

Day 1

Getting Started

Overcoming Your Fears

For as long as I can remember, I always think back to when I was only five years old. I would spend the day outside either playing in the dirt or building. At the end of the day I would talk my parents' ears off (I assumed they were listening) about what I built or what I was going to build. Little did I realize that my training as an engineer—my first career—was already beginning.

One day in school, somewhere around the turn of the century, my first-grade teacher, Mrs. Collins, asked the class for volunteers to speak to the class about what we loved to do. Immediately my hand shot into the air. No one else raised a hand except those who all of a sudden needed to go to the bathroom. I was excited to talk about the latest pirate ship I had just built. My talk was such a success that I was asked to share my story with other classes. Even then I was a natural public speaker—my second career—and anxious to share information with an audience. Now, when people ask me how long I have been on the speaking circuit, I can honestly say since I was five.

Throughout my career both as an engineer and then later

as a public speaker trainer, I have had the opportunity to write and present papers at conferences to various professionals. Early on I learned how important it was to develop my speaking skills. As a professional speaker, I now coach people from all over the world on ways to improve their speaking, presentation, and communication skills.

Regardless of your profession, you probably spent your school years training, learning, and fine-tuning your reading and writing skills. If you are like most, you spent very little time learning how to develop your public speaking skills—schools don't typically teach these skills, unless you join the debate team. However, as you will learn shortly, most communications occur on a verbal basis. Each day presents opportunities for informal and formal public speaking, from making a phone call at work to giving a new business presentation or running a meeting.

It is a common misconception that certain people are born good speakers. Yes, I agree that some people have the gift of gab—I could think of a few who have too much of a gift—and seem more natural at it. But make no mistake: Becoming a confident public speaker is achieved only by the desire to become a better speaker, followed by focused effort and a lot of practice. The good news is, your payoff will come quickly, you'll have fun along the way, and the confidence you develop will improve virtually all areas of your life.

Professional speakers, myself included, never stop practicing and honing their speaking skills. I am a better speaker today than I was five years ago and expect to continue to improve.

If you are like most people, you did *not* have a great first-time public speaking experience, and the thought of speaking in front of people scares you to death. In fact, according to the *Book of Lists*, public speaking is the greatest of all fears. More than 41 percent of people polled for the book named public

speaking as their number one fear. The fear of dying is number seven on the list! I guess that means people would rather die than get up in front of a group of people to speak.

If you feel this way, you're not alone. In fact, some of today's most famous presenters have freely admitted to nervousness and stage fright when it comes to public speaking. You may be saying to yourself right now, There is no way I will be a good speaker. I can never learn to be like those professional speakers; speaking just comes easily to them. Most of us naturally worry about what other people think about us, and this is especially true when we are asked to speak to a group of people. Learning specific techniques to improve your public speaking can help eradicate your fear and help you succeed in your business and personal life.

Confidence Builder: Public Speaking Improves Every Area of Your Life

Whether you are having a casual telephone conversation, teaching a Sunday school class, having a conversation with your boss, or giving a formal presentation, you are involved in public speaking. Following are examples of how public speaking can positively influence your everyday life, your career, your relationships, your communication style, and much more. Let's get started on the path to successful public speaking.

- **Build success in your professional life.** Most presidents and CEOs of companies possess strong speaking skills. I work with many high-level executives in the business world, and when I ask them why they feel they need coaching to improve their speaking skills, they all indicate that they know their success and their

companies' future business ventures rely on their ability to speak well. Their promotions to the top were related directly to their ability to communicate effectively.

