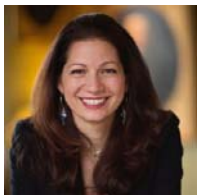


THE ART AND SCIENCE OF **COMMUNICATION** AND WHY THE DETAILS MATTER

Day 1: Overcoming Fear when communicating to 1 person up to 1,000 people

Welcome to CVWD's first Communication Challenge. The fear of "public speaking" is a very "real" issue for a lot of us. Everyone I know, including myself, feels some level of anxiousness when we have to speak in front of others. It is perfectly normal to feel this way. Admittedly, some of us struggle in this area (more than others) for different reasons. Fortunately, public speaking is a skill that can be learned and a "fear" that can be overcome. To kick off Day 1, we have assembled some amazing mentors on this topic; people who are well-respected and knowledgeable on changing our mindset and providing practical steps to get us through some mental (and sometimes emotional) barriers. **This challenge consists of 3 powerful articles and 1 insightful video...let our 2021 Communication Challenge Begin!**

Today's Mentors:



Allison Shapira founded Global Public Speaking LLC and has grown the company from a solo business to a global team, with clients ranging from Bank of America to Belvedere Vodka. She works with emerging and established leaders to help them speak clearly, concisely, and confidently. She teaches The Arts of Communication at the Harvard Kennedy School and recently published "Speak with Impact: How to Command the Room and Influence Others, which became a Washington Post best-seller.



Mark Bonchek is the founder of Shift Thinking. His mission is to "change the way people think". He has advised global leaders for such organizations as McKinsey & Company, The Economist, IBM, Adobe, Kaiser Permanente and the American Heart Association. He is a regular contributor to Harvard Business Review and an Adjunct Faculty member of Singularity University.



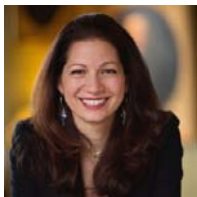
Mandy Gonzalez can be seen on the stage, TV, and film, and is currently starring on Broadway as Angelica Schuyler in Hamilton. She just released her debut album Fearless and is the founder of the #FearlessSquad, a movement for inclusion and positivity in social media. She has shared her experience, knowledge, and perspective through various publications including Harvard Business Review.



Sarah Gershman is an executive speech coach and president of Green Room Speakers, a communications consulting firm based in Washington, DC. Sarah is an adjunct professor of communications at the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University. She has coached and trained executives and staff at Microsoft, General Dynamics, GDIT, Gulfstream, Kaiser Permanente, Booz Allen, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense.



Matt Abrahams is an innovative educator and coach. He has published research articles on cognitive planning, persuasion, and interpersonal communication. He recently published the third edition of his book "Speaking Up Without Freaking Out", a book written to help the millions of people who suffer from anxiety around speaking in public. Matt is a faculty member at Stanford School of Business, where he received the Robert K. Jaedicke Faculty Award.

Day 1: Overcoming Fear when communicating to 1 person up to 1,000 people**The Upside of Your Public Speaking Jitters**
by Allison Shapira**Article 1**

Contrary to popular belief, the secret to confident public speaking is not about getting rid of your nerves. The key is to reframe your anxiety as excitement. Professional performers know that a certain amount of nervousness can be incredibly helpful. It keeps you focused and prompts you to spend your time preparing as opposed to procrastinating. As a former opera singer turned speaker, entrepreneur, and singer/songwriter, I've mastered physical and mental techniques that help me center myself and prepare to perform at my best in front of thousands of people. I now coach clients through a pre-speech ritual that includes breath work and visualizations to calm any nerves and get into the right mindset to deliver a presentation with confidence and authenticity.

A few years ago, my team and I led a leadership communication training for a large financial institution. One banking manager in particular was incredibly anxious about public speaking. Despite the fact that she had a warm personality that lent itself well to speaking, the idea scared her to the point of near paralysis. But rather than reveal her nervousness, every time she had to get up and present to our group, she would exclaim, "That's amazing!" And we'd all laugh with her because we knew it really meant, "I'm terrified!" And despite the nerves, her presentations were very engaging. That phrase became an inside reference within our small group: Every time someone was nervous before speaking, they'd shout, "that's amazing!" when they stood up and we'd all sympathize.

