



7 GREAT WAYS TO BEAT YOUR PRESENTATION NERVES

Ever felt nervous before giving a presentation? Well relax, because help is at hand. Professional speaker and bestselling author Paul McGee offers these seven tips to help you remain cool, calm, and confident.

1. Remember nerves are normal. This is especially the case if you don't present regularly, or if you're presenting a topic for the first time to people you're keen to impress. You see, we humans like to feel in control, so going into a situation that is either new or unfamiliar to us will inevitably cause a little tension.

That's the primitive part of our brain just doing its job.

It's keeping us on our toes and alert to the potential challenges of a new situation. Its release of adrenalin and cortisol is its way of preparing us. And it's these hormones, when released into your system, that causes us to feel nervous and experience feelings often described as 'butterflies in your stomach.'

Now rather than fight such feelings it's probably best to accept they're normal. It's your body's natural response to the situation it's faced with. As the author Rob Bell says, 'make friends with the butterflies.'

2. Manage your movies. The brain is an incredible piece of hardware. However, be aware that it cannot tell the difference between a real or vividly imagined event. So if you imagine things going wrong in your mind before the presentation your brain will respond as if the scenario is actually taking place – a condition sometimes referred to as anticipatory stress.

The good news is, you can influence the intensity and vividness of the movie in your mind.

So how about you imagine the presentation going well. A positive projection of your future event could actually result in you feeling calmer. And a technique I've used if you find your mind running away with itself and creating its own personal disaster movie is to remember this. You're the director of the movies in your mind.

And you can always shout 'cut.'

3. Focus on your audience. Our nerves can be perpetuated due to the fact that our underlying question may well be 'What do people think of me?' If that's the case our energy is being focused inwardly, and this can increase our feelings of anxiety. A more effective question that will divert our energy and attention outwardly would be '*How can I best help my audience?*' Your brain can only hold one thought at a time. So when it's occupied thinking about this question there's less opportunity for worrying and feeling anxious.

4. Be prepared. OK, so that just won't win this year's award for the world's most obvious piece of advice. But without preparation you'd have a right to be feeling nervous. And if the talk you're making is important and for whatever reason you've not put the time in to prepare, then it's understandable that your nerves are increasing. One approach some people adopt is to convince themselves that what they're doing is no big deal and that they'll just be able to wing it. This may relax you, but it does very little to prepare you mentally to give your best. So increase your preparation (which includes practising it out loud) and decrease your nerves.



5. Have a contingency plan. Nerves can stem from the fact that you're concerned things may go wrong. Well guess what? There will be occasions when they do. Rather than hope this never happens, anticipate it instead. Technology problems? Have a backup. For instance, it's wise to anticipate what you would do without being able to show slides. If you're travelling to give your talk expect traffic delays and having difficulty parking.

This is not being negative. It's being prepared.

Having a backup plan and preparing for the worst means you're reducing (you can never fully eliminate) potential surprises.

6. Get perspective. In your eyes this may indeed be an important presentation. A new job or promotion may be riding on it. If things don't go well, a possible worst case scenario is that you might look or feel a little stupid. If that happens, do this.

Take a moment to look at yourself in the mirror. Guess what? You're still alive. Is it possible that some time in human history someone felt even worse than you right now? And if you have messed up, is it possible that someone has messed up even more?

Now does this make you instantly feel a whole lot better? Probably not, but it is planting the seed to see what happened to you in perspective. In many ways we need to get over ourselves. The universe does not revolve around us. All eyes in the room may at some stage have been focused on us, but they're not anymore. Other events will quickly occupy people's minds.

So whatever you're about to do in terms of a presentation, get perspective. On a scale of 1-10 where 10 equal death, where is it really?

7. Slow your breathing. When we're anxious our breathing is often fast and shallow, which increases our heart rate and further fuels our nerves. So we need to take control of our breathing. Think about it. Have you ever seen a stressed out yoga teacher?

But you don't have to adopt the lotus position just before you speak in order to calm your nerves. Simply do the following. Inhale normally and exhale slowly. Maybe even follow the advice of 'take a deep breath' (but don't hold it for too long). The key though is in the exhaling. The release of your breath. Take it nice and slowly and as you do you'll notice your heart rate begins to slow down too. And you begin to relax.

Paul McGee is author of the new book *How to Speak So People Really Listen: The Straight-Talking Guide to Communicating with Influence and Impact*