- **Communicate with others more clearly.** Many mistakes or misinterpretations are a result of not properly communicating your ideas. Good public speaking skills help you articulate ideas well and make them come alive for the listener. This was one of the most critical skills I needed to develop as an engineer, because I often had to speak to audiences that didn't know the first thing about how to "shore up" a building, for example, but had the authority and the money to fund my next project. If I was ineffective in conveying why they should invest more money, I might have been out of a job.
- **Build overall confidence.** As you become better at organizing and communicating your ideas effectively, you will start to exhibit more confidence. People with this ability have a "glow" of confidence when they speak in public. (Let's not confuse this with the red glow of terror on the face of someone who is scared to death.)
- **Increase your comfort level in social situations.** How many of you have ever been invited to a party and are afraid to strike up a conversation? (Don't be shy, no one can see you.) Social situations are, in fact, the perfect opportunity to practice your public speaking skills. Here's a little bonus: It is a known fact that people who speak well are perceived as better looking. Thank God, now I know why I worked so hard at it, and it wasn't just my cute smile that made me popular with the girls.
- **Speak more confidently on the telephone.** Whether you call to request information, make a cold call at

work, communicate with a client, or just leave a phone message, others can hear your confidence level in the tone of your voice. Did you know that over 86 percent of your telephone message is communicated through the tone of your voice?

- **Run meetings or present new ideas more effectively.** I remember running my son's Cub Scout pack. Having the ability to conduct a Cub Scout meeting with six to eight screaming, energetic boys definitely challenged my public speaking skills (and required a lot of aspirin). Organizing and running a meeting with adults is more difficult, I think, because you can't bribe them with candy.
- **Become an effective member or volunteer.** At some point in your life, you may volunteer or even be affectionately coerced to lead or participate in a professional or social organization. Your success within the organization depends significantly on your ability to speak to a group and keep their attention engaged in order to achieve common goals and objectives.
- **Establish trust and respect from others with greater ease.** Your success in dealing with clients—or even your own children—depends a great deal on your speaking skills. The ability to convince people with words is key to establishing trust and respect. This can include not only what you say, but how you say it.

If these examples describe characteristics you want to possess, then congratulations—you have the desire to succeed as a public speaker.

Lessons from Mom: Practice Makes Perfect

There is no magic formula for becoming a polished public speaker. Those of you who play a musical instrument know you do not become proficient without practice. I used to roll my eyes when my mom told me to practice for an hour after school before I went outside. I later came to appreciate that time, and I continued to improve. As a semiprofessional musician (my kids may beg to differ) who has learned to play the guitar and piano, I know what steps I had to take to play these instruments well. It has been said, “To learn to play the trumpet, you have to play the trumpet.” Similarly, “To learn to speak, you have to speak.” You cannot become an effective communicator by just watching other great speakers. You cannot become a confident public speaker without practice, practice, and even more practice. Many of you have probably heard the two-line cliché “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” (Answer:) “Practice, practice, practice.” Public speaking demands the same level of practice. You can start right away by practicing your public speaking skills in everyday situations.

Quick Tips You Can Use in Everyday Speaking Situations

A terrific first step to developing speaking skills is to begin to focus on how you speak in everyday speaking situations. Let’s take a look at four situations where you can begin to polish your speaking skills.

Running into Someone at the Store

How many of you have bumped into a friend while shopping or running an errand? Here you are—another opportunity to practice your public speaking.

- Initiate the conversation.
- Ask the person how her family is doing. What's new with her job? Does she have any vacation plans coming up?
- Tell a funny story about something that happened recently to you, your family, or your friends.
- Think about how fast you speak, how you pronounce your words, and how you organize your thoughts. This is called your natural speaking style and will come in handy later.

Parties

Parties are the perfect opportunity to practice your public speaking skills. So the next party you attend, make sure you bring your bag of tricks.

- If you find yourself standing alone in a corner of the room, don't just eat all the crab dip: Initiate a conversation with the next person who walks by.
- Introduce yourself to two new people (see "Your First Speech: 'Introducing Yourself'" later in this chapter).
- Participate in a group discussion, but do not dominate the conversation.
- Have a conversation with someone you have not seen in a while.

Leaving a Telephone Message

Doesn't it seem nowadays that you leave a message or voice mail more often than reaching someone on the phone right off the bat? Telephone tag is the new corporate sport. Consider these moments golden opportunities to practice your speaking and organization skills. The next time you need to call someone, write a few brief notes so you won't forget anything if you get the person's voice mail—and I guarantee you, you will get their voice mail.

