

Taming Adrenaline

 SEMINAR WORKBOOK



Taming Adrenaline:

Surefire Strategies for Overcoming Speaking Anxiety

Seminar Overview

In this seminar, we'll take an in-depth look at the phenomenon of speaking anxiety.

- What causes it
- How to minimize it in the moment
- How to prevent it in the future

We'll address these solutions:

On-the-spot remedies

- Control your mind-set: Understanding the experience goes a long way toward bringing it under control.
- Control your body: Four physical things you can do in the moment are scientifically proven to lower your adrenaline level.

Short-term strategies

- Know the “tells” of nervousness: Just because it's natural to feel nervous doesn't mean you can't counteract the reaction.
- Prepare your inner mojo: What you do in the few hours before your moment in the spotlight can set the tone for success or failure.

Long-term strategies

- Train for the conditions: Gain experience managing adrenaline effectively in low-risk situations to prepare yourself for the high-stakes conversations.
- Develop a superior skill set: The most reliable strategy for taming adrenaline is to master your speaking skills.

What triggers speaking anxiety?

The exact situation that triggers your adrenaline rush might be unique to you, but that you feel nervousness when you are on the spot is not unique.

- Nearly everyone suffers from speaking anxiety in one situation or another.
- The majority of nervous symptoms aren't visible from the outside.
- Since it's difficult to tell when others are nervous, we think we are unique.

Why do we experience speaking anxiety?

Your primitive, limbic brain perceives the situation as a threat, and in an attempt to protect you, it releases adrenaline to prepare your body to either fight or flee.

- In the animal world, being singled out is dangerous.
- Being “stared at” is reminiscent of being hunted by a predator.

On-the-Spot Remedies

The fight-or-flight response

To prepare your body to defeat or escape the perceived danger, blood and oxygen flood to your extremities, and all nonessential body functions stop, causing the following symptoms:

- Butterflies in the stomach
- Dry mouth
- Increased heart rate
- Rapid breathing
- Flushing
- Increased perspiration
- Tense and/or shaking muscles

Break the adrenaline cycle

Most of us find the adrenaline response to be threatening unto itself, which creates a devastating vicious cycle. We no longer fear the audience; we fear the lack of control we feel in our bodies. To break the cycle, you must take control of your mind-set.

- Mind shift 1: Nervousness has nothing to do with your competency.
- Mind shift 2: Nervousness isn't inherently negative.
- Mind shift 3: Nervousness isn't as visible as you think.

Your limbic brain doesn't respond very well to rational thought; it responds to physical stimulus. Following are four physical things you can do that are proven to lower the adrenaline in your system.

Take up space

Taking on a strong, high-status posture increases testosterone (the power hormone) and decreases cortisol (the stress hormone). Taking on a small, low-status posture does the opposite.

Strong posture includes:

- a tall, firm spine
- a level head
- weight balanced equally over both feet (if standing)
- shoulders held level (if sitting)
- arms moving freely in the space in front of you

Breathe

When the fight-or-flight response hits, your breathing is affected in these ways:

- Your abdominal muscles tighten to protect your vital organs.
- You shift from abdominal breathing to thoracic or rib-cage breathing.
- Your breath becomes more rapid and more shallow.

You must shift the pattern back into abdominal breathing (relaxed breathing) by intentionally releasing your abdominal muscles and taking long, slow inhalations.

Focus your eyes

When perceiving a threat, your limbic brain instructs you to dart your eyes around. When danger is present, you need to be continually monitoring perils and escape options!

To counteract this tendency:

- Keep your eyes up (horizon level)
- Focus on the action in front of you, not on the periphery
- When speaking, hold eye contact for three to five seconds with each person

Pause

When adrenaline hits, we tend to speed up. However, just as we can decrease nervous symptoms by taking up more physical space, it helps to take up temporal space. The easiest way to take control over time is to pause.

