

Countering Stage Fright

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Week-04

Lecture-16

Hello friends, I am Smita Jha, once again here to discuss countering stage fright with the topic, can stage fright be cured? And in the previous discussion, I highlighted some of the points with the help of which you can reduce it very well or you can be cured from the symptoms of stage fright. So, tell yourself positive aspirations. Before you walk on stage give yourself an encouraging word. Self-doubt can be a big mood dampener, not to mention a confidence crusher. Silence those anxious and intrusive thoughts with positive, self-affirming ones to feel empowered. Whisper them while you get ready or scream them into the empty theater before the audience arrives.

Now, let us discuss some of the points that you can carry to uplift your positive thoughts, uplift your mantras, like: I am capable of achieving greatness. I can and will succeed. I believe in myself. I can achieve whatever I set my mind to.

I am strong, confident, and powerful. These are the mantras that can boost up your energy. Think of the audience as friends, because an audience is not a threat. Pretend you are presenting to your best friend, not a room full of strangers. One of the many causes of stage fright is the fear of failure.

Screwing up in front of a live audience is awful. Screwing up in front of your best friends is laughable. Imagining that you are speaking in front of people you love can help you feel more at ease and lessen those performance jitters. Make your vision a reality by asking a friend to sit in the front row. And this way you can look to them whenever the nerves rise.

If making eye contact with the audience makes you more nervous, no worries. Stare over their heads at a spot on the wall. They won't know the difference. Rehearse every day. Silence thoughts of failure with practice, practice, and practice.

The best way to overcome stage fright is to make sure you know your routine, speech, or

lines by heart. Stage fright is a mixture of fearing failure and self-doubt. By rehearsing every day leading up to the performance, you can nip that fear in the bud. Record yourself while you are practicing and watch or listen to it back to see where you can improve. This can help you be more confident as you will know exactly what you will look and sound like.

Time your presentation or speech as you practice, so you know if you need to slow down or speed up beforehand. Practice in front of a pretend audience full of friends and family members. Ask those you practice in front of how you did to get feedback before your big day and stick to your routine. Sometimes a set schedule or ritual can help you feel more at ease. Plan out the day of your performance or presentation.

What time will you wake up? What will you eat? How will you dress? When should you leave for the venue? Think about what will help you succeed and execute it. Aim to get to where you are performing, speaking or presenting earlier. The earlier you arrive at the venue, the more time you will have to set up and get comfortable. Try wearing something to bring you luck. This is emotional perception also, but sometimes it works, like a bracelet or mismatched socks.

Visualize your success instead of thinking about what could go wrong, think about what could go right. Before you go on stage, picture yourself standing proudly on the stage as the audience cheers and laughs at your jokes. They love you. This image can and will become your reality. If you can dream it, you can do it.

Imagine how you will look from the audience's point of view. What are you wearing? How are you moving or talking? Think of it like manifesting. The stronger you think it, the more likely it will happen. Talk to someone if your symptoms worsen. Vomiting and fainting spells could be a sign of severe anxiety.

If you have tried some tricks and your nerves keep rising, or you experience physical sickness, it may be time to talk to a therapist. They will be able to help you with your stage fright with personalized guidance and treatment. Online platforms are also there like Better Help, Talk space. They can help you to find and talk to a counselor almost instantly, to know yourself. Feel your body, especially your extremities, you know, over excitement.

Feel your hands. your feet, your nose, and your ears, even your cheeks. Be as physically in your body as possible, like rub your hands together briskly. Develop some heat in them. Feel the heat. Then, hold your palms close together and slowly start to separate them.

Feel the energy between your palms, take the energy and "wash" it over your body, from head to toe. Allow any tension in your muscles to release as you wash the energy over them. See the environment, the lights, the wings, the people around you, the stuff surrounding you. Dance bags, old leg warmers strewn about, etc. Force yourself to see the colors, shapes and textures.

Let your sight pull you into the present moment. Have faith in something greater. Have a spiritual practice of any kind. If you have, it is really great. Use it now, like we think of God, that is, we think of our strength.

If you do not have, do not worry. Develop some. Just try considering the possibility that this current experience might be way bigger than you. Envision yourself where you physically are right now as if you are watching yourself from outer space. At any given moment, from this grand perspective, we are all each just tiny specks amidst a vast sea of a universe.

An important speck but a small part of the greater whole nonetheless. Trust the process. Remind yourself of all the work you have done to get here- all the hours of rehearsal learning and fine tuning the choreography in your body, your movement, your gesture, and posture. Yes, one could always do more, but it is show time, trust that you are as prepared as you are supposed to be at this moment in time. Plan something to look forward to after the show.

A nice meal, a hot bath, watching your favorite movie, something concrete and tangible that will help to remind you that this is just a show, not the question of life and death. It is one piece of fabric out of the entire quilt of your dancing life. Movement gets your adrenaline pumping ahead of time, meaning, that you would not feel so out of shots on stage. Go for a brisk walk if you have time before the show or audition. Just before performing, try breathing exercises like lengthening your exhale and breathing from your belly.

