

35 TIPS ON OVERCOMING STAGE FRIGHT



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As a speaker and entertainer that has appeared on stages in over 150 countries, I have learnt to deal with stage fright. Here are 35 different tips and ideas which may help you feel more relaxed on stage. Not all of them may be for you, but I am positive that many of these tips will make a positive difference for you.

1. Set an end time for your fear

If you have a presentation at 20h00 tonight, set yourself a goal to get over the fear by 16h00 so that you can focus on preparing for your speech. It sounds crazy, but by setting yourself an end time, you are actually giving yourself extra time for the fear to diffuse itself.

2. Talk to the audience as friends

If you had to do your speech for a close friend, would it sound as structured and formal as it does now? Most probably not! Look at the audience and make eye contact with one person at a time. Now talk to that person as if they are a personal friend. In other words, talk to one person at a time in the audience. This will relax you and make the whole pace of your speech more informal. As such you will be connecting on a deeper level with the audience and they will be able to relate to you more effectively. Plus of course this approach reduces your anxiety.

3. Take it easy/ Don't take it easy

There are two schools of thought here:

a.) On the day of your presentation - relax! Take it easy and don't be too busy. It will fluster you more and make you worry about preparing for the presentation. Rather schedule lots of free time on this day so you can get your mind around it.

b.) Other people find that the more they do on the day, the less they think about the stress of the presentation. This helps them cope. Only you know which personality type you are and what will suit you.

4. Know your stuff

I have always believed that if you know what you are talking about, there is no reason to be nervous. Make a point of understanding what you intend talking about and do not learn it parrot fashion. When you understand and know the topic, you speak naturally and hence more confidently. Also, should a technical hitch occur, because you are confident on your subject, this shouldn't phase you.

5. Stretch

If you are nervous, odds are your muscles will be tight and your body stiff. 10 Minutes before you go onto stage do a few simple stretch exercises. This will loosen you up and relax your whole body.

6. Loose yourself in the material

When you become the material you are speaking about, you go into another zone and the focus moves away from you - this can make a big difference.

7. Practice in front of an audience

Even if you just gather your family, social circle or offer the talk for free to an old age home - an audience is vital! The more you practice with a live audience, the easier it gets and the less the fear becomes.

8. Be at the venue with enough time to spare

Obviously if you arrive late and have to run onto stage, you will be stressed. Give yourself ample time at the venue to acclimatize and get used to the auditorium. Remember, there could be a scheduling change on the day and you may have to go onto stage earlier than planned. This won't do the nerves any good if you are still in your car and get a frantic phone call from the organizer that you have to be on stage in 2 minutes! It's always better to be early.

9. Mental practice

If you drive past me when I am in my car, odds are you will either think I am mad, or I am talking on the hands free phone. I mentally practice my talk out loud and imagine myself standing in front of the audience. I even imagine, and answer people questing me from the audience. In fact, I enact the whole presentation out loudly. At home I will stand in a room on my own and pace act out the entire speech. My family already understands this and accept me as mad! Visualizing this two or three times really helps calm the nerves and cement the presentation in your mind.

10. Use your imagination

Some speakers actually imagine their audience in a funny manner when they walk onto stage - they believe this calms them down. It could work for you too! Imagine them all dressed in funny clothing, or without clothing! Whatever works for you and makes you smile!

11. When things go wrong

If you are on stage regularly, something will go wrong sooner or later. Accept this! If you know your stuff, odds are it won't bother you as much. If a microphone suddenly stops working, carry on in a louder voice, but don't let it distract you. The technical people are already stressing and trying to sort out the problem. You adding to the stress won't change anything. Think about the things that can go wrong and plan for them, thus when they happen you already have an action plan.

12. Double check everything

Do you have notes, or a laptop that you use? Check that you have them with you and that everything works. Before you leave home, have a checklist so that you don't forget anything. When you walk onto stage and suddenly realize that your notes are missing, or the projector doesn't work, it's too late! Of course your nerves will take over! In the same vein know your speech so well that should this happen, you don't need to rely on notes or presentation slides. That alone will give you huge confidence!

