

FEAR!

Three ways to handle fear when presenting or speaking in public



YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AFRAID

Even experienced speakers feel nervous at times - but you never know it. They have learned to handle nervousness so that their message is delivered with clarity and power.

Fear can drain the inexperienced speaker's message of impact. The audience will concentrate on the speaker, feeling their discomfort, and the message will be forgotten.

What makes the difference?

1 REINFORCE YOUR SELF-IMAGE

Very few people would describe themselves as excellent public speakers. Fair enough! It is important to recognize areas of our life where we need improvement. But that's just the point. Potentially, we could all speak well if someone were to show us how. You are not a *poor* public speaker; you are *untrained* as a speaker, and that can be easily fixed.

While it is damaging to tell ourselves we can't speak effectively, it is even worse to tell *others*. The more you say something out loud, the more strongly you believe it to be true. Every time you tell someone, "I can't do public speaking" you are reinforcing your negative self-image.

This is the start of a downward spiral. When you are required to make a presentation, your fear of speaking makes you less effective. When the ordeal is over you feel wretched about your performance, and your self image is now worse than it was before.

Avoid talking about your fear.

2 CONSCIOUSLY RELAX

When you are nervous, your muscles become tense. Hand gestures become jerky, and turning your head to make eye contact with all of your audience is all but impossible. And because your vocal chords also tense up, your voice sounds strained.

The cure for all this is so simple you may doubt that it will work. It will!

Shortly before you begin your presentation, take three deep breaths. Breathe in deeply, and exhale slowly. If you can, do this standing up. As you exhale, consciously relax - shoulders, arms, hands, abdomen - and repeat the process twice.

The increased oxygen flow and your relaxed muscles will give you a feeling of well-being, alertness and control that will transform your presence at the podium.

Take three deep breaths.

3 START PREPARING RIGHT AWAY

Dr. Paul Witt of the Texas Christian University in Fort Worth conducted some interesting research into the physiological reactions that can be observed in the gastro-intestinal systems nervous public speakers. He discovered that nervous reactions occur at the very moment a person accepts a speaking engagement.

More to the point, Dr. Witt also discovered that there is a very easy way to arrest these symptoms. Start preparing!

How simple! You know you have to make a presentation. Your stomach is already churning, so just sit down and start preparing. Now you can think about it without feeling nervous, and you start to see yourself not as nervous, but as a confident and capable speaker.

Prepare as early as you can.