Shake out your muscles. Do a dance, and move around until your body feels loose. And, remember who is the performer. The audience is there to see or hear you and only you, it is your gift, your expertise, your unique ability to make the role yours that got them out of the house on a rainy night. Of all the people in the room at the moment you are the one who knows more about this character, this performance and this work than anyone else. Let your mastery of the moment be your guide.

Forget their stakes. You could be in front of 20 people in a repertory theater or thousands

in the most prestigious or performing arts facilities. In the end, they are all the same. Too many performers allow the supposed importance of the performance of the night of the people in attendance to affect their mindset. Do not see above you. You and you alone are the key performer.

Whether they are wearing tuxes and gowns and, or, overalls and sundresses is irrelevant. The audience does not matter, you do. It is you who matter. In a related vein, what you are delivering matters far more than who you are delivering it to. Maintain focus on your performance, when you are on the stage, of course.

Before coming, you must think of the audience, because you are preparing a talk for them. But once you are on the stage, it is your performance and your performance alone, to the exclusion of all and everyone else, and you will be well insulated from any audience-related fear. That said, if you find it helpful to make eye contact with a few friendly members of the audience, follow your heart and make that connection early on. Some performers find it helpful to get that little bit of extra visual feedback and support.

Be a temporary broadcaster. Television and radio are excellent proving grounds for actors and other stage and performance professionals because they allow you to practice your craft without the physical distraction of a visual audience. Well, it sounds overly simplistic but getting some studio time with a camera or a microphone can help you develop the mindset to naturally ignore whoever is in the room and focus on your performance. Spend enough time staring into an unblinking red light. The theory goes and you will never even know who is sitting behind the bright light when you transition to a real stage. The deadliest mistake performers can make involves never filling the weight of a performance before they have to deliver it for real.

If you do not perform at full volume, at full cadence, and in the venue where you will be delivering it, your body and mind will never have the chance to know what it is like to do so. This is crucial in order to adapt to the very different reality of a live, in-person performance. Reading your lines at half volume into your bedroom mirror does not count. Replicate the intended space as closely as possible and get used to the unique cues associated with practicing, as if you are actually performing. Expecting the worst is good practice for managing yourself when the inevitable occurs, because let us face it, you will make mistakes.

My recommendation, do not even call them mistakes or errors. Accept the fact that they will happen, and instead, focus on how you will respond to ensure you can continue with a smooth and consistent performance. Set up specific speed bumps within your practice sessions to help you learn, innately, how to roll with the punches. By the time you get to a

live performance, none of this will seem like much of a big deal at all. Slow down, we tend to speed things up when we are nervous, which can increase the likelihood of tripling over our own tongues or worse.

To counter this, use clocks or even metronomes during rehearsal to control your speed and force your brain to keep to a workable pace. Buffer the performance. Try to put as much time and psychological space as possible between the real world and any given performance. Arrive at the venue early and preferably either alone or accompanied by supporters who understand why you need your space. Settle in slowly and disconnect from those around you.

Turn your smartphone and related electronics off. Use the time to review your lines or notes. Have your favorite non-alcoholic, non-caffeinated beverage and get into your performance mindset. Get your head in the right place. Speech anxiety is really unpleasant enough that you may focus on how awful you are feeling instead of what really matters- the response of your audience.

Put yourself in their shoes and think about what they are hoping to get out of this presentation. You will be on the right wavelength, which is that of your audience. Belly breath is also very important. Modern life with all its gadgets and digital assistance makes it easy for you to become a "talking head" which includes breathing shallowly and rapidly. The fight or flight response to social anxiety exacerbates this type of respiration cycle.

To counter these habits, learn how to breathe diaphragmatically. Yes, it will help you to have a resonant voice, but it will also calm you and also slow your heart rate. The longer you stay in negative territory concerning your response to public speaking, the more it will seem like home. We are all experts at beating ourselves up through negative self-talk. Why not use positive thinking instead? Turn self-destructive statements around by flipping that negative mindset.

Create a positive groove you can stay in. Stand straight and open up your chest. That I discussed earlier also, body language matters, in terms of how confident you look- your appearance. Hunch your shoulders lightly, now stand straight allowing your chest area to come forward as your shoulders drop into their natural position. Does not that feel better? You certainly will look more professional, let go of intrusive thoughts. Focus is one of your most important tools when it comes to reaching and engaging an audience.

But, you are human, which means, off the grid, thoughts will intrude when you do not want them to. Learn not to engage these thoughts or resist them, instead notice them.

Then let them float away. Come back to your message and its reception.

Greet your audience and smile. One of the most effective ways to have a relationship with an audience is to take a moment to allow that to happen. You do that in your greeting, giving your audience a greeting. They will remember. Invest yourself in this moment letting listeners know that you really enjoy being there.

