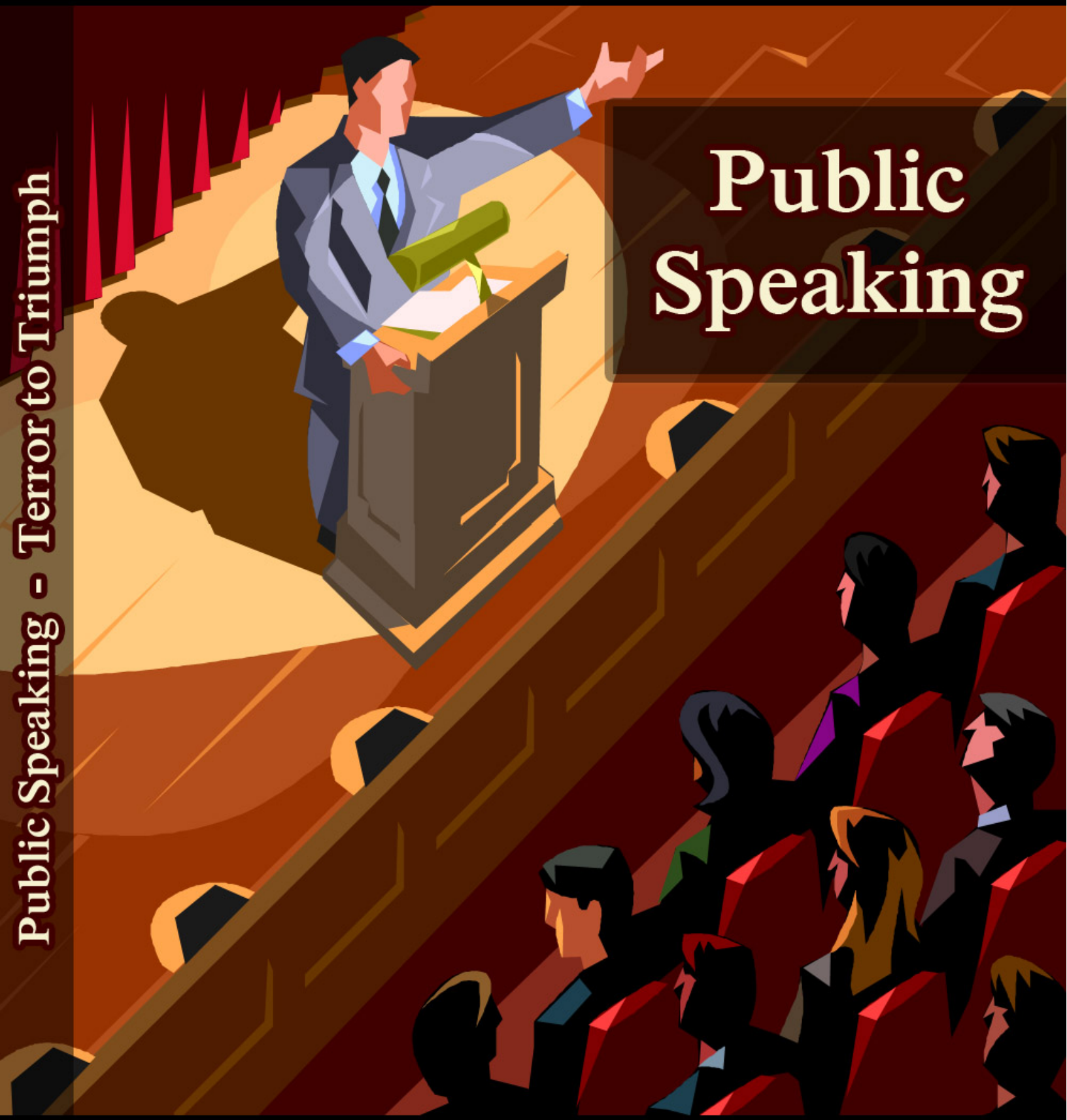

Terror to Triumph

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INTRODUCTION

Spoken language is a fundamental element of human relationships. The ability to use words effectively can help you achieve great things in life. Oral presentations are the cornerstone of human interaction on a large scale and they also have a profound effect on intimate interactions as well.

Speaking in public can be a great source of anxiety for many people. However, it doesn't have to be. People have been practicing this art for centuries and it has become an integral part of our interactions today.

Some approach public speaking like a type of internal thrill ride while others are choked silent at the very thought of giving a speech. Overcoming the fear of speaking in public is a subject of great interest to many. This activity is rated among the most frightening events in a person's life. Some have gone as far as rating the fear of public speaking higher than the fear of death.

Many people are able to overcome their fear of speaking in front of an audience in spite of its seemingly overwhelming nature. The process begins with a strong understanding of how public speaking functions.

This text focuses on defining public speaking in a way that can help you get a handle on your fears. It is also designed to help you create strategies that will give you the means to create an effective oral presentation whether you are directing a video conference or giving a toast during a special occasion.

1
PUBLIC SPEAKING

Public speaking is simply the act of talking in front of a group of people. The group can be quite small or impressively large. In either case, many individuals find the process to be overwhelming.

Speaking in public is an art. Effective presentations require clear delivery that includes proper inflection, pauses and emphasis. Some people seem to have the knack for oral presentation while others struggle with this type of activity.

Natural talent does help. However, effective public speaking can be achieved with research and diligent practice. The art of oral presentation is one that can be mastered with the right methods and persistence.

This form of communication is also a science. An oral presentation is most effective when it is well structured and purposeful. Those who take a scientific approach that involves a methodical system can do as well as ones who are accidentally talented.

Oral presentations serve a number of purposes. They can entertain. They can be used to influence others and they can simply be informative. The purpose of the talk will have great bearing on how the speaker will organize his thoughts, information and emotive components.

FIVE ELEMENTS OF SPEAKING IN PUBLIC

It is said that people wear different masks for different occasions. We change our mannerisms in various environments. When speaking in public, there are some considerations that need to be made in order to plan the presentation well.

