



Curing nerves and creating a positive state

Ask anybody what their greatest fear is, and speaking in public is never far from the top of their list, whether that is at a 500 delegate conference or in a board room pitch. Ask anybody who has mastered public speaking and they will tell you that they get nervous. But they will also tell you that nerves must be mastered because the way that we inwardly feel is outwardly expressed and interpreted into the meaning of our message. Feel uncertain or apprehensive and we register uncertainty and apprehension with our audience. Feel certain, confident, on top of your game and we register credibility and assurance. Critically, these impressions register at a subconscious level, reinforcing our acceptability and influence.

Here are some of the proven ways in which we can master nerves and in the process master our communication and persuasion abilities:

Plan - Fear of failure is the biggest cause of nerves and the most certain cause of failure is lack of planning. Planning is without doubt the key to confidence and congruence in the delivery of your message. When you have researched your audience so that your message is relevant; when you deal in benefits that relate to their needs or concerns; when you are clear about the specific outcomes you want to achieve; when you have practiced and know the beginning, the end and the steps in between. Then you will want to get on your feet and present!

Confront your Phobias - We are our own worst enemy when facing situations that we dislike. The most popular phobias that undermine confidence and instil hesitancy are: over-preparation; fretting over detail; self-limiting beliefs; apathy or indifference; pessimism; procrastination; fear of Criticism; fear of failure; over-concern for popularity. Like any phobias, we did not start out in life with them but we allowed them to develop. They can be easily cured. A simple and effective technique to try is to dismiss them! List them down on a piece of paper; screw up the paper into a ball, and then dismissively throw the screwed up paper over your shoulder.

Affirmations and empowering beliefs - Counter those self-limiting beliefs by talking to your self in positive empowering terms. An affirmation is simply a repeated spoken declaration, in the present tense, which creates a desired reality. Tell yourself "I have the skill to win this audience over!" But you have to be persistent. If we suffer a self-limiting belief such as "I cannot speak in public!" and we try a couple of times to tell ourselves that we can, it will not work. Ironically, because we are conscious of what we are attempting the self-limiting belief over-rides the affirmation. We feel we are just trying to kid ourselves and we ignore it. It is only when we recite affirmations repeatedly that we stop consciously listening and they begin to register. You may feel a bit foolish at first but they will work. Just give them time and get into the habit

Positive reframing - This is like seeing the glass half full instead of half empty or viewing problems as opportunities. Turn the downsides and negatives of a situation around and make them a positive. I once trained direct salespeople who often complained that they would knock on 100 doors and get rejection from around 70 of these. The successful sales people however viewed it differently. They said that they were practically guaranteed 30 interviews by knocking on a 100 doors. Once again it is just a case of getting into a habit, in this case of choosing to see things positively.

Anchoring a positive state - There are very few of us who cannot recall some situation in life where we enjoyed the moment, maybe savoured success, or just did something especially pleasing. That moment left in us a state of resourcefulness that is still there and can be reactivated. Go back and immerse yourself in that moment. Replay it in your mind and as you do, pay attention to the senses. What you see. What you hear. What you feel. Maybe even what you can smell or taste. Take note of which sense seems strongest, and when concentrating within it, seems to prompt that positive feeling most. It could be an image or it could be music playing. When that positive feeling is greatest, anchor it in some way. Twist a signet ring. Lock a specific image in your memory. Embed a phrase or self-talk. Then when you want to reactivate that resourceful state trigger it off by repeating your anchor.

Many of us practice anchoring without realising it, we may have a “lucky mascot” or a superstition ritual we enact but the likelihood is that the superstition worked because we triggered off a pre-anchored resourceful state. We may even adopt a hero role. This highly effective and simple to apply anchoring technique sees us become somebody else. Somebody usually famous, say like Ali or Churchill, who we would expect to deal extremely well with certain situations. We may have several heroes for different situations and effectively we model ourselves on how they would behave, but as with other techniques these heroes are just triggering off a resourcefulness that is already within us.

Positive Visualisation - Ask any handicap golfer to talk about their best and worst holes and they will remember the worst. The words “I always slice into the lake at this hole!” are almost guaranteed to produce that very result as the brain cruelly activates the *slice in lake programme* it has stored away. Positive visualisation is part of that *Getting into the Zone* habit that top sportspeople practice. We cannot possibly orchestrate all the mental and physical elements that make up complex activity, but we do not have to. The brain has these elements stored away and is waiting for a signal to trigger them off. Positive visualisation provides that trigger, whether it is to hit the fairway, or to hear the audience applaud the presentation you are about to deliver.

Last minute Preparation – If a blank mind is your concern because you are working without script or autocue then your own prompting system will serve you well. Try mapping your key points into a network diagram, or creating an acronym from the subject headings. Writing the acronym onto a postcard placed in your pocket will enable you to picture it in your mind’s eye. Another easy to learn technique is to imagine the rooms of your home or office and create pictures of each part of your presentation which you store in each room.

Try to enjoy the preceding presentations and get excited rather than anxious about the prospect of presenting. Listen for comments that can be linked into your presentation.

And finally, do not forget there are a few last minute rituals that will always help. Relaxing your shoulders and neck, and breathing deeply will calm you down. Swinging your arms or quick physical jerks will pump you up and will get the adrenalin flowing. Maybe a final affirmation will work best for you. What is important is that these habits are triggers that will anchor that state of resourcefulness we talked about above.

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