

PREVIEW  
CHAPTER 1

**GARY GENARD**

# FEARLESS SPEAKING

Beat Your Anxiety • Build Your Confidence • Change Your Life



# *FEARLESS SPEAKING*

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Beat Your Anxiety · Build Your Confidence · Change Your Life

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# 1

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR FEAR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

### PRACTICE EXERCISES

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WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE

1-2 YOUR PUBLIC SPEAKING  
STRENGTHS

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STRENGTHS

1-4 UNDERSTANDING SPEAKING FEAR

1-5 TYPES OF FEAR REDUCTION  
TECHNIQUES

The goal of this book is to change your life. To paraphrase a well-known saying: Today is the first day of the rest of your life as *someone who used to have public speaking anxiety*.

You're about to conquer a fear that has diminished your speaking pleasure, delayed your professional advancement, or disturbed your peace of mind. It may have been a nagging worry for years that you've finally decided to face, once and for all. Or perhaps your speech fright only revealed itself recently.

Some of the clients I work with, for instance, are senior executives who've been speaking in public comfortably for decades, yet they've suddenly lost their self-confidence. I don't take these clients back to their childhoods to figure out why they're anxious about speaking in public. Instead, we identify how their reluctance to speak is manifesting itself now, in the present. Once we have that information, we can work on reducing their fears and building their self-confidence along with their speaking skills.

That's exactly what this book will do for you. And you're going to get started right now. Overcoming speaking anxiety truly is something that will change your life, so why wait? Your new understanding and confidence will open up opportunities for you and show you the enjoyment you've been missing.

Just how powerful will eliminating public speaking fear be for you? The brief form below will help you decide. It's the first of many hands-on exercises for reducing speech anxiety that you'll find in *Fearless Speaking*.

## EXERCISE 1-1

### OVERCOMING SPEAKING ANXIETY WILL CHANGE YOUR LIFE

*List three ways that not reducing but eliminating public speaking anxiety will positively impact your personal life and career:*

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## THE BEST METHOD FOR OVERCOMING YOUR SPEAKING FEAR

Obviously, the three items you just listed are important for your overall peace of mind and enjoyment of public speaking. Now, how will you actually achieve those positive developments? You probably won't be surprised to hear that the best way to overcome stage fright and reach your speaking goals is to learn a few techniques from the theater.

Actors are the world's best speakers despite speaking anxiety. Did you know, for instance, that these performers suffer from stage fright as much as anyone? The difference between actors and everyone else is that stage acting teaches them the most efficient ways for overcoming their speaking fear.

You don't need to suddenly become an actor to benefit from these techniques yourself. I do, however, use the time-tested tools and techniques of the theater with people from all walks of life because I know they produce results. I recognized this truth years ago when I began working with business executives and other professionals. After all, effective performance is the core of all good speaking—whether it's in a theater, a boardroom, a meeting, or at the conference you're attending.

Another thing that actors understand is that talking about performance is helpful only in the beginning phases of rehearsal. After that it's time for *action*.

That's why at each stage of helping people cope with their speech fear, I include **actionable exercises** to reduce apprehension while boosting my clients' skills and confidence. Some of these exercises are designed to change thinking patterns (a process known as "cognitive restructuring"). Others are based in emotional response. Some feature positive visualization, while others are concerned with staying focused and present for audiences. Whichever exercises I'm using, however, my approach always includes dealing with the body's response to stage fright. That's because fear of public speaking nearly always produces a predictable *physical* reaction.

The exercises you'll find throughout *Fearless Speaking* come directly from the approach and techniques I use in my work in Boston.

Here's the great news about the speaking jitters you experience: this level of mental and physical activation is perfectly natural and even beneficial. Without those butterflies in your stomach, you might become too laid-back and bland, without any of the edge or energy that makes you exciting as a speaker. It's only when the balance tips too far toward anxiety that the normal level of nervousness that otherwise helps you, morphs into debilitating fear.