The first element of public speaking is the person delivering the lecture. The speaker should carefully consider how he wants to be perceived by the audience. The beauty of this type of venture is that you can create a persona that suits your presentation.

The second element is the message. It is important to consider the information you are presenting. The content is of immense value for any oral

presentation. Well organized subject matter is an integral part of a successful public speaking event.

The method is the third element to consider. Where will the speech be delivered? What prompt will be used? Will there be visual and sound aids? Is the presentation in a formal setting, a conference room or a casual setting?

The final element concerns the purpose of the presentation. Is it designed to inform? Is there an entertainment value to the piece? Is the presentation supposed to motivate and influence the audience?

BRIEF HISTORY OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

The art and science of speaking in public is deeply rooted in civilizations across the globe. The spoken word is of great value and it has been for centuries. This fundamental mode of communication has helped mankind progress through the ages.

Before writing was incorporated as a method of communicating, oral presentations were of the utmost importance. Many valuable written works were committed to memory and recited over and over again for audiences to enjoy.

Poetry evolved as a necessary method of effective memorization. Those who created oral presentations and stories would rhyme the words in order to make them easier to memorize. This useful literary device has persevered over time into an art form of its own.

The spoken word was of great influence on various civilizations over time. Public discourse, debate and discussions had a profound effect in nearly every aspect of life. Religion, politics and entertainment are just a few examples of venues that relied on oral presentations.

PUBLIC SPEAKING TODAY

Today, public speaking remains a driving force in many different realms of our daily lives. Oral presentations continue to inform, influence and entertain us. We rely on spoken words in our most fundamental dealings with family members and as a mode of connecting with one another on a global level.

The advancements of technology have given rise to effective communication on a grand scale. Word-of-mouth previously took days, months or even years

to travel effectively. Technology provides ways of spreading spoken language across the globe in an instant.

With some of today's public speaking venues, like videoconferencing, the speaker can deliver a presentation to hundreds or even thousands of people without facing the audience at all. Telecommunications has paved the way for effective communication to the masses with little or no contact.

Something does get lost in the process. The audience can be a very valuable tool in an oral presentation. The loss of this advantageous resource can leave some speakers at a loss. Others may find the prospect of speaking to a camera preferable to speaking to a live audience.

OCCASIONS AND EVENTS

The delivery of your message can be completed via telecommunications. You may find yourself staring into a blank lens that offers no feedback. Other occasions may call for you to create a stellar oral presentation to a handful of co-workers.

Some events may call on your ability to inform the audience. You concise informative speech may be designed to covey an important message about safety issues in the workplace. You may be in charge of influencing a number of people to vote on a certain issue.

Other events are more personal. Maybe you need to deliver an unforgettable speech at your best friend's wedding. You may simply want to hone your skills in order to effectively convey your thoughts to friends, loved ones and associates on a day-to-day basis.

2
FEARS AND PHOBIAS

Though the very thought of speaking in front of a crowd is overwhelming, it is important to take time to make a clear distinction between fears and phobias. You may find that you are more than simply afraid of the task. If you have a phobia then there are other precautions that you need to take.

Fear can be such a prominent emotion that you may feel confused about possibly having a phobia. After delving into the similarities and differences you may come up with a valid conclusion on your own. You may also want to consult a professional if you feel that you truly do have a phobia.

FEAR

Fear is a fundamental emotion that serves a very important purpose. This particular emotion is designed for self preservation. Without fear, people may engage in activities that are far too dangerous. Survival of the human race would be at risk without this necessary emotive force.

In spite of its fundamental nature fear is a very complex emotion that has several sources. This emotion is typically hardwired into our beings to ensure our safety. The severity of the apprehension and anxiety associated with the feeling varies from person to person.

The body has a prominent response to this emotion. Physical changes occur in our bodies when we feel fear. The autonomic nervous system kicks into gear accompanied by the adrenal glands. People can often recognize the feeling of fear by their automatic physical responses.

Trembling, tenseness and rapid breathing are common signs. Increased heart rate, sweating and dry mouth can also accompany this emotion. Blood flows away from the brain to other parts of the body since the energy can be better used to run or stand up to the challenge.

Since the blood can flow away from the brain rather quickly some may experience lightheadedness and fainting during extreme fear experiences. The fight or flight response is also commonly activated during substantially

fearful situations. This response tells the body to either flee or protect one's self through force.

Fear can also be learned. There is some debate as to the extent that this emotion is naturally hardwired for self preservation and to what extent it is learned. The environment can play a crucial role in a person's prominent fears but it is not clear how much of the emotion is learned and how much is naturally integrated into the human body.

PHOBIA

A phobia is a very specific fear that is excessive. The irrational nature of the fear along with the unwarranted response distinguishes this condition from typical fearful reactions. Phobias are relatively common. However, they can be classified as psychological disorders in some cases.

In order for a condition to be classified as a disorder it has to interfere with the individual's ability to function normally on a day-to-day basis. For example, a phobia of high places may not in itself qualify as a disorder. A phobia of high places that prevents a person from walking up and down steps would be a disorder.

THREE TYPES OF PHOBIAS

There are three basic types of phobias recognized by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Simple phobias are irrational fears of objects or situations. Social phobias consists of fear of social situations and agoraphobia is the fear of being trapped in a situation or setting.

- **Simple phobias**
  Simple phobias come in a variety of forms and they can include just about any object or situation. The individual tends to have an overwhelming feeling that he needs to avoid these object or situations. He also recognizes that the fear is irrational. Those who fall into this category do not always seek treatment for their conditions.

- **Agoraphobia**
  Agoraphobia was formally classified as a fear of open spaces. However, more recent developments recognize that individuals who have this condition avoid leaving their homes because they are afraid of being trapped. It is believed that agoraphobia develops as a result to panic attacks. The person is afraid of having an attack in a pubic place or an inescapable location.

- **Social phobias**
  Social phobias are completely overpowering to the individual that has them. Of course, a person with social phobia would be paralyzed at the very thought of speaking in public. The fear of being judged or publicly humiliated is too disabling for the individual.

Phobic conditions are considered to be anxiety disorders. These conditions can be treated with behavior therapy, medications or a combination of the two. Other treatment techniques include gradual exposure to the situation or object (desensitizing) and visualizations.

