

5 Easy Steps to Fearless Public Speaking:

A Practical Powerful Guide



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About the Author



Debbie Fay, founder of bespeak presentation solutions, a public speaking coaching / presentation building company, is an award winning teacher and trainer with a lifetime involvement in theater. Debbie has helped hundreds of people of all ages and vocations present themselves and their product or service with confidence, conviction and clarity. From Fortune 50 companies to start-ups, big corporations to solo-prenuers; Debbie works one on one, in workshops and seminars helping her clients become speakers who get heard and get results.

Debbie holds a BA and teaching certificate from Michigan State University, and is currently pursuing her masters in communication. Debbie lives in Fairfield Connecticut with her three children.



Introduction

There's simply no getting around it; if you want to advance your career, your product or service, or your new business initiative you must be adept at presentations. For those who are fearful about public speaking this comes as unwelcome news. In fact, many people who are afraid of public speaking choose to avoid situations where they may be called upon to speak, thus diminishing their own possibilities for success and advancement. I can only wonder how many terrific people, ideas and products are hiding in the shadows of this fear.

In this book, I outline five easy, immediately useful steps to combat fear of public speaking. Most will not be new, none are magical, but even using three of the five will make you a more confident, less fearful speaker. Believe it or not, if you follow these guidelines, you will actually begin to *enjoy* public speaking. How do I know? My most fearful clients tell me that after working together and putting these ideas into practice they look forward to speaking opportunities. And opportunities they are; ones I don't want you to miss!

So take a deep breath and read on. Once you've read and implemented these steps, you too will be a confident compelling speaker; one who gets heard and gets results.



Rule #1: Be Prepared

I cannot tell you how appalled I am when someone brags to me that they typically “wing it” when giving a presentation. Are you kidding me? Why would you take a golden opportunity to influence a group of people and waste it by not taking the time and energy to *plan*? You know the saying, “Those who fail to plan, plan to fail”? This could not be truer when it comes to presentations. And for those who are fearful of public speaking, failing to plan is a sure fire way to insure a miserable, terrifying experience.

You **MUST** plan your presentation. Begin by asking questions. What is the point of your presentation? How long are you to speak? Who is your audience? Why are they coming to hear you? How many will they be? What time of day will you be speaking? Will you be the only speaker or one of many? All of these questions must be asked and answered.

Once you have a handle on your purpose and your audience, you can then begin to build your presentation. Be sure to always reference back to your main point, or purpose. For many of us it is all too easy to start throwing all kinds of extra stuff in. We think our audience needs to know everything about everything. **WRONG!** If a piece of information does not directly support the point you’re making, throw it out.

I strongly recommend grouping your ideas into three main points. An audience can easily grasp three supporting ideas, reasons, etc. In fact, if you tell them at the outset that you will be talking about three main things, you will see them relax. They know they will be able to hang on to the content of your presentation. They're demeanor will effect your own. You will relax as you see them relax.

Go over your presentation thoroughly. Does it flow well? Does one idea lead easily to the next? Do you stick to your main point? Are you supporting it convincingly? Will it address the concerns of your audience? Can you give the presentation in the time allotted?

Knowing that you've got the content nailed down, that you've built it based on the audience for whom it will be given, that you're within your time frame and can deliver it with ease will go a LONG way toward building your confidence. Don't let your fear lead you to denial and procrastination. You **MUST** plan, prepare and practice if you are truly SICK of being a fearful speaker. Ignoring an upcoming presentation won't make it go away. It will only make it unbearable to deliver. Be good to yourself. Be prepared.



Rule #2: Turn your focus 180°

This is one of my “bespeakisms”. The problem with almost all nervous speakers (and frankly with speakers in general) is that they have their focus in the wrong place. Instead of thinking about the MOST important people in the room; the audience, they’re thinking, (if not obsessing) about themselves.

Here’s the typical nervous speaker’s scenario. He or she stands up to speak and begins sweating, or shaking, or blushing. Instead of focusing on his or her audience, the thought process goes something like this, “Oh my God, I’m sweating. I’m sure the audience can see me sweating. I’m so embarrassed. Now I’m sweating more. Now I’m flushed. My face always does this when I’m really nervous. How can I go on? How can I stand here with sweat dripping down my face and my neck all red?”

Notice the pronouns used here? It’s all “I” and “me”.
WRONG.WRONG WRONG. A presentation should never be about “I” and “me”. As a presenter, your focus must be all about “THEM”. It’s not the “you” show, it’s the “them” show.