In his book *Psyched Up: How the Science of Mental Preparation Can Help You Succeed*, Daniel McGinn, an executive editor at Harvard Business Review, talks about pre-performance rituals for athletes, speakers, and surgeons who have to perform in high-stakes situations. There's one quote in the book, by Harvard Business School professor Alison Wood Brooks, that really struck me: "The argument is that anxiety and excitement are actually very, very close, but ... anxiety and calmness are too far apart."

According to Brooks, focusing on excitement rather than trying to calm down actually increases performance. So, when we tell people to calm down before a big public speech, we're actually suggesting something that's incredibly difficult. We're also inadvertently recommending something that could potentially inhibit a person's performance.

Based on this logic, I've revised my pre-public speaking rituals to focus on excitement:

1. **Pause & Breathe:** Take a few minutes to center yourself. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
2. **Remind yourself why you care.** Why is this speech, this topic, or this audience important to you? Tell yourself – out loud — how excited you are about this opportunity and the positive impact it will have on others.
3. **Visualize the entire presentation,** from start to finish, in your mind; imagine it going incredibly well.
4. **Listen to a song that gives you positive energy and brings a smile to your face.** This could be something from your childhood or a recent song that you can't stop listening to.

Practicing these rituals before every speech or presentation will help you take advantage of your nervous energy instead of feeling thwarted by it. Then, you can channel your nerves into a powerful, impactful performance.

I recently told that story of the woman who reframed her nerves as excitement to my class of graduate students at the Harvard Kennedy School. A few weeks later, one student stood up to give a graded speech before the entire class. As he walked to the front of the room and picked up the microphone, he exclaimed, "That's amazing!"

And, despite his nerves, his speech was.

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5 Ways to Get Over Your Fear of Public Speaking by Mark Bonchek and Mandy Gonzalez

Article 2



We all want to be fearless public speakers. We dream of confidently striding onto the stage to give a speech or presentation, breaking the ice with the perfect joke, captivating the audience with compelling stories, handling the most difficult questions with ease, and exiting to cheers and applause. But the reality is usually less than perfect. Often, our fears take over and we imagine ourselves stumbling on the stairs, forgetting our lines, drawing a blank, or losing the audience. It's easy to interpret these fears as a warning that something will go wrong — a sign that we weren't meant to be on the stage in the first place.

If you find that fear inevitably gets in the way of your ability to speak in public, we have some good news for you. You don't have to overcome your fear in order to be a good public speaker. It never goes away entirely. Instead, it's about having less fear — think of it as being fear-less.

We both have some experience in what it takes to be fear-less. Mandy has a lead role in *Hamilton* on Broadway, performs highly acclaimed solo shows, and has a regular role in *Madam Secretary* on network television. As a business speaker and adviser, Mark presents to thousands of executives a year and leads high-stakes off-site meetings for executive teams. Even with all of the experience we've had getting on a stage and facing a live audience, neither of us has ever found a way to get rid of the fear. But we do have some tips on how to keep it from getting in the way of delivering that perfect performance.

The first two steps are designed to dial down your fears:

Be prepared. It sounds obvious, but the first step to quieting your fears is being prepared. This means knowing the material so well that you don't have to think about it. It also means making sure all the logistics are set well in advance. You want to be relaxed and focused, not scrambling to get the audio working. Checklists are helpful to make sure you have all the details covered. If possible, arrange to do a dry run with all the audio-visual equipment ahead of time. Enlist your friends to help you rehearse your speech. They can help review your material, ask you tough follow-up questions, or act like an indifferent audience. Play out the toughest scenarios in advance, so you won't have any surprises when it's show time. Rituals and routines can also help you get in the flow. You might listen to a favorite song just before you go on. Mandy has a mantra that gets her in the right state of mind: She says "You got this" to herself right before she goes onstage.

