

OVERCOMING FEAR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

unique
21-DAY
programme

Benjamin van Spijck



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Best regards,
Benjamin van Spijck

1. Foreword

For many of us, the fear of public speaking is an everyday reality. Striking up a conversation with a stranger often goes quite well, but having to speak during a meeting is far more difficult. Even the thought of a round of introductions breaks many people into a sweat, and if they have to give a speech, many of them contemplate driving their car into a tree.

But this isn't the fear of only a few. American research shows that more than eight out of ten people suffer, to a greater or lesser degree, from the fear of speaking in public. Four out of ten people place fear of public speaking in the top three of their personal fears; often even above the fear of a terrorist attack or the fear of death.

What is it with the fear of public speaking? People are by nature sociable beings. They share their lives with each other. They talk, laugh and cry together. They help each other, teach each other. They make each other's lives miserable. It's all so natural. Until the moment one person steps out of the group to address the others. That's when the tension strikes: the speaker's mouth goes dry, he breaks out in red blotches and his hands tremble. And a replacement-tension fills the audience; a tense hope that all will go well.

What is the speaker afraid of? That his public will devour him? If that were the case his fear would be justified. But it's often the case that the public want only the best for the speaker; so that actually makes the fear ungrounded. Or is the speaker afraid that he will suddenly forget his story? But that doesn't happen when he's talking to friends or colleagues, does it? If he loses the thread then, he makes a joke of it and gets back to the essence. The more you think about it, the more you have to come to the conclusion that fear of speaking in public is unfounded. That's why psychologists refer to it as an irrational fear. The bad news is that possibly eighty percent of the human race is afraid of something they need not be afraid of. The good news is that an irrational fear can easily be overcome. And that's what we're going to do over the next 21 days - overcome your fear.

I'll tell you now how I personally overcame my fear of public speaking.

As far back as I can remember, I was tormented by a fear of talking in public. I can clearly recall my earliest memory, when I was ten years old and had to stand in front of the class. Through the years my fear of speaking became a constant in my life. I mastered the avoidance of situations in which the spotlight would be on me. I made sure I was ill that day, I lied, hid behind others and, more than once, I even considered causing an accident while on my way to a meeting just so I wouldn't have to speak in front of others.

So, at the age of thirty-five, I decided it was time to overcome my fear of speaking in public. I started by taking a presentation training workshop given by a reputable communications adviser. She taught me how to build up an effective presentation, but unfortunately did nothing to reduce my fear of public speaking. I then found a coach online who had developed a unique method for not only dealing with the fear of public speaking, but other phobias as well. I first read his book and, enthusiastic about the

promises made in it, I took part in his training course. But unfortunately, this, too, did not help me get rid of my fear.

I did, however, become more and more convinced that I absolutely wanted to overcome my fear of public speaking and that it must be possible to do so. I started to understand that the fear of public speaking is a lie, an irrational fear. After all, why be scared of speaking in front of an audience that is made up of fellow human beings who often only want the best for you? Why be afraid to talk to groups when talking to individuals is something you do with pleasure day in, day out? Why act as if talking in front of a group is some kind of major performance? It really is nothing more and nothing less than a meeting with other people during which information is exchanged. Why was I allowing that feeling of nervousness to reach panic proportions? Why shouldn't I be able to amplify the joy and energy I normally get from talking to others when talking to a group?

If that were possible, then speaking in public would no longer lead to panic. It could actually be fun!

With this motivation in mind, I started looking for answers. I studied the scientific background of the fear of speaking and other (social) phobias. I talked to psychologists and trainers. I delved into information about Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT). I began to understand what the fear of public speaking is all about and discovered why expensive workshops and books often do little to overcome it. With all the knowledge I had gained, I developed a training programme for my own personal use. And it worked. I succeeded in exposing the lie behind my fear of speaking. And by doing all the exercises I had developed, I completely overcame my fear. Now I can speak freely, comfortably and with pleasure. And very soon you will also experience that wonderful feeling of freedom. It is now your turn to say goodbye to your fear of public speaking. Believe me, in 21 days you will be speaking confidently and comfortably, just like me.

Enjoy the course!

Benjamin van Spijck.

First some important words of warning. If you suffer greatly from a phobia, or if you suffer from several phobias, seek advice from your doctor before starting this programme. If you suffer from, or have suffered from breathing problems, hyperventilation, a heart condition, muscle problems or psychological symptoms, seek advice from your doctor before starting this programme. Following this method and doing these exercises could worsen symptoms or conditions. You follow this programme at your own risk.

2. Fear under the microscope

We can't live without fear. Fear is a fact and a very natural reaction to a threatening situation. From the beginning, fear, just like pain, has been an alarm signal of great importance for the survival of the human race.

Ingrained and acquired fears

Fears with which we naturally react to dangerous situations or objects are ingrained in human beings. Babies display a shock reaction when they hear a loud noise, and we very quickly realize that it would be foolish to dive into an abyss unprotected. But there are many fears that we acquire. A well-known experiment that falls within this framework is that of the psychologist John B. Watson who taught a child of less than a year old to be afraid of white mice. He did this by allowing the boy, Little Albert, to play with white mice, and every time the boy played with the mice, Watson made a loud noise behind him. After doing this only a few times, Little Albert was already afraid of white mice, even when the noise was no longer being made. Fear of loud noise was already ingrained in the boy's survival system; fear of white mice was acquired.

