

Think Faster, Talk Smarter

*How to speak successfully
when you're put on the spot*

Teaching activities
from author
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TAME THE ANXIETY BEAST

by managing symptoms
and sources

Chapter One



Key takeaway: Most people are highly anxious when speaking, especially in-the-moment. You can become more confident and less anxious in your spontaneous speaking by managing both the symptoms and sources of your nervousness.



Activity: Create your own Anxiety Management Plan (AMP) patterned after the ones provided in the Chapter 1. A solid anxiety management plan contains 3-4 specific actions you will take to manage the symptoms you typically experience when speaking impromptu. Once you have identified the techniques, create a memorable acronym using the first letter of each technique. Test out your AMP (see challenge below) and share it with others. You may help them refine theirs and you may think to include new techniques in yours.



Challenge: AMP

Find two spontaneous speaking situations that are lower stakes and test out your Anxiety Management Plan. Reflect on which portions of your plan helped you feel more comfortable and confident than in the past. If any techniques did not seem to work, take time to replace them.

MAXIMIZE MEDIOCRITY

to reduce cognitive load

Chapter Two



Key takeaway: We put tremendous pressure on ourselves to communicate the “right,” “best” way when speaking in-the-moment. This fixation on perfection reduces the likelihood we will perform well. We can get out of our own way by being more conversational and less tied to your typical reflexive way of communication. Focus on connection over perfection.



Activity: Over the course of three days, set a phone reminder for one hour before you go to sleep. When the reminder goes off, reflect on two events from your day where you spoke spontaneously:

- Did you rely on any typical responses that you often give (did you invoke any heuristics)?
 - How could you have responded so that you weren’t so patterned and reflexive?
- Right before you started these speaking situations, did you notice any negative self-talk such as judging or evaluating yourself?
 - What could you have said to yourself that was more positive...or at least neutral?



Challenge: Questioning

Find two spontaneous speaking situations that are lower stakes and start most of your turns by asking questions to invite participation and reduce formality. How do you feel when you start with questions? What does this approach do for your interactions and self-talk?

MIND YOUR MINDSET

by seeing spontaneous speaking as an opportunity, not a threat

Chapter Three



Key takeaway: We often see spontaneous speaking situations as threats and challenges to be endured or overcome. This approach can be intimidating and stifling. It impacts our approach, demeanor, and presence. By adopting new mindsets, we can reframe these impromptu situations to be more collaborative, inviting, and fulfilling. Further, focus on your audience and the value they can take from you.



Activity: In an upcoming, unplanned conversation, look for areas of agreement you have with the others involved. Highlight these mutually agreed to topics prior to having additional conversation. See how saying “yes...and” in this way helps connect you better and invite more collaboration. If there is conflict in your conversation, this approach will likely make the conflict resolution feel better and proceed more quickly.



Challenge: Positive Self-Talk

For an upcoming spontaneous speaking situation, you are likely to have, identify some of the potentially valuable ideas, concepts, or experiences that your audience can take away. Create a way to remind yourself of the value you will likely bring by setting up a phone reminder, putting a sticky note in your purse or wallet, etc.

DON'T JUST DO SOMETHING...

stand there to be a better listener

Chapter Four



Key takeaway: We often listen just enough to get the idea of what someone is saying and then we judge, evaluate, and rehearse. This “pseudo” listening sets us up to miss subtle, nuanced information that might help us speak better in the moment. Hone your listening by giving yourself a little space, pace, and grace whereby you become present oriented and focus on what is said and how you feel after it is said.



Activity: Find a video of a speaker that you admire that you have not seen previously. Watch the video without listening to it. What do you observe in the speaker’s nonverbal presence. What are their body posture, gestures, eye contact communicating? Now watch the video again including sound this time. Do you notice anything different? Are their words congruent with their body language or are they “saying” something different? Now reflect for a minute on your listening. What was different for you as a listener when you watched with and without audio?



Challenge: Paraphrasing

Find two spontaneous speaking situations that are lower stakes, and once others stop contributing, paraphrase what the key essence (i.e., the bottom line) of their contribution was prior to adding your own thoughts and feelings. How do you feel when you listen to paraphrase? Do you notice differences in others’ reactions to you once you paraphrase.

STRUCTURE YOUR SPONTANEITY

to help you be more concise and memorable

Chapter Five



Key takeaway: Listing and bullet pointing our ideas is not an effective way to relay information in-the-moment. Our brains are not wired to take in lots of itemized facts and figures. Structured information works much better. When we convey information in a logically connected way with a beginning, middle, and end, our audience can better digest and remember the information. Further, structure helps us prioritize our thinking and package our messages more readily.



Activity: Find two television or radio advertisements for the same type of products or services (but not from the same company). After watching/listening to them both, identify the structure they use by referring to structures discussed in Chapter 5. Reflect on which ad's structure was clearer and more defined. Now think about which was most memorable and likely to get you to purchase. Did structure play a role in your answers to which was more memorable and persuasive?



Challenge: What-So What-Now What

For one day, try to leverage the What-So What-Now What structure in various communications you have. For example, when:

- writing an email
- giving an update or status report
- providing feedback

How did the structure help you in terms of preparing your messages? Ask some of the recipients if they noticed anything different in your communication as a result of you using this structure.

FOCUS YOUR MESSAGE

by saying more in fewer words

Chapter Six



Key takeaway: We tend to say more than we need to as we are trying to determine what to say in spontaneous speaking situations. We ramble and provide superfluous information. This can confuse, bore, or otherwise disengage your audience. By thinking about your audiences' needs and your goal in the moment, you can better focus and prioritize your message to be more relevant and targeted to your audience.



Activity: Think about topics you convey that have a degree of complexity to them. What tools can you use to make these concepts more accessible. Can you use an analogy, draw a picture or process flow, deconstruct it into steps? Record yourself using a few of these techniques as you share something complex. Watch your recordings. What did you find worked best if you were in your audiences' shoes?



Challenge: Being concise

Review recent texts, social media posts or statuses, or instant messaging communications like Slack. Most of these represent spontaneous written messages. Pick the two longest ones. Take a minute to rephrase them to be more concise. What types of decisions were you making to help you be less wordy? How can you employ this type of decision making proactively?



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