Be real. Some fears are real; some are not. If you have 100 slides for a 30-minute talk, your fear of running out of time is quite real, and you need to cut some material. But the chance that someone will boo you in the middle of your talk is pretty slim. Mandy has a trick to help her be realistic about her fears: When she can't sleep before a big performance, she draws three columns on a piece of paper. The first column has her fear. The second column has the worst thing that could happen if that fear came true. And the third column has the best thing that could happen if it came true. For example, her fear might be stumbling onstage. The worst thing would be that someone films it, posts it to YouTube, and it goes viral. But the best thing might be that it shows her fans everyone is human and makes mistakes, and more people discover her latest album. As human beings, we tend to catastrophize and see things in the extreme. Make sure you are being realistic about your fears.

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Article 2

(continued)



Being prepared and being real can help to turn down the noise on your fears. The next steps help to turn up the volume on your confidence:

Be vulnerable. It's tempting to think that confidence means preventing anything from getting to us. But the truth is that our vulnerability can be our greatest strength. The way to connect with an audience is by being human. That means having flaws and making mistakes. It means allowing your audience to get to know you. You can't connect with them if you don't enable them to connect with you. They aren't there just for the information you have to convey. They are there to feel something and make new connections. The more connected you are to what you have to say, the more connected they will be, too. They will feel what you feel. In concerts, Mandy shares her story and why each song has meaning for her. In workshops, Mark shares the journey of how his career led him to his current thinking. Sometimes the best way to make something universal is to make it personal.

Be present. Just because you are physically onstage doesn't mean you're all there. Your audience follows what you are thinking and feeling even more than what you are saying and doing — which means you have to be fully present to make a real connection. Find the things that help you get present. This might mean doing something before you even get to the venue. Mandy has embraced some advice she got from her mother to "get out of her own head." When she's on the road and feeling anxious or uninspired, she finds something fun and different to do. Recently, she was in Memphis and went to visit Graceland, which put her in a completely different frame of mind. Mark finds that a hot yoga class does the same for him, clearing out the mental fog and forcing him to be present. When you are onstage, a quick way to get grounded is to feel your feet on the ground, take a breath, and find a friendly face in the audience to connect with — anything that gets you back in the present moment.

Be generous. More than anything, the way to be fear-less is to be generous with what you have to give your audience. Surely, there's a reason you want to deliver this talk or give this performance that goes beyond just doing your job. There's a message you want your audience to walk away with — to bring back to their own jobs, teams, families, and communities. Maybe it's an insight, an inspiration, a direction, or an experience. For Mandy, it's moving people's souls with her voice, and she is inspired by any opportunity to do that. For Mark, it's giving people new ways of thinking. What is the gift you want to give? How can you tap into your passion for giving it to others? How generously are you able to share it? How vulnerable will you be in the process?

As you put these five steps into practice, be aware that there's a bit of a balancing act you'll need to address. Your ego can be your enemy. Too much ego, and you won't be vulnerable enough to connect with your audience. Too little ego, and you won't earn your audience's trust enough to deliver your gift. It's a fine line, and a reason why being present is particularly important. You need to constantly calibrate yourself to be what we like to call "confidently humble and humbly confident."

Finally, it's easier to be fear-less together. Find people who help you feel that way — they are your fear-less squad. Help each other to be prepared, real, vulnerable, present, and generous. Bring out each other's gifts. We all have something to give; speaking is an opportunity to give it. Remember, you got this.

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To Overcome Your Fear of Public Speaking, Stop Thinking About Yourself by Sarah Gershman

Article 3



Most of us — even those at the top — struggle with public-speaking anxiety. When I ask my clients what makes them nervous, invariably they respond with the same answers:

“I don’t like being watched.”
“I don’t like the eyes on me.”
“I don’t like being in the spotlight.”

And it follows that when they get up to speak, nearly all of them initially avoid making eye contact with members of the audience. Therein lies the problem: While avoiding direct eye contact may seem like an effective strategy for coping with speaking anxiety, it actually makes you even more nervous.

To understand why, we need to go way back to prehistoric times, when humans perceived eyes watching us as an existential threat. Those eyes were likely predators. People were literally terrified of being eaten alive. In response to that prehistoric reality, the amygdala, the part of our brain that helps us respond to danger, kicked into full gear. And when our fight-or-flight response gets triggered, we understandably feel intense stress and anxiety. What does this have to do with public speaking? Turns out, everything.