- Slow down! Do not speak fast when you are leaving a message, especially if you have an accent. Most answering machines today allow enough time for a short message. I can't tell you the number of messages I get a day where I cannot understand what the caller is saying because he or she is speaking too fast. I often find myself replaying the message a few times. This is why notes come in handy. Also, slow down when saying your telephone number.
- Pronounce your name clearly. State your name slowly, especially if your name is not as common as Smith or Jones. Also spell your name slowly if necessary (*f* as in Friday, *t* as in ticket . . .).
- In addition to your name, give your title, your company name, and the reason you are calling. Describe to the person, in a few short sentences, the purpose of the call. If appropriate, leave the time you called (be sensitive to different time zones).
- Let them know when to return the call. Leave a date, preferred time, and telephone number.
- Always sound professional. Do not chew gum, and do not leave a long-winded message. Be aware of your tone.

I always tell people to smile when leaving a message—it automatically gives your voice an upbeat, pleasant tone.

Should the person you are calling actually answer the telephone, you can still use your notes. It will make you sound professional and organized.

Creating a Voice Mail

Even though you may not have thought about it this way, your own voice mail message is like a little presentation to the public and leaves a first impression.

- Before you record your greeting, write it down and practice saying it. Record the message, play it back, and rerecord it if necessary. Is your message too fast? Is it too slow? Is your voice clear and easy to understand? This is great practice for when you prepare your own speech.
- Make sure your answering machine greeting sounds professional and friendly. Call your own phone number and listen to your own greeting. Ask yourself if your voice is clear and your message makes sense. You would be surprised at the number of poor greetings I've heard when returning calls.
- Leave the caller clear instructions on what to do when leaving a message.
- If you run a business, as I do, your voice mail greeting is a great opportunity to plug your business. Be careful of information overload, though.

Speech Anxiety: The Doctor Is In

The problem most people face when they speak in more formal settings is keeping their focus on being conversational rather than worrying about what the audience is thinking about them. In every one of my seminars I ask participants to list the reasons they attend my program. The top vote—to quell their speaking fears. Here are seven “symptoms” of fear expressed over and over again. Any of these sound familiar?

- Sweaty palms
- Nausea
- Accelerated heart rate
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pains
- Tingling or numbness
- Anxiety or uneasiness

Most people with speech anxiety experience one or more of these symptoms. Think about a time when you experienced similar feelings. Have you ever had to make a cold call to someone? Ask someone out on a date for the first time? Explain to your boss why you think you deserve a raise? These are all situations where you may become anxious and experience some of the symptoms discussed. Everyone, even veteran speakers, experience some anxiety when speaking in front of a group of people. Let’s take a look at where some of these fears originate.

First Things First—Calming Your Anxiety

During my many years as a speaker (remember, I have been doing this since I was only five), I have witnessed every kind of speech anxiety symptom. In my seminars I always present a section on techniques for dealing with these fears. Learning to overcome these feelings is critical to becoming a more confident, successful speaker.

The best way to deal with speaking anxiety is to first acknowledge that this fear is perfectly normal and you are not alone. Most studies suggest fear of public speaking is associated with a stressful childhood or early school year experience speaking in front of others. My fears were limited mostly to being beaten up by the school bully. Most people remember a specific moment in their life when they first experienced this anxiety. It may have been during one of those “show and tell” moments in school when the entire class, especially that girl or boy you had a crush on, laughed at you. We have a tendency to forget why they laughed and just remember that they did!

Most people develop speaking phobias while in middle school. This is the time when a well-meaning teacher asked you to speak in front of your class or asked you to say something in a social setting. Yet think about it. Adolescence is one of the most difficult periods in life. As a middle school student, you were going through tremendous social, emotional, and physical changes and were very sensitive to what other people thought about you, especially your fellow classmates. Unfortunately, many people carry these turbulent feelings into adulthood; thus experiences, good or bad, are etched in your mind forever.

