

## Change your mind

There are several ways to manage speech anxiety. The most promising cognitive approach I've found is described by Michael T. Motley at the University of California, Davis, in his handbook, *Overcoming Your Fear of Public Speaking*. According to Motley, the most helpful concept in reducing this type of fear is to focus on your talk as a communication task rather than as a performance.

I've interviewed several excellent speakers and all of them described their delivery on stage as a performance. However, that may not be a useful perspective to hold in mind if you find yourself overwhelmed by speech anxiety. Motley has found that most speakers that experience stage fright view speeches as performances. Conversely, low-anxiety speakers view public speaking as a communication encounter.

### Role of speaker

- share ideas
- relate point of view
- make information easily understood

The role of speakers is to share ideas, relate their points of view, and make it easy for the audience to understand their information. Of course, there are many performance techniques that may enhance the delivery of that information, but those techniques are merely useful tools rather

than the substance of a talk. If you approach public speaking from a *performance orientation* there are many aspects of true performance that tweak the anxiety knob higher; those aspects don't even come into play if you can hold a *communication orientation*.

### True performance

- plays
- musical recitals
- dance routines

True performance brings to mind plays, musical recitals, and dance routines. These normally involve the memorization and delivery of a large chunk of material without any breaks, goals oriented towards receiving a positive evaluation of your performance skills, and not being

natural – playing a role and even wearing an uncomfortable costume you wouldn't normally be caught dead in. Performances generally suggest abnormal, unnatural situations. There can be considerable fear of tripping over yourself, forgetting your lines, and looking foolish.

### Performance tasks

- memorization
- delivery - no breaks
- goal - positive evaluation of performance
- contrived behaviour "acting"
- costumes
- sets

Seen as a communication task, a talk can be more closely associated with daily, relaxed, natural conversation than with a performance. I never memorize my lines in preparation for a conversation – unless it's with my ex-husband! If a talk is memorized it will sound stiff and unnatural. In a conversation there are pauses where you

can collect your thoughts. In a talk, even though you don't have a conversation partner providing pauses, you can build in pauses by dividing your material into nice bite-sized sections. By anticipating a pause, you can more easily make it to the end of each short section. Pause, breathe, move, take a break, and carry on.

### Communication tasks

- talk - conversation
- no memorization
- breaks
- goal - communication of information
- speak naturally - relax
- dress comfortably

Motley says there are only two primary differences between giving a talk and having a conversation. First, you get to talk longer before your "turn" is up, and, second, you get to take more time planning, organizing, and clarifying your thoughts before you speak. When giving a talk, as in a conversation, you can be relaxed,

natural, and comfortably attired. Even though you can enjoy the comfortable feeling of having a conversation while you're using the *communication orientation*, you don't have to apply any brain cells to deciphering anyone else's point of view – at least until your designated question period that is!

If you're comfortable performing – great! Perform. If you're not comfortable then remember, it's the content your audience wants, not a performance.

## Narcolepsy Caution

walk through the poppies

There is one caution to having a *communication orientation* rather than a *performance orientation*. If you're a boring, unanimated, monotone conversationalist, don't expect your talk, no matter how natural, to keep anyone awake. But there's no reason you need to be boring. If you have passion for your ideas – let it show! Just communicate your thoughts with the same excitement that fueled your enthusiasm for giving the paper in the first place.

*Be Passionate*



There are proven performance techniques that you can use to enhance your material and to make your delivery interesting and alive. This will be a lot easier if your anxiety isn't overwhelming you.

Change your mind

Performance —→ Communication

Changing your mind from a *performance orientation* to a *communication orientation* could help.