Overcoming Stage Fright

If you suffer from what people call ‘stage fright’, you have my sympathies. I too am very uncomfortable, very self-conscious in front of people. However, I’ve never let it stop me getting what I want, and I don’t think it should stop you either.

You’re not alone. Lots of people suffer from the same anxiety. It’s okay, you’re in great company. In fact, in a poll created by Gallup, the Number 1 TOP public fear was ‘Getting Up in Front of Others’. ‘Death’ lost out and only came in second. That tells you just how much company you have in your fear.

Stage Fright, or performance anxiety, is a naturally occurring phenomena, it is part of the natural survival instinct that presents one from getting hurt.

But I want to help you to overcome your Stage Fright, or your fear of speaking in public. The good news for you is that it is entirely possible for you to overcome Stage Fright, and if other people can successfully overcome it, so can you.

Does this sound like you? Does any of this chime with you? Do you see yourself here below?

Your body is talking, it’s most noticeable in your hands. You feel anxious, your throat tightens, making it harder to speak. Your knees and legs feel weak, you are enveloped in gear. Your mind won’t stay quiet, it replays past failures, it imagines new failures. Your heart is almost exploding with its manic drum beat out of your chest, and in just a few minutes, with your heart in your mouth, with every part of you telling you NO NO NO, you will walk in front of others and they will laugh at you, they will snigger at you, they will know, what you have known all along, that you’re just no good and you can’t do it.

Let me tell you something.

Stage Fright is like a horror film. What’s going on in your head, in your mind, in your imagination is what makes it TRULY scary. Your mind imagines far worse things than the movie could possibly present. That’s right, stage fright, just like the movies, works because your mind, your imagination paints the picture for you. The reality is ALWAYS less scary, less terrifying and less awful than you ever imagined.

Here are some things that you can do, to combat and overcome your Stage Fright, or irrational fear of speaking in public.

BREATHE – My favourite way to stay calm in all situations. I remember going for a job interview and I was so nervous, I’d made such a fuss about it, I actually felt sick. I took control by taking slow, deep diaphragmatic breaths.
REALITY CHECK – Accept that everyone, successful and experienced gets a little nervous or excited before speaking in public or performing. If you take all of the negatives away from the things that you feel before a performance, they are EXACTLY the same as those things that an excited person experiences, shaking legs (it’s an adrenalin buzz), agitated mind (how exciting, you’re going to be performing soon), heart thumpety thumping (your body preparing you for it), it’s great, it’s all about perspective.

FOCUS ON THE TASK AHEAD – This is probably the best advice I can give you. Focus on the tiny individual elements of your task – the ones that make up the entire task. These tasks will take your concentration and your focus and place it where it NEEDS to be, which is right on the task. When your mind is focused on doing, not thinking, it is easier to calm the mind and still the body. Focusing upon the task during your performance will take your mind away from the audience and the entire activity will be MUCH more enjoyable.

WARM UP – Always warm up – even if it’s a few stretches, a little breathing and some tongue twisters and mouth exercises. No matter what you’re doing, you’ll be more confident knowing that you’ve prepared for what you’re about to do.

PREPARATION – That word again, but being prepared allows you to relax more about what you’re doing. If you’re underprepared, you’ll have less confidence in yourself. Prepare, so that you can relax into the task.

SOUND CHECK – One of the things that goes wrong when most people experience ‘Stage Fright’ is that they speak too quickly and too quietly. It’s very important if you’re public speaking to make sure that people can hear you. I spent my first two years as a university acting teacher yelling at students that I couldn’t hear them. Slow, Loud and Clear. Don’t gabble. Take a sip of water, calm yourself and make yourself understood. If you’re acting on stage, make sense of the words, go after your task, place your focus on the other actors.

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