You see, it is this fear of failure that you find yourself dealing with at one time in your life. I remember back in middle school when my best friend, Jerry, was going to talk to the en-

tire sixth-grade class about what it is like to play drums. Jerry had made special arrangements to get into the school early so he could set up his drum set. He set up his drums quickly and was ready. When he rushed to his first-period class, he did not see his drum set. He thought someone had played a trick on him and moved it. Jerry was so nervous when he got to school, he had set up his drum set in a similar classroom on the third floor. The problem was, our classroom was on the second floor. He forgot to check which room he was really in. Needless to say, Jerry learned a good lesson. Half of a speaker's or performer's success is just showing up in the right place at the right time. Hopefully something like this has never happened to you.

Many people today who work in front of the public, such as singers, actors, and politicians, still experience, to varying degrees, these same fears. Some people call speech anxiety "stage fright." I like to think of it as "speech excitement." How you deal with it starts with what you call it. Speech excitement means positive energy.

When I survey the participants in my seminars and probe further, I find similar stories to Jerry's. You'd think I was a doctor asking about their symptoms so I can prescribe the "magic pill" to help them.

Relaxation Techniques

Let's assume that you had about ten minutes before you were scheduled to give a presentation. What can you do to help yourself relax?

Deep Breathing

One of the best exercises you can do before you speak is to practice some deep breathing techniques for about five to ten minutes. Here's how it's done:

1. Sit relaxed in your chair with your back straight and your hands dangling at your sides.
2. Let the blood flow to your fingertips and slowly inhale and exhale, taking deep breaths as you let your body relax. You can even close your eyes if you want.
3. As you breathe in, hold your breath for about three to four seconds and exhale slowly.
4. Repeat this slowly for about five minutes.

Deep breathing allows your body to take in more oxygen, which in turn acts like a natural drug to relax your muscles by forcing your body to release endorphins—chemicals in your body that act as a stimulant. This simple exercise is used by many speakers, performers, and athletes. Practice doing these exercises until you learn the proper rate and extent of deep breathing you need to relax you. Be careful not to breathe too deep, too fast, or you may find yourself getting dizzy. You do not want to hyperventilate.

Visualization

Another great technique, which you can use in conjunction with deep breathing, is “visualization.” This is a simple process.

1. Close your eyes and imagine, or “visualize,” yourself speaking.

2. Picture yourself speaking in a loud, clear, and assured voice, and imagine that the audience is fascinated by what you're saying.

Studies have shown that if you visualize yourself giving a successful presentation, you will be successful. Professional and Olympic skiers use visualization, too. Before they actually head down the slope, they visualize in their mind where the gates and turns are and virtually practice the course in their mind.

As a professional speaker, I use visualization all the time, visualizing and “navigating” the “course” of a speech before starting. I first visualize myself walking up to the stage as I am introduced and the audience applauding as I make my way to the podium. It is not unusual for me to arrive early to physically practice walking on stage so later my visualization process is more realistic. Some experts even suggest imagining your audience sitting nude. I don't know about you, but if I tried this with some of my previous audiences, I might get very distracted. The most important part of the visualization process is to think positive.

Positive Self-Talk

Positive self-talk is the process of associating a situation with positive results. Imagine people applauding you, not running away, as you walk on stage. Imagine your audience listening to every word you say, not snoring so loudly that even you can't hear yourself. The power of the mind is truly amazing, and those who have a positive outlook experience success, which in turn builds confidence.

Don't worry if you have trouble at first. These breathing and visualization techniques take some practice and become easier the more frequently you practice. Try all these tech-

niques to discover which technique or combination of techniques works best for you.

Warm-up Routines

I, as well as many other professional speakers, all have “warm-up” routines. For me, it’s arriving early and walking around the room where I will speak. As I said earlier, I walk to the podium or stage and even walk around the room where the audience will be sitting so I can get a feel for the room. Then I find a quiet location, out of sight from the audience, where I practice deep breathing exercises while visualizing the speaking environment. I also visualize people looking at me as my introduction is being given. As I start my speech, I like to smile at the audience and focus on my opening lines. I use this warm-up routine before each speaking engagement. It has the greatest positive effect on me—I not only relax, but I find I actually have more energy. Find a warm-up routine that works for you and begin using it regularly.

