

SPEECH ANXIETY: IMPROPER COMMUNICATION & FEAR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

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Abstract:

We all are aware of two commonly used terms “**Anxiety**” & “**Communication**”, the term “**Anxiety**”, can be defined as a feeling of worry, nervousness or unease about something with an uncertain outcome. And the term “**Communication**” can be defined as the imparting or exchanging of information by writing, speaking or using some other medium. With respect to **Communication**, there is a type of **Anxiety** known as “**Speech Anxiety**” which is faced by an individual while delivering a speech on a public platform. “**Speech Anxiety**” can also be termed as “**Communication apprehension**”, “**Fear of Public Speaking**”, or just “**Plain Fear**” which is faced by the majority of people when speaking to a group of people in a formal setting. Sometimes just the thought of giving a speech makes one feel uncomfortable and those feelings manifest into physical reactions such as sweating, stuttering, flushness, and dizziness. The person often forgets what he/she is going to deliver and feels unprepared; wanting the experience to end. Vividly we have divided these groups of people into three categories namely “**Good**”, “**Average**” and “**Poor**” based on their hold of the particular language, self-confidence and speaking skills. One can reduce these experiences and deliver an effective speech with vivid information, enough self-confidence, and manage the anxiety often associated with public speaking so that he/she can improve the content and the process of delivering the speech.

Keywords: Anxiety, Communication, Speech Anxiety, Plain Fear, Fear of Public Speaking

Introduction

The term “Anxiety” is a very common word known to all of us. In this context, there is also another term that we encounter quite often “Speech Anxiety”. Digging deep into the route cause, it is generally faced by those individuals who are not stage free and eventually tries to deliver a speech on a public platform. Speech anxiety can also be termed as “Glossophobia” derived from Greek words glōssa meaning tongue and phobos meaning fear or dread.

Whether you call it speech anxiety, communication apprehension, fear of public speaking, or just plain fear, one thing is certain, the majority of people experience the same thing when speaking to a group of people in a formal setting. Sometimes just the thought of giving a speech makes us feel uncomfortable. Sometimes those feelings manifest into physical reactions such as sweating, stuttering, flushness, and dizziness. Often we forget what we are going to say, feel unprepared and unsure, and just want the experience to end. With information, experience, and self-confidence, however, you can reduce these experiences and

deliver an effective speech.

There are many ways to approach giving a speech. Some people regard delivering a speech as no problem. Often people with high speech anxiety wish they could be so confident and unafraid.

This no problem approach is not without its drawbacks, however, people with this approach are often so confident in their speaking abilities that they fail to prepare even an outline of their speech. In other words, although the delivery is skilled, the content lacks direction, clarity, and focus. Furthermore, because the speaker has only considered their own abilities, they have failed to consider the other crucial part of a speech - the audience. Effective speakers must consider how the audience might respond to the delivery and content of the speech. Because speakers with a no problem approach are often so confident in their own abilities that they forget how crucial the audience is to the success or failure of their speech.

Speakers with high speech anxiety often place the emphasis on the wrong place as well. Anxious speakers tend to focus more on what the audience might think about them and what they are presenting. Again, equal emphasis must be placed on the speaker and the audience. Speakers experiencing anxiety often try to manage their uncomfortable feelings by being well organized and prepared. Anxious speakers often invest a lot of time and effort into preparing a very informative speech but struggle to convey that information effectively. Though informative, public reading is not nearly as interesting to the audience, nor as effective as public speaking. Consideration must be given to what is said (content), how it is said (delivery), and who it is said to (audience).

Based on these points we are going to show more vividly the causes, effects and ways to reduce this anxiety in this paper.

Discussion:

This is caused due to the effect of nervousness, lack of self-confidence, poor speaking skills, etc. When such a person is about to deliver a speech in public, he/she is infected by speech anxiety symptoms like sweating, stuttering, flushness, dizziness, etc. It is a universal fact that neither everyone is born public speaker nor are trained to become one.

