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Prepare for the Unexpected

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Life is full of things we can't control. Even if we do everything in our power to plan in advance, we can always count on something unexpected happening. When it comes to speaking in public lack of control and unpredictability can be difficult to handle.

Imagine how great it would be if we could control everything we cared about! But wait a minute. That also means that we would never leave our comfort zones. Thus, we would waste our chances to grow, learn, and be creative. Leaving your comfort zone is what helps you become a better version of you and cope with your fears in a healthy way.

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Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2

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Anxiety Is in the Eyes of the Beholder

Perception of how much control we have over our life is an important contributor of anxiety. People prone to anxious reactions usually strive to have as much control as possible. When things are beyond their supervision, they tend to perceive the circumstances as extremely threatening, as if their worst nightmares are coming true.

Prepare for the Unexpected

This overwhelming need for control is particularly relevant when it comes to public speaking. Everything you do before standing up in front of the audience is geared towards gaining

control over the situation. One of the goals of preparation is to predict possible outcomes and solutions. However, no matter how meticulous of a planner you may be, the actual event is often far different from what we have imagined.

A Strategy for Uncontrollable Events

Thinking that you have to control overall parameters of your public speech your public speech can be compared to a cognitive distortion. On the other hand, it's totally normal to strive to control whatever you can, when dealing with something that gives you anxiety. Is there any middle ground between the urge to predict everything and complete lack of control?

Consider Everything

Luckily, there is. The first step you can take is to think about all the relevant aspects of your future public speech. Apart from the presentation itself and the techniques for overcoming fear, there is also your audience, the questions they may ask, the possibility that you might forget to say something important, and so on.

Rehearse Your Attitude

After that, assess how much control you have over all of these aspects. For example, you can't control what someone may ask you during your speech, but you can prepare for the most likely questions, and you can choose to remain calm, whatever questions you may receive. Besides, you can rehearse the answers to a variety of likely and unlikely questions, if that would help you gain confidence. Nevertheless, keep in mind that this still doesn't mean that everything is under your full control, and that is perfectly alright because it is unrealistic to expect to control all of life. We don't mean to scare you, but rather to help you understand that having total control over everything is impossible.

Is the Worst that Bad?

Consider what would happen, if some of those unpredictable, and possibly negative situations, did occur. Instead of trying to answer every possible question your audience may ask, come up with a strategy, rather than a single answer, and think of the realistic worst thing that can happen. Often we tend to exaggerate the consequences we imagine. Upon asking yourself what the worst realistic outcome is, you will probably notice that it may not be as frightening as you might have thought.

Creating a Strategic Response

Creating a functional strategy is about deciding how to approach everything you can't predict. To use the example with the unpredictable question from the audience, your answer can be as simple as, "That is a great question, but I'm not able to answer at the moment. I can look it up for you and send the by email, if you'd like" or, if your audience is large, and you are not able to communicate with each separately, "Thank you for asking, that is not a concept I am familiar with, but I am always striving to increase my knowledgeability and will make sure to

learn about the as soon as possible.”

Remain Calm

Try to plan similar strategies for other aspects of your public speech as well. For example, bring your notes, or iPad, tablet or laptop with you, in case there is an issue with the device provided by the event, and you have a visual presentation, which needs to be projected along with the speech. Plan and apply a similar approach to other unforeseen circumstances. However, most importantly, make sure you can react in a calm, collected and honest manner, whatever happens.

Get Comfortable Before Improvising

Even if it is impossible to control everything, there is a vast difference between being well prepared and going with the flow. The latter may be a more suitable approach when you become an experienced and self-confident speaker. Once you have faced your fear and feel more comfortable in the role of a presenter, planning and rehearsing can still help, but they won't be as critical.

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