Real and irrational fears

Both ingrained and acquired fears can be real, meaning that you are afraid of something that presents actual danger. But fear can also be irrational: being afraid of something that does not present danger. Even a real fear can take on irrational proportions: i.e. when you react to something quite harmless with the same intensity that you would if twenty-five hooligans were chasing you down a dead-end alley. The lack of a real threat therefore differentiates irrational fears from normal feelings of fear. The symptoms are the same in both cases: palpitation, dry mouth, an oppressed feeling, nervous tension, irritability, restlessness, increased muscle tension or sleeping and concentration problems.

Anxiety disorder

Real fear is therefore useful because it keeps us away from dangerous situations. Many people are able to live quite well even with irrational fears, but problems arise when the irrational fear takes on such proportions that people are hindered from functioning normally. In cases like these, psychologists speak of an anxiety disorder or a phobia.

Many people suffer from a social phobia. Actually, this is a severe form of shyness; the fear of losing face with other people. As well as the fear of speaking in public, fear of telephoning, fear of eating out and fear of blushing or trembling also fall into the category of social phobia. Another group of frequently occurring fears is the fear of situations. People who suffer from this often have a persistent fear of things like water, heights, enclosed spaces, speed, flying, and the like. A third group of frequently occurring fears is the fear of animals, and all sorts of other fears such as the fear of public spaces, and fears of blood, pain and illness.

If someone suffers from one, or a few, of the mentioned phobias, the impact on their life is often manageable. Instead of seeking help, they often choose to avoid the fearful situation. However, it is often the case that people suffer from more than one or a few fears. If they choose not to seek help but avoid all fearful situations, it almost certainly leads to social isolation.

This programme has been written in order to offer help to people who wish to overcome their fear of public speaking. It appears that this method has also proved successful in overcoming other social phobias. And that's logical. The same twisted thoughts lie at the root of the various social phobias, and it is these twisted thoughts that we are going to unmask in the coming weeks. The exercises in this book are also perfectly suited to overcoming irrational fears that do not fall into the social phobia category. But, if you suffer greatly from a phobia, or several phobias, then I seriously advise you to seek professional help; in the first place from your doctor.

In the following exercises, we put your fears under the microscope. In the first exercise you gain insight into the fears you have and the extent to which you have them. In the second exercise you get a picture of the characteristics of your major fears. This insight into your fears is the first step to overcoming them.

Day 1 - exercise 1**insight into your fears**

This is a list of frequently occurring fears.

Indicate by ticking the boxes to what degree you experience fear.

Enclosed spaces	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Deep water	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Talking to a group	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Illness	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
High speed	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Terrorism	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Aggression	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Dogs	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Telephoning	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Lightning	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Fire	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Blood	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Death	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Travel by plane	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Public places	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Heights	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Driving	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Arguments	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Being alone	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Snakes	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Blushing	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Mice	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Crowds	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Having to succeed	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Natural disasters	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Panic attacks	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Bees and wasps	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
Death of a loved one	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
.....	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful
.....	no fear	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	very fearful

Day 1 - exercise 2

personal fears Top 5

Take the list of fears from the previous exercise and determine your personal Top 5. Write these in the first column below. Begin with your biggest fear at position 1.

Then for each of your Top 5 fears, determine whether or not you think the fear and the degree of fear you experience are real or irrational. A fear is real for you if it is caused by something that actually presents a threat or danger. And the degree of fear is real for you if it is logically proportionate to the degree of danger you are in.

Conversely this means that a fear is irrational if it is caused by something that actually presents no danger to you. The degree of fear is irrational if you very fearfully react to something that actually presents relatively little danger.

Personal fears Top 5

Fear					
1.	real	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> irrational
2.	real	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> irrational
3.	real	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> irrational
4.	real	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> irrational
5.	real	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> irrational

Is 'talking to a group' in your Top 5? Wherever it is, by using this method you will overcome your fear of public speaking in 21 days. And if you suffer from other irrational fears, then it is possible that these will also lessen in intensity during the coming weeks. One thing is certain, as soon as you speak confidently and comfortably you will be greatly motivated to work on any remaining irrational fears. You can use the theory and exercises in this book for those fears, too.

3. Getting to know fear of speaking

Eight out of ten people suffer, to a greater or lesser degree, from the fear of speaking in public and this fear can be found in all age groups. Men and women suffer to an equal extent. The fear of public speaking is a persistent fear of critical judgement from others. Actually, it is fear of making ourselves look ridiculous.

The fear of public speaking is a social phobia that comes in various kinds and to varying degrees. Many people have trouble speaking to large groups. Others particularly experience fear during a one-to-one conversation. And there are still others who find it difficult to remain calm while talking to superiors. Also, many people are terrified when they have to speak in situations on which something depends, like interviews and oral exams.

