

For three months, the young man had practiced this speech by himself and on Fridays he would recite it to his District boss.

The day finally arrived for the Mexico City convention. While waiting for the plane at the Seattle (SeaTac) airport, unexpectedly, the Regional boss arrived. This was a surprise because he didn't come to Seattle often. Apparently, his sole purpose was to sit on the plane and listen to the young agent practice his speech. The regional boss wanted the agent to "shine" as a representative of the western region. They boarded the plane for the trip. On the plane, most of the agents and spouses were drinking tequila and enjoying a good time; however, the young agent was stuck practicing his speech with the bosses.

They arrived in Mexico City and settled in at the Santa Maria Isabella—Sheraton. Someone suggested he go check out the auditorium before the next morning because his speech was scheduled during the convention's opening gathering. However, he declined the suggestion in favor of going up to his room where he could continue to practice. The majority of the agents gathered in the hotel dining rooms and lounges enjoying their leisure time. The Conference began the following morning, and everyone witnessed the freeze—the most embarrassing moment of the young agent's life.

What do you think happened to this guy? You might think of many things. Here are a few. When he got back to Seattle, he quit his insurance job—clearing out his office in the middle of the night so he didn't have to face the other agents. He decided to never give a speech or any type of presentation again. He simply buried himself in his new job—selling appliances at a Seattle department store.

It took me 14 years to come to terms with that embarrassing event in Mexico City—I may never get over it. Yes, that's right, you figured it out, the young agent was me! That experience debilitated me for a long time and to this day, it still affects me. I will always have some degree of stage fright.

Don't you agree it is ironic that I failed in the worst possible way at public speaking, had this traumatic experience, and never wanted to try speaking in front of a group again—EVER—and now, here I am, several years later, teaching public speaking? Since I started studying the fear of public speaking, I have taught over 6,000 students to successfully harness this "stage fright."

## ***Questions for Discussion***

1. What is your horror story of public speaking?
2. How did you handle it?
3. What would you have done differently to have a better result?
4. Did you withdraw to never speak in front of a group again? Why or why not?

## *Questions for Discussion*

1. What value do you see in an honest and open introspection of the failed speech?
2. Which critical error do you see as most important?
3. What do you take away from these three critical errors?
4. How would you apply the solutions in your case?

## ***Questions for Discussion***

1. What opportunities have you lost by avoiding public speaking?
2. What have these lost opportunities cost you in terms of job or job promotions?
3. What have these lost opportunities cost you in terms of job satisfaction?
4. What have these lost opportunities cost you in terms of income?
5. What has your fear of public speaking cost you in terms of your self confidence? Self esteem?
6. Have you ever wanted to speak up at a birthday party, wedding, anniversary, or funeral services, but didn't because of your fear of public speaking? What happened? How did it make you feel?

learn how to harness that fear and make it work for you. You can become an excellent public speaker.

That first meeting of my first public speaking class ended in an interesting manner. I could not find my car keys after the class ended. I checked in my pockets and I searched around my chair—no car keys. So I asked a couple of people, “Have you seen any keys around here?”

The instructor came over and asked, “What is going on?”

I replied, “I can’t find my car keys.”

She offered an explanation, “Maybe you locked them inside your car?”

I thought of this possibility; however, I hoped it wasn’t the case.

The instructor offered, “I’ll walk out there with you to check and if they are locked in the car, we’ll call someone to come and get them out.” (This was before cell phones were affordable, so she was keeping the office/classroom open for me to use the phone if needed.)

While we were walking towards the car, I had mixed feelings. I didn’t want to look like a flake; however, I did want to find my keys. We got to the car and I looked inside. Sure enough, my keys were in the car. That wasn’t the embarrassing part—they were in the ignition switch and the engine was still running!

I had forgotten to turn off the engine while nervously checking my hair, teeth, and tie. The car had been parked there idling for the entire three and a half hours of class! That is how distraught I was going into the class that night.

## ***Questions for Discussion***

1. Do you want to get over the fear of public speaking?
2. If you do, what is stopping you?
3. How will you go about managing the fear? If not, why not?
4. What is the cost to you for avoiding public speaking opportunities?
5. What do you see as the benefit(s) of harnessing your fear and learning to stand up and speak?
6. Is the pain of missing opportunities more than the pain of taking steps to manage the fear yet? Why or why not?

egory as those other fears is comparing apples to apples; even so, lists and statistics are fun to analyze. Jerry Seinfeld stated his interpretation of this list of fears by observing, "This means we would rather be in the box than giving the eulogy." As funny as that sounds, it may not be very far from being the truth.

### ***Questions for Discussion***

1. What are the symptoms you experience? List them.
2. Does it make you feel any better that these symptoms are natural? How so?
3. Are you surprised that the physical reactions are the same no matter if it is excitement or fear? Describe why or why not.
4. Look up "celebrities with stage fright" and describe what you find? Are you surprised?

real world. Remember, *The Book of Lists* ranks public speaking as the number one fear of Americans! You are not alone. But, here is the thing that most of my students have found very liberating, and for them, has helped them to perform:

It is OK to have this anxiety! The vast majority of others have it too! You are not unique or alone in this respect. The thing you want to do is **harness that fear** and make it work for you.

### ***Questions for Discussion***

1. What are the reasons from this chapter that cause you to not stand up and speak?
2. If you do stand up and speak, are do any of these reasons cause you anxiety? Which ones? How do you handle the jitters?
3. Are your fears rational?
4. What do you think you can lose or gain by someone thinking any of these bad things about you thus not standing up to speak?
5. What can you gain or lose by dismissing these negative thoughts people may have about you thus standing up and speaking anyway?

## ***Questions for Discussion***

1. What strategies do you find interesting? How many have you considered before? What happened?
2. Specifically, what strategies do you find might be useful? How might they work for you?
3. Is there anything else you have done in the past you might want to share with others?
4. Does this list help you? Why or why not?



cals would be selling them, or psychologists and psychiatrists would be offering them. It is only the proverbial “snake oil salesmen” who claim to have such goods. Besides, the anxiety is such a treasure, why get rid of it? It enables you to be more animated, interesting, energetic, and sharp minded. This is necessary to get and keep an audience’s attention.

Think about it, have you seen a speaker who was laid back and calm as a cucumber? Was s/he very interesting to you? Did s/he hold your attention? Did you want to “zone out” and drift off into a nap? The goal is not to get rid of the fear of public speaking; the goal is to learn how to have that anxiety work for you.

### ***Questions for Discussion***

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2. Specifically, what strategies do you find might be useful? How might they work for you?
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## Questions for Discussion

1. Can you relate to any of the situations explained in this chapter? Which ones?
2. Did this chapter spark a memory of a situation you experienced? Explain.
3. List at least three specific benefits to you for learning to harness your fear and speaking up?
4. Can you think of an instance where you didn't speak up and later wished you did? What was it? How did you feel? What did it cost you in terms of well-being?
5. Are you ready to face your fears, use these strategies and speak up? Is so, what will be your immediate plan in terms of speaking and preparing? Describe it in detail.
6. If you are still not ready to harness your fear and speak up, why not?