## NERVOUSNESS IS NORMAL, BUT FEAR MAKES YOU IRRATIONAL

Don't believe that those butterflies can be helpful? Then ask yourself this question: Do you know anyone who doesn't get at least a little nervous before speaking in public? I don't. I've been performing

on stage since I was nine years old (my first performance was to 1,500 people). And I *still* get those butterflies before speaking to groups, and a high-stakes speech or presentation will sometimes make me have trouble sleeping the night before.

Those reactions are normal and fairly universal.

As I said earlier, stage performers undergo all of this, too. The difference is the degree of the reaction they experience. Getting slightly nervous is helpful because it psyches you up for the “big game.” But deep-seated fear or a gnawing anxiety is likely to push you over into irrational thinking.

Below are four common misconceptions about public speaking that reflect such thinking. Each of them is an unreasonable conclusion, or what I call a *fiction*. You should learn to recognize them and send them on their way without you!

## FOUR FICTIONS ABOUT PUBLIC SPEAKING

**Fiction #1: Public speaking is dangerous.** This is a particularly widespread and damaging myth. Not only are audience members not your enemy; but even a failed presentation will rarely result in your being fired, demoted, or even seriously compromised in your job. Speaking isn’t a perilous adventure on the order of any of the things that should really scare you, no matter how hard you try to make it so. Remember, a diamond is formed by pressure, and only afterwards is it polished. If you find speaking in public challenging, that means it’s a golden opportunity for you to shine.

**Fiction #2: Nervousness will make your performance worse.** There is no reliable link between feeling anxious and giving a bad performance. At least in all my years helping speakers I’ve never found one. Quite to the contrary, there are many stories from business and the professions, when someone will speak and then say to a colleague, “I know I was horrible . . . I was so nervous.” And the other person will respond: “Really? You looked fine to me.”

**Fiction #3: Everyone will see how nervous you are.** And once they do, the entire audience will doubt your credibility! This is non-



sense. Most nervousness isn't visible to others because it's internal. And if people do see you're nervous, they'll most likely have the normal reaction, which is to sympathize with you. Since audience members feel good when you're succeeding and embarrassed when you're failing, they're actually on your side and want you to do well.

**Fiction #4: You have to be an excellent speaker.** Who says so? If you're a motivational speaker by profession perhaps that's so, but otherwise it isn't true. The belief that you have to be "excellent" is often a hindrance to effective public speaking because it confuses polish for true communication. When you speak to people (who almost always *want* to be in the audience), your job is to connect with them and give them something of value. Your task isn't to be slick, charismatic, or a stand-up comic. So concern yourself instead with being honest and trustworthy. And if you happen to give a lackluster presentation, so what? Failure can be the best of teachers, since you'll want to do that much better the next time.

## DEVELOPING A POSITIVE MINDSET

Now that you've brought to light this quartet of damaging public speaking fictions, it's time to banish them by stepping from this negative territory into a more positive mindset. The following exercise is an excellent one for getting your thinking headed in that direction. Rather than "trying to be an excellent speaker" (as we saw above), this activity will bring you more in touch with the positive attributes you *already* have to offer listeners.

Remember, regardless of whether you succeed or fail in a particular presentation, **YOUR PERFORMANCE DOESN'T CHANGE WHO YOU ARE AS A PERSON.** There's an excellent reason, for instance, why you were asked to speak in front of that audience: you're exactly the right person for the job! Why not remind yourself of that fact? The exercise on the next page entitled "Your Public Speaking Strengths" is designed to help you do so.

This exercise has two parts. In the first part, you'll fill out an inventory of your attributes as a speaker. Don't be shy; be honest. This is your opportunity to reacquaint yourself with all the good things





## EXERCISE 1-3

### TALKING ABOUT YOUR STRENGTHS

Good! Now for the follow-through—because this is a book about better public speaking, after all.

Take a few minutes to look over your list on the previous page. Once you've become familiar with it, talk on this subject for between two and five minutes. In other words, your topic is "My Public Speaking Strengths." Use your notes if you like. Imagine that you're interviewing for a fabulous job and the interviewer says, "We're quite interested in your oral communication skills. In fact, it's the only thing we're interested in. So tell us what makes you an effective communicator."

Feel free to record your talk on audio or videotape it.

Writing down your attributes as a speaker is a down payment on your willingness to succeed at public speaking. But actually talking about good communication will give you practice in speaking freely and frequently, and get you closer to sealing the deal. So go for it!

