

A blue-tinted photograph of a conference room. In the foreground, a dark wooden podium stands on a light-colored floor. A microphone is attached to the top of the podium. In the background, rows of blue chairs are arranged in a room with white walls and a drop ceiling. The lighting is bright, and the overall atmosphere is professional and clean.

PUBLIC SPEAKING FEAR?

21
SECRETS
TO SUCCEED
IN FRONT OF
ANY CROWD

Lucas McCain

**Public Speaking Fear? 21 Secrets To
Succeed In Front of Any Crowd**

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Published by:

Laurenzana Press

PO Box 1220

Melrose, FL 32666 USA

www.LaurenzanaPress.com

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Like It Or Not, It's Time To Speak

Put simply, public speaking is a skill that every person needs to practice. While you may never be called upon to be a professional Tony Robbins, encouraging the masses towards higher reaches of success, you are likely to be asked to speak in a team meeting at work, a little league practice, a presentation at school or to make some other type of public presentation not just once but many times throughout your long and busy life. For happy occasions and sad, celebrations and work, school and play, you will be called on to speak in front of small groups, large groups, and groups of every size in between.

The need to speak in front of an audience *will* present itself at various times in your life. In your personal life there will be a time when someone close to you passes away and you will want to speak at his or her memorial. You will talk about how important they were honoring their life and their impact on others; and you will need to do this at a podium, in front of other mourners. There may also come a time when you feel passionately about a topic, whether it is the curriculum at your child's school or a new speed bump that you think the city should install on your block; you will want to present your thoughts logically, with your emotions in control, in front of the group responsible for making decisions on this matter. You may need to excel in a group interview, lead a team at school or work, speak at an awards ceremony – the list goes on and on. The point is that if you spend your life avoiding speaking in public then you will miss out on, well, life. And you may miss out on success, recognition, respect... an endless list.

So, for business and private life, school or the workplace, the need to be comfortable speaking in public is not something you can easily escape. It is, however, something you can become better at, with some practice and valuable advice. Read on to learn about the value of public speaking in today's world, followed by some Secrets for ensuring your own success and comfort when addressing an audience.

Successful Public Speaking in Today's World

In today's business world workers at every level are called upon to air their point of view in meetings, lead teams, and speak in a variety of venues. Furthermore, we speak at PTA meetings, town halls and more. Being comfortable speaking in front of a group is more important today than perhaps at any other time in history; while it may have been easy for historic greats like Thomas Edison to avoid speeches (as he was famous for), your modern work environment doesn't allow that luxury. Yet, the fact remains that nearly half of all Americans are uncomfortable with these public speaking requirements. The good news is that with a few simple steps you can be on the road to feeling more comfortable when you are speaking publicly. You will be able to speak without fear.

People are afraid of a lot of things. Some fear heights, others small spaces. Indiana Jones, the seemingly fearless adventurer made famous by Harrison Ford, laughs in the face of ancient booby-traps and eating monkey brains, but is terrified of snakes. But one of the most pervasive fears in modern society is the fear of speaking in front of an audience; interestingly, Harrison Ford himself is uncomfortable in crowds and prefers to live a more secluded life, avoiding crowded restaurants or anywhere that mass amounts of people gather. It is not just you – many people have this fear of crowds and public speaking.

As many as 45% of people are self reported to be shy; according to some sources, nearly 90% of people reported feeling shy or uncomfortable speaking in front of others at some time in their

lives. In fact, many sources say that entertainment legends Elvis Presley, Sigourney Weaver, Tom Hanks and Sally Fields were excessively shy. Interestingly enough, many modern performers enjoy performing *because* it is somewhat scary – they enjoy the adrenaline that the fear and action of public speaking brings.

Imagine the loss of great entertainment had talent like this not learned to overcome their inherent dislike of public address. We would have been deprived of countless hours of hear warm, head pounding entertainment. How did these stars move beyond their fears? They just forced themselves to come into the spotlight and do what they needed to do. And you can too.

Thomas Jefferson was known for being so shy that he limited his speaking engagements whenever possible. Even modern superstars have managed to survive their tendency towards shyness. Superstar singer Cher has been reported by many to have been very shy in her early days, though few see that shyness now. But the charismatic singer has asserted that when she dated a younger Tom Cruise he was just a “shy boy” who was afraid to talk to girls in high school. Modern day country sensation Carrie Underwood is admittedly socially awkward, nervous, and shy. Somehow, they all overcame it by simply getting out there and doing what needed to be done, just as you will do when the time comes. But you can do it more easily with a bit of help.

No matter your level of fear or shyness you can overcome and become an effective public speaker. If you watched much 70s and 80s TV you have no doubt heard the public speaking advice told the world over: simply picture your audience in their underwear and you will have no problem speaking to them. If you ever tried this tactic you probably found it to be amazingly... unhelpful. But the idea is sound, that is the thought that visualization can help you overcome your fear. This is used in psychology to combat phobias and is extolled in New York Times best selling books such as *The Secret*. With Secrets like visualization and positive thinking, along with some more unexpected ideas inspired by Yoda, yoga and toothpaste commercials, you can improve your own public speaking skills. Following are 21 powerful Secrets that you can use to take the fear out of your public speaking and improve your effectiveness.

Attention All Eagle Eyes: We’ve had a number of people proof this book before we released it to you, but there is a chance you might spot something that was missed. If you find a typo or other obvious error please send it to us. And if you’re the first one to report it, we’ll send you a free gift! Send to: corrections@laurenzanapress.com

Secret #1: Adhere to Assigned Guidelines

One of the most important things to remember about public speaking is to stay within the guidelines that are given to you. Most often this means sticking to your allotted time. You might be thinking that you are so terrified that there is no way you will talk too long, but people babble on for a variety of reasons including lack of preparedness and nervousness.

Let's look at an example of people who you would imagine are good public speakers, yet are seemingly unable to adhere to their time guidelines – Oscar winners at the Academy Awards for film in Hollywood. Many of these winners are actors who really know how to get out and perform on a soundstage. But they do not necessarily know how to speak unscripted in front of a live audience, and many simply cannot stick to their specified amount of time.

Oscar winners have had trouble sticking to a reasonable time for over 60 years. In 1943 Oscar winning best actress Greer Garson came up to the podium, starting with a humble, "I'm practically unprepared." But she then went on to speak for seven minutes, rambling about the arbitrary nature of awards, going over time and off topic. Garson never won another Oscar and after this a 45 second time limit was imposed on acceptance speeches. 1949 Oscar winning actress Jane Wyman seemed to understand the limit well when she walked to the podium to accept an award for playing a mute character; she said, "I accept this very gratefully for keeping my mouth shut for once. I think I'll do it again." And she took her seat.

