

Introvert Warren Buffett Was 'Terrified' of Public Speaking. Here's the Secret That Helps Him Address 40,000 People at the Berkshire Hathaway Annual Meeting.

Most people (56.8%) around the world identify as introverts, according to a 2020 study from The Myers-Briggs Company. Those with an introverted personality are often reflective and self-aware, prefer to write rather than speak and feel tired after being in a crowd.

Naturally, many introverts aren't big fans of public speaking. Addressing an audience might be an inevitable part of professional life, but the average introvert probably isn't clamoring to get in front of a group.

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Even the most successful business leaders in the world aren't immune to stage fright.

Warren Buffett, the 94-year-old billionaire chairman and CEO of conglomerate holding company Berkshire Hathaway, considers himself an introvert. In his biography *The Snowball: Warren Buffett and the Business of Life* by Alice Schroeder, he admits that speaking in front of a crowd used to make him physically ill.

Image Credit: Chip Somodevilla | Getty Images. Warren Buffett.

“I was terrified of public speaking,” Buffett says. “You can’t believe what I was like if I had to give a talk. I was so terrified that I just couldn’t do it. I would throw up. In fact, I arranged my life so that I never had to get up in front of anybody.”

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After Buffett graduated from Columbia Business School, where he studied under investor Benjamin Graham, he returned to Omaha, Nebraska. There, he saw an advertisement for a public speaking course using the Dale Carnegie method.

Buffett was familiar with Carnegie's 1936 self-help book *How to Win Friends & Influence People*, and he'd even signed up for a Carnegie public speaking class in New York – before he backed out and stopped payment on the \$100 check.

Buffett decided to give the course another chance in Omaha.

"I took a hundred bucks in cash and gave it to Wally Keenan, the instructor, and said, 'Take it before I change my mind,'" he recalls in *The Snowball*.

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In Keenan's class at Omaha's Rome Hotel, Buffett discovered the key to conquering his public speaking fears.

"The way it works is that **you learn to get out of yourself**," Buffett explains. "I mean, why should you be able to talk alone with somebody five minutes before and then freeze in front of a group? So they teach you the psychological tricks to overcome this. Some of it is just practice – just doing it and practicing."

Practicing under the same conditions in which you'll speak or otherwise perform can help promote success in high-pressure situations, Sian Beilock, cognitive scientist and current president of Dartmouth College, told *Entrepreneur* in 2022.

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Additionally, it can help to take a step back as the event draws near, according to Beilock. Then, during the high-stakes moment, she suggests interpreting physiological responses positively; for example, consider sweaty palms or a racing heart signs of excitement rather than anxiety.

"And it worked," Buffett says of the psychological techniques he learned in his public speaking class many decades ago.

“That’s the most important degree that I have.”

Buffett’s certification of completion for the Carnegie course, dated January 1952, hangs above the sofa in his office, according to Schroeder’s account.

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Now, Buffett stands in front of an audience of 40,000 at Berkshire Hathaway’s annual shareholder meeting, where attendees line up hours before the event to listen to the Oracle of Omaha speak.

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