## THE BENEFITS OF STAGE FRIGHT

If your response to the above heading is, "There are actually *benefits* to stage fright?" then my answer is: You'd better believe it!

Here's why:

The anxiety you feel about important events in your life actually prepares you for challenging or dangerous situations. But as you saw in Fiction #1, public speaking *isn't* dangerous—you just perceive it that way if you have anxiety about speaking in public. Your fearful response is, therefore, a beneficial reaction that helps build up your skills so that you can succeed in front of an audience.

As I said earlier, the key is finding a *balance* between your ordinary, beneficial nervousness, and actual anxiety that's more harmful than productive.

Here are three specific ways that your “helpful” stage fright is a positive reaction:

### **3 WAYS STAGE FRIGHT IS HELPFUL TO YOU**

1. It shows you care about your audience.
2. It gets you ready for peak performance.
3. It’s a source of energy you can channel positively.

### **UNDERSTANDING YOUR PERSONAL RESPONSE**

Now that you realize stage fright can be a positive reaction, you’re ready to understand more closely your specific response to speaking fear. The step after that, later in this chapter, will be matching your reaction with the best technique to deal with that particular response.

Ready? Please turn to the exercise on the next page.

## EXERCISE 1-4

### UNDERSTANDING SPEAKING FEAR

Please complete the sections below concerning the eight causes of speech anxiety. Answer the questions honestly and candidly. Your answers will help you know whether you have speaking fear, and identify the type of fear response(s) you experience. Knowing this information will help you zero in on the fear reduction technique best suited to your situation.

Feel free to answer, “Yes” to more than one of the eight causes. But once you’ve completed the entire exercise, go back and circle the name of the response that is strongest for you. It will be helpful for you to know this information when you get to the Fear Reduction Techniques shown later in this chapter.<sup>1</sup>

**Learned Response.** Are you still influenced by a negative public speaking or performance situation that happened to you in the past? Did something “teach” you that public appearances are unpleasant, risky, or even dangerous? Have you been afraid to get up in front of others since then?

.....

Yes, I have a learned response. \_\_\_\_\_

No, I can’t think of anything like that. \_\_\_\_\_

Maybe. There’s something that might apply. \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain:

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\_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>1</sup> For the format of this section and the Fear Reduction Techniques that follows, I am indebted to Karen Kangas Dwyer’s *Conquer Your Speechfright* (Harcourt Brace 1998).

**Anticipatory Anxiety.** Does the thought of giving a speech or presentation cause you excessive anxiety beforehand? Do you worry constantly about the upcoming speaking situation, lose sleep, have no appetite, or fixate on what's coming?

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Yes, I experience excessive anticipation. \_\_\_\_\_

No, I don't worry excessively. \_\_\_\_\_

Somewhat. \_\_\_\_\_

Describe what you go through:

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**Mindreading.** Do you believe you know what your audience is thinking? Can you "hear" them in your own mind challenging and criticizing you? Are you certain that their facial expressions reveal their true feelings toward you?

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Yes, I think I know what people are thinking. \_\_\_\_\_

No, I usually leave my crystal ball at home. \_\_\_\_\_

I respond like that in some situations. \_\_\_\_\_

Share your thoughts with yourself now:

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**Fear of Appearing Nervous.** Is your greatest fear that everyone will see how nervous you are? In other words, do you think, "If I appear truly nervous, everyone will realize I don't know what I'm talking about!" Is this your big concern?

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Yes, I'm afraid of appearing nervous. \_\_\_\_\_

No, I don't think like that when I'm presenting. \_\_\_\_\_

I do worry about that at times. \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain:

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**Fear of Going Blank.** Are you afraid that nervousness and anxiety will make you forget everything you're supposed to say? Do you picture yourself having a brain freeze? Are you convinced you'll be unable to say anything or that you'll forget key parts of your message?

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Yes, I'm constantly afraid I'll lose my train of thought. \_\_\_\_\_

No, that isn't my concern. \_\_\_\_\_

I sometimes have that response. \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain these feelings:

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**Lack of Skills.** Are you convinced that you simply lack talent as a public speaker and shouldn't be up there? Are you afraid that you'll be "found out" and your secret will no longer be safe?

