

## **Confidence: The Secret to Success**

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#### Opening:

One thing I've realized in a lifetime of living is that: I can accomplish almost anything **if I believe I can**.

Conversely, when my confidence is shaken I can psyche myself out and suffer disastrous results. Even things I often do well can go poorly if my confidence is on shaky ground.

#### *Example 1*

I was speaking at the Seattle Boat Show. An article had recently appeared in a national sailing magazine touting my skills as a speaker and noting that I'd be presenting at the Seattle Boat Show that month.

Just as I was beginning my talk, an international legend in the marine industry walked into the room and sat down. Now I've done countless talks and this one many times before. But the simple act of his coming in the room threw me off. He was a revered speaker and I worried about his opinion. I was so distracted by his presence, I started becoming wooden and reading off my slides. (His joke "Death by PowerPoint" flooded into my mind.) Eventually, probably after deciding that I was a boring speaker, he got up and left. I suddenly relaxed and the rest of my talk went well. What was different? My confidence had returned.

Here's what might have helped before it was too late:

I needed to find a way to lower the stakes in my mind. Before I even began I'd psyched myself out because I worried I couldn't possibly live up to the hype.

I needed to remember that people usually attend talks because they are curious to learn more about a topic. Audiences want you to succeed. If you succeed, they will enjoy your talk and they want to enjoy your talk.

Speaking is just communicating. If I remind myself that it's really just a conversation, then I am less likely to panic if everything doesn't go perfectly.

#### *Example 2*

I was speaking at the Wooden Boat Festival. Just as I was about to begin the electricity went out for the entire building. That could be a panic moment. While it was daylight and we could all see one another, I

had no slides to show and had no idea when the power might return. Around me, the technical staff scurried around, trying to problem solve. But, in that instance, I did well because I felt confident.

I made a joke about shifting to Plan B and how that's what we often have to do when we are out boating.

Then I started asking questions of the audience. I remembered that this was just a conversation, but with a larger group. I probed to find out what kind of boating they did, what kind of boats they owned, and what their goals were, using a show of hands to yes/no type of questions.

Then I started with my bio, which is typically one of my first slides that I use to give the audience an overview of my background and experience. I was able to do this easily because I know my history by heart and had spoken this intro many times. When the power came back on about 10 minutes later, I had an idea of about what slide I was on and quickly flipped to that slide before continuing.

### **TIPS for speaking success:**

Here are some tips I've learned for buoying my confidence so that I can produce the results I want.

The key to my success is to find ways to buoy my confidence.

Most importantly: The more familiar I am with my presentation, the less likely I am to screw up and the greater my confidence.

The more I practice, the more comfortable I become. The more frequently I get up in front of others and speak, the more normal public speaking feels. When that is the case, if some snafu happens, I can focus my energy on fixing that problem or deflecting the consequences because I am spending less energy feeling nervous.

The first time I do any talk, I'm always a bit anxious, but if I can do it again soon afterward, I can practice making it better and feel more confident.

Tips for speaking success:

1. Prepare as much as possible in advance.
  - a. Memorize your opening statement.
  - b. Memorize 3 key points.
  - c. Memorize 2 examples to demonstrate your points.
  - d. Memorize your closing statement.
  - e. Count each item off on your hands to help you remember everything and reinforce your point. You can use this technique to reinforce your talk as you come to a close.

(You could also prepare note cards in large print if that will help you remember key points.)

2. Mentally prepare right beforehand for maximum confidence. Consider what relaxes you.
  - i. Do you need quiet time beforehand?
  - ii. Do you need a distraction to take your mind off of your stress?
  - iii. Does exercise help?
  - iv. Does music help?
  - v. Could a power stance help you feel more confident?
  
3. Beginning: I often begin a talk by smiling, taking a deep breath, and asking questions of the audience because it reminds me that it's a conversation and it helps to break the ice and remind me that the audience is human.
  
4. Learn what sets our confidence plummeting.
  - a. Believing that I am insufficiently qualified to speak on a topic: If I speak from personal experience then I don't have to be an expert on everything, just on my own experience.
  - b. Comparing myself to others. Everyone is unique. You have a special angle.
  - c. Judging myself harshly and letting negative self-talk hijack the rest of my presentation after I've made a mistake. Stumbling is only a stumble if you get up again.
  
5. How to stop negative self-talk:
  - a. Pause and smile. I put my hands on my hips and adopt a power stance.
  - b. Think of the phrase, "I can do this."
  - c. Think of a moment when you felt powerful.
  - d. Ask the audience a question. It shifts focus from your discomfort and brings them back to attention if it's wandered.
  - e. Remember that if you can end on a positive note, you can salvage even the worst performance.
  
6. Use your fingers to remind yourself of your key points to help get yourself back on track.

Closing:

You can recover from even the worst performance. The key is to find ways to buoy your confidence both before and during a talk. Practice, adjust, and repeat.

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