Quick Techniques for Handling Nervousness

You may not realize it, but a major portion of speech anxiety comes from nervousness. There are a variety of techniques you can start using immediately to help you deal with nervousness. Here are some that I teach clients during workshops. I have broken them into two categories: physical and mental.

Physical Techniques for Handling Nervousness

You can use these techniques to physically warm up your body.

1. Take a brisk walk before you speak. This will help loosen up your entire body and get your blood circulating. If you are speaking in a large hotel, as I often do, take a walk around the hotel and walk off some of this nervous energy. Just don't get lost, and keep your eye on the time.
2. Don't sit with your legs crossed. Stand up well in advance of being introduced and walk around so your legs will not cramp as they often do when you first stand.
3. Before you speak, while sitting in your seat, let your arms dangle at your sides and let the blood flow to the tips of your fingers. When the blood flow is directed away from your skin, fingers, and toes, you often feel a tingling sensation, and your skin may begin to look pale and feel cold. Sometimes people experience tingling or numbness because the blood flow travels to the larger muscles such as the thighs and biceps. Letting your hands dangle at your sides helps reestablish blood flow to your hands and fingertips. During this process you will start to feel better and more relaxed. You may need to stand up and walk around to get the blood flowing to your legs for the same reason.
4. Also while sitting, turn your wrists and shake your fingers to force the blood to flow to your hands and fingers.
5. Wriggle your jaw back and forth gently to help loosen up your facial muscles.
6. Scrunch your toes, but be careful not to scrunch so tightly that you get a cramp.
7. Yawn (politely, of course).
8. Use deep breathing exercises.

Mental Techniques for Handling Nervousness

Here are several mental techniques you can include as part of your warm-up routine.

1. Prepare and rehearse. This is the single most important thing you can do.
2. Think “success” using the visualization techniques.
3. Be natural but enthusiastic.
4. Visualize the audience applauding you when you are done.
5. Think conversational, and include some personal stories during your talk.
6. Focus on your message and *not* on your nervousness.

Top Ten List: Tips to Help You Overcome Speaking Anxiety

To help you get started on the right track, here’s a roundup of specific tips to help you better deal with any speaking anxiety.

1. **Get ready.** Preparation is key to any speech. I like to think of it as the nine *P*’s.
**Prior Proper Preparation
Prevents Poor Performance
Of the Person Putting on the Presentation**
2. **Think on the bright side.** Although you may think the audience will rise up and laugh at you in unison, this never happens. Use all your newly learned techniques to conquer your first and future speeches.

3. **Be aware of your speaking environment.** Arrive early and walk around the room. Stand in the location where you will give the speech, and sit in an audience seat, too.
4. **Know your listeners.** Greet audience members and chat with them. It is easier to speak to a group of friends than to a group of strangers. Arriving early provides you with the opportunity to meet people.
5. **Warm up.** You can ease some of your tension by practicing your warm-up routine.
6. **Realize people want you to succeed.** All audiences want speakers to be interesting, stimulating, informative, and entertaining. They want you to succeed, not fail.
7. **Don't apologize for being nervous.** Most of the time your nervousness will not show at all. If you don't refer to it, nobody will notice. If you mention your nervousness or apologize for any kinks you believe you have in your speech, you will only be calling attention to yourself.
8. **Concentrate on your message.** Your nervous feelings dissipate when you focus your attention away from your anxieties and concentrate on your message and your audience, not yourself.
9. **Control jitters constructively.** The same nervous energy that causes stage fright can also be an asset if you let it. Force your body to move by walking as you speak. Use your arms and hands to gesture with vitality and enthusiasm.
10. **Gain experience.** Experience builds confidence. The more you speak, the more your confidence helps dispel your anxiety. Most speakers find their anxiety decreases more after each speech.

Your Own Natural Speaking Style

Most novice speakers look at professional speakers and think to themselves, I can never speak like them. You might be tempted to copy someone else, but don't. Just be yourself, but do learn to be enthusiastic. Each speaker has his or her own way of presenting just as everyone has his or her own writing style. It's perfectly okay to study the various styles of great speakers, but also determine what you like about the way they speak and how that relates to your own style. Certain mannerisms might be very charismatic in another speaker but come across as forced or fake when you try them yourself. Trust your own judgment about what feels right.