GLOSSOPHOBIA

There are fundamental differences between fears and phobias. Our fears are necessary components to self preservation. They may seem a little unreasonable at times but they do not interfere with our ability to function normally on a day to day basis.

Phobias are persistent, unreasonable and excessive. The mere thought of being in a certain situation or getting close to a certain object is the source of overwhelming anxiety. The major difference between fear and phobia is impairment.

For example, a person can be afraid to deliver an oral presentation and still function normally. He may perspire, shake and lose his train of thought but he is able to attend the event. He may choose to back out of the speech out of fear but he is still quite capable.

The person who suffers from glossophobia has a very different experience. The very thought of speaking in public results in all-consuming anxiety. Physical distress is exhaustively uncomfortable and includes nausea and feelings of panic. Individuals who have glossophobia avoid any situation that may call for verbal interaction with any group.

The physical responses to glossophobia are closely related to fear's fundamental flight or fight response. The individual experiences accelerated heart rate, increased blood pressure, dry mouth and stiffened muscles. The senses are heightened but they individual may still feel lightheaded and even faint.

Some people can develop speech disorders while trying to speak in public. These include stammering and stuttering. Some may find it difficult to articulate words that usually pose no challenge for them in these situations.

Glossophobia is a condition that is related specifically to public speaking. Some people are able to perform in public through dancing or singing and

still have this social phobia. Speech anxiety can be overcome in some situations if the person sees himself as an actor rather than himself as he gives the presentation.

3
ROOT CAUSES OF PUBLIC SPEAKING FEARS

In order to overcome a fear, it is necessary to recognize the root causes of it. Fear is an important emotion that is designed to help us protect ourselves. Some emotions are hardwired into our system in order to keep us out of danger. Even the fear of public speaking may have roots in self preservation.

Fears can also be learned. We can adopt a fear of a certain situation through our experiences. Some of us find ourselves fearful of an object or circumstance when we see others fearful of it.

Of course, it is obvious that a person is not facing immediate threat of harm when he speaks in public. However, there are components to the emotion that are self-preserving in nature. Fear of public speaking is complex because it seems to be a combination of both instinct and learned fear. To what extent either has influence is unknown.

HARDWIRED FEARS

The fear of public speaking can be considered a natural response to an overwhelming social situation. The negative emotion may have a significant purpose. It can be considered as a mode of self preservation.

Some fears are hardwired into the human system. They help us make sound decisions that can protect us from harm. Fearful reactions are perfectly natural in spite of their negative impact on the body and psyche.

The fundamental message is that there is danger in the immediate surroundings. We are naturally afraid of many indicators of danger. Some include loud noises and high places. Our bodies react in a way that makes us aware that some action is required.

The fear of public speaking can be partially hardwired into the human psyche. Considering the conditions of a public speaking event, there is little wonder why the body has such a profound reaction to the situation. One

person faces a crowd of others. This can be a precarious position on a primitive level.

It stands to reason that the body would naturally transfer into a flight or fight response when faced with such a situation. Though you may know that the audience is harmless, you still feel a natural sense that you need to protect yourself. This is part of what makes the fear of public speaking universal to some degree.

LEARNED FEARS

Some fears are learned. Our early experiences teach us to be afraid of various objects and situations. A child may not be afraid of a flame until experience teaches him to be wary. The experiences can come in a number of different forms.

Let's consider the child and the flame. The child may learn to fear this element by experiencing a burn. He can also learn to be afraid of fire if his caretaker exhibits a severe reaction to the element. He can also learn to have a fearful reaction if he sees someone else get burned.

It is important to remember that the mind is a very powerful force that has a profound effect on our fears. A person can imagine an experience that leads to feelings of trepidation in certain situations. A vivid imagination is as influential as an actual experience in many cases.

PUBLIC SPEAKING FEARS

It is natural to feel trepidation when faced with the task of speaking in public. There are also learned elements that come into play. Part of the fear arises from pure imagination. There are also hidden sources as well. Each individual has his own reasons for feeling anxious about speaking in public.

Some may have had a traumatic experience related to public speaking. A negative incident can have life-long implications. A person can learn to be afraid to speak in front of a crowd through experiencing extreme fear in a single experience related to this activity.

Even if the intense fear is felt for just a moment, the impact can last a lifetime. The nervous system is designed to connect fear with situations that should be avoided. Feeling great anxiety and dread during a certain event teaches the body to respond appropriately.

People make strong associations between feelings and events. Some are quick to learn fear in some situations directly. In other instances, the negative feelings may not have anything to do with the act of speaking itself. The individual simply makes the association through the mind.

EMPATHY AND ASSOCIATION

Many people develop a fear of public speaking though association. The person does not experience the negative event personally but he witnesses someone else's negative experience. If the event is traumatic for the observed individual, the subject learns to fear the situation himself.

This empathetic take is similar to a child becoming afraid of dogs after witnessing another child being bitten. The observance of the traumatic incident is enough to create fear in the child.

GRADUAL BUILDING

People can also learn to fear speaking in front of a crowd over time. A very mild case of stage fright can develop into a more serious condition if the individual lets the feeling accumulate over time. If the subject focuses on the fear, the fear will become stronger.

Relatively innocuous experiences can build into feelings of overwhelming fear. The body learns to respond appropriately through the mind's preoccupation with the fearful emotion. The anxiety is fostered in the mind and the nervous system responds accordingly.

The gradual building of fear of public speaking is similar to Pavlov's famous behavioral experiment. Pavlov's dogs are well known for their seemingly inappropriate responses to the sound of a bell.

The experiment was quite simple. A bell was rung immediately before the dogs were fed. Over time, the dogs salivated at the sound of the bell whether there was food present or not. Their natural bodily responses were transferred to the sound of the bell.

Associations can be quite powerful. The mind can make an experience far worse than it really is. It is important to remember that you can control your thoughts and feelings to some extent. You can also retrain your body to have different responses to the experience of speaking in public.