Here’s the bad news: Our brains have transferred that ancient fear of being watched onto public speaking. In other words, public-speaking anxiety is in our DNA. We experience public speaking as an attack. We physiologically register an audience as a threatening predator and mount a comparable response. Many people’s physical responses while speaking resemble how their body would react to physical signs of danger (shortness of breath, redness of face, shaking).

So today when we speak in front of a group and feel the eyes watching us, we feel painfully visible, like a caveman exposed in daylight. And because our brain is telling us that we are under attack, we do whatever is necessary to protect ourselves. We construct walls between ourselves and the source of danger — in this case, the audience — to repel the attack and blunt any danger.

What do these walls look like? We focus on our slides. We look down. We retreat into our notes. In the process, we disregard the people in front of us, wishing them into invisibility. Even the most confident speakers find ways to distance themselves from their audience. It’s just how we’re programmed.

Fortunately, there is a solution: human generosity. The key to calming the amygdala and disarming our organic panic button is to turn the focus away from ourselves — away from whether we will mess up or whether the audience will like us — and toward helping the audience.

Studies have shown that an increase in generosity leads to a decrease in amygdala activity. Showing kindness and generosity to others has been shown to activate the vagus nerve, which has the power to calm the fight-or-flight response. When we are kind to others, we feel calmer and less stressed. The same principle applies in public speaking. When we approach speaking with a spirit of generosity, we counteract the sensation of being under attack and start to feel less nervous.

Day 1: Overcoming Fear when communicating to 1 person up to 1,000 people**To Overcome Your Fear of Public Speaking, Stop Thinking About Yourself**
by Sarah Gershman**Article 3**
(continued)

Admittedly, this is hard to do. As a speech coach, I often find that my clients who are the most generous in work and life have the hardest time speaking in public, because their brain is telling them, “Now is not the time to give. It’s time to run!” But it’s absolutely possible to become a generous speaker. Start with these three steps:

1. When you’re preparing, think about your audience.

When we start preparing for a presentation, the mistake we all make is starting with the topic. This immediately gets us inside the details — and makes it harder to break down the wall between us and others. Instead, start with the audience. Before diving into the information, ask yourself: Who will be in the room? Why are they there? What do they need? Be specific in your answers. Identify the audience’s needs, both spoken and unspoken, and craft a message that speaks directly to those needs.

2. Right before you speak, refocus your brain.

You are the most nervous right before you speak. This is the moment where your brain is telling you, “Everyone is judging me. What if I fail?” And it is exactly at this moment that you can refocus your brain. Remind yourself that you are here to help your audience. Be firm with your brain. Tell yourself, “Brain, this presentation is not about me. It is about helping my audience.” Over time (usually between four and six presentations), your brain will begin to get it, and you will become less nervous.

3. While you’re speaking, make eye contact.

One of the biggest mistakes we make is speaking to people as a group. We scan the room — trying to look everyone at once — and end up connecting with nobody.

In reality, each person in the room is listening to you as an individual. And so the best way to connect to your audience is by speaking to them as individuals. How? By making sustained eye contact with one person per thought. (Each thought is about one full clause.) By focusing at one person at a time, you make each person in the room feel like you are talking just to them. This is hard. We are accustomed to scanning the room. Making direct eye contact can feel uncomfortable at first. Yet, as you practice it more, it will actually make you less nervous.

It is far easier (and more effective) to have a series of one-on-one conversations than it is to speak to everyone at once. When my clients use this technique more than three consecutive times, they almost always report a decrease in speaking anxiety. (Note that the most important people to look at are those who are at the far edges of the room. These are the people who are already at a disadvantage. By being extra generous to those at the edges of the room, you bring everyone in.)

We know the power of generosity to give us a sense of fulfillment, purpose, and meaning. Generosity is just as powerful in speaking. It turns a nerve-wracking and even painful experience into one of giving and helping others. A generous speaker is calmer, more relaxed, and — most important — more effective at reaching the audience and making the desired impact.

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Speaking Up Without Freaking Out by Matt Abrahams



Video