Here’s a news flash, (and I hope a welcome one) the audience doesn’t care so much about you. They’re like every 15 year old you’ve ever known. They only care about themselves. The ONLY meaning you hold for them is what you’re going to say that matters to them. You’re sweating? So what? They could care less. They didn’t come to see if you were going to sweat, (or shake, or blush).

They came to *change their lives*. Can you do that? Do you care about doing that? If you don't, if you're focused more on you than you are on them, you will not only contribute to your fear, you'll seriously undermine your ability to speak effectively.

If, when you're speaking, you find yourself focusing on your sweating palms, shaking hands, blushing neck, remind yourself to *turn your focus 180°*. It's not about you; you are only the vehicle disseminating valuable, critical, life-changing, fabulous information to your audience. THEY are the real stars here. Look at them; are they getting it? Are they agreeing with you? Do they look confused? Are they laughing, crying, taking notes?

Start truly paying attention to your audience and you'll forget all about your nervous mannerisms. And guess what? Once you take your focus off yourself the sweating, shaking and blushing will abate. I promise. It's like any other nuisance, ignore it and it will go away. Better still, by focusing on what's most important, your audience, you will become an exponentially more effective speaker. And that's the point of all of this anyway, right?



Step #3: Getting to Carnegie Hall

This is as old as the hills, (or more accurately, as old as Carnegie Hall). Do you know how one gets there? Practice, practice, practice. No kidding. In fact, if you follow not one other rule in this book, and *only* practice, practice practice, you will be a vastly more confident speaker.

Here's why. The first few minutes we're speaking are the most nerve-racking. Think about it, it's the beginning that feels most terrifying; often it's an out of body experience. You don't even know exactly what's coming out of your mouth. You may be astounded that anything is coming out at all. Even seasoned speakers experience something akin to this when they begin speaking. I do, and I'm a HUGE ham.

But I know I've practiced my introduction; I know it cold. I could recite it in my sleep (and probably have). Thus, it doesn't matter *how* I feel; the words I know inside out and backwards come rolling out of my mouth. And success breeds success, as I hear myself giving a confident, smooth introduction my heart rate relaxes. I smile, take a deep breath, and plunge in to the meat of my presentation.

You **MUST** practice and you must practice **OUT LOUD**. Clicking through your PowerPoint at your desk or flipping through index cards doesn't count. It's certainly helpful as far as familiarizing

yourself with your material, but it is NOT the same thing as practice. There's a whole world of difference between running through something in your head and actually hearing yourself speak those thoughts aloud. Saying it aloud forces you to put those thoughts into complete cohesive sentences. Saying it aloud forces you to hear what your audience will hear when you're saying it to them.

"OK" you say, "But I don't have time to practice." To which I have a two word retort: "Shower and Car."

We all shower at least every other day, and I'd be willing to bet we are in a car alone at least 20 minutes a day. (For those who commute via public transport, you probably have a 10 minute walk to the bus, train, metro, etc.) These are perfect opportunities to practice!

Try practicing in the shower; you'll find the acoustics are unbeatable. You'll sound like a superstar. Try different things out. Hear how things sound. I recommend to my clients that they use a portable tape recorder. That way if they come up with something really spectacular they'll have it on tape. Sometimes when we play something back, it doesn't sound as great as we thought it would. Better to find that out *before* we're saying it to a big group.

I always practice my introduction on the way to the venue. Typically I'll begin by thanking those who invited me to speak. Practicing this assures me I know their names, and that I won't forget to thank them. Depending on the group there may be something newsworthy to tie to my introduction. There may be something about their line of work that I can reference. This will form the very first few comments of my introduction. The real body is something that remains pretty much constant, and I practice that as well.

No matter what, I have practiced OUT LOUD and often. Knowing this makes me more comfortable and confident right from the start. The same will be true for you. Practice, practice, practice and you will find your nerves greatly quieted. You will begin your presentation smoothly, no matter where your mind and body are in the universe. And once the out of body you sees the in body you doing such a great job; it'll climb back in and take off!



Step #4: Be early

I recommend always arriving early. At minimum, get to the site of your presentation at least 30 minutes before you are scheduled to speak. There are several reasons why this is not only necessary, but will help diminish fear.

First, you want to familiarize yourself with the venue. What's the size of the room? Is it light? Dark? Imposing? Casual? Is there a stage? How are the audience's seats laid out? Are they in rows? At tables? Will they be able to see and hear you easily? Will you be using a microphone? If so, what kind? How big is the screen, if you've requested one, for a PowerPoint presentation? Did they provide you with a projector? If so, are you expected to set up the laptop, etc, or will someone be helping you?