Of course, the time limit and even such good examples as the brief, humorous uttering by Wyman have not taught everyone in Hollywood how to give a speech of appropriate length, content or interest. Award ceremonies today are full of actors pulling rolled up lists from the hidden depths of their designer gowns and tuxes, nervously or quickly rambling off name after name – that no one has heard of – as the entire viewing audience yawns and rolls their eyes.

People talk beyond the time they are supposed to for a variety of reasons. Some people talk too long because they simply have too much to say, whether the information is valid or not. It is important that these people learn to work within established guidelines. If a time limit is set on a speech then that speech can only be successful if it fits within the established time. Similarly, while being brief may be laudable at an awards ceremony, PTA meeting or some other event, in business being too short can also be a bad thing. Often business meetings are scheduled with allotted presentation times for various people, and if one presenter goes far too short there can be a hole in the schedule. Thus, watching your presentation time can be about not going over or not going too far under.

There are a few ways that you can help yourself stick to given guidelines. First, be aware of what the guidelines are. As you begin making notes for your speech write the guidelines down at the top of your paper. You might write something like this: 7 minutes. Clean language and jokes – there will be children there. Only be positive; this is an awards ceremony. Mention company name at least twice.

Then, remember to look at your guidelines just before you go on, to be sure you remember them. If time is important, practice your speech a couple times to ensure that it is not too long or too short. You can also look at your watch before you go on and keep track of the time subtly as you speak. You should even consider setting an alarm on your phone, preferably on vibrate, to warn you when you have one minute left.

Remember that sticking to established guidelines is not only about time. You also need to be aware of your content and your tone. Do not use words that are considered inappropriate by your audience. Do not dress in a way that is against the design of the event. And be aware and respectful of any other guidelines that are given.

Secret #2: Allow Yourself to Be Afraid... But Do It Anyway

People are afraid at various times in life for a lot of different reasons. We fear danger, we fear injury, we fear losing those we love, but one thing that almost every person fears at one time or another is embarrassment. Our drive to be accepted by our fellow humans makes us shy away from any activity that might make us look silly, or lead us to feel out of place, or foolish. For most people this is the biggest fear behind public speaking concerns; the worry that we may do something that reflects poorly upon ourselves or negatively impacts the perception that others have of us.

When asked about their deepest fears many people list public speaking, even fearing it more than they fear heights, spiders, deep water, or even death. It's almost universal. Yet, in modern society these same people who fear public speaking will almost undoubtedly be called upon to speak in public at various times in their lives. So, what happens to a person who never overcomes their anxiety about public speaking? Do they simply never speak in public? No. They have to speak publicly sometimes. So, they avoid it whenever they can, letting the fear build and build, never learning to deal with it. They become increasingly anxious, and when eventually forced into a presentation of some sort they are ineffective in their delivery, become miserable in their own stress, bore their audience, and generally do a poor job. The result? Their biggest fear... they look foolish. It is unfortunate because the best way to overcome your fear of public speaking is simply to do it.

Jim Carrey is terrified to speak in public so what does he do? He does it anyway. All you have to do is force yourself onto the stage and you will quickly learn that you aren't going to die. Do not expect too much of yourself, just expect to live through it; you can raise those expectations as you gain experience. Even Academy Award winning actress Reese Witherspoon experiences this dreaded fear of public speaking. After winning her 2006 Oscar for Best Actress Witherspoon said, "I was sitting there hoping they wouldn't call my name, because the idea of having to give a speech in front of everyone in the world is terrifying." Her response was to just get up, smile, walk to the podium and speak. She did well, but the point was that she did it. Period.

In 1933, giving his inaugural address, President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." These immortal words ring true in so many different avenues, but nowhere are they truer than when talking about public speaking. When you think about it, most normal people want to see others do well and succeed. For example, a woman once had two friends come to her house for dinner. When the friends entered the woman said, "Please, forgive the mess. I've been so busy I haven't had time to clean properly." One of the friends replied sarcastically, "Oh, I wish you hadn't said that because we came here just to criticize your housekeeping." The point is that the friends were not there to criticize her, or make the woman feel bad; they all just wanted to enjoy some friendly company. In most situations when you have to address a crowd the people in the audience will *want* you to succeed. This means you would actually have to work at failing. So, just do it. Get up, remember that you have nothing to fear, but the fear itself, and give your speech. Be afraid, but do it anyway. The popular athletic wear company Nike may have said it best when they suggested that we all, "Just do it."

Secret #3: Be Yourself, Prepare, Take on a Persona – Do What Works for You

If you talk to three people who are really good, comfortable public speakers and ask them each for their best advice on how to overcome your own fear you will get three different suggestions. Similarly, if you spend much time searching the Internet about overcoming shyness or public speaking fear, you will get a lot of advice that is – contradictory. Everyone has a different idea of what makes a person a good public speaker or what techniques make public speaking easier.

Some people will tell you to be yourself, and not to overly prepare. Others will tell you to practice and practice again, perfecting your speech as you look at your own face in the mirror. Famous comedian Jim Carrey is painfully shy and does few interviews because he is so uncomfortable being in front of others when being simply himself. Johnny Depp has a similar problem, creating amazing characters when working from scripts but almost numb with anxiety when forced to be himself in front of a crowd or camera. These two men get by – and became quite successful – by escaping their own personas and becoming entirely different people whenever they are in front of a crowd. For some people the best way to be at home in front of an audience is to pretend to be someone else. This is a perfectly fine solution.

Other people are extremely comfortable just being casual; Suze Orman, for example, is well known for being comfortable taking to any group with no apparent anxiety. But it is possible to have fear and yet still be casual; you can see Jim Carrey do it on his interview for “The Actor’s Studio.” How? Again, he just did it, starting out quiet and casual but taking every opportunity to be himself and show his over the top humor and acting character.

The point is, as with many things in life, is that you need to do what feels right to you. This may mean doing some experimentation. Try preparing for a speech, writing it down word for word, memorizing it, practicing in the mirror or in front of family and friends. Then, see how the speech works. Try another speech where you think about what you will say, write down a few of the important points that you want to get across, but do not over prepare, you just go in and be yourself. Then, do what works best for you.

If you feel the most comfortable memorizing a script, do it. If you feel best going out without too much thinking, do it. Practice different ways and then embrace the style that works best for you. Getting advice and suggestions from others is great, as is learning little Secrets and tricks to make public speaking easier. But in the end you simply have to do what feels right and makes the entire process less stressful and more effective, for both you and your audience.

Secret #4: Breathe

Yes, this sounds silly; it seems silly to write, but it is so true. Taking a deep breath relieves stress in real, physical ways. As you obviously know, all mammals – including you – need air to survive. It is the thing you can live the least amount of time without. In fact, the average human can only go without breathing for two, three or maybe four minutes before their body forces them to breathe or they lose consciousness. After about ten minutes the brain will experience serious damage from lack of oxygen, which can lead to death. But oxygen does more than just keep you conscious, oxygen gives you energy, it helps you think clearly, helps your body heal and so much more. In fact, oxygen therapy is commonly used in sports and medicine.

