

YOUR SHORTCUT TO BETTER PUBLIC SPEAKING



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Can you remember a moment when your whole life changed?

Chances are, it wasn't actually that major at the time. It might have seemed really mundane. A struggle. A moment of courage. Doing something most people won't. Meeting someone new. Taking on a challenge.

About 10 years ago, I tried stand-up comedy. It was the scariest thing I'd ever done. I felt like I was walking to my death. I remember it was about 15 feet from my seat to that stage. A few minutes later I sat back down, and I knew in that moment that the sound of people laughing was the sound of my life changing.

That little decision brought comedy into my life, a practice that has given me confidence, happiness, a way to process a really tough childhood, even a framework for greater impact in my messaging. It taught me to ask not only "Is my message important?" but "Is my message engaging?" 10 years later, I've spoken to hundreds of thousands of people, had stories played on The Moth and NPR, keynoted countless conferences and symposiums, and written a few books. Once I even spoke to 18,000 students in the stadium where the Indiana Pacers play.

All because I took a short, uncomfortable walk to an incredibly important action step. This is what separated me from the people I thought were smarter and more talented than I was. They weren't. They simply recognized the value of acting bigger than they might feel.

For many of us, even the thought of public speaking seems uncomfortable. But the rewards of better public speaking are substantial. You get to share the messages that are the most important to you, and you learn to do it in a way that causes them to take the action you want them to take. It's an incredible platform.

And once you overcome the nervousness, the more you enjoy speaking and the more authentic you can be in a spot most people won't even stand. Now imagine standing there without any nervousness whatsoever! That's been my life for the past few years. And I didn't get there because I have a superhuman amount of talent or confidence. I really, really don't.

I like to tell people I'm a completely natural speaker, I just had to do 500 speeches first. Now I'm going to save you A LOT of time and share with you what I've learned about mastering the craft of public speaking: there is no shortcut.

But there is a shortest possible path.

The shortest path to public speaking confidence is to do exactly what scares you until it doesn't scare you anymore. Go straight at it. Doesn't that make you want to throw up? But doesn't that also feel true?

Have you ever dreaded a public speaking opportunity, only to discover afterward that it wasn't as awful as anticipated? If so, then you've already experienced the truth: speaking's bark is way worse than speaking's bite. All the more reason to build your confidence so you stop listening to doubt and start sharing your message.

The right question to ask yourself is: how should I TALK, THINK, ACT, FOCUS in order to get myself up on stage enough times to overcome my nervousness in the shortest amount of time possible?

THINK:

Try being curious about your fear. Study it like an anthropologist. Why does it exist? Is it actually valid? Am I really in danger? How does it feel when my volunteer for something scary? Does my chest tighten? Interesting. Are my palms sweaty? Does my hand shake? No? Great, I'm making progress!

Now identify the smallest possible action step to overcome this fear.

"The best way to build confidence is one minute of discomfort at a time."

—Colin's grandma

Instead of avoiding, ask yourself: "Where will I do the minutes?"

TALK:

You can start simply by talking about your message/product/service to everyone you know. Talk about it as much as possible. For one, you're way too close to it – feedback from others will help you see what you can't see. And two, the more you talk like you are it, the more you'll forget you're not it. Pretend you are until you are. The more repetition, the better.

Talking about it (aka "Getting On Stage") helps you:

- to hone your message
- to build confidence in it (and yourself)
- to see what you can't see
- to spread the word!

Now that you're talking about, ask yourself, "What actions will 'get me on stage' and build my confidence with speaking in public?"

ACT:

Look at all these possibilities:

- Comedy open mic night
- Storytelling open mic
- Poetry jam
- Improv comedy class
- Theater production
- Lead a yoga class
- Attend a networking group
- Assemble a practice audience
- Toastmasters
- Talk to your friends and family about what you're doing
- Emcee a panel
- Volunteer to kick off a meeting
- Read announcements over the PA
- Ask to introduce a speaker
- Talk into the live microphone after the event is over
- Tell a story at your next team meeting
- Offer to be a guest speaker in a high school class or career day
- Attend chamber of commerce "networking" events where you have to talk about yourself
- Suggest one on one meetings with fellow entrepreneurs to explain what you do (and listen to what they do)
- Look for Lunch and Learn events (at co-working spaces or at your organization) where you can give a free talk to people during lunch
- Volunteer your services at a local group who might benefit from your message (i.e. Boys and Girls Club)
- Get a booth at a trade show related to your expertise - lots of conversations and feedback

FOCUS:

Your absolute best feedback will come from the exact audience you're trying to reach. So how can you test out your message on that specific audience? Who is a gatekeeper who could put you in front of them? Once you get to do that, here's the most important part: It's not about what you say -- it's about your ability to listen.

Stop focusing on how good you are/aren't. Focus on what they are responding to.

- What did they find funny?
- What did they find relatable?
- What did they find confusing?
- What is the most common response to your pitch/message?
- When do you lose them? When do they glaze over?

- When do you have them? When do they lean in?
- If you lost them, what did you say that brought them back?
- When you take a risk and really try to go outside your comfort zone and be intriguing/engaging, does this change their response in any way?
- Find a universal hook that creates a way to get into your real subject ("I want to teach meditation, so I'll talk about how to have a career in music to segue into the role of meditation in managing your mental health as a performer").
- Internal feedback is also helpful, of course! How did it feel to you? Were you comfortable with it? Why/why not?
- Are you using your time efficiently? Are there more succinct ways to state your message? Is everything clear in your mind?
- Ask for feedback from people in the crowd after speaking via an evaluation form.

ONE ACTION STEP:

In the next 2 weeks, **one thing** I'll try in **one area** is...

TALK	THINK
ACT	FOCUS