The fear of public speaking is also referred to as an anticipation fear, which means that the fearful person anticipates that speaking will lead to something awful like public failure or a black-out. He then anticipates avoiding the situation. For the fearful person, this seems to be the best solution. What he doesn't realise is that by avoiding such situations, the fear not only remains, it grows.

Opinions differ about the precise cause of public-speaking fear, although there are three groups of causes that often play a part in the creation and persistence of the fear. These groups are: lack of knowledge or skills, bad experiences and negative thought.

Lack of knowledge or skills

For people who don't know how to give a speech, the very prospect of having to do so can make them fearful. And fear of failure can strike those who have to give a speech on a subject they know little about. Fear that is based on a lack of knowledge or skills is, in general, quite easy to resolve. The level of knowledge can be raised by a little study of the subject, and the necessary presentation skills can be gained by following a presentation training course. If someone with a lack of knowledge or skills does give a presentation, it can indeed result in a bad experience.

Bad experiences

Bad experiences lie at the root of many people's fear of public speaking. That could have already begun in early childhood. Many small children have bad speaking experiences because others don't really listen to what they have to say. Being laughed at during a talk at school is a bad experience. Repeatedly receiving negative feedback from colleagues or boss about your presentations is a bad experience. Bad experiences lead to negative thought: 'it didn't go well then, so it won't go well next time, either'. That is the thought pattern that hinders good preparation and strengthens the fear of speaking in public. You can't undo bad experience, but you can do something about the negative thoughts bad experiences have produced.

Negative thought

Negative thoughts are far and away the most important cause of the fear of public speaking. Negative thoughts are thoughts like: 'if I have to give a presentation, I'll certainly be terrified and everyone will think I'm an idiot' or 'they'll be bound to find my presentation boring and think I'm stupid'. The source of negative thoughts is not always clear, although it is accepted that in many cases they spring from bad experiences. Negative thought leads to an avoidance of situations in which public speaking is necessary. Overcoming fear of public speaking resulting from negative thought is the essence of this training programme.

Fear of public speaking is unnatural, as are other social phobias. People are sociable beings by nature; they depend on each other and most of them enjoy that. So, people with a social phobia are afraid of something that, by nature, they should enjoy. You probably know the inner conflict: on the one hand the dream of speaking confidently and comfortably, and on the other the fear of actually having to speak. The following exercise will give you insight into how your fear of public speaking relates to your wish to speak confidently and comfortably in public.

Day 3 - exercise 1

test fear and pleasure in public speaking

Answer the following questions by indicating to what extent you agree with the statements. Don't think about it for too long; go with your first thought.

1. I feel pleasantly excited when I give a speech.
(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree
2. When I give a speech, I am afraid I'll have a panic attack.
(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree
3. I say as little as possible when I'm in a group.
(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree
4. In general, I feel comfortable taking part in a group conversation.
(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree
5. I enjoy taking part in group conversations.
(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree
6. When I talk to a group, I'm afraid I'll make myself look ridiculous.
(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree
7. If I say something in a group, I say it as briefly as possible.
(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree
8. I believe that it's possible for me to feel relaxed when giving a speech.
(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree
9. When giving a speech, I try to make contact with my audience.
(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

I feel afraid when speaking in a group.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

10. I am uncomfortable speaking to strangers.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

11. In general, I can say what I want to when speaking in a group.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

12. I enjoy speaking in a group.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

13. When giving a presentation, I'm afraid I'll make mistakes.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

14. I am extremely uncomfortable speaking in a group.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

15. I feel fairly calm when speaking in a group.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

16. I can easily express my opinions.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

17. I'm afraid and nervous if I have to give a speech.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

18. It would be great if I never had to speak in public again.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

19. I am confident in my attitude and behaviour in a group.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

20. Speaking in a group gives me a sense of satisfaction.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

21. When I give a presentation, I'm afraid they can see that I'm nervous.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

22. My audience will probably find what I have to tell them boring.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

23. I can speak to a group.

(1) totally agree (2) agree (3) don't know (4) disagree (5) totally disagree

Calculate your own personal scores

Extent of public-speaking pleasure

Start with 24, add to it the values of the answers to questions 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23 – then deduct the values of answers to questions 1, 5, 9, 13, 17 en 21.

My score is

Extent of public-speaking fear

Start with 24, add to it the values of the answers to questions 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24 – then deduct the values of answers to questions 2, 6, 10, 14, 18 en 22.

My score is

If your 'extent of public-speaking fear' score is 24 or lower, then you often accept this fear as controllable. But you don't have to learn to live with it. If you scored higher than 24, then your fear of public speaking probably hinders your daily functioning. See this as an extra stimulus for overcoming your fear in the coming weeks.

If your 'extent of public-speaking pleasure' score is lower than 24, then you don't enjoy being in the spot-light. Ask yourself why. Is it because of your fear? If it is, let this be your motivation for attacking the fear. If it isn't, then it's going to be difficult to remain motivated over the coming weeks. Think of ways to motivate yourself to continue following the daily programme. You can use the following exercise for that.