.....

Yes, I believe deep down that I'm just not a good speaker. \_\_\_\_\_

No, I can't say I feel like that. \_\_\_\_\_

Certain aspects of my speaking skills do concern me. \_\_\_\_\_

Explain here:

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Physical Reaction.** Is your biggest problem the physical responses you have when you speak in front of others? Is your principal complaint dry mouth, pounding heart, gastrointestinal distress, racing pulse, sweating, shaky voice, gasping for breath, or other symptoms?

.....

Absolutely! This is my biggest problem. \_\_\_\_\_

No, physical distress isn't the worst thing I go through. \_\_\_\_\_

I do experience some physical discomfort. \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain what you feel physically if this is a source of discomfort:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Performance Orientation.** Is your principal concern that you have to be an excellent speaker? Do you compare yourself to other speakers, telling yourself you have to come up to their level? Is your skill in performance your major concern?

.....

Yes, I need to be excellent and don't think I am. \_\_\_\_\_

No, I'm focused on my message not my performance. \_\_\_\_\_

I do sometimes compare myself with others. \_\_\_\_\_

Please explain:

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Well done! Now that you've identified possible anxiety responses, you can focus on *the technique best suited to deal with that particular response*.

Exercise 1-5 on "Types of Fear Reduction Techniques" on the next page shows you how to do that. Match the principal speaking fear you just identified (all eight are listed in the left-hand column) with the fear reduction techniques in the right column. Each of these techniques will be explained in further detail later in the book. Those are the techniques you can work closely with for maximum results!<sup>2</sup>

2 Note that you needn't focus *only* on the fear reduction techniques associated with your principal response. You can also benefit from the other fear reduction techniques explained in *Fearless Speaking*, and you should pay attention to them as well.

## EXERCISE 1-5

### TYPES OF FEAR REDUCTION TECHNIQUES

CAUSE OF SPEECH ANXIETY	FEAR REDUCTION TECHNIQUE
Learned Response	Cognitive Restructuring (Chapter Two) Learning to Love Speaking in Public (Chapter Twelve)
Anticipatory Anxiety	Breathing Techniques (Chapter Three) Improving Focus and Presence (Chapter Five)
Mindreading	Cognitive Restructuring (Chapter Two) Using Positive Visualization (Chapter Eight)
Fear of Appearing Nervous	Body Language and Confidence (Chapter Four) Connecting with Listeners (Chapter Six)
Fear of Going Blank	Improving Focus and Presence (Chapter Five)
Lack of Skills	Connecting with Listeners (Chapter Six) Vocal Improvement (Chapter Seven)
Physical Reaction	Breathing Techniques (Chapter Three) Body Language and Confidence (Chapter Four) Biofeedback/Stress Response (Chapter Ten)
Performance Orientation	Connecting with Listeners (Chapter Six) Overcoming Extreme Self-Consciousness (Chapter Nine)



## ANDREW

Andrew is a middle-aged executive with a maritime freight shipping company. He came to me because of the panic attacks he'd been experiencing when speaking at meetings. This was new to him, and he was mystified about why it was happening. He'd been a successful businessman for more than twenty years, and had always been quite comfortable speaking in public. When he experienced panic for the third time in a few weeks, he sought my help.

His response to public speaking fear was what he called a "physiological cascade": a hot wave followed by the sensation that his mouth was glued shut. Naturally, he couldn't get out the things he wanted to say. An obvious self-starter and strong personality, Andrew was determined to meet his problem head-on and defeat it.

I worked with Andrew to approach his anxiety from a different direction: not to attack it but to learn from his experiences instead. He found the relaxation exercises we practiced (you'll find them later in this book) particularly helpful. He grew easier on himself, and began to carve out quiet time to prepare when speaking at meetings and in presentations. Gradually, he realized that his "gladiatorial" approach wasn't working because he couldn't beat his anxiety into submission.

Using the relaxation techniques, Andrew gained a productive approach to dealing with his speech anxiety. And he acquired insight into how he dealt with problems generally.

Want to read more?

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