

Facing Fear Can be Fun

Really? Upon first glance at the above title, most of us raise an eyebrow and wonder what the catch is. True, that Facing Fear may not be fun all the time. Especially if your fear is around something like, say, being buried alive. But the good news is that when it comes to the fear of public speaking, facing your fear doesn't have to be a testament to withstanding torture and humiliation. It actually *can* be fun. It's all in the approach—the actions we take and the perspective we hold. A few shifts can change a usually scary experience to exhilarating.

From Scary to ...

Let's say you are asked to address a group of people. What happens? A whole slew of thoughts and feelings pop up in seconds. These are the associations we currently hold around our ability to speak or what we will experience when we do speak. These associations form a perspective and create an instinctive response that either help us embrace or hold us back from excelling and *from enjoying our speaking experience*.

The best time to notice our obstacles is when we are in the situation of having to agree to speak or prepare to speak, and we realize that we are becoming anxious or uncomfortable.

The heat of the moment is like a magnifying lens on our personal triggers and barriers. Because our response is so raw and right at the surface, it's also an easier time to gain insight and truthful perspective on ourselves.

Once the Gateway is Open, Get on with Asking

Once we recognize we've been triggered and choose to use our response as a portal to understanding and initiating a change, we open the door to changing our habitual response.

Let's consider again that we've been asked to speak to a group and the prospect feels uncomfortable or scary. The time is ripe to ask ourselves non-judgmental questions that will give us the fundamentals for redirecting ourselves:

- What would I enjoy about this, the way it seems right now?
- If I could back out or say no with no repercussions, would I? Why?
- How do I really feel about the idea of doing this?
- Do I think this speaking opportunity will help me in a way I really care about?
- What would I prefer to do instead? Why? How do I feel when I do *that* activity? What do I get out of doing what I prefer?

Sometimes we are not personally invested enough to make taking the risk worthwhile and we just have not identified our disinterest. If the incentive is not meaningful enough, then taking the risk is likely to yield more frustration than results.

Sometimes the way we look at a situation prevents us from recognizing things we might desire about it and if we can shift our perspective, we tap into a motivation that matters enough to move forward and face the unknown.

It's important to ask ourselves questions with the understanding that our answers are private and do not ever have to be divulged to anyone other than ourselves. Still, sometimes it can be hard for us to get a clear and penetratingly honest answer back when we ask ourselves questions like the ones above. If so, it can be very helpful to ask the following (before returning to the first list):

- What is the worst I can see happening as a result of doing this?
- When else have I been asked (or forced) to do something outside my comfort zone and what happened? Does anything about this situation feel similar?

- Are any memories of mine or others I've heard of coming up that I'd not like to repeat by doing this? What are they?

This will help us understand what we might need to change about the situation in order to want to take the risk and accept that public speaking invitation. When it comes to change, we have two primary options:

1. Change the circumstances of the situation
2. Change our perspective on the situation

Ok, That's how I feel, but what do I Do?

Once we know where we'd like to make some changes, it's helpful to know what to do next. If you are looking to disable disempowering self-speak, ask yourself if "buying" into any of your newly uncovered beliefs can help you net a better result. The answer will surprise you. Most of our naysaying only leads to avoiding a situation, not succeeding in it.

More Questions?!

Figuring out how to change circumstances can be easier when we ask ourselves:

- What would make me look forward to taking this risk or more willing to give it a shot?
- How can I make the PROCESS more rewarding—
 - what can introduce and include in the process
 - how can I change the way I perceive the process, so it is already feels achievable?
- What would make this fun?
- What would make me feel safer?

Sometimes it's as easy as hiring a coach or taking a class to guide us through the experience. There are many resources to help us prepare with confidence and make public speaking more enjoyable.

Sometimes the answer does not involve not an outside "thing." For instance, when I first took clown class at acting conservatory (yes, you read that right, classical acting training programs often include clown class), I thought, "Oh, boy, I am going to be awful at this. This is going to be painful." I found myself dreading it. I envisioned embarrassing myself in front of my classmates. I imagined the judgment and humiliation. I felt I did not have a natural ability with clowning. I believed that because I was the one in the class with the most professional stage experience, I should therefore be more accomplished and adept at everything.

Then I realized that none of these beliefs were going to help me enjoy the semiweekly class or get anything out of it. If I went in with my current perspective, I was going to do more than be bad at something. I was going to waste my time and energy and miss out on anything I might gain that would help me be a better actor.

What made me feel safe, it turns out, was to give myself permission to be bad. Be worst in the class, to be exact. I reframed the concept of success so that it was based on my effort, willingness to take risks and seek fun. Failure was no longer an issue. Even if the teacher gave up on me and every exercise was like banging my head again a wall, I was going to show up in the class, do everything, have as much fun as possible and not care how it turned out. I didn't have to progress the entire time, I just had to do my best and glean as much joy as I could.

Whew, the pressure was off. Suddenly, the idea of coming to class with no strings attached was uplifting. Here was a place where I could practice not caring what others thought and pushing my limits without judgment. I could practice being silly and experiment with every crazy idea that came up. And no repercussions! I vowed to accept the outcome, whatever it would be. Turns out, I learned a ton, improved throughout the class and had a ball.

This and many other experiences like it, shapes my workshops. We've got enough places in life where we have to leave our warts at the door and ignore the wonder of mistakes. Let's get involved, support each other and explore with gusto! The take-away is usually better and is always, a heck of a lot more fun.

Wayne Gretzky said, "You miss 100 percent of the shots you never take."

Remember:

- Build "risk muscles" (improv classes are GREAT for this)
- Set the tone for success by clearly envisioning who we are and what we are about to create
- Assume you will adjust as you go—unpredictability is part of life
- Commit to and enjoy the ride: with gusto.

Looking inward and getting real are irreplaceable steps that lead to lasting change. If you want to take your presenting to the next level, it is also very helpful to seek out opportunities to practice in a group dynamic. A private coach will help you to take strategic risks, capitalize on your individual strengths, tailor your preparation and net improved results in desired areas.

Whether we want to raise the consciousness of the local Chamber of Commerce, motivate our team to action or lead 5,000 convention attendees to new thought, if we give ourselves permission to pursue our passion and release ourselves from that process having to be picture perfect, we can develop into the seemingly carefree speakers we see in our favorite speakers.

Some deeper causes of our response may be illuminated by asking:

How do I normally feel about the prospect of taking chances?

How do I normally feel after I've taken chances? What has been the outcome of taking risks?

Do I think I am good at public speaking? Why or why not?

Do I think I could be good at public speaking?

Do enjoy public speaking? Why or why not?

Do I think I could enjoy public speaking?

Would I enjoy the process I'd need to go through to perform to my expectations or standards?

Do I accept the beliefs I've uncovered as my personal legacy?

Wow. OK. That can seem like a heavy question. It's not to generate guilt, shame or another other feeling connected to obligation or "shoulds" about who you are or what your life is about. It all comes down to owning up to what you truly want and are motivated to put your energy towards. The payoff has to be there and is has to be a personal reward to be effective.