Research shows that people who pause often are viewed as

- better prepared
- more intelligent
- more authoritative
- easier to understand

Learn the “Two-Snap Pause” technique that is demonstrated in the video and use it any time you feel you are rushing.

Avoid the “tells” of nervousness

While it’s true that most symptoms of nervousness aren’t visible from the outside, the “tells” of nervousness are not only visible, but they are also predictable.

Common “tells” of nervousness include these:

- Small posture (feet close together, arms tight to the body)
- Asymmetry (chin dipped, shoulder raised, weight off balance)
- Hands locked down (in pockets, behind the back, in front clasped tight)
- Self-touch (hand rubbing, fingers playing with rings/clothes/hair)
- Eyes and nose not aligned
- Tail wagging (see “The tend-and-befriend response”)

The tend-and-befriend response

When you put a cluster of the nervous signals together, you get what is called “tail wagging.” This behavior is driven by oxytocin—the relationship hormone—and it’s an attempt to make friends with the audience by appearing nonthreatening or submissive.

Correct all of the “tells” above with

- strong posture
- strong voice
- strong eye contact

Short-Term Strategies

In the hours before a potentially nerve-racking event, if you begin to feel the adrenaline bubble up, be sure to use the tactics we've covered already—take up space, breathe, keep your eyes up, and, especially, take your time. Additionally . . .

Remind yourself:

- You are a part of the event because you contribute something valuable.
- Your audience wants you to do well.

Visualize:

- Picture an audience full of friends
- Imagine yourself doing your best

Repeat a mantra:

- I'm in a fantastic mood!
- I'm so excited to be doing this!
- I'm gonna knock it out of the park!

Rally some endorphins:

- Exercise
- Play music
- Dance around
- Chat with a good friend
- Recall some favorite memories
- Negotiate yourself into a celebratory mood

Long-Term Strategies

Train for the conditions

Since it is not your talent but, rather, your ability to manage adrenaline under pressure that is likely to dictate your performance, intentionally putting yourself into adrenaline-inducing situations will help you practice bringing it under control.

Complete the BOSS Checklist

Building on small successes is the heart of the program. The checklist guides you through a series of progressively more difficult communication tasks to help you actively court adrenaline. Some suggestions and tips about the checklist:

- Reorder your list according to what scares you most
- Do something every day
- Complete every task on the list—even the easy ones
- Accept that it may take several months to complete the list

Be intentionally effective

For every item on the checklist:

- choose the task
- anticipate it
- do it
- celebrate it!

Master your skill set

The best long-term strategy for managing nervousness is to develop superior speaking skills.

- Belief in your skill set creates the most authentic form of confidence.
- Mastery takes practice, not talent.

The Credibility Code

The Credibility Code: How to Project Confidence and Competence When It Matters Most defines the behaviors—the explicit codes of conduct—for projecting credibility and confidence in face-to-face interactions. It covers:

- the basics—strong posture, strong voice, strong eye contact
- unconscious behaviors that may lower your status
- how to create a connection and elicit a response
- how to find a balance between authority and approachability

Putting it all together

You now have a better understanding of why you get nervous and what you can do about it. If you do your homework, speaking anxiety no longer has to be a barrier for you; you can feel confident saying “Yes” to opportunities in front of you. Good luck!

Resources

SpeechSkills Workshops

For an expert assessment of your strengths and areas for improvement, our small-group workshops provide individualized feedback and on-camera coaching.

The Credibility Code Online Training Library

Our library of more than 25 video lessons provides detailed demonstrations, skill drills, and practice ideas for every key concept in *The Credibility Code*.

SpeechSkills SoundBites cards

This creative pack of 360 speaking prompts gives you a practice session in a box. Designed to combine fun with skill building, SoundBites allow you to test your skills with a variety of communication tasks from storytelling, to giving difficult feedback, to simplifying a complex idea. Go to speechskills.com/free for a free sampler pack.

For more information, go to speechskills.com.