If you scored higher than 24, then you actually take pleasure in speaking in a group. But this pleasure can go hand in hand with the fear of speaking, and when it does, it causes frustration. If that is the case with you, understand that the wish to speak confidently and comfortably in groups is the perfect basis for overcoming your fear.

A promise to yourself

Do you dream of speaking confidently and comfortably in public? Or speaking with pleasure? Or explaining your standpoint with enthusiasm? Or remaining calm if you are forced to the front? And if you could speak confidently and comfortably, what would you do with your new-found freedom? Start going to parties again? Do that voluntary work you've been planning to do for so long? Would you finally have the courage to apply for that job? Many people with public-speaking fear deny themselves a great deal by avoiding situations that evoke fear. But that means that there are so many possibilities, once the fear has been conquered. What will you do with your new freedom?

Day 2 - exercise 2 **a promise to myself**

Think about what you will do when you have overcome your fear of public speaking at the end of this programme. Which possibilities will you take advantage of? Which goals will you set yourself?

Goal 1:

.....

Goal 2:

.....

Goal 3:

.....

Now, with these goals in mind, make yourself a promise to persevere during the coming weeks and overcome your fear of public speaking. Say, for example, in your own words: 'I am prepared to do everything necessary to overcome my fear of public speaking'. Or: 'I will do the exercises every day for three weeks so that I will then be able to speak confidently and comfortably'. Formulate your promise positively!

A promise to myself:

.....

Just imagine; no more fear of speaking in public. In a few months, confident and comfortable speaking will be normal for you; as it should be. And yet, if you have struggled with this fear for a long time, overcoming it will most certainly be worth celebrating. Don't let the victory pass uncelebrated. What will you do when you've completed the programme? Go out to dinner with your partner? Throw a party for your friends? Buy yourself something expensive? Donate a large amount to charity? Whatever you do, your victory must be celebrated!

On day 21 I will celebrate overcoming my fear by:

.....

4. Fear of public speaking under the axe

You've managed to get a good picture of your fear over the last two days. You have also discovered how your fear relates to the pleasure you have in speaking. And you have written down everything you are going to do with the freedom living without fear of public speaking will offer you. It is high time, therefore, to attack your fear.

Hanging on to fear by avoiding situations

First we are going to return to Little Albert and his acquired, irrational fear of white mice. That fear was acquired because it was coupled to a loud noise. The fear was irrational because the white mice presented no danger. In that way, it is comparable to fear of public speaking. You acquired your fear in the past, maybe by not being taken seriously as a child. Or by being laughed at or teased, or, for one reason or another, you began to believe that what you had to say wasn't worth saying. And that is why the fear symptoms with which you react to public speaking are out of proportion. Speaking in public is actually just as harmless as playing with white mice.

You could be wondering why irrational fears don't disappear as quickly as they appear. Little Albert probably reached an age at which he asked himself why he was afraid of something as insignificant as a white mouse. He probably saw others allowing small mice to walk up their arms without any reservations. And he might have sought advice from experts who would have confirmed that white mice are harmless. You could also have discovered long ago that speaking in public is harmless, and that it is totally unwarranted to react with a thumping heart, red blotches and a dry mouth.

But it doesn't work like that, unfortunately. After the first learning experience which convinces us that a situation or an object is something to fear, we continue, subconsciously, to strengthen that fear. We do this by avoiding situations that could evoke the fear. Little Albert probably avoided being anywhere near white mice (and maybe he soon began avoiding all rodents). Some people walk up twelve flights of stairs rather than take the lift. Others avoid parks where dogs are taken for walks. Maybe you hide behind a colleague if a presentation has to be given. It feels good to avoid a fearful situation. We actually receive a reward for our avoidance behaviour: less fear. But this rewarding of negative behaviour preserves the fear and helps it grow. In this programme, we are going to use a few useful psychotherapy tools to break this vicious circle: cognitive restructuring and imaginary exposure.

Cognitive restructuring

Cognitive restructuring is a technique used in cognitive therapy, one of the larger movements in psychotherapy. Cognitive therapy is a form of therapy that is based on the idea that psychological symptoms or problems stem from the way in which people select and process information. Cognitive restructuring is based on the fact that you don't so much react to a situation itself with fear, but to the way in which you interpret that situation. In other words, to a large extent you yourself define whether or not you see something as a problem, and how intense that problem is for you.

That defining happens in a fraction of a second and is often based on a whole complex of twisted ideas. With cognitive restructuring, you learn to replace twisted ideas with realistic, positive thoughts: positive affirmation. You will be doing exercises that will challenge you to correct irrational thought. Through insight and practise, you will learn to understand that your fear is not a rational reaction to (the thought of) public speaking. And just that understanding will give you a great feeling that your fear is diminishing. And then you'll be ready for the next step.

Imaginary exposure

The next step is imaginary exposure. It is a technique used in behavioural therapy, a second important movement in psychotherapy. The basic principle of behavioural therapy is that undesired behaviour is learned and can, therefore, be unlearned. With imaginary exposure, you will expose yourself to situations that evoke fear, not in reality but in imagination, in the safety of your own home. You begin with a situation that is the least fearful and gradually, when you're ready, build up to situations that terrify you. By breaking through the avoidance, your fear will gradually decrease and you will become used to what are for you very difficult situations.

