

Speak Now or Forever Hold Your P's

Panicking, passing out, puking, pink blushing cheeks. Not very nice! And yet they've all happened at one time or another before, during or after stage appearances. Fear of public speaking is not a new phenomenon and plagues even the most confident of people (apparently even the dashing Cary Grant!).

Every now and then another poll is taken of what people fear the most, and fear of public speaking inevitably ranks in the top ten. It ranked in the top three of Gallup polls run in 1998 and 2001, where over 40% of Americans reported a fear of public speaking. Reactions can vary from mild nervousness to blind terror at the very thought of it.

A fear like this can effect how we feel before and during:

- Conferences
- Job interviews
- Contributing to or leading meetings at work
- Media interviews
- Wedding speeches
- Special events and award ceremonies
- Presentations
- Meetings/negotiations with banks or lawyers
- Meeting people for the first time (including the in-laws!) and the list goes on...

When I'm working with clients on this issue, they may report:

- Fluttery tummy through to nausea
- Blushing
- Shaky hands and/or sweaty palms
- Elevated heart rate and body temperature
- Talking too fast or wobbly voice
- Speaking too quietly
- Tense shoulders or whole body
- Mind all over the place, or completely blank
- Feeling dread about doing it
- Talking to themselves about "What if I screw up?"
- Feeling judged "They don't want to hear what I have to say"
- Afraid of being asked questions or of being challenged
- Procrastinating about preparing



"There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act II, Scene ii

Thankfully the technology of NLP means we know why one might react like this, and how the responses can be changed. Let's look at it through the eyes of movie watching. Most of us have had the experience of watching a fictional film or television show that caused us to feel emotional – afraid,

anxious or even sad. We have the response even though we know it's not real. I recently took myself off to the movies to see the new Batman film, The Dark Knight.

I hadn't seen an action/thriller style film for a while and I was amazed at the roller coaster ride of adrenalin I found myself on. Rolling Stone online describes the movie as "a shock to the system." I have to agree! I had adrenalin pumping through my body, felt tense all over and my heart rate was higher than usual. And yet I knew it wasn't real, that the Joker's face was covered in make-up and so on.

Why does this happen even when we know it's make-believe? Because all behaviour is unconscious (sub-conscious), and the unconscious mind doesn't know the difference between what is real and what is imagined. When you imagine biting into a wedge of lemon, you can almost feel the sour tang in your mouth and more saliva being produced. But you're not eating the lemon!

So it is with public speaking. For many, just imagining speaking in front of people that makes them nervous! And once they're in front of their audience, focusing on what could go wrong or how nervous they are, also causes their body to tense up in an adrenalin frenzy and quake with fear. The unconscious mind thinks it's a scary dangerous situation, so it's responding accordingly.

Even when we know everything about the topic we are presenting, we can falter. Recently one of my clients was saying how intellectually she knows that what she is saying is right. However, her body is (unconsciously) behaving as if she doesn't. (Well it was - past tense!) After our work together she not only presents confidently, she actually enjoys it.



Making changes

So how can we feel relaxed, focused, in the moment and fully present in our bodies as we enjoy speaking or presenting? Because the current responses are running unconsciously, this is the level at which we want to be able to make changes. Using simple techniques from NLP this is easy, quick and lasting.

When I'm working with a client, I will help them work out what they want to be doing instead (set an outcome), what their current patterns and responses are, and then teach them how they are able to make unconscious changes. Then we will go through one or several processes that could include techniques such as visualisation, changing internal dialogue (yes, it's perfectly normal to talk to yourself!), hypnosis, etc. It's usually a fascinating, fun journey that clients find delightful.

Try this fun NLP strategy – the *Mood Mover*

You can also try something yourself – a simple technique that will give you an idea of how you can change these responses.

Can you recall a time when you were feeling nervous? Once you have a time in mind, read through these instructions in full, then take yourself through them from start to finish all in one go. You may even like to ask a friend to talk you through it for ease – preferably someone who will be curious and kind about it, and non-judgemental. It's a slightly absurd technique, but I guarantee it works. Your friend will probably want to have a go too!

Here goes:

1. Think about that time you were nervous. Can you get the feeling back and remember what it was like? What is the feeling like in your stomach, in the rest of your body?
2. Now stand up. Lift your arms above your head, and shake your hands as if they are rattles, shaking vigorously.
3. Then look up to the ceiling and turn up the corners of your mouth.
As you look straight up, notice it's not easy to have a serious thought when you do this – it is in fact difficult to have a serious thought as you look up!
And when you turn up the corners of your mouth, did you know that serotonin is automatically released in the brain? It is a biological response, so you can keep enjoying turning up the corners of your mouth!
4. Finally, say Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes!
5. Now, as you bring your hands down and relax your body, is that old nervousness there, or has it gone now? I expect it is gone.

And you can do this whenever you want to be able to change your state. Try it when you need a burst of motivation, confidence or energy, or when you're feeling frustrated about something, and see what happens. I'd love to hear from you, so let me know how it goes!



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