that mean. You show them respect and they will show you respect. However, when they do laugh, they are not laughing at you; they are laughing with you.

Nobody likes to see anyone fail; we like to see people succeed. Studies have confirmed that in most cases, audience members feel embarrassed when somebody else fails; they don't want the experience of witnessing a failure.

Some people fear that an audience member is going to throw things at her/him such as tomatoes or rotten eggs. This just isn't going to happen. Can you

see how most of our fears are irrational and will never happen? You must identify the fears that might trigger your flight, fight, or freeze instincts.

List the Reasons Causing Your Fear

On a sheet of paper, list all the reasons that make you want to “run for the hills” whenever you are asked to do a presentation. You will have to be brutally honest with yourself. In the case of public speaking, we are nervous because of many different reasons—most of them are unrealistic. Let’s revisit the reasons listed earlier:

We don’t want to be stared at.

We don’t want to be laughed at.

We don’t want to make a mistake.

We don’t want to be judged.

We don’t want to look stupid.

We don’t want to look silly.

We might forget to say something.

We might have our mind go blank.

We might not know as much as others in the audience.

We might not be able to answer a question.

We might not be able to get the audience’s approval.

We might fall down.

We might forget what we want to say.

We might stumble over our words.

We might start shaking.

We might get a red face.

We might get a pale face.

We might start sweating.

We might embarrass ourselves.

Can you relate to any of these fears? Most of us have at least one of these fears, and many of us have several of these fears and more.

The single most common fear is getting approval from the audience. We want the audience to like us, respect us, and think highly of us. Other most common reasons for being nervous include being stared at, making a mistake, looking silly, being embarrassed, stumbling over our words, or being judged by others. These are all common causes of speech anxiety.

Once we identify the fear(s), then we can deal with it (them). Think of speech anxiety this way, even if you have all of these fears or all of these things happen—so what? It isn't the end of the world. There are over 6 billion people in the world who do not know you are nervous about giving a presentation. We can't worry about getting everyone's approval. Universal approval won't happen. Even Jesus Christ didn't have everyone's approval. The best strategy to deal with these sorts of fears is to "Get Realistic."

*Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear,
not absence of fear.*

—Mark Twain

Face Your Fear and Speak Often

Many of you have heard that in order to get over a fear or phobia, a good strategy is to tackle it head on. For instance, if you are afraid of snakes, handling a snake could reduce your fear. Although, I am not ready to try handling snakes, it does make sense. Psychologists call this behavior therapy.

In the case of having a fear of public speaking, a good way to manage the fear is to do it. The theory suggests that every time you give a presentation, you get a little bit less nervous and better. This does work; however, it might be like diving off the end of the dock to learn how to swim. I wouldn't suggest volunteering to speak at major events such as the Republican or Democratic National Conventions in front of millions of people, or at an insurance company's business convention in Mexico City. Instead, I suggest you start with small audiences at your workplace. This has proved to be effective. It is a strategy that worked for me.

Immediately after I learned, through training, how to write a speech, and to stand up and speak to a group, I volunteered for United Way with the idea of practicing my new skill and helping the community at the same time. Everyday, I was at different businesses facing my biggest fear by delivering persuasive presentations. Over time, as I repeated this behavior of continuously

speaking to one group after another, my anxiety slowly became more and more harnessable.

Facing your fear and doing it is like baseball players who practice by getting into a batting cage and gaining confidence with each session until they are ready to face live pitching. If a pitched ball hits them, even though it really hurts, they still know they have the ability to hit the ball. So each time they face a live pitcher, they gain a little more self confidence and a little less anxiety; however, I am sure many professional baseball players say they never do completely get over the nervousness and anxiety of batting. In fact, baseball players will tell you they need the nervousness to stay sharp and successful.

In that very first course (formal training) that I took on public speaking, we also practiced this behavior therapy. We stood up and did our first presentation where we introduced ourselves, which to my surprise at the time, I was able to do. We built on that success and did another, this time it was a little 60-second presentation. This built even more self-confidence to tackle the next assignment, a 90 second presentation. Finally, over the next 10 weeks, we did a two-minute presentation at every class. We did it several times and it was just the act of doing it that helped us out. Behavior therapy is a strategy that I practice to this day. It works.

Visualization

Visualization has been used successfully by athletes for years. It became very popular in the 1980's and it is estimated by psychologist, Jim Loehr that over 80 percent of professional and top athletes use some form of visualization. It is now applied to manage the nervousness of public speaking.

Often people are nervous about speaking and can't figure out why. Usually, it is negative thoughts. As discussed earlier, many people think things such as I am not good at speaking, I will forget something, I will look dumb, I will start to sweat, my face will turn red, I will embarrass myself, etc. Then these thoughts become a self-fulfilling prophecy; therefore, they do indeed happen.

One theory of visualization is to make the self-fulfilling prophecy become your desired outcome instead of a dreaded outcome. Positive visualization can replace those thoughts and help you harness your fear of public speaking.

In 1952, A. Richardson published his famous study on visualization. Richardson developed an experiment to measure the effectiveness of visualization. He divided students into three groups. Each group was assigned a different strategy to improve the "free throw" accuracy of its members with a basketball. The first group was to practice shooting free throws for twenty minutes every day for three weeks. The second group was to only visualize successfully

making free throws for 20 minutes everyday of the three weeks—no shooting. The third group was to neither shoot nor visualize shooting baskets; they were to do nothing with a basketball for the three weeks. At the end of the three weeks, group three showed no improvement; however, groups one and two showed the exact same improvement of 24 percent. This study suggests that daily visualization is equally as effective as daily practice.

