

How to manage public speaking anxiety when presenting your business to investors, the media, or your employees...

We all know that people buy from people, so if you want to win customers you need to put yourself out there. But what if the very thought of stepping into the limelight causes a crash of confidence? Or even fills you with dread? Well, firstly, you're not alone! And secondly, it IS possible to feel better about it – and even enjoy it. Promise.

But first thing's first. To help manage your anxiety and keep you focused on your core objective, you have to prepare. And prepare well. It doesn't have to take too long, but it's better to focus your energy on what you're going to say than the experience itself.

So what should you keep in mind?

Don't plan a script

Seriously, you might think that planning out all of your words in advance will give you a boost of confidence, but very rarely does a script work.

Your anxiety is already going to heighten your awareness of yourself and others. Throw in trying to remember the exact order of a sentence, and it's a path for stilted delivery, if not disaster.

Also, and even more importantly, audiences buy into us when they can tell we are being authentically ourselves. Being natural. Listening to someone who is using their own words as they come, is far more engaging than listening to a robot reciting a script. Give them what they need by being yourself on the day as much as possible.

But if a script helps in the first instance, go ahead and write it all out. But then go through it and pull out the key points, turning them into bullet points.

Thinking in bullet points when presenting or responding to questions can keep us on track – making sure that we are saying what we know will be of value to the audience (and our brand). It can also mean that by learning these and having them close to hand, we are comforted that we know what we want to say but can be free to say it how we need and want to in the moment.

That said... Please. Don't. Wing it!

Because winging it is not going to help your anxiety, or your audience.

You may know your stuff inside out and feel that it's better to turn up on the day and just take what comes at you, running on adrenalin (especially if it's a Q&A situation), but that doesn't mean that sharing what you want to 'off the cuff' is right for your audience.

We need them to sit up and take notice. To

And for this preparation is vital. You need to understand the audience that you are wanting to engage with. What matters to them has to be taken into consideration – and you won't know this if you wing it.

So, who are they? And why are they the audience in that moment? Why are they at the event / reading the publication / listening to the podcast? The story you then prepare to bring your messages to life (and yes, you should have one!) needs to resonate with them personally, so that they can find you and your brand relevant.

Also, winging it can result in your anxiety making you waffle – throwing everything but the kitchen sink in when talking because your nerves take over.

Make sure you have one core message and 1 – 3 stories (depending on length of interview or presentation) to back it up, prepared. This will keep you grounded. What do you want the audience to hear and take away from you? Focusing on them and your value to them, can often help reduce the ‘spotlight effect’.

Have your Brand Champion Message ready to go

Heard of an elevator pitch? Good! If not, I’ll let you quickly Google it.

An elevator pitch helps you stay focused. And in fact, this is where I don’t mind you having a succinct, punchy script prepared. If you have one, you can kick the whole thing off with a strong introduction. Helping you and your audience settle down for a good ride.

But I want you to take this further. A Brand Champion Message is a next-generation elevator pitch. It’s not just the what and the how + benefit. It includes a greater, far more engaging WHY. Why do YOU care about the message you want to share, or the topic you’re discussing?

Bringing yourself into it is vital for people to listen, engage, and relate to you. Personal experiences and stories are far more interesting than just a corporate statement. Bringing in your why can also help you loosen up. A positive emotion, and buying into what we’re saying ourselves, can elevate our delivery and help us to relax into what we have to share.

Finally, just remember that your audience actually wants you to do well. They’re rooting for you. They want to learn, to be interested, to engage with you. So if you prepare to help you be authentically you on the day, then you’re already a very large part of the way there.

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