

Life... First talk before a group

Situation:

I've accepted an invitation to stretch out of my comfort zone – I'm scheduled to talk in front of a group of people for the first time in a long, long time. In between long ago and now, I've had severe panic attacks. I'm over the brutal problems, for more than three years now, but I admit I'm tense about this new adventure. I'd appreciate any general hints that you can pass along.

Answer:

The beauty of public speaking is that it's nothing like the "old" days when we had to stand up in front of the class and recite the Gettysburg address. Think about it. The audience doesn't know exactly what you're going to say, so in a sense you can't make a mistake. That's a very secure thought to keep in mind. If you forget something – only you will know, so it won't be a big deal at all.

When I was doing training shortly after I re-entered the corporate world, I started out talking to small groups of three or four people. Suddenly I was scheduled for a class of 30. My secure thought? If I could talk in front of four people, I could talk in front of 30. If you know your material, it doesn't matter how many pairs of ears there are out there listening. If you can talk to one person, I assure you, you are capable of talking to many.

A secure/positive thought is that if you do miss something, there are bound to be questions, either during your talk or at the end of it. If people want to know something important, someone is bound to speak up.

Another way of lessening your tension is to think of it as a talk, not a speech. The word "speech" sounds formal and scary. In fact I've used the term, "exchange of information" to help me be more calm.

You may experience some nervous symptoms before or just as you begin speaking. In fact, if this is your first time in a long time, you probably will. The very same cognitive-behavioral tools that you used to squelch the intense symptoms of the panicky feeling you had waiting in a grocery store line or in an elevator will work this time too.

Learn to face the scary feelings one event after another, and there will come a time when can literally do anything you choose to do!