13. Eat a banana!

No I am not kidding! Someone told me a long time ago that eating something nutritious, but not too filling, takes away the butterflies in your stomach. Fear and anxiety causes an empty nauseating feeling in your stomach. By eating a banana 20 to 30 minutes before you go on stage, that empty feeling disappears!

14. Do something different

Whether you listen to soothing music, phone your spouse or play a game on your mobile phone - just try doing something completely different before walking out on stage. It takes your mind away from the fear and relaxes you.

15. Be comfortable with who you are

If you are self-conscious about your looks, clothes or anything about you - you will be distracted and nervous. The only solution here is, to be honest with yourself and learn to be comfortable with whom you are. Similarly, wear clothes that are comfortable and not distracting. New shoes give blisters, so don't wear new shoes on stage that could hurt and distract you. Wear them in first. Ladies, high heels can get stuck between floor boards! Leave them at home. If you are comfortable with yourself, it is easier to laugh at yourself, if something goes wrong.

16. Don't rush it.

When you start your presentation - take it easy. Don't rush it. Make a point of starting slowly so that you can get into a comfortable space. Not only do you have to get used to the audience, they have to get used to you. Especially if you have an accent - they need time to understand your pronunciation clearly. I'll never forget seeing one speaker who walked onto stage, sat down on a chair, lit a cigarette and drank a cup of coffee. At the end he turned to the audience and said, "*What's the matter, do you start immediately when you get to the office in the morning?*" What a brilliant gag and opening! He had the time to check out the audience, plus turned it into a huge laugh that everyone could relate to. Immediately everyone was more relaxed.

17. Never apologize for being nervous

Most, if not all people may not even realize that you are nervous - so why tell them? You may feel yourself shivering and shaking, but the audience may not be aware of anything. Never mention it - it will make the audience nervous on your behalf too, and they won't listen the way they should. Instead they will worry about whether you will cope.

18. Get through the first 5 minutes!

Get onto stage and just concentrate on staying calm for the first 5 minutes. Imagine your hour speech as only 5 minutes - this makes it less stressful. Simply focus on getting the first bit done. By then you will have calmed down and the rest is downhill.

19. Stop stressing about whether the audience will like you

This goes hand in hand with being comfortable with who you are. Yes! We all want to do a great presentation and have the audience like us. But, if that's your focus, you will be distracted and nervous. Focus on doing the best you can within your parameters. As long as you honestly know you did your best, it doesn't matter if someone didn't like you. Think about it this way... does everyone like the same foods? No! There will always be some people that don't like you. Accept this and do the best for those that do like you. Your whole approach then becomes more relaxed, and odds are you'll convert the negative ones too! Will the world end if you fluff a line? No! So don't worry about it.

20. Focus on them, and not you

You are a vessel through which a message is delivered. The presentation is not about you, or your slides - it's about imparting information and knowledge to the audience. When you turn your focus from yourself to the people out there, the fear subsides.

21. Don't share your mistakes

You have rehearsed the presentation and feel good about it. Suddenly on stage you realize you forgot an important point, or mixed up the order of topics as you had prepared them. The audience doesn't know this! Only you know your talk. If you suddenly apologize for making a mistake, or leaving out a point - you are making the audience aware of a mistake they didn't even know existed! However, if you say nothing and bring it in later - no one will be the wiser, and you will feel far less awkward. Odds are it may even work out better that way!

22. Imagine a white light

I always imagine a bright white light around me before a walk onto stage. I see this light/energy engulfing the whole audience and endearing them towards me. This can calm you down immensely... and your audience too!

23. Do a run through at the venue

If time allows, do a full practice run on the stage at the venue. This will definitely familiarize you with everything and make you feel less nervous. Think about it logically... you will have gone through the process once before, this gives your mind time to process everything around you. Hence when you walk onto stage the second time, you are already familiar with the environment and thus more relaxed.

24. Visit the venue

If you know that you will be nervous and worried what the venue will look like, make a point of trying to visit the place a day or two beforehand. This will give you time to think about it in your mind and become more comfortable.

