



The following is excerpted from *THE MILLION-DOLLAR TOOLBOX: A Blueprint for Transforming Your Life and Your Career with Powerful Communication Skills*, a soon-to-be-released book from Ty Boyd.

## TOOL FIVE, MANAGING FEAR

### Never Again Be Controlled By Fear

If you're reading this to get rid of your fear of speaking in front of others, you're in the wrong place. In my experience, that isn't possible. And it isn't even desirable. What you can do is change the way you think about fear.

Let's pack a few new truths into your communication toolbox, turn them into concrete tools we can use in keeping fear whittled down to a manageable size. What are the truths about fear?

We will experience some level of discomfort when making a presentation. It's normal. (Below, you'll find some effective techniques for managing your fear and your physical reactions.) But first and foremost, accept that your nervousness is normal.

- We look more comfortable than we feel. Our perceptions about ourselves aren't always accurate. We feel nervous so we think we look it, but the truth is most of us don't show our nerves. Confidence and nervousness aren't mutually exclusive; you can feel nervous on the inside but still have confidence.

This brings up an important bit of advice: Don't shoot yourself in the foot by acknowledging your fear to your audience and chances are they'll never know. Never tell the audience you're nervous. Never tell them you haven't had time to think about what you're planning to say. When you do that, you create fear in them, fear that you'll fail, fear that they'll have to witness your failure. Don't create the reality for them. Because we look in charge. And that makes us far more effective and powerful than we give ourselves credit for.

- We can compensate for our fear by coming prepared. We can practice, practice, practice. And even in our worst nightmares, that preparation will kick in and save us from a poor performance.
- We can put the focus on the audience rather than on ourselves. When the focus is on self, communications can and usually do fail; when the focus is on others, enormous opportunities open up.

The question to ask yourself before you get up to speak is not, "Will they like me?" or "Will they think I know what I'm talking about?" Instead, try this little bit of self-talk: "What I have to say is valuable. I want to share it with others. How can I do that most effectively? How can I be sure they learn this important topic or enjoy these funny stories?"

Then we can reinforce that connection by seeking a positive response from the audience as quickly as possible. We can ask for audience feedback, for raised hands, for a verbal response, for a group activity. The sooner we can get a positive response from the audience, the quicker our anxiety level drops tremendously.

And getting positive feedback from our audience is pretty simple, because of this basic truth: The audience is on our side. The audience rarely wants nor needs all the power we give them. Sometimes we're in an adversarial relationship with our audience, but not often. Most of the time, they want to like us. They want to think we're smart. They want us to be in control. They want us to be entertaining and exciting. They will meet us more than halfway, most of the time.

- Forget perfection. Accept your humanness and remember that vulnerability is an asset in effective communication. We can be our best but we don't have to be perfect in order to be effective communicators.
- We change our negative, limiting thoughts by behaving in a manner contrary to those thoughts. When we act as if we have courage often enough, we wake up one morning and discover that we do have courage. Fear is a habit. We establish a new habit by faking it 'til we make it.
- Fear can be transformed into one of our greatest tools: Energy.
- The simple task of walking through our fear - doing what we fear, then doing it again - transforms our fear into courage.

#### **Some thoughts about diminishing fear**

- Develop a personal mantra or affirmation that cuts the power of your fear. Phrase it in present tense, as if it were already true. Repeat it daily. Look yourself in the mirror and say the words, "What I feel is normal and has no power over me. It does not hold me back or limit me in any way." Or, "Fear is an old habit. My new habit is confidence."
- Talk about your fear to people you can trust.
- Slow down. If your heart is racing, slow down all the physical responses you can - voice, movements. Take the time to make eye contact.
- Stand tall and breathe from your diaphragm, which will strengthen your voice and eliminate the quivers.
- Smile.
- Practice, practice, practice.

#### **Relaxation Techniques to Lessen Fear**

Paying attention to the physical aspects of our nervousness pays off in a big way. By borrowing tools from yoga, from biofeedback, from meditation, we can calm our bodies and our minds.

Begin by tensing all your muscles, one by one, then loosening them. Begin with your toes. Curl them tightly. Hold that for a count of five. Then relax them. Feel and appreciate the difference.

Then move up to your calves, your thighs, your stomach muscles. Clench your fists, then let them relax. In privacy, before you enter the room, tighten every muscle in your face. Make the worst

frown you can imagine, purse your lips as tightly as you can. Lillias Folan, a yoga instructor for public TV and a top-notch communicator herself, calls it making a prune face. Hold that prune face, then let it go. Allow the tension to drain out of you as you release each tensed muscle.

You can also watch your breathing, and use it to generate calm assurance. Breathe deeply, into the diaphragm, not just into the chest. Fill your tummy with breath, then empty it slowly. Do it three times. In through the nose, out through the mouth. Make an audible, sighing sound as you release the breath.

And imagine, as you do, that you're gently blowing out your tension, your nervousness, your fears. Then breathe in calm, confidence, positive energy. Fill yourself with it, then release your breath again, and with it, all the fear and tension.

Practice these relaxation techniques regularly, not just before big presentations, and you'll see what a difference they make.

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