

## Need to calm your public speaking demons?

When it comes to public speaking, here's some pointers to help you make your experience as a speaker or presenter more enjoyable and manageable. Let's face it, as regular research shows, speaking in public is one of the scariest things anyone can do in life, but it doesn't have to be that way. Public speaking occasions can also be a great growth opportunity for boosting your confidence and self-expression, once you're prepared to face your sense of dread about stepping up there and speaking when there's lots of people out there.

The paradox is that the more you're concerned about you and your worries about how it's going to go, the less bandwidth you have to focus on that other thing – the audience. And by not focusing on them, they feel it and you don't get their rapport and support, so you worry more. Que Sera, Sera. Etc. Ad infinitum. You can break that vicious circle.

While it's important to be aware of yourself and not ignore your concerns, do keep the wider bandwidth in mind so that you can manage your concerns AND connect with the audience, rather than only one or the other. You'll discover that, as you dare to look out there and focus on the audience, a new perspective starts to open up and you can feel your own concerns shifting and starting to dial down, allowing you to focus more easily on your message and the audience.

Here's a few dos and don'ts:

1. Don't start until you and the audience are ready. They need to be quiet and settled before you start. And if you're the opening act and there's no sign of the audience settling down, make an announcement to say that we'll be starting the event in a couple of minutes and ask them to take their seats so we can begin. That signals to the audience that something is shortly going to happen, whereas left alone they will likely go on talking and you just lose time. Making that announcement also gives you a useful practice at speaking and hearing your voice in the room before you do your actual speech.
2. Be well enough prepared so you can speak your opening 30 seconds without needing notes and can just look out and make eye contact with the audience. Speak slower than you think you need to, because the speed in your head and body is faster than that of your listeners. Consciously slow down and allow time for your words to sink in. It may sound slow and clunky to you, but taking a bit more time sets the scene for the audience and helps them settle and warm up into the conference or event. That way, you have their attention and that in turn gives you confidence to continue now that you've built that powerful connection in just a few seconds.

3. Video yourself practising your speech regularly beforehand, as if you are on stage. It may be painful at first as you notice all sorts of mannerisms (hand and arm movements, facial expressions etc). You'll also hear more errs, ahhs and other fillers in your sentences that you weren't aware of and didn't mean to add. Just having that awareness of those things happening gives you a new place to start to improve, by getting the viewer's perspective. Many of those things will simply disappear after that without needing special effort from you, because your focus is now sharper and you are more present to what you are going to say before opening your mouth. That is a sign your self-management ability under pressure is growing.
4. If it's a short speech you're giving to summarise and re-affirm a few key points for your team or wider organisation, keep it short. Think about 2-3 key things they need to know at a high level that you can set out for them in 2 minutes, if that's the time you've got. What do you need them to remember? Stay focused on landing just those 2-3 short messages.
5. No matter how nervous you feel beforehand, don't use alcohol as a way to calm yourself down. You'll lose your focus and edge when what you need is for your full awareness and concentration to be available. That focus and edge is much more present when you're nervous and alert, however unpleasant it feels to you. Make adrenaline your friend rather than your enemy: it is natural to feel nervous, so embrace it. Allow the adrenaline in and go with it. It will help you step past your nerves and connect with your audience.
6. Maintain eye contact with the audience as much as possible, just as you use your mirrors frequently when driving. Watch their reactions, for example as you choose to pause and reinforce a point. Pausing is a physical gesture because it creates an unexpected moment of silence. It's a way to regain your audience's attention by interrupting their autopilot. Use this when appropriate to draw their attention, but don't make it a predictable habit or its value is quickly lost. And, if you need to check understanding, ask a question, or stop and summarise briefly the 3 key points you've been talking about so far. Stop and ask them if they have any questions so far. Interactivity is powerful and breaks down barriers, making it more energetic and lighter when you get a response from someone in the audience.

Want to know more about how to strengthen your speaking and presentation skills? Reach out for a discovery call [here](#) and we'll explore how coaching could support you in getting there faster.