Again, you too will feel it. Talk, do not present. Edward Everett was, at the time, a famous orator who delivered a two-hour address at Gettysburg in 1863. But we remember the other guy, the one who gave the two-minute speech known as the Gettysburg Address. Since then, speeches, public and private, have been getting more conversational. Your need to calm your nerves come from the thought that they are there to give a speech, but you will really just be talking to some people.

Sounds enjoyable, doesn't it? So, you try to do it. See America, such a developed country, is celebrating 160th anniversary of the Gettysburg address, often called the greatest speech in our history. Did President Abraham Lincoln realize he was about to achieve immortality as a speaker that day in a small town in Pennsylvania? Perhaps not. After all, he had prepared a remarkable brave 270-word speech for the afternoon of November 19, 1863. But it was indeed a magnificent speech despite the mere two and a half minutes it took to speak it. Interestingly, the President did not have top billing that day.

The dedication of the Union cemetery following the Battle of Gettysburg four months earlier was to feature Massachusetts politician and famed orator Edward Everett. So, athletes, chess grandmasters, theoretical physicists, use positive visualization, and you should too. In other words, help yourself to create a successful presentation. It just makes sense. The more time and effort you spend anticipating positive outcomes, the better prepared you will be to respond that way in the real situation.

And your visualization should be positive. If you have an important presentation coming up, it is natural for you to be worrying. But if you think positive, siding negative, it is called self-fulfilling prophecy. Of course, thinking this way is not going to do any good for your upcoming speech. So, why not imagine positive outcomes instead of negative ones? And doing so is called practicing a positive visualization.

Turn the spotlight around. This too is a visualization technique. Speaking in public can feel like standing alone in a hot, bright spotlight. There, every move you make can add to the feeling that you are naked and vulnerable. So, in your mind, turn the spotlight. Now, you are in the cool dark and the spotlight is on the audience. After all, are not you

supposed to illuminate listeners? The best way to reduce stage fright is good preparation.

Knowing their material well will free your child's performance and help them to focus on delivery. Practicing in front of a mirror may be the first step. Also, by introducing a small audience of family or friends. Besides, practicing for a group is the best way.

And speaking with your family members as audience. Be encouraging no matter what the level of speaking ability is. Your active involvement and interest will model your self-talk. It is not only a matter of praising and commendation for hard work and effort. In addition, just showing your investment in what they create will act as a strong motivator for yourself.

Watch and learn. So, even speaking in front of family and friend may trigger public speaking anxiety. To help yourself overcoming this reaction, take some time to watch inspirational movies, talk to your close friends and also your elders. Use affirmation, along with visualization techniques. The use of affirmation- repeating phrases to be yourself, out loud or silently is a proven method of self-improvement.

I have so much to say and cannot wait to say it or I can do this, I will. These are the positive affirmations. Create a positive feedback loop and one can flip, you know, this system, and use it to one's advantage encouraging the speaker to practice good posture, deep breathing, emphatic hand gesture, facial expression, and volume as a way of releasing this pent up energy productively. Promote daily habits, I have already discussed this, that, stick to your ritual or routine. And in his renowned book "Tiny Habits: The Small Changes that Change Everything," Fogg advises- if you want to create long term change, it is best to start small. And he suggests taking a behavior you want to make it tiny, find where it fits naturally in your life, and nurture its growth.

So, instead of waiting until the week before an event, encourage yourself to express your opinion, thought, feeling to yourself and others as often as possible. Never apologize for being nervous. This is a very wrong gesture. Three quarters of time, no one will notice you are nervous.

Why tell them? You may feel yourself shaking and shivering, do not mention it. It is not good for you. Do not share your mistake. You have prepared, practiced. Feel good about your speech and presentation. Suddenly on stage, you realize you mixed the order of topics, or you forgot an important point.

But remember you are the only one who knows about it. Why to tell the audience? To reveal your mistake? Arrive early and try to know, feel acquainted with the surrounding.

You can even check out the stage. Over time, build personal rituals that make sense to you and help you achieve comfort and balance before you are scheduled to perform.

So, there are different types of people- introverts, extroverts... But performance anxiety and stage fright are perfectly normal phenomena that occur to many people. Choose your language. If you have a choice to pick up a language pick either your mother tongue or native language. If your audience can understand your native language and you are also comfortable with your native language, then there is no need to choose English for speaking. Go with what you are comfortable with that can help you to convert your thoughts into words easily.

And yes very important, wear suitable clothes. Standing up and presenting before the audience is not an easy task. So, if you are not comfortable with what you are wearing it will distract you, and you will end up losing your confidence. So, make sure to prepare your clothes in advance and very comfortable. Interact with your audience, take 2-3 minutes, introduce yourself, interact with your audience, and then start with your topic.

Making eye contact will make you easy with your audience. And with this, I wrap up my discussion on stage fright- can it be reduced or not? But we have discussed that it can be reduced by following small gestures, some practice, and with positive thought. I'm sure that these points will help you, inspire you, to be a great performer. With these, I conclude my words and I'm looking forward to meeting you in my next lecture related to this stage fright. Till then, bye and see you. Thank you.