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“Give Me Public Speaking or Give Me Death?”

By Mary Anne Dorward

In an old Seinfeld episode, Jerry was sitting at a funeral. He turns to the person next to him and comments, “Did you know that people fear public speaking more than death? That means that more people would rather be inside the coffin than giving the eulogy!”

But why is it that we all tend to break out into a cold sweat and go immediately to thoughts of death rather than delight at the very thought of public speaking?

I think it has something to do with fear. But what are those fears trying to tell us? And can we listen to them in order to convert their tremendous potential energy into positive outcome? While your fears believe it is their job to save you from pending humiliation, we have to explain to them that we need all their valuable energy in our mental and physical gas tank, not standing out in front of our car, screaming “Get out while you still can!”

But How Do We Do That?

One way people are able to overcome their fears is by working with a professional speaking coach—it’s a great start. Not only can a professional coach help you understand what your fears are trying to tell you, they can help you design a personalized program for overcoming them.

The perceived value of your company rests in your ability as a leader to effectively communicate with clarity and passion to your desired audience. As a leader, your audience is both the people who work for you and those to whom you sell your products or services. At the outset of the second World War, Franklin Delano Roosevelt told us, “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.”

In the context of making a speech, I would add, “We have nothing to fear. But we fear ourselves.” With practice and determination, you can overcome those internal fears so that you can get on to the business of telling the world your story and winning more customers. The time has come for you to wow the world with your great speeches, and not to have to die a painful death time and time again.

Over the next several issues, we will explore how you can become a more powerful speaker. We will review proven tips and techniques for giving a great speech so that you can reach your audience, deliver your message, and achieve your goals every time.