Building On Small Successes (BOSS) Checklist

One of the best ways to develop your confidence is through “a series of small wins.” When it comes to your communication skills, the BOSS Checklist offers you a set of incrementally more difficult tasks to help you create a history of success.

All of the drills presented in this checklist will require you to talk to or interact with other people, starting with simple one-on-one scenarios and moving progressively toward formal presentations. The checklist is ranked from easiest to hardest according to what typically triggers speaking anxiety. However, every person is different, so feel free to reorder the list according to your personal triggers.

Be deliberate about completing every item on the checklist, even the “easy” tasks. Since the goal is to gain experience managing your adrenaline responses, by all means start with those tasks that will assure a positive outcome.

Remember: It’s often the planning and anticipation of a communication task that creates the anxiety—even with normally relaxed interactions. For example, very few of us have trouble spontaneously asking a question, but sitting in your chair *planning* to ask a question can cause your adrenaline to rise.

To this end, you may only check off a specific communication task if you do it intentionally. Realizing in retrospect that you completed a task is not at all the same thing as planning and completing the task *on purpose*.

Every item on the checklist has several steps: Choose the task, anticipate it, and be present while doing it. When it’s over, there’s one final step: celebrate it! You might even do a little happy dance in your head. Acknowledging the win is what reinforces your confidence in the future.

Building On Small Successes (BOSS) Checklist

ASK A QUESTION

- Ask a question of a librarian, a hotel concierge, a museum docent, or a person at an information desk.
- Ask questions of people in authority, especially if they look intimidating. Approach and ask for information from the security guard at the airport, a police officer at the mall, or a stuffy maître d'.
- Ask a question from the audience at back-to-school night, on a walking tour, or at an art lecture.
- Ask a question of someone you respect (or someone who intimidates you) such as a senior partner or top executive at your company. Raise the bar by also giving this person some feedback—either a compliment or a constructive comment.
- Ask a question or make a comment at a public meeting or other large gathering—a school board meeting, a public policy session, or a town hall lecture. This type of environment should be big enough that the audience is required to speak into a microphone.

ASK FOR SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

- Ask for special treatment at a restaurant. (Some ideas include: ask for a different table, check with the bartender about turning down the TV volume, ask the hostess to adjust the room's lighting or temperature, request a unique preparation of your meal.)
- Return something without apology. (Some ideas include: return an item to a retail store; ask for something to be taken off your bill at a restaurant if it wasn't up to par; try a new item at the grocery store and return it if you don't like it.) You should be pleasant but resist the urge to apologize.
- Ask for a discount. Think of a reason that you should get a discount on something you are purchasing and ask for it. (Some ideas include: being a local customer or an out-of-town visitor, buying more than one, being a first-time buyer, remaining a loyal customer, mentioning that it's your birthday month. You might also simply ask if the company or store is offering any specials or coupons you don't know about.)
- Ask your boss, teacher, or manager for a simple accommodation. (Some ideas include: ask to leave an hour early, change your schedule, purchase a unique office supply, defer a deadline, work from home for the day, or swap one task for another.)
- Contact someone who is an established expert and ask to have a conversation over the phone or over lunch. This should be someone you don't know personally but admire, such as an author, a professor, an artist, or other thought leader.

Building On Small Successes (BOSS) Checklist

DEVELOP YOUR SKILLS IN ANONYMOUS SITUATIONS

- Make phone inquiries to get more information on a product or service. Ask lots of questions. If possible, record your end of the conversation and listen to yourself afterward.
- Go on a time-share or new condo tour or visit several open houses. Ask lots of questions but resist the urge to apologize for not buying.
- Go to a craft fair, farmer's market, convention, home show, or festival and start conversations with as many vendors as possible.
- Work a booth at a convention or pass out flyers at a mall or festival to experience the environment from the vendor's point of view. Greet and make eye contact with everyone who passes by. Be willing to handle their rejection or avoidance.
- Go to a networking meeting outside of your field to practice introducing yourself with confidence. Practice leading the conversation—jump in, introduce others to each other, and intentionally add new topics to the conversation.
- Take a one-day seminar through a university continuing education program and choose to be a vocal, engaged student.
- Go on a cruise or vacation and practice being a dynamic, magnetic personality. Allow yourself to be a social butterfly; make it your job to assure that everyone else feels good about themselves.