Stop and try it right now. Take a deep breath – really deep – slowly, through your nose. Let it out just as slowly through your mouth. Then, take three normal breaths, and then take a deep breath again. Now, pause and notice how much more awake, alert, and prepared you feel. There is a reason that breathing techniques are part of every major martial art and every good exercise program – because they provide energy and focus. Breathing techniques are also an important part of yoga, Pilates, and every stretching or relaxation technique and for a reason – they help alleviate anxiety and promote relaxation and calmness. Think about it, if you feel calm and relaxed, with no anxiety, and you are also focused and full of energy, then your chances of being successful in whatever you try increase exponentially. There can be no better way to prepare for a successful public speaking engagement.

If you do not believe the experience of martial artists, meditation gurus, and aerobics instructors around the world, then listen to the science. Breathing deeply brings extra air into your lungs, ensuring an ample supply of oxygen. This oxygen then enters into your blood stream, fueling every single cell, removing toxins, and leaving your body fully energized.

If you have ever watching a professional sporting event you have likely seen an exhausted athlete sitting on the sidelines with an oxygen mask over his mouth. This is to help quickly replenish the oxygen in the athlete's bloodstream so they can get him back out on the field, in the best condition possible, as quickly as possible. This works because oxygen not only provides energy but it also helps muscles to recover more quickly. Oxygen actually rejuvenates every cell in our bodies. That is precisely why hyperbaric oxygen chambers are used to treat cancer patients and to help heal chronic wounds. Oxygen is the key to youth, healing, energy and concentration – it's like a super-drug!

So, the next time you feel stressed because you have to speak in front of an audience just pause and take a deep breath. Slowly. Not too many too quick or you may pass out. Just slowly inhale deeply, and then exhale thoroughly. Do it again. Do it two or three times, then run out to the stage or wherever it is you have to speak while you have that immediate sense of relaxation.

Secret #5: Brush Up on Your Facts to Demonstrate Your Credibility

As you prepare your speech you will be focusing a lot on how you will stand, how you will talk, how you will keep your nerves under control and so on. But you need to remember not to be distracted by these incidentals – the reason that you are speaking is to get some points across; you should be most concerned with what those points are. Specifically, you need to be sure that any information that you are giving is absolutely accurate. This is particularly true in a business presentation. Your speech is only as good as the information you provide, so you need to brush up on your facts and verify everything! By being accurate and providing your audience with valuable, truthful information you will show your audience that you are credible, and a credible presenter is an effective presenter.

Think about it for a minute. Imagine that you are at a convention center representing your company that installs roofs. You have been thinking about teaching your installers how to create more eco friendly, grass-based, “green” roofs; you live in an area of the country where you think this could be a great asset to your business. Fortunately, another company is giving a presentation on their green roof technology, so you decide to attend. Enthusiastic about learning this new technology you listen attentively. The speaker seems a little nervous, but that’s ok – you just care what he has to say. As you are listening the speaker is talking about the importance of structure, stating that a green roof can weigh far more than a traditional asphalt roof, it can weigh up to 2.5 pounds per square foot, he relates. The speaker continues, going on about ways to ensure that the structure is sound. But the speaker has left you behind because you know that something is wrong.

You have done a lot of research on green roofs and you know that they are extremely heavy. In fact, they can weigh 15 pounds dry and 20-30 pounds after a rain. This guy said 2.5 pounds, and you know that an asphalt shingle weighs almost that much. As the man goes on you hear one other mistake. You are crushed; there is no good information to be learned in this meeting, the speaker knows less about green roofs than you do, so you get up and leave.

Now, it is possible that the speaker meant to say 25 pounds rather than 2.5 and there was simply a smudge on his notes, but whatever his reason his incorrect use of facts turned you off and potentially lost his company a sale. His speech was more than ineffective, it was damaging. This can happen to anyone who does not double check all of their facts. Think about politics and how much negative publicity is generated when a candidate misspeaks, gives an incorrect fact, or forgets what they were going to say.

In order for you to be credible it is imperative that you have the correct information going into your presentation. This means double checking every fact, and being sure that you get your information from a reliable source. Furthermore, being credible means appearing credible, by using proper language and terms that are appropriate to your audience. If you throw around terms that are over your audience’s head you will alienate them, and if you avoid terms that are standard in the topic you are speaking about you may look uneducated. Know your audience and know your facts and you will appear credible.

Secret #6: Consider Your Audience and What is Appropriate

Thinking about your audience is the most important consideration when preparing any type of presentation. To be successful in any group presentation or public speech you absolutely must understand who your audience is. This includes recognizing their level of knowledge on your topic, their command of the English language (or whatever language your presentation is in), their level of interest in the topic, and so forth. This information is absolutely necessary if you want to communicate with your audience in a meaningful way, holding their attention and getting your most important points across.

Remember that without an audience you would not even have a presentation. Worse, if you have a live audience and you speak to them in a way that simply does not resonate with them then your points and information will be lost, making you as ineffective as if you did not show up at all. Actually, it could be even worse than not showing up at all. Imagine that you are a technology professional – a computer whiz – and that you were asked to attend a large sales event to help the salesperson by explaining your company’s new computer system to the audience. The salesperson runs the meeting and you are just sitting in the wings waiting for him to ask you to explain the technology. Your time arrives and you stand up. Clearing your throat you step up, relatively comfortably, and begin to tell the audience about the systems you helped design. In your speech you talk about gigabytes and processors, throwing out buzzwords like cloud computing and asynchronous communications. You are giving a brilliant presentation about how this amazing system was created, but you are giving this in-depth presentation to an audience of end users. They do not understand your terminology, and everything that you think sounds *smartsounds hard* to them. The audience is losing interest and while the salesman had them quite excited at first, now they think that this technology will be too hard to use and is beyond them. You did not properly address this specific audience.

Audience is of paramount importance because without an audience you would not need to say anything – there would be no one to listen to your words or care about your presentation. Similarly, if you do not speak in a way that is audience appropriate, your point may be lost upon your audience, and thus your presentation will be of no use to those for whom it was intended.

When you consider your audience ask yourself a few questions about them before you prepare your presentation. Consider the following: Will your audience be composed of similar people with similar levels of knowledge on the topic, or will you have a broad, diverse audience with varying levels of knowledge? What are the audience’s background, knowledge level, expectations and interest in this topic? What assumptions might the audience have before they hear you speak and what will they expect to hear from you?

Answer these questions for yourself and use that information to prepare your speech. Also use the information to anticipate what questions your audience might have and do your best to answer those questions within your presentation. Before you step onto any presentation stage be sure you analyze who you are speaking to. Recognize who they are before you prepare, cater your content, language, and presentation style to their needs and knowledge, and you will do well.