4
UNLEARNING YOUR FEAR

The benefit of making associations thorough learned responses to stimuli is that these responses can be unlearned. The process does take some time but it is well worth the effort. There is more than one way to address the issue of relearning responses to various situations and objects.

A wonderful technique is to take a cognitive approach to addressing your public speaking fears. This is an effective way of using logic and rational thought in a deliberate manner. It may take some time to get accustomed to dealing with emotions on a cognitive level but it is a very viable tool once you have created an effective cognitive approach.

You can also retrain your responses on a behavioral level. Specialists who work in the field of behavioral psychology may refer to this as operant conditioning with a positive spin. If a negative experience can produce feelings of anxiety positive ones can create feelings of pleasure.

It is important to keep in mind that the fear of public speaking is one that is not based in an actual threat to your safety. It is a very common condition that is pretty universal in nature. You can opt to take your feelings of fear and anxiety and turn them into feelings of exhilaration and excitement.

LEARNED FEARS CAN BE UNLEARNED

People commonly navigate through their lives with a set of beliefs. Some of the beliefs are deeply rooted in fact. Some are products of faith. Others are based on an invalid perspective.

The fear of public speaking is frequently rooted in an irrational perspective. You may feel excessive anxiety and dread but there is realistically no basis for these feelings. Many people learn to be afraid to speak in front of a group through their experiences and their perception of the situation.

One obstacle people face is their perception of the audience. The group of people really poses no threat but the individual has taught himself that it does. Since the nervous system has been trained to respond with the physiological responses appropriate to fear the mind and body concur that the situation is one of danger.

Consider that a single traumatic event can lead to a lifetime of phobia and fear. The event may have lasted a mere second. It could have been observed rather than experienced first-hand. The lasting effect is evidence that we can revert back to a fearless response with practice. If one event can be so powerful several positive ones can be just as effective, if not more effective.

MIND OVER MATTER

We've all heard the "mind over matter" phrase at one time or another. This saying may be based in cognitive therapy. When a person takes a cognitive approach to a situation he addresses it with deliberate thought. Stepping away from emotions can be challenging but it can yield very good results.

Objectivity is not always easy especially when you are in the throes of emotion. The cognitive approach does take practice and it can be a little demanding but once you begin looking at public speaking objectively you begin to get control of the situation.

Feelings and thoughts are closely linked. You control your thoughts and you can use your thoughts to control your emotions over time. Following are some quick examples of using cognition to overcome your feelings of anxiety and fear about public speaking.

- Speaking in public is not inherently dangerous.
- You do not need to create a perfect presentation.
- Mistakes are a natural part of everyday life.
- The negative outcomes that you may fear are not realistic.
- The audience is not your enemy.
- You do not need to control every aspect of the presentation.

Each individual can cater his thoughts to his specific fears. Some may be afraid of different aspects of the presentation. You can decide which aspect of public speaking affects you the most and modify your thoughts appropriately.

RETRAINING YOUR RESPONSES

Just as you can retrain your thoughts you can also retrain your emotional responses to objects and situations. People are able to suppress fear reactions through desensitizing. This process is also known as exposure therapy.

Fear extinction is quite possible and there is a high rate of success among those who use processes like desensitizing and exposure therapy. Some believe that this approach works best if it is used intensely through a short period of time rather than stretching the process out over days or weeks.

FEAR EXTINCTION AND DESENSITIZING

Basically, exposure therapy and desensitizing help people in the process of fear extinction. They do this by replacing old memories with new ones. This approach may seem quite simple on the surface. Surprisingly, it is rather simple.

Fear memories are placed in the amygdala, a region of the brain. The process of controlling the emotion begins in the medial prefrontal cortex. This area of the brain sends messages to the amygdala and to the brain stem. The basic notion is that the brain's "safe" signal is also nestled in the amygdala.

People can be exposed to new experiences involving the source of fear. They can relearn how to react to the stimulus by retraining the brain. The frightful emotions housed in the amygadala can be replaced by feelings of safety. This carries into the brain stem where involuntary behaviors like heart rate and breathing are originated.

How is this simple? The process of making the magic work in the brain simply involves gradual exposure to the source of fear coupled with pleasant experiences. Those who want to overcome their fear of public speaking would expose themselves to the task in small doses and with great pleasure as the outcome.

The medial prefrontal cortex communicates the pleasantness of the experience to the amygadala and subsequently to the brain stem. These areas of the brain replace negative memories with pleasant ones and they help to control bodily fear responses.

Some suggest that this process should only take a few hours. Others suggest that the individual should practice exposing herself to public speaking over an extended period of time.

5
ALL ABOUT THE AUDIENCE

The audience is of the utmost importance when it comes to public speaking events. Your perception of the audience is the very cornerstone of your presentation. You can control how you view the crowd and you can quickly gain favor if you are empathetic.

This may seem difficult at first but after some consideration you will see that the audience is really your companion. The presentation is a two-way street in many cases. Some find great success through visualizing the audience as an alliance.

There are some examples of individuals who took their public speaking shortcomings and transformed them into impressive achievements. These individuals use the art and science of performing to overcome significant obstacles in their ability to articulate.

With inspiration on your side, you can opt to relinquish control of the situation to create a performance approach that works for you. Whether you want to create a public speaking persona or build a rapport with the audience for a single event, you can do so.

THE AUDIENCE WANTS YOU TO SUCCEED

Much of the anxiety that rests in the task of public speaking revolves around the speaker's perception of the audience. The fundamental fear can develop quite rapidly if the presenter sees the audience as a threat. You can do yourself a great favor by recognizing that the audience wants you to succeed.

Empathy is a big part of this general idea. Those sitting in the crowd are probably just as apprehensive about speaking in public as you are. They are well aware of what you are probably feeling and you may even use this to your advantage in your approach.

People are apt to enjoy someone who is confident. However, some humor and humility mixed into a presentation can do wonders. Public speaking in front of a live audience is interactive in nature. Just as a person is forgiving

when you stammer across a sentence in one-on-one conversations, the crowd will be forgiving of your public speaking imperfections.