PRACTICE IN LOW-RISK ENVIRONMENTS

- Set up a video camera in your living room or spare meeting room and capture a sample of yourself answering impromptu questions or delivering a prepared business message. Even if no one is present, you'll learn a lot about your personal speaking style. (You can raise the stakes by sharing the video with others to get their feedback.)
- Talk to yourself while driving, showering, cooking, and/or walking the dog. Use these moments to perfect your professional elevator pitch or to practice speaking without filler words.
- Play board games (Charades, Balderdash, Guesstures, Apples to Apples, Taboo) with friends while focusing on your speaking skills.

Building On Small Successes (BOSS) Checklist

PRACTICE IN LOW-RISK ENVIRONMENTS *continued*

- Read to your kids. Practice being a dynamic storyteller. Take your performance up a notch or two from your usual style.
- Focus on your communication skills while enjoying a meal with friends, coworkers, or family members. Work on holding eye contact, speaking with optimal volume, and listening actively.
- Join a Speaking Circle or Lean In Circle and be sure to contribute something at every meeting.
- Sign up to receive our *SpeechSkills SoundBites* daily impromptu questions via email. Or buy the boxed set and practice at your leisure. Create the discipline of doing one communication drill a day, even if it's only for two to three minutes.
- Create your own practice group at your work place. (Use *Lifestories*, *TableTopics*, *Chat Pack*, or *SpeechSkills SoundBites* cards for impromptu questions.)

PRACTICE IN REAL-WORLD ENVIRONMENTS

- Volunteer to be the information desk person or greeter at a school fund-raiser, professional organization, or charity event.
- Speak up at meetings. Make it a matter of discipline to contribute a question or comment at every meeting. Do some homework if necessary to be prepared with a contribution.
- Start a round of "Happy Birthday" at a restaurant even if no one in your party is having a birthday. Try to encourage other patrons to join in.
- Give a toast. This can be as simple as at the family dinner table or at a public venue like a restaurant birthday party, wedding, retirement dinner, or other celebration you might attend next.
- Be the one to suggest that people introduce themselves at the top of a meeting, back-to-school night, neighborhood association gathering, networking breakfast, or other event that finds you interacting with strangers.
- Invite someone you've never socialized with before to join you for coffee or to accompany you to an event. This can be a brand new colleague or an attractive acquaintance you've always wanted to spend more time with.

Building On Small Successes (BOSS) Checklist

SIGN YOURSELF UP TO BE IN THE SPOTLIGHT

- Join a volunteer program to read to kids at schools, community centers, or bookstores.
- Volunteer to make announcements at your work, religious organization, gymnasium, dance class, school, community theater, networking meeting, or any other group gathering.
- Sign up to be a teaching assistant for a continuing studies class in your field. Be sure that your duties include making announcements or giving instructions on the teacher's behalf.
- Teach a class or be a guest lecturer for another instructor at your local college or community center.
- Take an improvisation or singing class. Look for one that includes a recital or performance at the end of the session.
- Join Toastmasters International and go through the organization's ten-speech *Competent Communication* program.
- Offer to give a short talk about your hobby or area of expertise. Venues for your talk might include your child's school, a networking breakfast, a charity event, a retirement home, an open enrollment Learning Annex, or a youth support center.
- Schedule yourself to give a presentation or project update at work. Try to choose an opportunity for which you will need to stand at the front of the room.
- Sign up to be the emcee or host of a talent show, Halloween costume contest, business rally, award program, or fund-raiser.
- Create a keynote address in your area of expertise and volunteer to deliver it at a conference or large group gathering of your peers.

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