Secret #7: Do, or Do Not -- There is No Try

There are things in life that are more about the effort than the results achieved. When it comes to grades we tell our children to try their best – that it is the effort and the learning process that matters. When we give gifts we proclaim that it is the thought that counts. These ideas are more than just platitudes, in fact in many areas of life it is the trying that matters. But then again, another saying says that close only counts in horseshoes; in most sports and many other areas of life you either win or you don't. And what is the difference? Attitude. Being a success in almost any endeavor is about your attitude; a winner sets out to achieve, not simply to attempt.

As the all powerful Jedi Master Yoda once said in *The Empire Strikes Back*, you, “Do or do not. There is no try.” He said this to young Jedi Luke Skywalker, as Luke attempted to use the Force to pull his ship out of the sticky swamp of a dank planet landscape. Luke tried, a little, but gave up quickly in failure. Yoda closed his eyes and easily used the Force to pull the large ship from its watery prison. A breathless Luke said to Yoda, “I don't believe it.” “That,” Yoda replied, “is why you failed.” It may be just a movie, but the ideas are sound and valid in modern life. In this scene Yoda shows us that this mythical Force is really just about faith, about seeing a goal, envisioning it, and accomplishing it. We will talk more about visualizing success later, but this Secret is more about confidence.

To be a success you must feel like you are a success. To *do* means to enter a situation with an attitude that the solution is within your reach, that the game has already been won. As you prepare to enter a room or a stage where you are expected to address a larger group repeat to yourself various success statements such as, “I feel comfortable and I am at ease speaking in front of this group because I know what I am talking about.” Or think, “I am prepared to give this speech; I know exactly what I am going to say.”

Also take some time to think about our previous Secret on audience; think to yourself that the audience wants you to be successful. Think that the audience is here because they need the information you are about to present and that you are welcome in this group – everyone wants to see you do well. Never entertain the idea of failure. Do not let negative thoughts of fear enter your mind. Go in positive or do not go in at all – do, or do not. There is no try.

Does this truly mean that success is only in accomplishing and that trying has no value? No. It means that before you even embark on any activity in your head you must have already succeeded at it.

Secret #8: Don't Think of Yourself as a Public Speaker

While visualization is important, it is also important to not over-think things or to second guess yourself. Just be a person who has something to say – no more, no less. Fear of speaking usually comes from having too high of expectations. Most likely you have significantly higher expectations of yourself than your audience has of you. Relax. Just go out there and be yourself. If you do not try to be something you are not – do not try to live up to this image of “being a public speaker” – then you will enjoy yourself more, and your audience will see that and respond.

When you visualize your own success ensure that it is *yours*. Think about your dreams for a moment... when we dream we are often someone else. You look different, sound different, feel different and act different. You cannot be successful in a public speaking engagement if you expect yourself to be a different person. Do not put on clothes that you would normally never wear and try to act a part – unless acting happens to be your forte and you feel it will really work for you. If you are like most people you will have more luck just being yourself and not trying to pretend that you are some amazing public speaker who wows audiences for a living.

In fact, do not even think of yourself as a public speaker. Put a different image of what you have to do in your head. Let's say for example that you are at work and you are asked to present a new plan to a customer. You are terrified to speak in front of crowds and you know that your boss, his boss, five team members, the client and six people from the client's company will all be there. You are terrified that you will stammer, stutter and say nothing intelligible. Consider your options: You can tell your boss now, that you do not want to do it, and let someone else get the credit and glory for all this work. Or, you can just do it. One way to do it without panicking is not to think of it as a large presentation. Focus only on the actual client – one person – and address everything to him or her. Think of yourself as a person who is talking one on one to a valued client; there just happen to be other people around.

This same Secret can be used in a class presentation. Say you have to build a model of a bridge for your architecture class, and then present it to the class. Do not think of it as a presentation. Either focus only on showing it to the teacher, ignoring that your classmates are there. Or, think of it as a casual conversation where you are simply sharing your own ideas and work with your peers, in exchange for them showing their ideas to you. Break it down into something less frightening than a *presentation*; just make it a *conversation*.

Secret #9: Dress For Success

Entire books, even top 40 songs, have been written on this topic. Think John T. Malloy's 1970s New York Times best seller *Dress for Success* and then 1980s pop band Roxette's hit single *Dressed for Success*. However you slice it, what you wear is a big point of conversation and a large part of your success in business, in presentations, and in life. Does this mean that you always have to be fully decked out in a business suit or ball gown? No. It means that you have to dress appropriately for the venue and for your audience. Let's look at a few examples and then dig down deeper.

You are a carpenter, a really good carpenter. You work for a large company that installs custom cabinetry for companies in shopping malls. Most days you wear jeans and a T-shirt as you cut wood, glue, nail, and get down and dirty on the floor doing installations— all very physical work. Now you have been asked to speak at a banquet for the company, where the company is receiving an award for significant donations to charity. The event is also a fundraiser, costing \$50 a plate and taking place in a nice hall. Your job is simply to accept the award on behalf of the company, thank everyone and be humble. Simple. What do you wear? If you show up in your work clothes you will be far underdressed compared to everyone else. You will also look as though you do not take the award seriously. This situation definitely calls for dressing up in a suit, perhaps even a tuxedo depending on what you know of the other attendees.

Now, say you are the same person, but you have been asked to head a meeting of the other cabinet makers and installers, explaining to them the particulars of a new project you have just landed. It is a large meeting of about 30 workers, to be held in the cafeteria of your company. How do you dress? If you were to wear a suit and tie you would likely alienate the other workers, who are likely to show up in their work jeans and T-shirts. However, if you wear your usual work jeans and T-shirt then you may not command the level of respect that you want as this new project leader. The best bet is to go just one step above your audience, dressing perhaps in either really nice jeans or casual Dockers' type pants, with a simple Polo styled shirt or a simple button down shirt, but untucked with no tie or jacket. This takes you just a step up, to show authority and seriousness, but does not make you feel unreachable or unapproachable to those you are speaking to.

The main idea here is that to be a public speaker you must always command respect. But, being respected does not always mean dressing to the maximum degree. It means dressing at the level of, or just slightly above, your audience. Showing that you are one of them, but also that you take your presentation seriously and are dressing for success. When you do this your audience is most likely to take you seriously, and you are most likely to feel comfortable in the role of speaker.

Secret #10: Drink Conservatively

Whether you are at a black tie event or a company picnic three things are almost assured. One, you will be nervous, or else you would not be reading this book. Two, there will be alcohol, as alcohol is a common drink of choice in a variety of business and social settings. Three, you will be tempted to over-drink because as we all know, alcohol lowers inhibitions and loosens a person up. Just be careful, these three things – nerves, alcohol, and the belief that drinking will loosen you up – make for a dangerous threesome.

