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Fighting the Fear of Public Speaking

Everyone is afraid of *something*. Spiders, heights, angry bees. But while spiders and bees can make a picnic challenging, they usually don't get in the way of doing a job. Unfortunately, my fear is public speaking.

At one point, my phobia got so bad that when I gave presentations, my right eye would twitch. Not only would I get nervous about my talk, but I would also stress about the possibility of the eye-twitch emerging, which made it hard to actually present my information. (Try reading notes through an eyeball that has a mind of its own.) The stressing, of course, just made the twitch inevitable. It was a vicious circle.



Everett Collection

Are there things we can do to fight the fear? Psychologist Sian Beilock, in an interview with [NewScientist](#), has a few tips to alleviate the stress:

Don't over-think it: Beilock's research shows that if you have a well-practiced presentation, when it is go-time, it is best if it runs on autopilot. When we have practiced a speech to perfection, or taken hundreds of golf shots for example, performing well involves paying less attention rather than more.

Put it in writing: Jotting down your worries "downloads" them so they are less likely to pop up and impact your performance.

Distract yourself: Singing a song or counting backwards by threes in your head can prevent you from worrying over the details of your performance. You prevent yourself from thinking "Everyone is looking at me! What if I keel over? What if..." Essentially, it helps cut out the thoughts that get in the way of coming across the best you can.

These tips have been really helpful to me. I've recently had the opportunity to do a few radio and TV interviews related to my Juggle posts. Luckily, the invitations usually come just an hour or two before the interview, leaving me little time to get worked up and worried. Sure, every time I wait outside of the radio booth to be called in I feel like I'm about to step into the dentist's office for a root canal, but I distract myself by thinking about what is going on in the city streets out the window, the cupcakes at the bakery up the block, how hot it must be out there. Before I know, it the interview is over and each time it gets a bit less nerve-wracking.

Readers, how comfortable are you with public speaking? What are some of your tricks for avoiding getting nervous? Do you have any other phobias that affect your performance on the job?

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