How to Become a Confident Public Speaker



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Glossophobia, or the fear of public speaking, affects nearly 73% of the U.S. population, according to The National Institute of Mental Health. Classified as a social anxiety disorder, it's characterized by an "underlying fear [of] judgment or negative evaluation by others," and its effects range from simple bouts of anxiety to paralyzing panic attacks. But there are practical and effective steps, proven by industry leaders, that can help address and overcome it.

Invest in yourself

Life gets hectic. When you have multiple priorities to tend to, including family, clients, work and everything else that life throws at you, making time for ourselves and our passions

can get pushed to the wayside. It's nothing less than vital, however, to set aside time and money to spend on your professional development, no matter what you want to do with your life. For example, executives can spend up to $50,000 on a public speaking course. That is a large sum, but most don't regret it for a minute because it's an investment in themselves, their career and their passions. (And excellent public speaking courses start at around $2,000, so they don't have to break the bank.) Make your development a priority so you, too, can become self-assured in your expertise and the way you present it.

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Be authentic

The number-one rule for being a confident public speaker is to be yourself. People will be less likely to connect with you if you create a fake persona, and you simply won't feel as confident trying to be someone you're not. An audience will sense and respond to authenticity and the way you tap into true passion.

Recently knighted, Didi Wong (aka Lady Didi) – CEO of The Yes Academy, keynote speaker, TV producer and business mentor, among other vocations – is a perfect example of a speaker who presents authentically and confidently. She and many other experts are outspoken in their belief that doubt kills more dreams than failure – that you have to believe in yourself, first and foremost, before an audience ever will.

Remember the little things

It is crucial to be mindful of how you represent yourself on stage. Be aware of your body language, tone and point of view. Facts are great to have, but if there is no feeling or passion

behind them, they'll fall flat when connecting with an audience.

Also, try to pair impactful images with messages to create an unexpected brand of connection, and consider applying this strategy further by inserting personal stories and commentary into the presentation. Be confident in your experience and let your passion seep into your voice. You can further build that confidence by dressing up in a favorite outfit or wearing bold lipstick. Feel confident in your look and you will feel confident in your speech.

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Make meaningful connections

When it comes to public speaking, underlying anxiety often comes from the fear of being rejected, but if you can create meaningful relationships with others, you will become more optimistic about your speaking abilities. Mentors can help in this area; they are an excellent source for learning the ins and outs of an industry and for vetting ideas. So, find and connect with people who will bolster your career and help you become a stronger spokesperson for your brand or company, and the result will be self-confidence.

Just do it!

Sometimes the best way to get over fear is simply to face it. The more you practice public speaking, the less you will feel anxious and the more capable you will become. Everyone starts somewhere: begin practicing by yourself, then work your way to speaking in front of a small group, then a larger one, and so on.

Practice, practice, practice

It’s no secret that repetition is instrumental to perfection. This is particularly true when it comes to public speaking. I’ve also found that visualization is one of the most effective ways to overcome associated anxiety. Imagine yourself succeeding: To your brain, this is essentially the same as doing it. Imagine responding well to setbacks and you will be more likely to handle them with ease.

Also, rehearse in front of people with whom you already feel comfortable, then ask for honest feedback on how you can improve. Consider, too, adding noise in the background to distract you while practicing, as well as throwing in other minor obstacles to help you prepare for what might go wrong. Doing this is another way to build confidence in the ability to handle adversity. And don’t worry if you forget a line or two. Carry on, and remember that an audience has no idea what the actual script says.

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