



Overcoming Nervousness When Speaking In Front Of A Crowd

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I was recently asked this question...

---"When I am giving speeches at Toastmasters club, I am 100% focused on what I am saying and the thought of nervousness does not even enter my mind. However, when I am speaking in other situations, I feel I am not able to effectively carry over the skills I have developed in Toastmasters to my non-Toastmaster audience because all I can focus on is how nervous I become. Anyone had a similar experience or have suggestions as to how I can be an effective speaker in any situation?"---

What advise would you give? My answer was this...

That is not an unusual situation. My day job is at a public school, grades K through 12. Exposed to teachers all day, I was quite surprised when I heard how nervous teachers get speaking in front of the public, parents, school board, or even just other staff members. My thought process was "How can they be scared? They do this all day long?"

Well, it works out that when teachers are focused on the learning of their students, they are quite good presenters. But for some teachers, in front of other groups, they start to think about themselves and how they are going to appear. In other words, "what will they think of me?" This focus on "I" is what starts to create the nervous condition.

So, I would ask you, with your clubs, do they create a friendly condition that allows you not to worry about "I"? When you leave the club, do you start asking yourself "What will they think of me?"

Many people create a ritual, performed before a presentation, that ties a physical routine into a good mindset. This triggers your mind to think in a certain way. For example, whenever I get a good feeling about a presentation I rub my thumb and forefinger together. This associates my good feelings with that action. Then, when ever I am start to get nervous, I repeat that action, and my mind automatically starts to shed the nervousness.

Perhaps you could develop some action, or even a preparation routine. Routines remind me of my time in the Marine Corps. Every year, ever Marine is required to shoot a rifle for qualification. Five days of shooting at the same targets in the same order. On the fifth day, your score determines whether or not you qualify. We Marines would wake up and shower, dress, and travel to the range in the exact same manner. We would wear the same clothes, eat the same food,... I think you can see where this is going. We would change NOTHING that we had control over. This meant that Friday, we would be shooting under exactly the same conditions that we had practiced all week long. But the most interesting part, is something I did not realize till many years later. These actions put us in exactly the same mindset each day. They prepped out mind for the action ahead of us.

If you read the book "Blink" by Malcom Gladwell, you will discover that you can prep your mind to think in a certain way. The thoughts, books, and conversations before a written test can set the precedence for how you will perform. Ryan Stewart (a web geek, non-profit junkie, and future medical

student living near Knoxville, Tennessee with his wife and two chihuahuas) recommends using rituals before a class, as a way to prepare your mind for learning.

You can use this same type of prep, to get you thinking "I WILL do well on my presentation!"

Make This a Great Day!

Michael Cortes

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