For nervous people forced to give a presentation that takes them far outside their comfort zone a calming alcoholic drink may seem like just what the doctor ordered, but use caution. Loose lips sink ships and nothing loosens lips like too much of the old bubbly. Alcohol can be the root of all evil and it would be a shame if all that stands between you and standing naked in front of an audience is one more drink. Does this mean that you cannot drink at all? Of course not. Like many things in life it means that you must use thoughtful planning and discipline to keep from causing yourself unnecessary trouble. So, before you give a presentation in a place that you know will be serving alcohol – whether it is a wedding toast, or an awards acceptance speech, remember the following.

Plan ahead. Tell yourself in advance how much you can drink. Know yourself and calculate what amount of alcohol (and what kind, whether beer, wine, or spirits) you can have to relax but not damage your ability to be an effective, appropriate speaker. Plan not only for how many drinks you can have but for how close together you can have them.

Tell others. If you anticipate a serious case of anxiety you may not trust yourself to stick to your plan. So, enlist help by telling family or friends; ask them to remind you of your limits or at least to not offer you additional drinks.

Stick with what you know. Do not try out a new drink when you have to speak later in the event. Some drinks sound easy and taste light, but they can pack a wallop. Other drinks can cause you headaches, heartburn or stomach problems if you are not accustomed to them. Do not take a chance, just stick with what you know.

A good rule of thumb is to not have more than one drink per hour if you want to keep your wits about you. Allow yourself a single drink when you first arrive at the event to immediately calm your nerves and prevent you from building your fear up too large inside your mind. Then, limit it to a single drink an hour, only drinking things you are familiar with, until your presentation is done. Even after that try to curb your drinking. You don't want the reality of your drunken stupor after your presentation to negatively impact people's memory of your awesome speech.

Secret #11: Give the Audience a Gift

Speaking of how the audience perceives you, one surefire way to make an audience love you is to give them something. One popular middle school teacher outside Detroit, Michigan has this great way of encouraging students to speak up in class. Anytime a student makes a good comment or answers a question the teacher throws them a Tootsie Roll. This small gesture of a one cent candy is a strong encouragement to listen to what the teacher is saying and participate actively. Does this mean that you have to show up to every team meeting with a bag of chocolates and throw them around the room? Not exactly, but it does explain why so many meetings include doughnuts, bagels and coffee, and why salespeople so often buy lunch for companies that they are pitching a new product to.

Now, don't worry. You do not have to give away new cars like Oprah does. Sure, it was amazing when Oprah, in one of the most memorable surprises in her show's 25 year history, gave every member of the audience a Pontiac G6 as part of her season premiere in 2004. But you do not have to go that big to make a big impact. You just need to ensure that every person at your meeting gets something from the presentation, whether it is physical or emotional.

Giving your audience something can certainly mean a real, physical thing. You see it at convention centers all the time, as every booth hands out free pens, magnets or note pads with their name on it, or at shopping malls when they give out free perfume samples. When you give people something they remember you, think fondly of you, and are more likely to act on whatever you are saying. Of course, actually handing something physical to everyone is unrealistic in most settings. And that is fine. So, instead, give them something emotional or informational. Let's look at some examples.

Humor is a great way to give the audience a gift. Awards ceremonies are famous for this. Think about it. If you are getting an award then a ceremony can be exciting. But if you are just one of the crowd watching the ceremony, they can be something of a bore. That is why the hosts often inject a lot of humor, turning the entire awards show into something of a stand-up comedy act. What do they give the audience? Laughter. And laughter, with all its healing properties, is far better than any Tootsie Roll could hope to be.

Now, let's say you are at work, leading a team to create some new product. You are not going to hand out candy or cars, and your meeting is not very funny. However, as you tell the team members what their assignments are you can begin by complimenting them. For example, say that Harry is very organized, with a beautifully clean desk, every bit of work he does tracked and accounted for, with everything always on time. You decide you want Harry to be the coordinator. Start out by publicly telling Harry that you are so impressed with his organizational skills and attention to detail that you feel he is the only person who can truly track this project and coordinate it from start to end. You have given Harry a compliment, fed his ego and made him feel appreciated. Again, this is a gift better than any chewy treat. In this way you use information to give something important to people.

Secret #12: Know What You Are Talking About

Speaking of information, it may seem obvious to say, yet it is important that we point out the need to provide valuable information to your audience in all parts of your speech – to know what you are talking about. This issue can be as much a problem for people who are comfortable with public speaking as with those who are not. In fact, once you become more comfortable speaking in front of a live audience you may become more tempted to “wing it” and just talk without proper preparation. But whether you are giving a best man’s speech at a wedding or presenting the most recent statistics that are guiding your company’s newest product development stage, knowing what you are talking about is really important to a successful presentation. There are three parts to successfully preparing for a public presentation.

First, be sure to research the topic thoroughly. No matter what you are speaking about, be certain that you know a lot about the topic. Maybe you are going to speak to the school board about a problem that you have with one of the teachers. You need to do some research ahead of time. This might include talking to some other parents to see what their experiences are with the teacher, and getting specific information from your child. Be sure to have specific examples prepared as well as suggestions for what action you want taken.

Second, use the Rule of Three to create a well rounded presentation. The Rule of Three is a concept that most things are best when they come in threes. This is very true to speaking. For example, your presentation, no matter how informal, should have three parts: an introduction, a body and a conclusion. You may have heard it said that you should tell your audience what you are going to tell them, then tell them, and then tell them what you just told them. These means that you start a presentation or speech by explaining what you will be covering today. Then, you cover the material. Then, you summarize what you just covered. You can also use the Rule of Three to guide the development of the body of your speech, ensuring that you prepare at least three main points to present.

Third, be prepared for questions. You probably will not get any questions on a wedding toast, but most of the time when you are called upon to speak in public there will be the opportunity for people to ask you questions. Be prepared. If you have well rounded knowledge of your topic you should be able to field questions well, but try to anticipate what questions the audience may have and prepare to answer these specifically. Also, prepare a response to provide if someone asks you a question that you do not know the answer to. For example, you might respond with, “That is a very good question. I don’t have that information available to me right now, but I will find the answer when we are done here and send it out to the group via email. Thanks for the great question.” When you respond in this way be sure to speak in a casual, honest tone and to engage the question asker with your eyes. Then, follow through on your promise.

Secret #13: Let Your Eyes Wander

Engaging a person who asks you a question or addresses you directly is a very important part of being an effective speaker. As with any individual or small group communication, eye contact demonstrates honesty and integrity, and makes people feel acknowledged. This is why it is important that you let your eyes wander when you present.