For some reason, people feel they need to use a different voice when giving a speech. Nothing could be further from the truth. The voice that communicates the best for you in all speaking situations is your own natural conversational style, but at its most upbeat and enthusiastic. This is true whether you are speaking to a small group or a room full of hundreds of people. Okay, let's give this a try with a very short, informal kind of public speaking—introducing yourself.

Your First Speech: “Introducing Yourself”

Your first assignment is to deliver a short speech about yourself. It does not have to be very long. Since you are talking about yourself, there's no research involved. (See, that's easy.) What you do need is a game plan:

1. Think about “what” you are going to talk about—this is your content.
2. Decide in what order you will discuss items—this is your outline.

3. Begin by thinking about it as a conversation and not a speech.
4. Keep it short and sweet.

To help you get started, I have provided a short example—a brief synopsis about myself. After all, you will be my audience for the next ten days, so why not get to know a little more about me? Use this as an example and the following general outline to develop your own introduction.

1. Start off with your name.
2. Discuss where you are from.
3. Talk a little about yourself. You might include something about your work, family, interests, hobbies, or even the goals you would like to accomplish after completing this book. Tell a few funny anecdotes that help define “you,” if you like—and let your own sense of humor come out.

Sample Speech: Let Me Introduce Myself

Good morning. My name is Lenny Laskowski. I’m here today to tell you about my wife and kids. I live in Connecticut and have been married for twenty-five years to my wife, Joan. I have a son, Michael, twenty-one, and a daughter, Kelly, eighteen. My wife is a learning disabilities teacher who was, I’m proud to say, the 1996 National Learning Disabilities Teacher of the Year.

My son is a senior in college, majoring in business finance. Michael has always been a good, hardworking student. He also keeps himself in great shape by working out daily. He makes me feel guilty. Michael knows more about health, taking care of your body, and how to keep fit than anyone else I know, and he is my own personal fitness trainer. But I think his biceps

will always be bigger than mine. Michael plays on his college rugby team (ouch!) and truly loves his dog, Riley, a rottweiler, who we think might actually make the Olympic Frisbee team.

My daughter, Kelly, started college this year and is majoring in business and political science. Kelly has been a dancer since the age of two. Her mother and I are thinking of starting a Web site to sell all her old costumes. She is a member of the USA tap team and is a two-time world champion in tap dancing! I myself would fall flat on my face if I attempted to do such a thing. She must have gotten her talent from her maternal grandmother, who was a real pistol on the dance floor back in the twenties. We watched Kelly at her most recent performance at the America's Junior Miss competition. I will always remember what Kelly said to my wife and me after the competition: "Although I did not win any of the national college scholarships, I still came back wealthy." Kelly made friends from all over the United States and keeps in contact with them by e-mail.

As you can probably tell, I am happily married and am very proud of both my kids.

Tip of the Day

To practice developing content for informal speeches or for adding a personal touch to any speech, get out a notebook and label the top of each page with a separate category. For each one, jot down anecdotes, funny thoughts, little stories, and ideas. Many of the people I coach have told me the hardest thing for them to do is to come up with topics to speak about and icebreakers to start speeches. Here are some categories to get you started:

- Self. It's okay to be self-centered in speeches about yourself. You might include some subcategories such as travel stories, funny things that have happened to you, childhood anecdotes, things you do well, and things you love to do.
- Family. You never know, your audience may enjoy hearing how your husband took your daughter to get her license and got pulled over for speeding, causing her to miss her driving exam.
- Friends. The fact that your best friend plays the piano with her toes can really lighten up a speech.
- Neighbors. You may have a Kramer living next door whom you can use for entertainment in your speeches.

Here are a few more categories you can use:

- Work
- Hobbies and sports/interests
- Kids

Breathe a sigh of relief, you made it through Day 1. See, that wasn't so hard! In Day 2 I provide you with a road map for organizing your presentations. I give more than 120 programs a year, so trust me, I have to be organized. In addition, I offer ideas and secret tricks to spice up your speeches and give them more impact.