You may perceive a slip or a stammer to be a major obstacle but it really means very little to the audience. Consider that you will always judge yourself more harshly than anyone else. You are the biggest critic when it comes to your presentation.

Even if you imagine a handful of harsh critics in the audience, you can quickly overpower them. Consider someone saying, "Did you hear him pause at the inappropriate time?" Who is going to look like the fool? In the audience's eyes, it will be the critic because the majority of them know what it takes to speak in public.

MEETING EXPECTATIONS

Expectation is a complicated issue when it comes to the audience. Let's consider a person who really enjoys public speaking. This person may find the task to be so enjoyable because he knows that he needs to meet the audience's expectations.

Actors deliver lines. They are rehearsed, memorized and recited. The actor knows what to expect and he also has the benefit of a persona for delivery. When you look at the audience as having some expectations you may feel overwhelmed. However, these very expectations can help you overcome your fear.

Use the audience's expectations as a source of inspiration. Organize your information around what they want and need to know. Be empathetic. What would you expect a speaker to deliver? Would you shun this person for making a mistake?

INSPIRATION

Many people who are afraid of public speaking never dream of delving into the performing arts. However, there are many painfully shy individuals who do quite well in this field. There are some who use performance as a way to overcome articulation difficulties like stuttering and stammering.

One of the most outstanding examples is James Earl Jones. He stuttered and this prevented him from talking to others in social situations when he was a child. He overcame his articulation challenges by reading Shakespeare aloud to himself.

He did not use this approach until he was a high school student. His English teacher encouraged him to use this strategy. James Earl Jones managed to overcome his stutter and his shyness through reading aloud to himself, then to audiences. He later became one of the most recognized voices in Hollywood.

RELINQUISHING CONTROL

You may not be the next James Earl Jones but it is helpful to know that someone can overcome significant challenges if he puts his mind to it. Part of the challenge lies in control. Even though public speaking in front of a live audience is interactive in nature, it is necessary to relinquish control in order to overcome your fear.

People can feel much anxiety when others do not act they way they want them to. If some of the members of the audience seem distracted or fidgety they probably have their reasons. If some seem as if they are not paying attention, don't fret.

Your focus should be on the things you can control. Feed off of the people who are throwing positive energy in your direction. Some of the members of the audience may not respond as you would like. This is simply part of the process.

CREATING AN APPROACH

You can control your approach. A well thought-out strategy can do wonders for some speakers. Others may function better when they speak off the cuff. Too much rehearsal can backfire in some instances. Some people work well with notes. Some speakers have to dedicate the information to memory because the notes are too distracting.

Consider your own personality and think about how you naturally interact with others. If you are commonly relaxed and spontaneous, you might want to use a brief outline and speak naturally. If you like to plan things to the finest detail, you may want to include detailed notes. Only you can develop an approach that works for you.

Always remember the audience. Think about speeches and presentations that have impressed you in the past. You may choose to model after those events. This is a great strategy because you initially take the audience's point of view in this undertaking.

6
TIPS TO REMEMBER

There are great benefits to collecting a few tips about overcoming your fear of public speaking. These little threads of advice can help you use your resources well. The brevity of the tips is one of the most appealing aspects of the tidbits. They are easy to remember and you can even use small notebook for reminders and inspirations.

You will want to decide which tips will work best for you. Some of the suggestions will be of great interest to you while others may fall to the wayside. The purpose is to encourage you to take a first step into overcoming your fear of public speaking.

LETTING GO OF STRESS

Letting go of stress is much easier said than done and it always isn't realistic. It is important to keep in mind that stress can be a very good thing. Instead of fighting stress you can harness it to your benefit. This may be a new way of looking at stressful situations but it can yield wonderful results.

You have probably heard friends, relatives and associates tell you to let go of your stress. However, this approach doesn't work well for most of us. If it did, we would all be pretty much stress-free. Simply telling yourself to lose your stress can lead to feelings of anxiousness.

Stress, like fear, exists for a reason. The human body requires some stress in order to function properly. When pressure from this necessary component becomes overwhelming, it is necessary to use anxiety management techniques to help control the burdensome feelings.

Managing stress does not entail letting go of it. This natural anxiety can be harnessed effectively during a presentation. The very release of stress can function as a highly creative force that drives you through your public speaking venture.

NERVOUS ENERGY

One tip to remember in this realm is to think of stress as nervous energy. You can harness this energy source to your benefit. Considering that the

anxiety is yours you should take charge of the emotion. This is far more productive than worrying about taking command of factors that are out of your locus of control.

Your nervous energy can serve several purposes. It can help you create a public speaking persona and it can be used for effective delivery. For example, you can focus on vocalization, volume and pauses with the stress energy you harness from within.

Performance is a matter of transforming nervous energy into a productive force. Some people naturally do this when they take the stage. Others require practice and training to accomplish this task effectively.

Learn to harness stress rather than letting it go. It is far too valuable as a tool for effective delivery for you to simply release it with no purpose.

Takeaway:

- **Stress serves a purpose**
- **Nervous energy can be harnessed**
- **Laughter is a form of stress release**
- **Concentrate on using stress rather than overcoming it**
- **Focus on what you can control**

KNOW YOUR LIMITATIONS

We all have our limits. If you are aspiring to create a stellar presentation that is going to take the world by storm then you may want to evaluate your situation. Creating realistic limitations for yourself is a great way to approach a public speaking venture.

Remember that the audience is on your side. No one really wants to see another person struggle through a presentation. It is nearly as painful to watch as it is to experience first-hand. Part of knowing your limitation involves setting attainable objectives and goals.

The goals are particularly effective if you are working with exposure therapy or desensitizing program. You can create small objectives that lead to larger goals. Breaking down the task into small, learnable steps is an effective approach to learning anything new.

And you are learning quite a few new things in this process. Not only are you unlearning your fear, you are replacing it with new experiences and emotions. You are learning the basics of oral presentation and you are learning how to harness nervous energy to your benefit.

The long list of learning in this process is more realistically achieved in smaller, doable steps rather than all at once. The last thing you want to do is jump into a vast public speaking engagement full force. Your limitations should be kept in check.