You may have received advice in the past – suggestions often given to novice, or extremely nervous public speakers – to find a single person in the audience to focus on, so that you feel less like you are making a spectacle of yourself. This can be good advice if you are exceedingly nervous. There is also some truth to the suggestion to focus your attention on a person's forehead, just above the eyes; in this way the person thinks you are looking at them, yet you are not distracted, or made uncomfortable by the eye contact. Both of these can be handy Secrets for the extremely nervous presenter. But once you have some practice you should engage in a better habit, that of letting your eyes wander so that you can engage your entire audience.

We have all been to some event where we sat a few rows back, or perhaps in the balcony, and felt as though we were watching the entire event without really participating. Maybe you have attended a music performance and seen the people in the front few rows get to high five or hand shake with the performer, or you have been to a live entertainment show at a theme park where the people in the front row get a chance to pet the whale or have water splashed on them. Watching the people in the front of a presentation become so engaged can leave the people in the back feeling very left out. One way to make everyone in an audience feel included – which makes your speech better received – is to engage each person with some level of eye contact.

If you are in a small group, let your eyes wander methodically around the group, pausing a few seconds to make friendly eye contact with each person. If you are presenting to a larger group, this level of individual eye contact may not be possible. In this situation be careful to give attention to each *area* of the presentation forum. You see this in concert halls, where the performer engages one section of the audience by having them applaud or sing a certain line from a well known song. But simply moving to the side of the stage and clearly looking up to the balcony as you make one important point, then walking to the other side of the stage and looking straight to the other balcony for a second point, can have a similar affect. By doing this you ensure your audience that you know they are all there, and that it is not just the people sitting in the first few rows that matter. Even if you are giving a very large presentation, and the lights prevent you from actually seeing the audience, still do this because the audience sees you and they do not realize that the lights prevent you from seeing them.

Secret #14: Memorize, Do Not Read

As your audience watches you one thing that they will notice is whether or not you seem to truly know what you are talking about. How do you show that you know what you are talking about? Well, you give good information in a casual way, but most importantly you do not just read off a sheet of paper.

Take political speeches as an example; everyone knows that politicians have speech writers who perfect their words and ideas, but if the speaker is good you would never know that this is the case by watching them. Whether you agree with President Obama's leadership and political views or not, you have to admit that he can deliver a speech. He rarely consults any notes and always seems well versed on every topic. Then, look at President George W. Bush. During the 911 crisis he did an amazing job of delivering emotional speeches that seemed sincere and honest, always without notes – he was great. However, most of his issue-based speeches were not as well delivered; he tended to misspeak, or forget points and often came across as having been given information that he forgot during his speeches. Bush was great when being himself, just friendly and casual, but when giving prepared speeches he was often forced to look down to read, losing his focus and his eye contact with his audience.

Preparing for a presentation by writing up notes or a speech is good. But never stand in front of a crowd and just read. You will bore the audience, convince them that you are not really prepared, and likely end up reading in a monotone, boring fashion. Also, when you are so bound to your notes you run the risk of losing your place and stopping the flow of your speech. To be totally dependent upon your written notes is dangerous. But also remember that if you do not plan to read your speech then you need to ensure that you know the content well. If you do not then you will end up using filler words, such as “um” to fill the gaps while you think of what to say next.

This happened to academy award winning director Jonathan Demme when he accepted an award for his film *The Silence of the Lambs* in 1992. Demme reportedly used the filler word “um” nearly 40 times in his five minute long speech. With better preparation and sans “um” perhaps he might have fit his speech into the Academy's 45 second time limit.

Remembering not to read your speech is also important when you are giving a visual presentation, such as a slide show. Never, ever read your slides to an audience. You will bore them, distract them, and possibly insult their intelligence. Any slides you show should be brief, so that the audience does not ignore you to read them. Just include brief phrases to punctuate important ideas and guide your own speaking. Then, fill in the gaps from your memory and tell the audience what they need to know. When you do require a written prompt to guide your speaking consider note cards. You are less likely to lose your place if you are going one by one through note cards than if you are trying to read from a full piece of paper.

Secret #15: Remember that Humor, Friendliness and Humility Help the Audience Embrace You

We have said a lot here about looking professional, engaging your audience and not making mistakes such as reading from your notes, or otherwise appearing as a boring presenter. However, it is also important to realize that no one expects you to be perfect. Your audience does not expect it of you and you should not require it of yourself. In fact, a small mistake here or there can actually make you seem more human. So if you make a small mistake or feel like things are not going well, do not let that derail the rest of your presentation. Just move forward and know that your mistake simply may have made you seem more down to earth, more honest and more approachable.

The biggest way to get people to really embrace you as a speaker is to be humble and friendly. By talking with an air of casualness and friendliness – acting as though you have known everyone in the audience for years – you can make people feel comfortable. When the audience is comfortable then they can better pay attention to you, without worry about how they are being viewed or concern that the information that you are providing is too far out of reach to be useful to them. By being casual and friendly, speaking the language of your audience, and seeming approachable, you make the entire experience more satisfying for you and your audience.

Humor can be another way to break the ice with an audience and make them feel more comfortable. But only attempt humor if it comes naturally to you. Forced humor will come off as awkward and will only serve to make everyone involved uncomfortable. But if you feel you can pull it off, the occasional joke, rye comment, or amusing anecdote can help create a fun, and casual, atmosphere that will make it easier for your audience to pay attention to your message. Do remember that self deprecating humor can be effective, but only in small doses. But never make fun of anybody else, specifically the audience or other presenters. Well, unless you are giving a roast or in some environment where you specifically know that insulting another person is ok, or expected.

Do not be afraid to be human. People feel comfortable when those speaking to them seem human. Put other people at ease by seeming at ease yourself and you will create a positive circle that relieves stress. If you feel comfortable with humor use it, but never force it. Be humble, authentic, and honest – this will make you believable. Tell people what your experience is, why you are qualified to talk about this topic, and then be open to their comments and questions. Value every question, acknowledging and respecting it; even if a question seems obvious or “dumb,” find a way to respect the question by responding in a positive, meaningful way. When you show respect for others and put yourself in a place of vulnerability they will respect you and they will want to see you succeed.

Secret #16: Speak to the Back

Connecting with your audience through humor, friendliness, and humility is extremely important. However, be certain that you make this connection with the entire audience similar to our Secret on letting your eyes wander. This is not just about your eyes; it is about your voice, your energy, and your words. Speech communication classes say that you need to *speak to the back*.

If you have ever been to a live play, perhaps on Broadway or something of similar caliber, you may have noticed how much the actors and actresses project their voices. They almost seem to be shouting through the entire play. This is because even with modern microphones, it is still important that they project to the back, so that the entire audience feels involved – even enveloped – in the action occurring on the stage. Even their stage make-up is designed for this; stage actors wear heavy, thick make-up that is highly exaggerated. Why? So that their features and colors can be seen even in the back of the auditorium. In fact, if you have ever seen a stage actor live, up close, after a presentation – when they still have their make-up on – you may think that they look almost clown like because of how much color is on their face. The same is true of their costumes, they usually wear sharp, bright colors that are much more lively than real life just so that the color can travel to the back of the room, engaging the entire paying audience.

