Presentation Skills – Overcoming Speaker Anxiety

Speaking in front of groups makes most people nervous and anxious. Both the experienced presenter and the person new to that role are likely to have “butterflies” before a presentation. The difference is that the experienced presenter knows how to get the butterflies to “fly in formation.” In other words, experienced presenters know ways to Relax, Focus, and Breathe.

The exercises below will help you control symptoms of stress that come when feeling frightened or nervous about presenting in front of a group of people. These feelings are almost universal. In fact, many people fear presenting in front of a group more than anything else, including falling, insects, and other commonly held fears.

Symptoms of stress caused by speaker’s anxiety occur because your body senses fear or nervousness and prepares to deal with the perceived threat. Adrenaline rushes more energy through the body than is needed to get the job done. It’s like having a car in park and racing the engine! By practicing some simple exercises, you can learn to Relax, Focus, and Breathe.

Relax

• Ball your fingers into a tight fist, hold for five seconds, and then slowly release. Do this exercise several times.

• Tighten every muscle in your body, hold tight for five seconds, and then slowly release. Repeat again.

• When standing in front of a group, try moving by taking a couple of steps in one direction. (Be sure to stop moving; do not pace back and forth.)

• Smile at someone in the group – generally the person will smile back at you.
Focus

• Establish eye contact with various individuals in the group. Remember, they are real people just like you.
• Think about what you want the learner to be able to do after the session is over.
• Know what you are talking about – practice, practice, practice.
• Think about how in control of yourself you really are!

Breathe

• Just breathe...in and out, slowly and calmly.
• Take a “belly breath.” Hold it for three seconds, and let it out slowly. Repeat several times.
• If you have butterflies in your stomach, let your deep breaths out in short spurts.

Expect to be Successful

Expecting to be successful when speaking in front of groups makes a person work harder to achieve success. If you are focused on fear of failure, your efforts are diminished. When you anticipate success, your efforts are enhanced. Never underestimate the effect of positive “self-talk” to help you succeed at public speaking.