But if such a situation demands where the person find himself/herself as the focus of attention in any public gathering or addressing a formal mass, then there lies the real challenge and high chances that the person would be attacked by emotions like fear, anxiety, nausea, sweating, stuttering, flushness, dizziness, etc. Most of the people try hard to avoid these situations of self performing or speaking in public, but when such a situation becomes unavoidable, and then it leads to distress.

According to Lucas (2011), "Many people who converse easily in all kinds of everyday situations become frightened at the idea of standing up before a group to make a speech". Such individuals need to realize that they are not the only ones who are going through these emotions. In fact, almost every speaker more or less feels the same while addressing. Professionals regularly keep on improving their communication skills. Verderber, Sellnow and Verderber (2011) state, "Public speaking, one form of human communication is actually a sustained formal presentation to a targeted audience. So, learning to be an effective public speaker will help you to be more effective in other communication settings as well". A change in confidence, improved speaking style, intonation pattern and hold on particular language can result in a positive change in their professionalism and personality. People can overcome these problems by practicing in small groups of peers and then moving on to larger audiences acquiring enough self-confidence. Anxiety is defined as a feeling of worry,

nervousness or unease about something with an uncertain outcome. According to Kant (2000), people in general negatively assess and appraise those who demonstrate their fears towards public speaking and fail to make a strong impression through confident gestures. These problems create difficulty in delivering the content successfully to the audience; hence speakers need to develop strong public speaking skills to enable them to become more confident and overcome this problem. The purpose of this study is to identify and investigate the symptoms and causes for the anxiety level of an individual on a public platform and recommend ways to overcome their anxiety level. This study includes the detailed description of the results and findings of the research that addresses anxiety issues.

These problems can be resolved but the process varies from person to person. If we consider natural processes to solve these problems we can say that these problems can be overcome by some common practices such as concentrating before the speech, reading and practising the delivery of the content several times before going live on stage which will give enough self-confidence.

Addressing the issue: Improving Communication Skills

Observing how others communicate effectively can help you improve your own communication skills.

For the socially anxious individual, communicating with others might seem daunting and nerve-racking. Shyness and fear of embarrassment might prevent you from striking up conversation with classmates and/or co-workers. However, improved communication skills can be achieved, although it will take effort, practice and commitment to overcome your nervousness.

Instructions

1. Observe how others around you communicate with each other. Listen to how they make conversation. Specifically, think about how they initiate and continue communication through verbal cues. Make note of what they talk about, as well. You can apply what you learn from others to your own conversations.

2. Develop a list of things to talk about (conversation starters). Paying more attention to the news would be an advantage, as this would give you subjects to chat about. For example, a new YouTube video that has suddenly gone viral can serve as a topic of discussion. If you are going to a party or an event, be prepared with a list of topics that everyone can talk about, so that you can find common ground with others. A funny topic works best, since people will really enjoy the conversation.

If you have run out of ideas for conversation starters or draw a blank, you can even make a casual remark, such as, "I heard it's going to rain today -- it'll be the fifth day in a row!" This will be a cue for the other person to respond and will give you the chance to strike up a conversation.

3. Practice every day conversations by initiating little chats with people whom you interact with during errands. These can include grocery store clerks and bank tellers. Ask them simple questions, such as, "How's your day going?" Or make little remarks, such as, "The bank isn't too busy today." These little conversations will help you build your confidence level to a point where you will feel less anxious about communicating with others.

4. When communicating with others, listen attentively to what they say and show genuine interest. Listening will help you understand what they like to talk about. Respond by asking them questions, which will allow them to continue talking about themselves. This is good conversation practice for socially anxious people who are not comfortable speaking.

However, it is necessary to contribute to the conversation by commenting or giving feedback, so as to stimulate the other person's interest in you. Ask open-ended questions -- not ones that result in yes-or-no answers, but rather detailed answers. Once you feel more comfortable talking, you can share your personal experiences/feelings and tie them in to what the other person is saying. For example, if you ask the other person about her trip to Costa Rica, you can respond by talking about how you would like to take a vacation someday soon.

