



iSpeak University

Module 1 of 12: Overcoming Fear

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Art Linkletter once said it's okay to have butterflies in your stomach before you speak in public, we just want them flying in formation. A lot of people experience fear or anxiety before they stand up to speak in public. In fact, the number one fear in America is snakes. Actually the number two fear in America is speaking in public. You know every time that study is done they find that speaking in public always shows up ahead of death. So you may have heard the joke before that most people would rather be in the coffin than delivering the eulogy at a funeral.

Now I've been speaking for about twenty years and I still have students ask me Russ do you still get butterflies in your stomach before you speak. Yes, I do. I will say that they are flying in formation. But I want you to question whether or not you feel anything on the inside, because if you don't feel anything, then I would actually question whether or not you truly care. You see if you feel something on the inside, it means you care. You care enough to want to give the audience something that they will be able to use.

So do I still feel anything on the inside, yes, I do. I would actually argue that if someone were to say Russ, do you feel anything? And if my answer is no, I don't, I don't feel anything on the inside. Well, I'm from Texas and I'd probably use a phrase from Texas, which is, it's time for me to hang up my spurs. In other words, I'm done. If you don't care, then you really shouldn't be speaking up there.



Now when we talk about what you feel on the inside, do you want to know what that is? Literally, do you want to know what it is? It's energy. Now I'm not going to get all feng shui on you here or tai chi, but what is it, it is energy. If you think back to biology, if you took a biology class, and if you think about a phrase you may have heard there called fight or flight. Fight or flight. Now what happens is when you are put into a situation where you fear for your life, you will actually fight or flight. Either way, something happens on the inside where the adrenaline starts pumping, endorphins start firing, your heartbeat will actually increase, it increases the blood flow to every part of your body, and your muscles are getting ready for action. Now when you speak in front of the public, I certainly hope you aren't fearing for your life. But it's a very similar effect that will take place. So when you feel something on the inside, it is energy.

So what should you do with it? You need to use it. Those people who don't use the energy that's building up on the inside, you will actually see those people, I call it inflate. In other words, they'll get in front of the group and you'll see them taking short breaths and it's almost like they're filling up like a balloon and they look extremely nervous. When you feel something on the inside and you have that extra energy, then you need to use it.

So what are some tips? What can I do to help get my butterflies in alignment? I'm going to give you six things that you can use right here. I'm going to start with the top three. These are the most important, the top three.

The first one is, you got to know your stuff. You need to be a subject matter expert with what you're speaking on. Now some people raise their hand right there and they say well that's just it Russ, that's why I get all the fear because I know that I need to be a subject matter expert, and guess what? I know I'm also not the smartest person in the room. I know who's going to be there and I know that they know more about this than me or they have more experience than me, that's where my fear is coming from. Let me say this, and I want you to hear it, I'm going to say it twice. Speaking is not a smart contest. I'm going to say it again, speaking is not a smart contest. If you feel something on the inside because you think someone out there knows more than you, if speaking were truly a smart contest, and we always wanted to have the smartest person up there speaking, then wouldn't we do this, every time you walked into a presentation, we'd hand out the scantrons. We hand out the test, everyone would take the test, we'd score them and say, ahh, looks like Gary, you're the smartest one of this topic today, so you're going to come up and speak to us today. That sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? It's because it is. You need to know your subject, but you do not need to be the smartest person in the room to speak on the topic. You've been asked to speak for a reason. Speaking is not a smart contest. But you need to know your stuff.

Second, you need to prepare for tough questions, especially when you know you are going to have some subject matter experts in the audience. Prepare for the tough questions and then prepare the answers. I don't want you to just write down the questions like whew those are some tough ones, let's hope they don't ask those, and put them away. You can't do that, you've got to prepare the tough questions, prepare the answers to those questions.

The third critical piece is rehearse. You must take time to rehearse. There are several steps for doing that. In one of our other modules we go through all of those steps as to how you rehearse. Let me just say this for right now. It's more than just running over the topics in your mind to say yeah I'll say this and then I'll say that and yeah okay I'm good.



Now a few other tips that you can use. Next, walk around, just walk around. Why? Remember what I said this is? It's energy; you literally have energy building up inside you. If you have the energy building up inside you, then I want you to release some of it. When I would give presentations, in let's say a downtown building, we'd go up to the 20th floor and we'd go into the conference room. Before it was time to speak, I would often times ask is there a washroom or bathroom? Yes, it's down the hall to the left. Thank you, I'll be right back. I'd go down the hall to the left, washing my hands in the mirror, I come back out, now I know that the conference room is back to the right. Downtown buildings are often times set up in a large ring. So what would I do? I'd take a left and I'd walk the entire floor, all the way back around to the conference room. Why would I do that? If I have extra energy building up inside me, one way to release some of that is to take a walk. I'm sure they don't want you jogging around the floor, so let's not do that. But taking a walk can help release some of that energy. So if you feel like you got too much, then you can walk around.

Next, three deep breaths. Three deep breaths. I said this in a class one time, I said you take three deep breaths, in through the nose, hold it for just a second or two and then release it. A woman raised her hand and she goes, we do that in yoga. I said well I don't do yoga, but I believe you. And I said why do you do that in yoga? She said well it's for calming ourselves, it's for centering, it's for meditation. Guess what? That's why speakers do it too. When you have the opportunity to take three deep breaths, do that before, before you take the stage, I don't want anyone walking out on stage and going, whew, whew, whew, psssst, let's not do that! Let's not do that. But three deep breaths before you take the stage.

And finally the last tip for you, have a drink. Now we used to say that and people go what? Now we're not talking about that type of a drink. I want you to think about this. Whether you like soup or not, when you're not feeling well, it's kind of chilly outside, and someone fixes you a bowl of soup, how does that make you feel right in here? Nice and calm, right? Feed the butterflies. Now I'm not saying have a big bowl of chunky soup before you get up to speak, but having a cup of tea or having some warm water with lemon and a little bit of honey in it, can help calm you before you get up to speak.

So one last option, let me just remind you that when you stand up to speak, the audience is your cheering section. They want you to win. Nobody goes to a presentation saying well I hope this guy is horrible. They don't do that. They don't want to see a horrible presentation; they want to see a great presentation. They're cheering for you, their rooting for you, they're on your team. They want you to win. Stop fearing the audience, and embrace them as your cheering section.

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