I use visualization before a presentation. Before I go to the facility, I visualize giving a successful presentation; however, I add my own twist to my visualization process. Instead of concentrating only on the upcoming presentation, I recall a previous successful presentation. I recall as vividly as possible all the smells, sights, sounds, feelings, and tastes of this past event. This boosts my self-confidence and reduces some anxiety because I know I can do it. Then, I transfer, in my mind, the mental picture of these past senses into the “new picture” and visualize myself being successful. It works for me; it can work for you. Also, I repeat this visualization process in the facility just minutes before I speak.

Visualization is a simple process. It is the act of imagining accomplishing your goal. The more vividness in your mind of the sights, smells, sounds, tastes, and feelings make visualization more successful. Other researchers suggest a systematic approach to visualization:

1. Find a quiet space.
2. Picture all the details of your speech from the beginning to the end (I find it best to recall a previous successful speech and apply those thoughts to the one coming up).
3. Mentally observe yourself, from a viewpoint as if you were sitting in the audience, confidently delivering a strong presentation.
4. See yourself using the gestures and speaking style the way you want to use them.
5. See the audience smiling and nodding heads.
6. Imagine the feeling of accomplishment when the audience applauds at the end of your speech.

Meditation

Meditation is very effective for many speakers. It is a way to “quiet your body” down. We live in such a fast paced environment that puts a tremendous amount of stress on our bodies and our minds. We all know the signs of stress. This ev-

eryday stress placed on top of the fact you have to give a presentation can make life seem overwhelming to you. This is how nervous breakdowns occur.

One form of meditation I learned was taught by a psychology professor in college. He had a strong belief in meditation and was convinced that people are stressed out to the maximum. This was his conclusion from observing people constantly and frantically racing around day after day from obligation to obligation with no goals in mind. He preached to us about “calming our bodies” down.

Here is his method. We must first find a quiet place with no distractions and find a comfortable chair. He instructed us to sit in the comfortable chair with our feet flat on the floor and our hands comfortably resting on our lap or on the arms of the chair. The next step is to breathe deep breaths in and out. As we did this, we were to clear our minds of all thoughts. The way to clear our minds was to concentrate on the breathing.

“Picture your breath coming into your body through your nose, down your throat, and into your lungs. Feel your abdomen fill and expand out from all the fresh air, then your chest fills and expands out. Once you reach maximum capacity, visualize the air then leaving your lungs in your chest and then your abdomen going up through your throat, over your tongue, and teeth, passing your lips on the way out.” Continue to repeat this exercise over and over. Every time our mind wandered to other thoughts during this exercise, we were to immediately put those invading thoughts out of our mind and return to the concentration on breathing. Over time, with daily practice, he asked us to build up to 20 minutes of this breathing per day. For me, it felt like a 2 hour nap when I achieved the 20 minute goal.

There are many ways and styles of meditation such as breathing, yoga, Tai Chi, chanting mantras, etc. I would suggest you do yourself a favor and investigate the many different forms of meditation (if you are constantly stressed out) and discover what works for you.

Maintain a Healthy Diet

Maintain a healthy diet to manage anxiety. A proper diet can help us be strong and confident in ourselves. Strength and self-confidence can go a long way in helping us deal with speaking anxiety. It is no secret to us that a proper diet is good for everybody. However, it may be a secret that a poor diet can cause anxiety.

Proper diets can cause muscle tissue to relax, thus easing our anxieties. One reason our muscles tighten up when we are under stress is a deficiency of magnesium. Add more magnesium in your diet along with more vitamin B and

calcium. If you are low on those minerals and vitamins, you want to get them back by eating such foods as whole grain cereals, leafy green vegetables and low fat products. Nicotine and caffeine are not good either. They have been proven to cause our anxiety levels to rise. These two are stimulants in your body that, of course, we don't need when we are nervous. Also, cut salts and artificial additives.

Actually, this is good advice for anyone who wants to be healthy. If you have lots of anxiety it is better to watch your diet along with the other strategies to begin working with this public speaking anxiety. Can you see how each strategy compliments each other and becomes a systematic approach that really works in dealing with this fear?

Exercise Regularly

Keeping your body fit and healthy is an excellent way of dealing with stress and anxiety of any kind. You really don't need much exercise; simply 25–30 minutes everyday of some type of aerobic exercise will work. It will help you feel strong, good, and confident.

Confidence cannot be overrated when it comes to speaking anxiety. Regular exercise is well known as a must by professional public speakers when dealing with their nervousness. Yes, professionals get very nervous before presentations also.

I remember during the last Democratic National Convention, Senator Hillary Clinton was doing an interview on TV a day or two before she was to give a keynote speech to the delegates and a National TV audience. The journalist asked her if she was nervous about such an important address. She replied that she was very nervous thinking about being in front of so many people; however, she said that she believed her information to share was extremely important and needed to be presented with the purpose of making this Nation better. It would be selfish of her to worry about her own nerves, and the affect nervousness would have on her image when the implications of her message for our Country were so important. And, I know before delivering any type of presentation, I am a bundle of nerves.

I have accepted that I will not completely get over this anxiety; however, I know exercise disperses some of this anxiety, and enables me to be stronger so I can still give presentations in spite of any anxiety I am experiencing.

Questions for Discussion

1. What strategies do you find interesting? How many have you considered before? What happened?
2. Specifically, what strategies do you find might be useful? How might they work for you?
3. Is there anything else you have done in the past you might want to share with others?
4. Does this list help you? Why or why not?