Takeaway:

- **Lofty goals can work against your efforts**
- **Set realistic goals and objectives for yourself**
- **Break down the task of speaking in public into small steps**
- **You can always create larger goals as you progress**

DO NOT OVER-PREPARE

Preparation for any oral presentation is a must for the average public speaker. Some naturally talented individuals can roll hours and hours of witty monologues off the cuff. You do not have to be Robin Williams in order to effectively speak in public.

There is no need to prepare to exhaustion and the very process of rehearsing to excess can work against you. Things rarely go smoothly. A person may distract you. It is easy to briefly lose your train of thought. Laughter may emerge out of the audience for no apparent reason.

This is simply part of speaking in front of a live audience. When you work to excess to prepare for an oral presentation you can be doing yourself a disservice. This falls back on to your locus of control. When you rehearse to excess you will probably buckle at the unexpected.

Preparing to excess can also lead to problems if you are really trying too hard. It is easy to become over zealous in your approach. You may try to squeeze too much information into a relatively small period of time. You can also be completely unprepared for spontaneous moments.

Takeaway:

- **Rehearse effectively but not in excess**
- **If you feel that you are obsessing then you are probably over-preparing**
- **Prepare yourself for spontaneous moments**
- **Avoid packing too much information into one presentation**
- **Rote memorization is the lowest form of cognitive learning**

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PUBLIC SPEAKING TECHNIQUES THAT WORK

HUMOR

Laughter is a form of stress release. Keep in mind that your audience is under some stress during the presentation as well. You are in this together and one of the best approaches to creating a warm, welcoming atmosphere is to integrate humor into the mix.

You do not have to come up with knock-out one liners or delve into a book of jokes. Humor is most effective when you harness your nervous energy during your delivery. You can either create a public speaking persona or you can be your honest self in your delivery. Either way, a lighthearted approach can work wonders.

There are some obstacles to trying too hard to be humorous. Comedy requires a masterful sense of timing. Avoid trying to create a comedy routine. Just make the presentation warm, friendly and full of energy. Remember that you can not control every aspect of the audience's response. Laughter is not always what you seek.

The key to taking a humorous approach is to focus on making yourself and your audience comfortable. This involves smiling, eye contact (if possible) and an overall outpouring of well harnessed nervous energy. Think of being humorous as being personable.

CREATING A WIN-WIN SITUATION

When you address the audience as a warm, humorous person you help to create a win-win situation for you, your presentation and your audience. There are various elements that naturally occur to just about every public speaker that may seem to work against him. However, these very obstacles can be used in your favor as well.

SILENT MOMENTS

The silent pause is a great source of anxiety for many public speakers but it doesn't have to be. In fact, a pregnant pause can work wonders for a presentation if it is well placed. These moments can give your audience time to reflect on the information you are presenting and it can provide time for you to prepare for your next step.

Not all pauses are well planned. Some occur quite by accident. Some speakers may become further paralyzed with fear as they try to overcome their unnecessary pause. The silent moment can either work for you or against you. The choice is up to you.

A quick way around this potentially awkward moment is to simply repeat your last statement with emphasis and continue on. You can inject a little humor in the process or you can simply move forward as if the silence was planned.

It helps to remember that nothing bad is going to happen. If you perceive a silent moment, heckles or harsh questioning as an opportunity to move forward, you can create a win-win situation for yourself every time. Look at obstacles as opportunity.

MISTAKES

Mistakes are part of being a warm, humorous presenter. No one likes a robot that does everything to perfection. Your flaws can be your greatest assets. Your audience can relate to you much better if you are a little flawed even in your presentation.

For example, imagine being in the audience when a presenter asks for a moment to gather his thoughts. "I apologize. I just need a moment," she says. She takes a deep breath and opens to the audience with a genuine smile and an even more genuine, "Thank you." This is actually an effective opening that may have been planned from the start.

As long as you are honest, warm and welcoming in your presentation your mistakes will have little effect. In fact, they can work in your favor, especially if you can inject some well-timed humor into the mix. If not, no worries. Humility can work just as well as humor.

HUMILITY

There is something universally appealing about humility. An audience loves to relate to the speaker on some level. Pious, pretentious personas do not

create a feeling of warmth and compassion. It may seem as if the suggestion is to "be yourself" but it is not.

You can create a persona to do your public speaking for you. It isn't necessary to hide your fear but it isn't necessary to put yourself out there on a personal level. Many public speakers develop a presenter personality that they use for their oral presentations.

This can be very effective if you are extremely knowledgeable about a certain subject. Your persona can help you discuss the topic on a personable level. This works much better than a cold lecture from an all-knowing, mistake-free presenter.

SPEAKING WITH PURPOSE

The purpose of your presentation is the driving force behind your performance. If you find the information tiresome and irritating it will come through in your delivery unless you are a very good actor. You can make nearly every subject interesting if you realize a notable purpose.

Look for the value in your message. Speakers are too often caught up in their anticipation of the experience, their fears and how others perceive them. If you consider the purpose, the value, of the speech above and beyond all else these issues fall to the wayside.

Having purpose will help you create a meaningful presentation that is driven by passion, not by fear. Speaking with the intent to influence, inform or entertain is not always enough. It helps to find value in your presentation. This can be difficult in some cases.

For example, you may find little value in overseeing a mandatory meeting at work. However, the meeting is mandatory for some reason. Find the reason. Create value and speak with purpose.

KEY POINTS

You may be surprised that a little information can go a very long way. In most situations you only need three or main points supported by evidence or anecdotal fillers. Memory aids are wonderful to use as well.

Consider that people rarely have total recall of a public speaking event. Auditory processing is quite complex and too much information can be overwhelming. Keep your information concise and in tune with purpose. This can be achieved by choosing three or four main points or fewer.

Too much information, too many facts and burdensome details can wreak havoc on your presentation. This works in a couple ways. Your audience may be confused about your core message and your purpose. They need to try and sort through what is and what is not important.

You are also causing yourself undo stress by trying to jam too much into one speech. Give yourself room and remember that your audience requires time to process the information. Emphasizing the same key points throughout the presentation will help your audience remember and it will help you stay focused.

