

Nervous?!



According to one survey, public speaking is one of the top three fears of adults in America today. For some, public speaking ranks scarier than death itself and lends credibility to the statement, "I'd rather *die* than speak in public!"

When asked to speak, many people respond with, "Oh, I could never do that! I'd be too *nervous*." In fact, it seems that nervousness *is* the fear of public speaking. People don't want to look or feel nervous.

One dictionary defines being *nervous* as "characterized by or exhibiting restlessness, anxiety, tensions, etc." However, it *also* defines being *nervous* as "having vigor, force, and vitality." Don't we all want vigor, force and vitality when we speak? Unless we're giving a death benediction, the answer is "of course!"

Lets examine two facts about nervousness:

1. **Nervousness is the spark and energy that will make your speech shine.**
Any performer will tell you that the time to really be nervous is when you are NOT "keyed -up" with nervous energy before a performance.

2. **Most nervousness is not visible.**

Speakers often relate that they felt like fainting or were shaking and sweating - and they were certain everyone in the audience knew it. The fact is, if you don't tell, the audience can't tell how nervous you are... they'll never know!

How can you minimize the nervousness you feel?

- Prepare, prepare, prepare! Rehearse your speech three to seven times!
- Breathe – take 2 deep breaths while being introduced.
- Visualize yourself giving a successful presentation.
- Don't expect perfection - there is no such thing as a perfect speech.

The following are excerpts from THE ART OF PUBLIC SPEAKING by Stephen E. Lucas:

Calming the Nerves...Tips from a Pro

- Be at your best physically & mentally. It's not a good idea to stay up until 4:00 a.m....the night before. A good night's sleep will serve you better.
- As you are waiting to speak, quietly tighten and relax your leg muscles, or squeeze your hands together and then release them. Such actions help reduce tension by providing an outlet for your extra adrenaline.
- Take a couple of slow, deep breaths before you start to speak. Most people, when they are tense, take short, shallow breaths, which only reinforces their anxiety. Deep breathing breaks this cycle of tension and helps calm your nerves.
- Work especially hard on your introduction. Research has shown that a speaker's anxiety level begins to drop significantly after the first 30 seconds of a presentation. Once you get through the introduction, you should find smoother sailing the rest of the way.
- Make eye contact with members of your audience. Remember that they are individual people, not a blur of faces. And they are your friends.
- Concentrate on communicating with your audience rather than on worrying about your stage fright. If you get caught up in your speech, your audience will too.
- Use visual aids. They create interest, draw attention away from you, and make you feel less self-conscious.