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It is quite funny how research has shown that we fear public speaking more than we fear death.

We've all been there. You're looking great and ready for that winning presentation or job interview. You've practised it one million and eleven times and you feel confident, as you're just about to take a sip of water.

In no time, you find yourself standing there with numerous pairs of eyes staring at you waiting impatiently for you to utter the words. Instead, all you're thinking is, "Oh God, I'm supposed to speak now, what should I say? How should I start? I'm messing this up! They think I'm an idiot..." You start to wish Harry Potter could appear and magically make you disappear.

Public speaking can be frightening especially if you've had a previous negative experience. Stage fright can consume you in no time and make you as mobile and vocal as a bamboo stick in an endless wasteland.

From your hands shaking faster than Eminem's rapping, to your brain accelerating through all possible escape plans, all your body parts are excessively moving except for the one that should: your mouth. It seems as though that sip of water is choking you to death.

I think you get the image. Now you're asking, "Well, how do I prevent those career-impacting experiences from happening again? How do I overcome my fear?"

Well, I suggest you move on to another article if you wish to overcome your fear of public speaking. I shall tell you a simple truth: overcoming fear of public speaking is as impossible as tickling yourself. Before you ask how others can be as fearless as the Superman when they're presenting, might I add that there is a difference between overcoming and controlling your fear.

If someone says they are not worried, nervous, or afraid of their upcoming presentation in a few moments, it could only mean one or two things. They don't care about it or they're lying through their teeth.

In this article I'm going to share with you a few practices to help control your fear and turn it into your



STAGE FRIGHT

CONTROL YOUR BIGGEST FEAR

advantage when presenting. Yes, your fear could become your strength.

RULE #1: KEEP IT TO YOURSELF

Never verbally acknowledge that you're nervous or afraid. That'll only make it worse as the audience will start to pick on any sign of nervousness from you and pigeonhole you as a nervous speaker.

Instead, acknowledge to yourself that you're anxious. After all, you're about to do something important so it's only natural that you'd feel the butterflies in your tummy. This will help you control your nervousness and stop it from consuming you.

Shouting it out loud won't add any meaning to your presentation. Not only will it reduce your confidence exponentially, it will also damage your credibility as a presenter.

RULE #2: MAKE THEM HUNGRY

You don't have to start speaking right off-the-cuff. A lot of nervous speakers start blabbering as soon as they enter the stage and they end up blabbering.

If you want my advice, take your time and nest yourself on your stage. Find the centre point and plant your-

self onto the stage.

Take a good look at the audience with a massive smile on your face and make a few brief eye contacts with the people in the audience.

Take a deep breath and let it out. The wait is not going to portray you as a person who lacks confidence, unless the wait is awkwardly long, but it will create suspense within the audience and make them hungry for your first words. Once you feel comfortable enough on the stage, you're ready to give them that jaw-dropping presentation.

RULE #3: GET THEM INVOLVED

One of the most helpful techniques to put yourself and, more importantly, your audience in a comfortable place, is asking an opinion-based question.

Get them to raise their hand, shout out answers, or raise a green or red card to show agreement or disagreement. Anything that works and is appropriate to the ceremony and the audience will be fine.

That'll not only take the spotlight off you for a while and allow you to regroup, it'll also work as an ice-breaker and will reduce the tension in the room.

Just be careful with what you're

asking them to do. Don't ask the board of directors to get off their chairs and high-five each other. That will probably get you more choking than the sip of water did.

RULE #4: STOP FIDGETING

One of the worst habits we have during our presentation is uncontrolled and meaningless body movement: fidgeting. From pulling our fingers to moving back and forth the stage, you should understand how body movement can add meaning and impact your presentation or else, it'll only be distracting the audience from listening to you.

When we are nervous, it's only natural for us to start fidgeting but we should always be careful and keep in mind that the unnecessary body movement is as poisonous as a bad marriage; figuratively speaking of course!

Keep your hands on your sides if you are not holding a microphone or a laser pointer. That's the safest course.

RULE #5: ENJOY YOURSELF

Here's the ultimate advice I can give to any speaker: enjoy your time in the spotlight.

The moment you embrace the chance to speak before an audience and try to have fun on stage, you will transform into a pro speaker.

It's no secret that we excel at things that we enjoy, so always try to embrace it with loads of positivity and fun, and that will automatically stop your stage fright from getting the best of you.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I sincerely hope that you will benefit from my sharing with you and, if you happen to have a question, feedback or any queries, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me.

I'd be delighted to hear your feedback, either positive or negative. We should always remember that the biggest room in the world is the room for improvement.

■ *Alireza Parpaei is a public speaking champion, professional speaker and public speaking trainer. He is the current president of UNMC Toastmasters Club and a member of Premier Advanced Toastmasters Club. To engage him for your organisation or to connect with him, write to editor@leaderonomics.com*



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