As your fear decreases, the desire to try speaking in public will grow, which is something that, until now, you have often avoided. You will, therefore, have to become familiar with a technique that will help you tell a story or give a presentation in a natural way. Mind mapping is such a technique.

Mind mapping

Mind mapping is a way of organising and recording information that well suits the human brain. With mind mapping, information is not linearly stored, as we are used to, but is stored in a logically structured and, as much as possible, visual manner. Neurologists agree that this is a better way of clearly organising and remembering information. By making a mind map, the presentation is actually recorded as a film in your brain. During the giving of a presentation, you will be able to link outlines and details in a very natural way. You will be able to give a presentation confidently from memory because you know that the information has been stored in an effective manner.

Visualization

Visualization is an important part of the psychological training of top-class sportsmen. They prepare themselves mentally for a match or competition with this technique. Before the competition, they repeatedly visualize the event, and in that visualization they see themselves performing well. They mentally practise an explosive start that immediately puts them in the lead. They imagine the forceful punches they will deliver. They feel the skilful goals they will score and they enjoy the crowd's cheering. By doing this they build healthy, positive tension in their minds. In addition, they mentally work on their skills by frequent repetition.

By applying this technique to the mental preparation of presentations you will learn to build positive tension under which you will be able to perform optimally. So, from this moment onwards, no more crippling stress but measured, positive tension that will better help you to perform. And, with visualization, you will learn to construct your routine so that during the presentation you will have time and energy for interaction with your audience.

Do it!

With the help of the above mentioned techniques, you can overcome your fear of public speaking in the safety of your own home. You will learn how to speak from memory and give presentations in a natural way. When you reach this point, then you will be ready to give your first presentation confidently, free of public-speaking fear. The first presentation should, preferably, be given to a trusted group of between five and ten people. After that, grab as many opportunities as possible to speak in public: at work, with friends, etc. Keep a note of what goes well, ask for feedback and work on your technique. In this way, your skills will increase and your confidence will grow. The vicious circle of fear has been broken; it has finally made place for an upward spiral of peace, pleasure and confidence.

Day 3 - exercise

yoga exercise - full breathing

In this programme you will learn to react in a pleasant way to having to give a speech, or even the thought of having to do so. At the moment you react with fear symptoms like blushing and trembling. Soon you will react calmly and in a controlled manner. In a number of exercises you will learn how to call upon that feeling of relaxation.

Today you will learn full breathing. This breathing technique is the basis of all the yoga breathing ever described. By breathing fully, body and mind find rest. All cells in the lungs are supplied with oxygen and therefore the oxygen supply to the muscles and to the brain is increased. This gives rise to a feeling of peace and calm combined with a feeling of strength and concentration: the ideal combination for giving a speech.

If you suffer from breathing problems, hyperventilation or a heart condition, consult your doctor before starting full breathing exercises. Such conscious breathing could worsen symptoms or conditions.

Full breathing

Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. Sit in an upright, relaxed position with your back as straight as possible.

Breathe calmly and evenly through your nose:

- allow the collarbone and midriff to drop: this makes the stomach expand and oxygen automatically flows into the lower lungs. Allow the air to flow out naturally;
- then expand the ribcage and chest in a smooth motion so that space is made there and oxygen fills the middle of the lungs;
- in the same smooth motion, gently lift the shoulders and collarbone so that oxygen fills the upper lungs.

Hold your breath and smile.

Then, in one flowing movement, breathe out calmly and evenly through the nose:

- pull in the stomach and gently lift midriff and collarbone;
- pull in ribs and chest and;
- allow the shoulders to drop.

Breathe in this way for five minutes. Try to do it as smoothly as possible. Allow the breath to flow naturally in and out by creating then reducing space. At the end of the exercise, rest for a few minutes by lying on your back with your eyes lightly closed and breathe calmly.

This breathing exercise might be a bit difficult at first; the movements may demand a lot of concentration and may not yet be smooth and flowing. But after having done this exercise a few times, you will see that it is actually very natural and automatic. It becomes second nature and you will always, wherever you are, be able to call upon that peace and calm that is coupled with strength and concentration.

5. Stop unhealthy reasoning

Your fear is based on illogical, twisted thoughts. Yes; it's not that speech that scares you but the string of negative thoughts that you have allowed yourself to acquire. One of the originators of this insight was the cognitive psychologist Albert Ellis. He discovered that people are not so much confused by events themselves but by the manner in which they interpret the events. In other words, to a large extent people themselves determine how intense problems are for them. So, if someone wants to change something unpleasant, he can best begin by changing his own way of thinking.

An example: Imagine I've been asked to give a presentation for a new client and it totally stresses me out: palpitations, panic, thoughts of escape. I assume my fear is caused by the fact that I have to give the presentation. In reality, my fear is caused by the following reasoning: 'I must deliver a perfect presentation for the new client. Oh no! That's bound to go completely wrong and my boss will be there and he'll see that I'm useless. And that's true; I am utterly unsuitable for this job. What can I do now? Help!'