BREVITY

Let's be brief about brevity. You have probably heard that brevity is the soul of wit. This stands true. Clear, concise language can do wonders for a presentation. Your audience will walk away with much more if you keep your information focused.

Well planned pauses, inflection and emphasis can help you create a brief delivery that has much more to offer than a boring lecture. You control the key points and you have the ability to help your audience recognize and retain them.

SELF PERCEPTION

Your self perception is of the utmost importance. Don't think of yourself as a public speaker. Why compare yourself to other presenters? You can develop your own style whether you are being yourself or whether you are using a public speaking persona.

There is no need to feel as if you have to be a professional speaker in order to do well. All you really need is to consider the audience, your message and the most effective way that you can deliver that message. Thinking of your self as a public speaker may lead to ridiculous expectations and feelings of inadequacy.

You really want to make the presentation about the purpose rather than about yourself. Worrying about how others perceive you is a waste of time. This is beyond the locus of your control. See yourself as a messenger with a purpose. This perception can take you a long way.

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HELP AND SUPPORT

Support from others is a crucial factor in succeeding in your efforts to overcome your fear of public speaking. There are a number of different avenues to explore in the realm of support. Friends and family can offer much and there are groups that are designed to help people who share the same anxiety and fear as you do.

Consider the various resources available to you. Some people find relief through hypnosis. Others prefer to join a Toastmasters group. Public speaking classes can be very beneficial. Many are perfectly happy working with friends and family to practice and hone their skills.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Practicing in front of close friends and family is a wonderful way to introduce your self to the task of public speaking. You can gradually expose yourself to being in front of a crowd in a very safe, controlled environment. After some practice you may become much more comfortable in the role of the presenter.

This is a fundamental of exposure therapy and desensitizing. You know that you are safe. You will not be judged and the practice will be a pleasurable experience. It is important to remember that things do not have to go perfectly.

Choose your audience wisely. Hopefully, you will have a handful of friends and family that is willing to give you honest feedback. They should show a genuine interest in your success. This is a great opportunity to find out if you are speaking with purpose. The feedback should include your main points.

PUBLIC SPEAKING CLASSES

The notion of taking a public speaking class may not seem very appealing. You may prefer to give yourself a root canal. However, most people who take these classes share the same anxiety and fear as you do. There are many benefits to taking courses of this type.

The classes offer helpful techniques that are designed to help you deliver effective speeches. These tips and tricks can also help you improve your confidence. They can also help you overcome your fear.

Concentrating on purpose, style and technique rather than how others may perceive you is a fantastic approach to public speaking. Those who teach these classes can offer you a systematic method of learning which strategies will work for you. This also serves to help you take a cognitive approach rather than an emotional one.

HYPNOSIS

Hypnosis is another valuable tool for you to consider. Your fears are rooted in your thought processes and your body's physical reactions to fearful situations. Hypnosis can be considered a short cut in the process of overcoming the fear of public speaking.

Hypnosis is not necessary for everyone. A qualified health care provider should be your guide in this process. Common techniques used by the professional include visualization and relaxation. This approach is ideal for someone who has difficulty letting go of his fear.

TOASTMASTERS INTERNATIONAL

Toastmasters International is perhaps the most valuable resource available to you in your endeavor to overcome your fear of public speaking. This organization offers a vast array of services and support designed specifically for that task of helping others overcome their fears.

This organization offers a wealth of information and resources that are specific to your needs. Anyone who has a fear of public speaking can benefit from Toastmasters International. Even those who do not share the same fear can benefit from the information and resources offered by this outstanding organization.

Information ranges from basic tips and tricks to help you overcome your fears to inspirational stories. There is a great sense of comradely and belonging. Toastmasters International can offer something for people of all different levels of ability.

You can find an organization close to your place of residence for services and support. You may even feel inspired to start a club of your own through this resource after you have mastered the art of public speaking.

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PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Knowing the basics of the fear of public speaking can help you overcome the overwhelming anxiety associated with it. It is important to determine how severe your personal condition is when it comes to this fear. Once you have a grasp on you individual state you can begin to take steps.

Evaluating your specific needs is an important component to your success. You may find that a cognitive approach will work wonders for you or you may need to go as far as to seek professional help through a physician or hypnotist.

Remember that you are not alone in this fear. Many people share the same emotional and physical responses as you do. There are many reasons that you should keep this in mind when dealing with your public speaking fears. There are also many inspirational stories for encouragement.

Finally, you can opt to put theories into practice. Practical application of various techniques and approaches can help you work through your fears. Knowing how to overcome you fear of public speaking is not enough. You also need to develop a personal approach that works for you.

FEARS AND PHOBIAS

Fear is an important, natural response to various objects and situations. This essential emotion is valuable for self preservation. It may seem as if being afraid to speak in public is invalid. However, the primary notion of facing a crowd while standing alone makes the inherent nature of this fear very reasonable.

A phobia is an unreasonable, disabling fear that prevents a person from engaging in normal activities. In some instances, the phobia of public speaking (also known as glossophobia) may be the culprit behind a person's overwhelming fears.

ESTABLISHING YOUR PERSONAL STATE

Fear is such an inherently powerful emotion that it may be difficult to determine whether you are suffering from mere stage fright or whether you are experiencing glossophobia. There are considerations that you can make to determine how severe your condition really is.

If you are unable to function normally on a day-to-day basis because of the remote possibility that you may have to speak in public then you might want to consult a professional. A phobia can be treated very effectively and you may be surprised by how effective treatment can be.

EVALUATING YOUR NEEDS

Everyone has different needs our memories and experiences are unique and the severity of our fears can vary greatly. Try taking small steps by visualizing yourself speaking in front of a small audience. Does it seem plausible or do you feel an overwhelming sense of dread?

You may find that hypnosis or professional therapy is in order. Some go as far as to use medications in more severe cases. Some medicines can inhibit fear responses, helping the person deal with the situation more effectively.

Others find that taking a cognitive approach that helps them view the public speaking engagement on a rational rather than emotional level work wonders. You may find that working in collaboration with classmates in a public speaking class offers the greatest benefits or you may find help with a close-knit group of family and friends.