When you speak to the back you ensure that no audience member feels left out of hearing what is being said or feeling like they are an important part of the entire event experience. For you, this will most often mean simply projecting your voice, and actually *speaking* to the back. When you talk, avoid mumbling or speaking too softly. Your voice is also unable to project if you slouch, look down at your notes or at the floor, or move around so much that your lungs do not have sufficient air.

While giving a speech make every effort to stand up tall, keeping your lungs and diaphragm uncompressed so you can get enough air to properly project your voice. Speak loudly and clearly, as if you are trying to talk exclusively to the people in the last row of the room or theater – speak to the back. If the person in the back row can hear you clearly, can understand your words and receive all of your main points, then you can be confident that everyone else in the room can hear you as well.

Secret #17: Stand Still and Do Not Fidget

When you are trying to project your voice, not moving around too much can be an important part of that as excessive moving can make you short of breathe – this is why you often hear of performers including Madonna and Brittany Spears lip sinking so that they can dance around the stage and still sound good without panting or getting short of breathe. Of course it is unlikely that you will lip sync your speech, so it is important that you not move around too much, which many people do out of nervousness. In addition to making it more difficult for you to project properly, excessive movements or fidgeting can distract your audience and reflect poorly on you as a speaker.

Moving around a little bit is interesting, but too much is distracting. If you are speaking from a large stage, or even in a large room, moving around a bit to engage your audience can be a great strategy. You can walk from one end of the stage to the other as you speak, engaging the various sections as discussed before. But unless you are giving a rock ‘n roll performance, avoid moving too quickly or jumping around pointlessly. Energy and enthusiasm are great, but if you jump and move too much you will simply look unfocussed, undisciplined and unpracticed. Use movement conservatively, to serve a purpose.

The same is true of how you move your hands, head or other body parts. Using hand motions can emphasize a point, but fidgety behavior is just distracting. If you are talking about how large something is, it is fine to engage the audience by opening your arms wide in a “big” gesture.

Think of good political speakers that you have seen, perhaps President Barack Obama or President John F. Kennedy. Both of these men use hand gestures well, occasionally punctuating an important point with their index finger and thumb together, or holding a horizontal hand up higher and higher to indicate that something is improving or simply growing. Such gestures can add interest as a speaker delivers a monologue. In fact, if you were to sit perfectly still, never moving an inch, you would likely look extremely awkward and uncomfortable, and that would make your audience uncomfortable. Conservative movements can enhance a presentation, but excessive ones will simply distract from your “performance”.

This principle of distracting movements can hold true when you are waiting for your turn to speak as well. Think of a recent political debate that you may have seen. You will often see that while one candidate is speaking, another candidate is making notes slowly and deliberately in a notebook. If you pay attention you will see that they are often writing so slowly that they likely are not really capturing ideas that they want to respond do; it is more likely that their motion of writing is intended to distract the viewing audience while their opponent is speaking. This can be a good strategy if you are looking to damage another person’s presentation. But most of the time you speak you will be part of a group where you hope that everyone is successful. Thus, you should avoid distracting movements even as you wait your turn in order to not take attention away from the person who is speaking.

Secret #18: Stay on Topic and Do Not Digress

While fidgeting is a great way to distract your audience and water down all of the important points that you are making, wandering off the topic can be just as distracting. It was mentioned earlier how actress Greer Garson rambled on in the longest Oscar speech on record, talking about how awards are so arbitrary and everyone is deserving, and so forth, rather than simply focusing on thanking people for her own award and being seated. This type of speech earned her a not so desirable, but memorable, place in Academy Award history. Such errors in speech giving are also often seen in political circles.

Famous Vice Presidential nominee Sarah Palin was well known for going off topic, or around the topic, quite frequently. Her propensity to answer questions in a very round about manner, often responding to a very specific question with only a vague generalization on an overall topic, made it difficult for the audience to truly know what her depth of knowledge and specific opinions on some important issues were. Sarah Palin may have had great ideas and vast knowledge, but her inability to focus her responses specifically did not allow her to truly showcase any knowledge, or any of the ideas that she possessed. While Sarah seemed very comfortable in public, this inability to stay on point certainly contributed in some part to the inability of that political party to win the election that year.

Staying on topic can be particularly important when you are addressing extremely professional, knowledgeable audiences. Business executives, scientists, medical professionals and other highly educated groups tend to be very task oriented; they want to get straight to the main point, deal with the issues, and then move on. With groups such as this you want to be clear, concise and very specific to your topic. But if you are dealing with a less serious group you may find that they feel otherwise. For example, when presenting to a group of pre-teenagers going off topic can have some advantages.

Say that you are presenting information about the dangers of drugs to some 'tweens. You may find that simply rattling off fact after fact, important point after point will likely bore them quickly and you will lose your audience. This is just as ineffective as rambling off topic and losing your executives. If you bore your audience, you lose their attention, and without their attention your presentation has no meaning.

Secret #19: Time Yourself

When you go off topic you not only run the risk of losing your audience, but you also waste time – valuable time that could likely be better spent focusing on the topic at hand. Most presentations are subject to a time limit. And most speakers have so many important points that they need to get across that working within the specific time limit is a real challenge. It is important that you prepare yourself ahead of time, so that you know what time constraints you are working with, and that you be aware of your time as you give the presentation. Let's look at a few in depth points in this area of time management.

One of the best ways to meet given time requirements is to prepare yourself to fit all important information within your allotted time. This means ensuring that you know what your time limitations will be, preparing reasonable material that you know can fit within this allotted time, and organizing the material in a way that it will flow cleanly from point to point, so you can get everything in that you want to. Notice that we are assuming that you will have a lot of material and will be struggling to fit it all in within limited time; most often this seems to be the case. But occasionally you may be asked to fill a time slot that is longer than what you really need; this can be a great challenge. What you need to do then is to find peripheral information – ideas that are related to your topic that add value, while also expanding your material. Also, you can be sure to pace yourself, speaking slowly and clearly.

As you consider time, remember that you need to be respectful of other's time, including the audience, the organizers and other presenters. Remember that it is not about you, really. Your presentation is about your audience getting what they need. And there is likely an organizer who has an overall goal of pleasing the audience. Of course there may be other presenters, each as nervous as you are, who are waiting for their turn. You need to respect all of these time constraints and people. Even if you are simply leading a work team meeting you need to be respectful of the time your team needs to do their other work; they certainly can't sit in a meeting with you all day.

