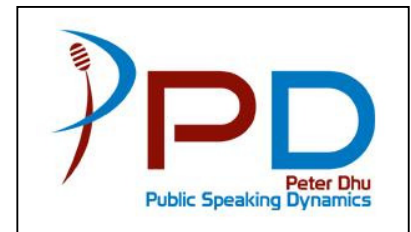


Peter Dhu, Public Speaking Dynamics



Controlling Anxiety

Fear of public speaking is often reported as one of mankind's greatest fears. It's even sometimes categorized as a greater fear than death. Many people just do not enjoy public speaking and will not accept an offer to speak, even if it may result in advancement at work, making new friends or personal growth. It is said that at a funeral, most of us would rather be in the coffin than delivering the eulogy. Why is it that so many of us have this irrational fear of public speaking? Is it fear of failure, fear of ridicule, fear of judgment by our peers, or is it just our own personal self doubt that won't allow us to take the stage or the microphone. In my workshops I focus on a series of strategies for gaining control of those nerves and in the speaking industry we say "making the butterflies fly in formation". These strategies help you to **PRIME** yourself for public speaking

1. **Preparation.** You cannot over prepare. Know your audience, know your venue, and know your topic. Can you plug and play? If your time was cut in half, or there was a power failure, can you still present your topic and get your key message across. You need to be able to.
2. **Relaxation.** Learning some quick relaxes, deep breathing exercises, and learn how to visualize your success on stage. Some people use yoga or meditations just to get in the right frame of mind and just bring that tension and anxiety under control before being introduced to speak.
3. **Immersion.** Immerse yourself into speaking. Having decided that you want to improve your speaking confidence and effectiveness, there is no better way to reduce anxiety than to dive in and do lots of speaking. You need to create speaking opportunities at work, such as volunteering to lead meetings, do community talks or you can also join a public speaking club such as Toastmasters. But you need to do it and lots of it.
4. **Monitor and Measure.** Feedback is the food of champions and you need to receive feedback so that you can monitor your progress. The ultimate feedback is to video yourself, but this is not always possible. You can have a friend or colleague in the audience who can provide you with the feedback that you want. It may relate to increasing eye contact, raising your voice more or using pauses for effect – or whatever you need to improve on. You can monitor your gestures by practicing in front of a mirror, so that you can ensure they are congruent with your message.
5. **Expand** your comfort zone. Once getting comfortable at staff meeting or toastmasters meetings, you need to expand your comfort zone and take on more challenging speaking situations. It is called "Pushing the envelope"

These steps will help you **PRIME** yourself for public speaking and the fear and anxiety will slowly reduce as you realize that you are prepared and ready to go.

Anxiety Reality Check

"If everyone is thinking alike, then someone is not thinking".

*General George
Patton*

One of things that I see consistently when running my public speaking workshops, is the person who stands up and presents effectively, calmly and professionally and then sits down with a sigh of relief. When you ask them to score that speaking experience on an anxiety scale of 1 to 10, where 0 is so calm you are almost asleep and 10, so anxious that your heart and brain are almost exploding, invariably they score themselves as an 8 or 9. I then ask the remaining audience what score they would give the person in regard to how anxious they appeared on stage. The score is always 2 or 3 and occasionally 4.

It is an amazing fact, but we are always our own worst critics. We also think and feel that we did worse than we really did. And even when we do quite well, we mark ourselves down. With this knowledge, if we can be aware that the audience is on our side and in reality we come across calmer and more confident than we ourselves feel, we should then be able to lower our own anxiety rating scale down to 6 or 7. If we can do this, we know that the audience is going to rate us as 1 or 2 and we are going to come across as calm and collected. So simple but not so easy to do.

So when you are waiting to speak, waiting to be introduced or about to chair a meeting, just examine how you are feeling. Where are you on the anxiety scale? If you can relax, deep breath, visualize or whatever and just calm yourself down a notch, then that will have an even greater effect on how the audience perceives you. Try and remember to get feedback. Have a friend or colleague in the audience and ask, "How nervous did I come across?". Compare it with how nervous and anxious you actually felt and you will be pleasantly surprised.

Pausing and Eye Contact

The same sort of scale and reality check can be used to try and improve your eye contact and your pausing for effect. John Harrison uses an exercise where you pause for an extraordinary long time and you make eye contact with one person for a very long time, you then rate how you felt. Then the audience rates you, and you guessed it. You feel as if you have paused and kept eye contact for an unnatural amount of time, but the audience says that it was neither uncomfortable nor unnatural and in fact they found it very engaging. Try this out and it will help you become a more engaging and effective speaker.

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Remember there are no failures, only lessons.

Stephen Lund, author of bestselling book "Fish" stated that "We learn little from success but much from failures".

Bill Gates said "Success is a lousy teacher. It seduces us into thinking we can not fail"

So go out and have ago and realize that there are no failures, just lessons to be learnt and enjoyed.