You can see that there's something wrong with this reasoning. Why would the presentation have to be perfect? And even if a few things didn't go as well as others, why would the whole thing be completely wrong? It's true that I'm not perfect, but the idea that I'm unsuitable or useless is rubbish. Do you see what's happening? It is not the situation that instils fear in me, it's my own illogical reasoning with which I interpret the situation. I'm entitled to feel a little stressed if I'm asked to give a presentation, but it is absurd that that should lead to the conclusion that I'm useless.

Physical and emotional reactions to fear are therefore not a result of the situation itself. These reactions exist because we see the situation through glasses of rational and irrational thoughts. That is why it is pointless to avoid situations. Avoiding presentations or hiding behind an impressive PowerPoint presentation will not rid you of the fear. No, it is time to clean those glasses so you will be able to reason in a healthy manner.

In the following exercises you will attack your irrational reasoning. That doesn't mean that you will learn to drown out or eradicate your negative thoughts, but that you will bring them back to a realistic level. Of course you are not perfect, but who expects you to be? And yes, you are a bit stressed about that presentation, but that doesn't mean that you'll clam up or black-out. And of course something could go wrong during the presentation, but that certainly doesn't mean you are useless.

Day 4 - exercise 1

cognitive restructuring 1

You start with an exercise in which you map out which fears and worrying thoughts you have with regard to speaking in public.

Step 1: think of three situations with regard to speaking in public that you might be confronted with and that evoke intense feelings of fear. For instance:

- Giving a presentation to the management of a new client in which you have to explain the advantages of your organisation.
- Giving a speech at your best friend's wedding.
- A round of introductions at the beginning of a training day in which you and your colleagues are taking part.

Take your time. Think of personal and work related situations in which you could be asked on stage.

Situation 1:

Situation 2:

Situation 3:

Step 2: Choose the most fearful of these three and place a cross beside it. Now concentrate on that situation. Try to put yourself in that situation.

Step 3: If you were able to put yourself in that most fearful situation, make a list of as many fears and worrying thoughts that you had. For example:

- It will be a disaster if I look nervous. Everyone will think I'm an idiot.
- I have to appear intelligent. Only then will I be taken seriously.
- I'm so afraid that I'll have a black-out and forget everything.
- They probably think my presentation is boring and that I'm stupid.
- Soon they'll ask a question to which I won't know the answer.
- Why am I doing this? If you're not a good speaker, you shouldn't give a speech.
- It will probably go really wrong this time and then I'll never dare speak in public again. How could I justify that in my job?
- When I feel myself getting nervous, I know for sure that my presentation will be rubbish.
- I'm afraid I'll have a panic attack and that I'll still have to completely finish the presentation.
- When will I ever overcome this fear of speaking in public?
- I should just be able to do this.

Take your time - be thorough. Write the most fearful and worrying thoughts on the top line. Keep the second and third lines empty for the time being.

Thought 1:

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Thought 2:
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Thought 3:
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Thought 4:
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Thought 5:
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Thought 6:
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Thought 7:
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Thought 8:
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Thought 9:
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Thought 10:
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Step 4: You have seen that fear of public speaking is not the result of the situation itself, so the situation you named in step 2 is not in itself fearful. Many other people would not react with fear to the same situation. It's those glasses of illogical and irrational thoughts through which you view the situation that cause your cold sweats and panic.

Examples of illogical and irrational thoughts that cause fear:

- I have to be perfect and appear intelligent.
- Everyone has to like me.
- To be able to give a good speech, I must be completely relaxed.
- Speaking in public is a top-sport for which you need to be in top condition.
- Everyone observes me closely and judges me when I speak.
- Someone of my status or with my job shouldn't be afraid of speaking in public.
- Giving a speech is dreadful.
- You should only speak in public if you are good at it.
- A negative reaction to my speech would be a disaster.
- Everyone in the audience has to look interested.
- One small mistake will ruin the whole presentation.

Now take the list of fearful and worrying thoughts that you compiled in step 3 and write on every second line, per thought, the illogical and irrational elements that lie at the root of the thought.

Day 4 - exercise 2

yoga exercise - full breathing

Now do the full breathing that you learned yesterday for five minutes.

6. Think of healthy ways of reasoning

I am curious as to how you experienced yesterday's exercises. It is often a great eye-opener when people realize that they have made themselves afraid by their own irrational reasoning. Today you are going to replace that illogical, fearful reasoning with rational, positive affirmation.

From a rational point of view, giving a speech is imparting information to a gathering of people. Most people enjoy meeting other people. People are sociable beings. Total isolation is reserved for very few, and an ideal for even fewer. The imparting of information is also something that man does from the beginning. Even small babies communicate in their own way, and a three-year old child never stops asking questions. Many people enjoy sharing their opinions with others; opposing views often lead to one's own standpoint being more forcefully and enthusiastically put forward. And approval and compliments affirm the speaker in his own ability. Speaking to people is natural behaviour that makes you happy. No more and no less.

