

Confidence Tricks – Boosting Your Confidence in Presentations

How is it that normally secure, confident, outgoing people can feel so nervous about giving a presentation? A recent survey of the top 10 things people most dreaded showed Public Speaking as top of the list closely followed by Death! Presumably if you were asked to give a eulogy at a funeral you would prefer to be in the 'box'.

It is likely, as a manager, that you will be asked to present in some form or other to an audience. It may be something informal such as a "Good Luck and Thank-you" speech to a departing employee or a full-on presentation to the board. So what is it that prevents people from being themselves when it comes to public speaking?

The main factor is 'stage-fright', when you move centre stage and all the attention is on you, and you freeze. You are like a rabbit caught in the headlights of an oncoming vehicle at night. You are powerless; your legs feel like rubber; the room starts to spin, your throat constricts and your mouth is drier than the Gobi Desert. Don't worry, it's easily fixed. How? I hear you shout.

The simple answer is do lots of presentations since each time we survive the experience we know that we can do it and we know more and more what to expect. One of the biggest causes of feeling nervous is that we are unfamiliar with something that demands a level of accomplishment. We also tend to get nervous in new surroundings. This is completely natural. If the thought of giving lots of presentations to overcome our fear public speaking isn't practical or just stupid, then here are a few exercises to try out before and during a presentation.

Dress the Part

This is easy advice to follow. Really put the effort in to look good. If you know you look good, you will feel good. It is part of getting ready for something and showing commitment to it. "I'm doing this and I'm going to look great!"

Raise your Posture

Another simple tip to put into practice. Try sitting up straighter right now. You will feel yourself taking in a breath and sense that you are in a stronger position. When presenting feel yourself stretching to your full height (not on tiptoes!) and keep that posture throughout. You will feel stronger and more powerful as you speak.

Create an Anchor

An anchor is an association that you create between a time that you felt completely confident, completely comfortable and in control and a physical gesture. Cast your mind back to one of those times until the memory starts to bring back the confidence you felt and link it immediately to a gesture such as squeezing your thumb and forefinger together or gently pinching the skin on the back of your hand. Then, when you want to bring back that feeling of confidence, simply make the gesture.

Don't Give a Hoot

When we care too much about something, raise its level of importance and weigh ourselves down with the expectations of others, then our ability to 'perform' can be severely effected. The trick here is to not care. That doesn't mean to say that we will do a bad job, it means if something goes wrong treat it as nothing, shrug it off. "I can't remember my next line", so what? "My hands are shaking" so what? "The audience looks bored", so what? Care less, perform better.

Become like Walter Mitty

"The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" was a short story written by James Thurber. Walter Mitty was a meek and mild-mannered man who as he day-dreamed could suddenly become anything he wanted to be; a fearless Naval commander steering his ship through a storm; a brilliant surgeon saving a life; a hero foregoing a blindfold in front of a firing squad. We can do the same. Pretend to be someone you admire and act like them.

Prepare your Opening

If you are going to freeze, it will probably be right at the start. Preparation is our biggest ally in presenting. If you do nothing else, prepare, prepare, prepare. By preparing especially well for your introduction you create momentum for the rest of your presentation. If you forget lines later on, don't worry; the audience doesn't know what you are going to say so they won't notice!

Inspire by iPod

Listening to music that inspires you on the way to giving a presentation can also strengthen resolve. A lot of sports teams use this idea to send them out on the



field full of confidence, ready for action. 'I will Survive" by Gloria Gaynor; 'We are the Champions' by Queen; 'The Theme from the Magnificent Seven' and the 'Theme from Rocky'; 'Ace of Spades' by Motorhead and 'My Way' by Ol' Blue Eyes are some suggestions!

You can find breathing exercises to do; you can imagine the audience in their underwear as well as a host of other ideas to help your confidence. Ultimately it will be your belief, passion and purpose that win the day. Just standing up front shows the courage you have and be sure that the audience is on your side. They much prefer to be where they are than where you are.

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