25. Keep fit

When you are fit and healthy, you handle yourself better. Go to the gym the morning before the presentation and work all the frustrations out of your system.

26. Breathe

Nerves can cause short fast breaths and this will throw you off balance, and make you more nervous. 5 Minutes before you go on, sit down, relax and work on your breathing by taking slow deep breaths. Thus by the time you walk onto stage, you have paced your breathing to a more relaxed rhythm.

27. Walk among the crowd

Standing alone on a stage with the audience in darkness is nerve wracking for anyone. Ask the organisers to put up the houselights so that you can see the faces of the audience. Then make a point of walking into the audience and look at everyone around you one on one. Make eye contact and bond with individuals in the audience. It calms you down, plus makes you more approachable/friendly in the eyes of the delegates.

28. Focus on the importance of the event within reason

Yes! Some events are more important than others and hence your stress levels may vary. Either way, when you stand on that stage, remember that it's only that group of people that are watching you at that moment. There are another billion people on this earth that aren't watching you - so what's the big deal?

29. Love what you do

It makes a huge difference if you are passionate about the topic you are speaking on. You are thus automatically more comfortable with it and naturally relaxed. Anyone who has to speak on an unfamiliar topic will be nervous - that's a given. Hence if you have the choice, choose something you love to talk about - this will reduce any anxiety you may have had before dramatically.

30. Smile

Smile from within - force the corners of your mouth up. Make it a proper smile and not just a grin. Try it now - see how it changes your mood!

31. Fake Confidence

Imagine yourself absolutely blowing the audience away - a super star performance! Get onto stage and fake it! You'll be amazed at how quick you get into it and relax.

32. Stop being over critical on yourself

This is a huge cause for butterflies and nerves. Just realize that no audience is sitting there waiting to criticize you. The majority of them are too petrified to stand on that stage. They are just too grateful it's you. So relax and enjoy it! In the same vein don't be too critical on yourself. As a speaker I have often walked off stage thinking the audience were a bit quiet and that it didn't go down so well. In the meantime they were so into what I was doing, they forgot to respond and clap, simply because they were so taken aback. Sometimes our expectations are too high. Calm down and enjoy the moment. Often you get a far better response than you expected. Also remember that if your expectations are too high and the audience doesn't respond accordingly, you may wrongly hold back and not give as good a presentation as you should have.

33. Add laughter

Yes, we are not all comedians, and jokes take practice and timing. However, it is in your interest to find a joke or funny anecdote that you know will work - we call it a stock gag - where at least 80% of the audience will laugh. Open with this, it will relax you and the crowd!

34. Practice in front of your fear

Imagine your fear is watching you and you have to do the presentation. It's a rehearsal on your own in front of your fear. Doing this two or three times makes you confront your fear and get over it.

35. We all make mistakes

Focusing on that perfect presentation will lead to a boring speech and you will lose all spontaneity. The only way we learn is through our mistakes! It is naive to believe that you won't make any - but in the eyes of the audience it also makes you human and endears them towards you. Just don't make the same mistake twice! Through practice and learning from your mistakes you will become more proficient. This doesn't mean that an older speaker is better than you - it all depends who learnt the most from their mistakes. As the golfer Gary Player always said, "*The more I practice, the luckier I get.*"

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About the author:



Wolfgang Riebe is a unique international keynote speaker on strategic magic who has inspired millions of people worldwide. He is a best-selling author with appearances in over 150 countries - from Hollywood to Singapore. Star of numerous television shows and many of his own prime time TV series, coupled with 27 years experience in the speaking, service and entertainment industry, make him a world leader in his field.

In 2012 the National Speakers Association (NSA) awarded Wolfgang the CSP (Certified Speaking Professional) designation, which is the highest award given to any professional speaker in the speaking world. This designation is currently only held by less than 800 professional speakers globally.

“Greatness in a Speaker, is defined by passion, humility, sincerity and personal experience, coupled with his ability to capture, communicate and entertain his audience, while still sharing practical, sustainable and immediately implementable life skills which have a positive effect on all present.” Wolfgang Riebe

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