5. Use proper body language. Maintaining good eye contact may make you feel nervous, but it will help you feel more connected to the other person. You can use gestures when you speak (but don't overdo it), such as simple hand movements when you're telling a story. Avoid crossing your arms, as this makes you look defensive.

6. Keep Smiling and act confident when you're communicating with others. Positive affirmations will also help you avoid negative thoughts such as feelings of embarrassment.

Table 1: Means (M) and Standard deviations (SD) values for the significance of difference among the three groups in state anxiety measures.

Statistic	Group	Good	Average	Poor
M		39.40	40.90	53.40
SD		4.74	11.19	9.89

**p<0.01 (Significant beyond 0.01 level)

Table 2: Means (M) and Standard deviations (SD) values for the significance of difference among the three groups in trait anxiety measures.

Statistic	Group	Good	Average	Poor
M		41.20	45.30	51.20
SD		2.82	9.42	9.51

*p<0.05 (Significant beyond 0.05 level)

Table 3: Mann-Whitney U values for multiple comparisons between two groups in state and trait anxiety measures.

Groups Compared	Good & Average	Average & Poor	Good & Poor
Type of Anxiety			
State	44.5	21.5*	8.0**
Trait	34.5	32	14**

*p<0.05 (Significant beyond 0.05 level)

**p<0.01 (Significant beyond 0.01 level)

Discussion of the results: A survey was carried out between state and trait anxiety measures (as shown in Table- 1 & 2) and was compared with standard Mann- Whitney U values to indicate a close resemblance of the data obtained from two different sources.

Remedial measures:

One common strategy that is used to reduce speech anxiety is to view a speech as a communication opportunity, a chance to share ideas and information with others. Although most people feel comfortable with communication opportunities when one-on-one and in

small groups, that feeling of comfort changes to anxiety when communicating with others one-on-many. Public speaking really is one-on-one communication, however, just with multiple ones. That is, you are a person trying to communicate effectively with several individuals simultaneously. Remember, a speech is not a performance. A speech is about being yourself and sharing what you know with others.

Another strategy to reduce speech anxiety is to avoid regarding a speech as an opportunity to fail. Mistakes will occur and although avoiding a speech to avoid making a mistake may make you feel better temporarily, remember that you have missed an opportunity to practice. Regardless of your performance, each time you deliver a speech you gain experience. It is that experience that develops confidence, even if a few mistakes are made along the way.

Allied issue: Social Anxiety and Communication about the Self

The reciprocal relationship between social anxiety and the communication of information about the self is examined. Social anxiety appears to arise from people's concerns about the impressions others are forming of them. Specifically, it is proposed that social anxiety occurs when people are motivated to create a desired impression on audiences but doubt they will do so. High social anxiety, in turn, is associated with qualitative and quantitative changes in how people communicate. It is argued that the combination of an important goal (i.e. to create a desired impression) and low expectations of goal achievement produces negative affect, physical or psychological withdrawal from the situation, and self-preoccupation with one's limitations. These distracting concomitants of high social anxiety impede optimally effective self-monitoring and control. The result is a lowered level of participation in interactions (e.g. initiating fewer conversations, talking less frequently), the avoidance of topics that might reveal one's ignorance (e.g. factual matters), minimal disclosure of information about the self

Conclusion:

Practice is another critical component of planning for a successful speech. Even if you know and like your topic you will still need to practice. You must practice for time, content, and delivery. Your speech must not be too long or too short but should fall within an acceptable range for the purpose of the speech.

In conclusion, most people experience speech anxiety to some degree. Learn to think of the arousal associated with public speaking as excitement rather than anxiety so that you feel enthusiastic about public speaking rather than nervous. Engage your audience in an interactive presentation that reflects your plan and preparation. In short, if you can understand what speech anxiety is, manage your physical and psychological responses, and plan a course of action you will be able to have a more positive and productive public speaking experience.

Acknowledgement:

References: