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Social Anxiety and Public Speaking

Discussion

The fear of talking or giving a speech in front of a large crowd is a common anxiety. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, public speaking is the number one fear in America. Being in front of a large crowd is intimidating because one feels exposed and out in the open for everyone to judge and scrutinize with the possibility for rejection. As a Cal Poly student, classes are interactive and teachers often assign group projects and presentations. Do not allow your fear of public speaking to keep you from getting that A! Throughout this paper, you will learn several tips on how to overcome anxiety and fear of public speaking in order to successfully complete your classes and enhance your skills.

Four Tips for Improving Public Speaking

1. **Don't Expect Perfection from Yourself.** No one is perfect and even professional speakers make mistakes. It is not uncommon to ridicule and find every imperfection and completely forget about all the excellent points that were made. The reason professionals do so well when they are speaking is because they gracefully move on when they make a slip-up. "Fake it 'till you make it" is appropriate in this circumstance; the audience will never notice unless you break down in front of them.
2. **Avoid Equating Public Speaking to Your Self-Worth.** Whether or not you are an eloquent public speaker has nothing to do with your value as a person. It is a skill that can be improved with instruction and practice. While this may seem like a skill some are born with, there are many professionals who struggled with public speaking at the beginning of their career.
3. **Avoid Being Nervous About Your Nervousness.** The important thing to learn is to channel your nervousness into excitement, you have to trick yourself into believing you are excited to stand in front of your peers and tell them something you have learned. Nervousness is just adrenaline, it is energy so use it to be more enthusiastic. It's all about confidence – confidence in your own abilities and in the subject you are talking about.
4. **Avoid Memorizing or Reading Word for Word.** Trying to memorize your speech word for word simply adds more stress and leaves you flustered if you accidentally go out of sequence while giving your speech. There is a big difference between reading and speaking, and the audience can tell. The audience is more likely to tune out or lose interest if you are simply reading from a script, so it is better to speak off bullet points and then add your own personality to the speech.

Practice Before Giving the Speech

- **Visualize:** Take a moment to imagine every step of the speech from walking to the front of the room to the last round of applause.

- **Relax:** Practice breathing techniques before the big day; it is important to calm your nerves and give yourself that boost of confidence while practicing at home and moments before the real thing.
- **Practice:** Don't memorize the entire speech; instead, really focus on the introduction and conclusion because those two parts leave a lasting impression. It's helpful to practice in front of a mirror or video camera so you can see exactly how you are standing and portraying yourself.

How to Handle the Nerves While Presenting

The most helpful thing to do is deal with your symptoms of nerves as they occur:

- Dry mouth? Take a little sip of water.
- Knees knocking? Shift your weight and flex your knees.
- Hands trembling? Put them together.
- Voice quivering? Pause, take a deep breath or two, and smile. It is amazing what a smile will do.
- Sweating? Forget it; nobody sees that anyway.

Bibliography

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