Day 5 - exercise 1

cognitive restructuring 2

Take your list of fearful and worrying thoughts and replace the irrational thoughts with positive affirmations. For example:

- It will be a disaster if people see I'm nervous.
My public consists of fellow human beings. They want only the best for me.
- I'm not a good speaker so I shouldn't speak in public.
Speaking in public is not some sort of blown-up performance; it is a meeting of people and an imparting of information. I do that every day. I enjoy it and it energizes me.
- The whole presentation will be effected if I start shaking or have difficulty swallowing.
Tension is normal; it's a sign I'm alive. But I don't have to exaggerate the nervousness - the pleasure I get from speaking to people is far greater and more deserving of emphasis.
- When will I ever overcome my fear of public speaking?
Tension is normal and useful. I'm very good at speaking enthusiastically. Some tension helps with that. I don't have to be perfect.
- What's wrong with me? Why am I still seeking approval?
I usually get positive feedback on my ideas, and that's nice. And I'm always ready to hear other opinions. I'm not afraid to be vulnerable and I love new ideas.
- I should be able to speak in public.
I can speak in public! I love enthusiastic communication with people! I don't have to make the nervousness more important than the pleasure I get from speaking to people.

Now go back to the list of fears and irrational thoughts that you compiled yesterday and, on every third line, place the positive affirmation that you will follow from now on.

Day 5 - exercise 2

yoga exercise - full breathing

Now do full breathing for five minutes.

7. Imaginary exposure

Over the last few days you have discovered how you scare yourself with illogical reasoning, and you have replaced the illogical reasoning that evokes fear, with real positive affirmations. Then the question is: What now? The fear is there and won't disappear just because you know how it came into being.

Everyone knows about the Pavlov dogs that started drooling the moment they heard a little bell. If you ring a bell then give a dog something tasty to eat often enough, eventually he will react to the bell in the same way he would to being offered a bowl of dog food; namely drooling and wagging his tail. This phenomenon is called conditioned reflex. Conditioned reflex is a deep-rooted acquired reaction to an event or stimulus. This conditioned reflex is also in effect in the fear of public speaking. For years you have been associating speaking in public with all sorts of negative, irrational thoughts. These thoughts result in cold sweats, a dry mouth, palpitations, the urge to escape, and so on. You don't even need the irrational thoughts anymore in order to have the various fear reactions. Moreover, you now experience fear reactions with anything that makes you even think about public speaking. Many people have told me that they feel their stomachs tighten just by hearing the word 'speech'.

This conditioned reflex creates a vicious circle that the American psychologist Thorndike called 'law of effect'. This law, simply stated, says behaviour is strengthened if it is followed by a pleasant reaction or reward, and, conversely, behaviour weakens if followed by an unpleasant reaction or punishment. People with public-speaking fear experience unpleasant emotional and physical reactions when confronted with anything to do with public speaking. Because of this 'punishment', they try to avoid situations in which they have to give a speech, and situations in which they may be asked to give a speech. This avoidance is then rewarded with less fear. Every time you reward a feeling of fear with avoidance, that avoidance becomes more pleasant. But the fear of the situation will just keep on getting stronger.

This vicious circle also works the other way round, fortunately. The more speaking in public is rewarded positively, the more pleasant it will feel. Because of this pleasant rewarding, you will more frequently seek out situations in which to address people. This stimulates a feeling of victory, and you will probably receive compliments and reactions praising your performance which will further strengthen your pleasure in speaking in public.

The exercise for reversing the vicious circle can, luckily, be done in the privacy of your own home. Psychotherapists have developed a technique called imaginary exposure. With this technique you imagine all the steps before, during and after a presentation. These steps are still coupled with feelings of fear, but you are going to break this coupling and replace it with a pleasant feeling of well-being. Repetition of this exercise will gradually diminish your fear until it has totally disappeared.

Day 6 - exercise

progressive muscle relaxation

With imaginary exposure you call up a feeling of relaxation that you couple with the thought of a situation that causes you fear. In a few days you will try that out for the first time. Today you will learn a technique that you need for that, a technique in which you consciously reach a state of complete relaxation: Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR). PMR is a much-used technique that was originally developed by Doctor Edmund Jacobson (1888 - 1983)

If you suffer from serious physical complaints, back or muscle problems, consult your doctor before starting PMR. The conscious relaxation of the different muscle groups could worsen symptoms or complaints

The process of Progressive Muscle Relaxation uses a muscle physiology principle. That principle states that a muscle, after it has been tensed, reaches a relaxation that is deeper than it had been before the tensing. With PMR you tense isolated muscle groups in order to then relax them. Make a fist with your right hand and clench it tight. You can feel the muscle tension increase in your hand and lower arm until it becomes unpleasant. After about ten seconds, unclench your fist, open your hand and feel the difference. The muscle tension flows away, and more, the muscle is totally relaxed.

By individually tensing then relaxing all the muscle groups, you will reach a state of complete relaxation. This is because of a domino-effect of the relaxation of body and mind. That domino-effect begins with total muscle relaxation. Relaxed muscles need less oxygen so breathing automatically becomes slower and deeper. The heart has to supply less oxygen and therefore both heartbeat and blood pressure drop. Blood pressure in the whole body becomes more even; hands and feet become warmer and stomach and intestines feel good. This relaxation of the body provides a general feeling of well-being. You feel calm and alert.