As you fit your information into an allotted slot, pace yourself, being careful not talk too fast or too slow. Talking too fast is ineffective in that people may not comprehend your words or your meaning, and it just does not look good. Talking too slowly can lose your audience's attention or make you seem unprepared, or worse yet – unknowledgeable.

When your presentation is faced with heavy time constraints and you have a lot of information to get across, consider practicing your speech, and timing it accordingly. This is truly the only way to know if you can say what you have to say in the allotted time. Get a stop watch, stand in front of the mirror, give your presentation, and time it. Then, continue the exercise until you fit everything you need to say perfectly within your allotted time. If you are concerned that you will go over or under, touch base with the meeting organizer and ask them how important it is that you adhere to your allotted time.

Of course, for some people their presentation length is not about how much information they have, but rather about their anxiety level. For some people fear can cause them to run off at the mouth. Other people are so afraid to speak in public that they cannot imagine talking for too long. You might think that being in front of a camera for a living means that all actors are comfortable giving speeches and are really good at it, but that's not necessarily true. People can run off at the mouth when they are nervous, and people who are too long winded show a lack of respect for the entire event – and as pointed out earlier, even actors get nervous sometimes.

Secret #20: Underdress... Stay Cool

Speaking of looking good, earlier we talked about the value inherent to dressing for success. This was the idea that you need to dress in a way that is appropriate to your audience, environment and presentation. We said that if you look good then you feel good. Actually, this was only partially true – if you look good, then you feel appropriate and accepted, true. However, you should not dress for appearances alone; you must also consider your own comfort because a person who is uncomfortable is unlikely to be a good presenter.

As most of us know, hotels conference rooms, convention centers and other such public gathering spots tend to be air conditioned. Because people easily become agitated, short-tempered and even smelly in overly warm conditions most of these rooms are air conditioned to the max, meaning that they are often far too cool for most people's comfort, particularly if you are a woman. Hey, it's true; women tend to run colder than men and are much more likely to be uncomfortably cold while a man is still comfortably cool.

On the other hand, the best laid plans of mice and men often go wrong. This means that air conditioning units break. Rooms become more crowded than air conditioning equipment can handle. In short, rooms get hot and stuffy and everyone gets grumpy.

So, the last thing that you want to be is a man, sweating in his suit in an overcrowded room with ill equipped air cooling units, about to go on stage under hot lights, and talk about something important. You also do not want to be a woman wearing a strapless evening gown in the middle of a room full of men in long sleeves shirts and suit jackets, where a man is in charge of the air cooling settings, and you are left to go up on stage, goose bumps in tow, as your numb fingers fumble with your notes and you struggle to say what you need to between chattering teeth. The answer? Dress for comfort... and for the unexpected.

When you dress for a presentation do your best to dress appropriately to the anticipated temperature. But also try to incorporate layers. For example, a man can start with a shirt, tie, and jacket. If it gets hot, you can always remove the jacket. If you are afraid that doing so will leave you underdressed, then dress up the entire ensemble with things that make a statement but do not add to heat. For example, if you wear a cummerbund or vest, as well as cufflinks, then when you have to take off your jacket you will still look very stylish and fancy. Similarly, women who intend to wear a sheer gown, or gown with thin straps, even strapless, be sure to bring an attractive, dressy wrap that you can throw over your shoulders if you get cold while still looking stunning. And, be sure to wear pantyhose; if you get hot you can always take them off in the bathroom and stuff them into your purse.

Secret #21: Visualize

While how you look and feel, physically, are important, how you feel about yourself and your audience is more important. Earlier we talked about being a success by listening to Yoda and doing, not just trying. That idea is similar to visualization, but when you visualize you go a bit deeper into a more specific area than just generally expecting and feeling successful. When you visualize, you use proven psychological techniques to better your performance. Visualization can accomplish two things. First, it can set you up for success by reprogramming your brain to view this previously stressful even in a positive light. Second, it provides you an opportunity to actually proactive, and improve your presentation skills. Let's take a look at both of these ways that visualization can make you a more successful speaker.

Visualization helps you reprogram your brain for success. Psychologists and psychiatrists use it all the time in a form of therapy called cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). With CBT a therapist works with you to re-associate events that create anxieties and fear, with positive emotions. It is used to treat phobias, including agoraphobia (the fear of being in public) along with other anxiety and mood disorders. In short, the person is taught to visualize happy things in association with the feared event. So, if you fear public speaking you would actually close your eyes and imagine that you go out on stage and that the audience loves you. They cheer and applaud, giving you a warm feeling and a rush of enjoyable adrenalin. You look around (inside your head) and learn to associate the vision of a podium, a microphone, an audience, and so forth with happy feelings of success and accomplishment. Then, when you see these items in real life they are more likely to make you feel happy rather than fearful.

The other way that visualization helps you is that it provides a safe environment in which to practice your presentation skills and rehearse your content. Seriously. In fact, psychological studies have proven that rehearsing something inside your mind has a tremendous impact on your performance when you actually do the action you rehearsed. Athletes use this; a baseball pitcher can improve his pitch dramatically by simply thinking about it before going to sleep, laying in bed, imagining the feel of the ball, the grip he needs for a certain pitch, the strength of the wind-up, the timing of the release, and so forth. One study in the 1990s looked at the use of visualization in athlete's; they found that an athlete could spend less time in physical practice than another athlete, but spend more time in visualization exercises and actually improve more than the athlete who spent more time in practice and less time in visualization.

When you think of visualization remember that the idea is to visualize not your undressed audience, but rather your own success. Practice mentally, imagining yourself stepping in front of a group, speaking your own knowledge with confidence, and being readily accepted. Mental visualization practice can be just as effective as actual rehearsal and experience.

Moving Ahead to Effective Public Speaking

Public speaking does not have to be the mythical, horrific beast that you are imagining. Yes, public speaking can be daunting, that is why many people fear it. But being able to speak in public is a necessary skill in personal life, academic life, and business life. To ignore the need to speak in public would be to limit your upward mobility in your career, your effectiveness in the workplace, and your ability to accomplish a variety of personal endeavors. However, if you just make a bit of an effort to move past your inhibitions and anxiety even you can become an effective, confident public speaker... or, at least develop the ability to speak when you need to without passing out.

All you need to speak well is to relax, trust your instincts, and be you. The best way to do this is just to do it. When you find yourself in a work meeting or at a party, take a deep breath, stand tall and speak in a comfortable, humble, yet authoritative way. Show yourself that you can do it and you will find that through sheer repetition your comfort with public speaking will increase. When you improve your ability to be an effective public speaker you will find that greater career opportunities open for you and that you achieve higher levels of satisfaction with your job and social life. Make the mental decision now to affirm to yourself that you can do it. With some practice, positive thinking and the above 21 Secrets you can develop a skill that will serve you well for a lifetime.

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