

NARRATOR: This is the public speaker, quick and dirty tips for improving your communication skills with your host Lisa B. Marshall

LISA MARSHALL: The brain is a wonderful thing. It never stops working from the moment you're born until the moment you stand up to give a speech. I wish I could take credit for that. But actually, it's from Robert Frost. Coming up in the first of a two part episode, you'll learn proven in practical techniques to overcome speaker's anxiety.

Very recently I got an email from Lisa B. Marshall. I didn't send an email to myself. This was another Lisa B. Marshall. Since we shared the same name, she was curious to learn about my life and my middle initial. I told her about my work, and of course, about this podcast. Surprisingly, she listened to the podcast, and then she wrote again with a question. Here's what she wrote.

I remember the day my boss first told me. I had to facilitate a meeting. I panicked even though it was a month away. I had flashbacks of high school, the day I had to deliver a mandatory 10 minute speech for honors English. I remember my name being called, walking up the aisle between a desk to the front of the classroom, tripping on somebody's schoolbag, and falling on my face in front of the entire class. I remembered the eruption of laughter, my heart pounding, my face burning. The teacher asked if I was OK and said go ahead and give your speech. I wanted to run out of the room. It was the longest 10 minutes of my life.

What I didn't know at the time was how that experience was going to be part of my conditioning for the rest of my life. And that fateful day, my boss dropped the bombshell, it was like that day all over again. I was so wrapped up in my fear I couldn't function. I went to my doctor, and he prescribed Valium. He said to take one the evening before and one the morning of the presentation. I thought to myself, do I really want to be tranquilized on Valium at my job in front of my peers? Would this really help? I decided not to take them. I just forced all the fear and negative thoughts out of my head. I refused to listen to that little voice in my head that kept saying, you're going to make a fool of yourself. I knew when doing this I was psyching myself out. I just pasted a smile on my face that morning and faked my way through the presentation, like it was an acting job. And it turned out OK. But I still feel extremely uneasy when I have to talk in front of a group. Have you ever thought about doing a podcast about fear, the inner voice, and calming nerves?

How to overcome speaker's anxiety is probably the single most common question that I get. In fact, I was ready to do a show on this because my inbox was full of questions just like yours. In some of the emails, the fear of speaking publicly is debilitating. People avoid making presentations, attending meetings, or even going to dinner parties. Other mention physical responses-- turning red, a shaky voice, feeling sick. For others, it's just a mild sensation of nervous energy-- a dry mouth or maybe a faster pulse. In my experience, it's rare for someone not to feel some nervous energy.

So the first and perhaps most important tip from today's podcast is to recognize that almost everyone when presenting themselves publicly experience some anxiety or nervous energy. It's normal. Even me. I've been a professional speaker for over 15 years. And still, there are occasions that I get extremely nervous. About six months ago, I was asked to deliver a talk at Johns Hopkins Hospital to a group of senior physicians. It was in one of those large and intimidating surgical theater halls like you see in that famous Eakins painting, *The Gross Clinic*. In the months leading up to the talk, my heart would race just thinking about it.

Some researchers think this response, fight or flight, dates back to our prehistoric days. None of us wants to be separated from our tribe, singled out, standing alone to be potentially attacked by a Bengal tiger. Of course, today, it's not a tiger that's the problem.

Speaking in front of others involves risk, the risk of making a mistake, the risk of not knowing something, the risk of being judged, the risk of appearing stupid. Whether we're about to be attacked by a tiger or about to deliver a speech, the brain perceives physical or psychological stress. Instantly, it starts pumping chemicals through your body. Your heart beats faster. Your blood pressure increases. Your senses sharpen. Having this response is a good thing. Extra nervous energy helps us. Research suggests it can help you perform tasks more efficiently and can improve memory. Good stress is something we want. Good stress stimulates us. For me, it's exactly that anxiety that pushes me. I want to be sure that I don't look stupid, so I spend extra time preparing and practicing.

So my second tip today is welcome and embrace nervous energy. Don't fight it. Use the energy to show your passion. Use the energy for a stronger voice and varied inflection. Use the energy to move around the room. Use the energy to encourage interaction. Here's the secret. Great speaking performance requires nervous energy. I've been teaching this long enough to know that most people need tools to help them ratchet down anxiety. And in part

two, we'll cover several techniques that can help you convert negative nervous energy into positive energy.

Today, I'd like to share the single most effective way to reduce speaker's anxiety. Nope, it's not imagining your audience in their underwear. That's just dumb. It's not deep breathing. And it's not practice, which is what most people think. Turns out, the best way to reduce speaker's anxiety is to receive coaching from a communication professional. It's like when my father taught me how to ride a bicycle. He told me what I was doing right. He told me exactly what I needed to do differently. He provided motivation and encouragement that helped me to overcome my fear of falling. A good communication coach can do the same thing when it comes to the fear of speaking publicly.

So if presenting yourself publicly as something that causes you anxiety, it's very important to keep in mind it's normal. It's expected. Everyone feels it, and it doesn't have to have a negative impact. It can be positive. But if this is something you really struggle with, consider taking a class or hiring a private coach. But please wait until next week after you've listened to part two. I promise to tell you about more proven and effective techniques that you can use to overcome speaker's anxiety.

This is Lisa B. Marshall, passionate about communication. Your success is my business.

Again, I want to say thanks for the flood of networking invitations I received this week. If you haven't connected yet, you can find me in all the usual places-- LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and of course plain old email. Really, take me up on my offer. I'd love to connect.

And thanks for the new iTunes reviews this week. I sincerely appreciate the effort and great reviews help to keep the show free. Have you been enjoying The Public Speaker, and you haven't left the review yet? You can show your support by writing a five star iTunes review. Thanks, it really helps.

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NARRATOR:

If you have questions about how to communicate better at work, leave a voicemail at 206-350-7970. Or email publicspeaker@quickanddirtytips.com. Sign up for Lisa's newsletter or get information about speeches and workshops by visiting lisabmarshall.com You can find a transcript of this show and links to connect with Lisa at publicspeaker.quickanddirtytips.com.

LISA MARSHALL: Hey, if you're still listening, I've got a question for you. What do you do to reduce your speaker's anxiety? Send me your response to publicspeaker@quickanddirtytips.com. Thanks.