Toastmasters International is an ideal resource for help and inspiration for nearly everyone who has a fear of speaking in public. This organization is dedicated to helping people in overcoming this specific fear.

A UNIVERSAL PROBLEM

A brave person is not a fearless person. What makes the individual brave is his ability to overcome his fears. Few people are immune to the fear of public speaking. This is a natural feeling that is worthy of recognition. Your effort to take control of your fear is the fundamental element of true bravery.

NATURAL RESPONSES

The physical and psychological responses to speaking in front of a crowd are perfectly natural. They just vary greatly from person to person. The dry mouth, shaking and shortness of breath are to be expected at some level. You can work to use these responses in a positive way.

All of the natural bodily responses can be considered forces of energy. You can harness that energy into a positive force that is used in your delivery. Your nervous energy can be your best friend.

THE AUDIENCE IS ON YOUR SIDE

Since the fear of public speaking is somewhat inherit, it is easy to understand that you face a sympathetic audience each and every time. Nearly everyone can relate to your fear. Instead of viewing the audience as an obstacle, it helps to view the crowd as an alliance.

The audience is there for a reason. There is a valid purpose for your presentation. Once you focus your energy on the audience's needs and your purpose your fears will fall to the wayside.

Offering humility and humor in your presentation is another great approach to working with an audience. Recognize that the group shares your fears and they respect your bravery. There is great benefit to re-seeing the audience in your presentation.

Your self perception is a powerful tool as well. Those who try to approach public speaking with the notion that they have to be outrageously talented, smart and witty will most likely be overwhelmed. Consider yourself as an individual with a purpose.

There is energy flowing between the speaker and the audience. You can use the very things that make you nervous to work in your favor. It is helpful to recognize that you and the audience are in this together.

CONCLUSION

One way to overcome this emotion is to re-establish your self perception. Do not view yourself as a public speaker facing a crowd. Consider yourself as an integral part of the audience. You are an extension of the insight and information that the audience needs and wants.

Overcoming any fear takes practice. Different levels of severity require different types of approaches. Each person is an individual with unique experiences and associations. It is best to cater an approach that works for you.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Simply knowing something is not enough. Storing information in the back of your brain yields little results. It takes effort to put theory into practice. Once you have decided which approaches to try, it is necessary to put forth the effort.

Practical application of what you have learned can begin with something as simple as visualizing yourself giving a speech in public. The audience can be any size you choose. This step is ideal for someone who doesn't really know whether he has a fear or a phobia.

USING YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Your knowledge base should help you re-see the situation. You are no longer the public speaker. The expectations are realistic and you are able to take an objective, cognitive approach to the task. This requires practice. Thinking past your emotional responses is an art in itself that requires mastery.

Hone your skills by creating a small speech that contains a single main idea. Are you able to drive the point through with purpose? Do you feel the need to speak during each and every second of the presentation? Step back and evaluate your progress.

Taking an objective approach to a fearful situation may require you to delve into the origin of your fear. Consider how the brain is automatically wired for certain responses and your nervous system makes your body react in kind. Are you able to look at these responses objectively?

USING YOUR RESOURCES

One of the best things you can do to take steps to overcoming your fear is to delve into the resources available to you. The primary resource is Toastmasters International. This organization offers a vast wealth of information and there is a great sense of belonging in these groups.

Friends, family and trusted associates can offer support. It helps to make sure that these resources are open and honest in their reactions. You can get to the core of your fear by practicing in a safe environment surrounded by people who are genuinely invested in your success.

If you believe that your fear borders on glossophobia then you may want to speak with a professional. There are resources available that can help you work through the phobia including desensitizing and exposure therapy. Some severe cases may require medication.

Hypnosis is an appealing solution for many individuals. This approach is particularly helpful for those interested in retraining the brain to respond to the public speaking environment differently. Hypnosis can be seen as a sort of shortcut to extinction.

TAKING STEPS TO OVERCOME YOUR FEAR

A plan of action is required in order for you to progress. Consider James Earl Jones and his speech impediment. He used something that was of great interest to him to turn his weakness into one of his greatest strengths. The process of overcoming the stutter required considerable, dedicated action on his part.

Use your passions to overcome your fear. If you feel strongly about a certain topic, begin practicing through this subject. Keep your subject within your interests at first. Later, you will be able to create presentations that have purpose and interest no matter what subject matter.

THOUGHTFUL PRACTICE

Practice comes in many forms. You may want to recite your favorite poem aloud in a secluded place. Perhaps you have a presentation related to your profession already planned. No matter what, you want to focus on the message instead of your delivery.

Thoughtful practice involves a deliberate use of nervous energy. You can use your anxiety in positive ways. Practicing with deliberate thought combined with effective relaxation techniques will yield excellent results.

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

You do need some stress especially when it comes to delivering a speech. How the stress affects you is the primary concern. Relaxation techniques are quite personal and they differ from individual to individual. Your specific approach should be designed to create a balance between your anxiety and your effective delivery.

Traditional approaches include picturing the audience naked. This does little more than trivialize the group. It is probably better to create a visualization of the audience as a group of people in need of information. You are merely there to deliver the message effectively.

BECOMING FAMILIAR WITH THE PROCESS

Becoming familiar with the process is a very important aspect of your success. The old adage "practice makes perfect" holds true in the realm of public speaking. Using your knowledge base and your resources can take you very far in your endeavor.

Consider the first time you tried any task. There are times when the task was completed with seemingly effortless ease. Other times you struggled over and over again to achieve success. You did master the tasks in most cases whether they required great effort of whether they were simple for you to learn.

It is important to remember that the outcome is the same for each situation. You can overcome your fear of public speaking. The only difference between you and a naturally talented speaker is the time it takes to reach the goal.

RESOURCES

http://www.toastmasters.org/

http://phobia.depression-guide.com/glossophobia.html

http://www.lcmedia.com/mind479.htm

http://www.scribd.com/doc/1319942/ap-psychology-chapter-2-outline-from-the-Psychology