Stand in front of the room; imagine the audience in their seats. This is a good time to test the microphone and your visual aids. Sit in a few different seats in the audience. This will give you an idea of what things will look like from their angle.

If you've brought hand-outs, decide where they'll be placed. (Do not hand out anything text-intensive before or during your

presentation. You never want to give an audience the chance to be distracted from you.)

Now that you're familiar with the room, you can introduce yourself to a few of the audience members. Let them know you're the speaker, and then ask them about themselves. They'll be only too happy to 1.) meet you, and 2.) let you know who they are, what they do and why they've come to hear you speak. Before you know it, you will have made new friends and (more important) fans! Once you stand up to speak these new friends will be smiling, nodding, and all in all rooting for your success. You are the "star of the moment" and they got to meet you! They instantly become your silent cheering section. Seeing their smiling faces and nodding heads will ease your nerves. You've got a supportive community in your audience. That plus your familiarity with the venue will give you confidence right off the bat. You will be and feel in control of your environment. You've tried out your mike, clicked through your PowerPoint, placed your handouts where you want them. You RULE the room. What's to be nervous about?



Step #5: Believe you can

My mother-in-law has a saying, “If you think you can, you can. If you think you can’t you’re right.” My friend Marc Tannenbaum says that success is all a “six inch game, right between the ears”. Boy, are they both on to something. As soon as you finish reading this, I want you to take a little piece of paper and write something like, “I am a terrific speaker”, or “I rock”, or “I am totally prepared and fully confident”. Something purely positive that you can put on your bathroom mirror, kitchen cabinet, or anywhere else you’ll be sure to see it every day.

My guess is that up till now you’ve been saying, both out loud and to yourself, “I am a terrified speaker.” Or, “I hate public speaking.” Something along those negative, totally undermining lines. Am I right? Well, if you keep telling yourself and others that, chances are you’ll make it so. Why count on yourself to fail? Wouldn’t it make more sense to bet on yourself to succeed? If you don’t, who else will?

I am a huge believer in the power of affirmations because they work. How could they not? We all know how well the negative messages we’re giving ourselves are working. Why wouldn’t the positive ones be just as effective?

Let’s take it a step further. Instead of imagining your next public speaking event as an accident waiting to happen, imagine it as the

BIGGEST success of your life. And why not? You'll be well prepared, well rehearsed; you'll arrive early, present with your audience in mind. How in the world could it be anything BUT a smashing success???

As you're practicing, picture your audience nodding and smiling, laughing even. Imagine yourself smiling, standing tall, speaking and gesturing with confidence. Imagine tremendous applause as you conclude. Imagine audience members approaching you afterward, thanking you for your time, energy and content. EVERY TIME you think about, prepare and rehearse your presentation this should be your picture. Keep this picture in mind and you will make it so.

I do this all the time, and I can tell you it works like a charm. When I'm cooking dinner for company I keep saying "This is going to be so delicious." And it is! As I drive to a workshop or presentation, I think (and say aloud) "This is going to be so great." and it is! Yes, I am well prepared and practiced. I have created a presentation with my audience in mind. I have arrived early and thoroughly familiarized myself with my setting. I have introduced myself to a few of the audience members. But all of this would be fruitless if I were thinking, "Well *this* is going to be a disaster." You're probably laughing, but that's exactly what nervous speakers tell themselves. Tell yourself your presentation will be GREAT and you will make it so. It's completely in your control.



Conclusion

Still doubtful? Probably. I know, I know, you've been a fearful speaker your whole life. Who am I to think that five steps outlined in a few measly pages are really going to change your mind? You've got a point except for one thing: this WORKS.

Try just one of the five the next time you have to give a presentation. Try focusing on your audience instead of yourself, or try practicing your introduction till you know it cold. Try getting to the site of your presentation early, get everything set up and meet a few of your audience members. Try putting a little positive note up on your bathroom mirror.

Then see how your next presentation feels. I guarantee it will be a vastly better experience. Do all five of these steps and believe it or not, you will actually *enjoy* the experience. Then write me and tell me about it. It makes my day when I get an email from someone, previously a reticent speaker, who's followed my advice. Inevitably they tell me how great their most recent public speaking event was. This will be you; all you have to do is make a commitment to yourself (and your audience) to try these five easy steps. You too will join the ranks of the "formerly fearful". HA! Look out fear, your days are numbered.

Go get 'em!