By practising PMR regularly you will learn to recognise the difference between a tensed muscle and a completely relaxed muscle. And if muscle tension occurs, as a result of fear for example, you can respond by relaxing the muscle. The domino-effect will then ensure that this muscle relaxation leads to deep relaxation of body and mind. This relaxation can be evoked in any situation.

Progressive muscle relaxation

Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. Sit in an upright, relaxed position with your back as straight as possible. Do full breathing for a few minutes. After the full breathing you may take a more comfortable position.

Now you are going to tense a number of muscle groups individually, each for the count of ten. Then you will relax them, again for the count of ten. Concentrate on the individual muscle groups; be fully conscious of the difference between the sensation of tensing and that of relaxing. Isolate the muscle groups as well as you can. Try not to tense any muscles not belonging to the group you are working on. Continue breathing calmly.

1. Bend your right hand backwards from the wrist and tense for the count of ten. Release the tension. Experience the feeling of relaxation for the count of ten. Now do the same with the left hand. Bend it back from the wrist; tense for the count of ten, then release.
2. Make a fist of your right hand. Clench it tightly and feel the tensing in the hand and lower arm. Unclench the fist. Now do the same with the left hand. Be conscious of the feeling of relaxation in both hands and lower arms.
3. Stretch your biceps by bringing your right lower arm to your upper arm and tensing the muscles. Hold for the count of ten, then release. Do the same with your left arm.
4. Now concentrate on your face. Tighten your forehead by lifting your eyebrows as far as possible. Hold for the count of ten, then release.
5. Squeeze your eyes tightly shut. Feel the tension around the eyes. Hold the tension and breathe calmly. Release. Be conscious of the relaxation in the area around the eyes.
6. Clench your jaws tightly together. Hold the tension for the count of ten. Release and feel the relaxation in the jaw for the count of ten.
7. Press your tongue hard against the roof of your mouth. Hold the tension. Release and feel how loose your tongue seems in your mouth.
8. Bow your head by dropping your chin to your chest. Feel the tension in the neck and hold for the count of ten. Release. Be conscious of the relaxation in your neck and feel the relaxation spread to your upper back.
9. Raise your shoulders as far as possible. Continue breathing calmly. Feel the tension, then release and relax.
10. Breathe in deeply and at the same time push your shoulders back by stretching your arms behind you. Feel the tension in your chest and surrounding area. Concentrate on this tension for the count of ten. Release and enjoy the relaxation in the chest for the count of ten.
11. Pull your stomach in as far as possible. Hold it in. Release and enjoy the relaxation in your stomach. Take a breath and now tense your stomach muscles as if you are preparing to be punched in the stomach. Release and relax.
12. Tense the buttock muscles by squeezing them together. Hold for the count of ten then release. Be conscious of the difference between the tension and the relaxation.
13. Stretch both legs and lift the feet a little from the ground. Feel the tension building. Release. Feel the relaxation flow through the legs.
14. Bend your toes upwards so they point to the ceiling. Feel the tension in the feet and ankles. Release and relax.

Remain seated in this relaxed state with your eyes closed for a few minutes. Continue breathing calmly. Experience complete relaxation.

8. Coupling relaxation to speaking situations

With imaginary exposure you break through the vicious circle of fear to make place for an upward spiral of pleasure and well-being. With imaginary exposure you expose yourself to fear-inducing situations. Not in reality, but in imagination, in the safety of your own home. And you learn to replace the feeling of fear with one of calm and relaxation. You begin with a situation that is the least fearful and gradually work up to situations that terrify you.

Imaginary exposure works by means of a ladder of fear. This is a list of situations surrounding the giving of a speech that instil fear in you. At the top of your ladder is the situation that most terrifies you. At the bottom is the situation that causes you the least fear. The ladder is, therefore, a reflection of the situations that cause you fear listed by intensity.

Imaginary exposure begins with the creation of a pleasant state of relaxation. To reach this state you need full breathing and PMR. Once complete relaxation has been reached, visualize the situations that evoke fear. Visualize the situations one at a time, as they are on your ladder of fear. In this way you learn in your subconscious to associate these situations with a pleasant feeling of relaxation. The negative vicious circle gets broken. You will be amazed at the result.

In the following exercise you will make your own personal ladder of fear. The imaginary exposure exercise is planned for the day after tomorrow.

.....The end (for now.....)

A special, time-sensitive invite just for you...

Dear reader,

I hope that you have enjoyed the free preview of the workbook Overcoming Fear of Public Speaking. What you have just experienced are only the first 6 days of this unique 21-day training programme. That's right; this is only the tip of the iceberg.

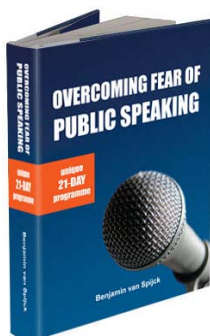
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