

PUBLIC SPEAKING & STORYTELLING
FOR PROJECT MANAGERS & ENGINEERS

Rashid N. Kapadia

Necessary Bridges



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Public Speaking & Storytelling for
Project Managers & Engineers

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Rashid N. Kapadia

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With infinite gratitude I dedicate this work to ...

My parents, for their limitless love and their sterling examples. And for invaluable memories of contentment, erudition and equanimity.

My wife and son, for their limitless love and their selfless support. And for making us the blessed family we are.

I would also like to dedicate my work to ...

All engineers and project managers, past, present and future. Alas, too often, “the world little knows ... nor long remembers ...” the greatness of our professions.

All who bring passion and purpose to public speaking, storytelling and oratory.

All who set audacious goals, long to build necessary bridges and make the world a better place.

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Preface

“It always seems impossible until it is done.”

— *Nelson Mandela*

I remember being truly mesmerized, watching a scene from the movie *Invictus*. This is the scene in which the president of South Africa summons the captain of its national rugby team to his presidential office, and plants the seed of an idea: “Win the Rugby World Cup; our broken nation needs this of you. Together, we must all become ‘One Team, One Nation.’”

This movie portrays a portion of the multifaceted book called *Playing the Enemy* by John Carlin. It is one of the best sports books I’ve read, covering one of the greatest sports stories of all time; but it is much more. It is an inspirational self-help book. It is a book about a political genius who faced multiple impossibly difficult challenges, and who responded with, “It always seems impossible until it is done.” It is a book about an epic injustice and an epic reconciliation. It is a book about a leader, who perhaps more than anyone else on this planet, mastered the art of making friends and influencing people. It is a book about a superb public speaker. It is a book, which describes the most unlikely exercise in political seduction ever undertaken. And it is a book, which led to a superb scene in a marvelous movie.

President Nelson Mandela (NM): Tell me, Francois, ... what is your philosophy of leadership? How do you inspire your team to do their best?

Captain of the Springboks Rugby team, Francois Pienaar (FP): By example ... I’ve always thought to lead by example, Sir.

NM: Well that is right ... that is exactly right. But how to get them to be better than they think they can be? That is

*very difficult, I find. Inspiration, perhaps. How do we inspire ourselves to greatness, when nothing less will do? How do we inspire everyone around us? I sometimes think it is by **using the work of others.***

On Robben Island, when things got very bad ... I found inspiration in a poem.

FP: A poem?

NM: A Victorian poem ... just words ... but they helped me to stand when all I wanted to do was to lie down.

But you didn't come all this way to hear an old man talk about things that make no sense.

FP: No, no, please Mr. President ... it makes complete sense to me. On the day of the big match, say a test, in the bus, on the way to the stadium, nobody talks.

NM: Ah yes, they are all preparing.

FP: Right. But when I think we are ready, I have the bus driver put on a song, something I've chosen, one we all know ... and we listen to the words together ... and it helps.

NM: I remember when I was invited to the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. Everybody in the stadium greeted me with a song. At the time the future ... our future, seemed very bleak. But to hear that song in the voices of people from all over our planet made me proud to be South African. It inspired me to come home and do better. It allowed me to expect more of myself.

FP: May I ask, what was the song, Sir?

NM: Well ... it was Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika ... a very inspiring song.

We need inspiration, Francois, ... because in order to build our nation, we must all exceed our own expectations.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQhns5AwAkA>

I wondered why this scene moved me so deeply. I thought long and hard about it. Engineers all too frequently cannot leave great feelings, or well enough alone. They try to “figure it out.” You already know this. I wasn’t really satisfied with anything I initially came up with. That changed after I was exposed to the worlds of public speaking and storytelling.

After spending a few years trying to improve my public speaking and storytelling skills, I got a much better appreciation and understanding of why I was so mesmerized by the powerful *Invictus* scene. It is the same power that public speakers and storytellers everywhere attempt to harness.

I know I want to exceed my own expectations on a regular basis. Who doesn’t? But to hear and see it dramatized this way was a game changer.

Vikas Jhingran has written a book called *Emote: Using Emotions to Make Your Message Memorable*. In his approach (with his uniquely analytical articulation of the role of emotions in speech craft), he recommends that we start writing a speech after having made a clear decision of the “final emotion” we want to leave the audience with.

Well, the emotions that I was left with at the end of this scene would be a fabulous way to feel at the end of any speech or presentation—regardless of whether I was in the audience or speaking to an audience.

I have drawn much inspiration from the movie *Invictus*, and especially from using **the work of others**.

In *Necessary Bridges*, I have used **the work of others** extensively. I acknowledge with much gratitude all that is available to us on the road to exceeding our own expectations. I have meticulously credited sources. Whenever I have cited the work (or the words) of others, I have italicized them. In the unlikely event I have inadvertently omitted to cite a

source, I apologize in advance. The oversight error is entirely my own.

To the reader, if I have cited sources in a way that seems excessive, and occasionally disrupts the smooth flow of reading, or requires you to read too much italicized font, I ask your indulgence. It is an essential compromise: I ask your understanding.

Over many years as a project manager and engineer, it became clearer and clearer to me project managers and engineers were inadvertently compromising their professional and career advancement by not being “good enough” in public speaking and storytelling.

I committed to write this book because I inadvertently stumbled into a hole. I became aware of a gap, a mismatch; one that I could no longer ignore.

Briefly, these conclusions dawned on me: (1) there is a mismatch between what project managers know they need to excel at: and with what they commit to excelling at: and (2) there is a mismatch between what engineers think they need to know and learn: and with what they really need to know and learn. Put differently, this topic found me and in an inexplicable way commanded me to act! “Write a book, Rashid. Evangelize public speaking and storytelling to project managers and engineers. In time they will thank you for this contribution to our professions.” A bonus benefit: Writing a book on a subject helps the author become an expert on that subject.

The primary purpose of this book is to get project managers and engineers to commit to acquiring expertise in public speaking and storytelling. The secondary purpose is to provide (just) enough content (accompanied by exercises, examples and directions to other resources—i.e. the work of others) to keep the commitment strong and sustained over

years. There is plenty of marvelous content out there.

This book is NOT about technical presentations or presentations specific to the professions of engineering and project management. The content of this book is generic and exposes the reader to the basics of public speaking and storytelling.

This analogy may help explain my thinking. In the 1970s there was a revolution in which personal computers began entering our lives in a major way. Two dominant companies driving this revolution were Microsoft and Apple. Microsoft focused on providing really useful and ubiquitous products, but they were (in my opinion) not too concerned, perhaps even indifferent, to the design and the beauty of the products. Apple, on the other hand (in my opinion), was deeply concerned about the design and beauty of its products, perhaps obsessively so.

I see the Microsoft approach as one to which possibly engineers and project managers (at least of my age and background) default. Certainly that was my approach. I mean, “Who cares what it looks like as long as it works well?” It was only after the stunning success of products like the iMac, the iPod, the iPhone, the iPad, the MacBook Air etc., that the advantage of great design dawned on many of us.

I have come to believe that deciding to lavish deliberate attention and care on public speaking and storytelling can make the same difference to our professions that Apple’s “design is very important” approach made to the computer (and computer-based consumer devices) industry.

This book has been conceived and created more as a product to be used in combination with other resources, than as a stand-alone book. It has been developed as a guide book providing course work. It has been conceived as an incubator of and companion to a self-development project,

of minimum two years duration. It has been conceived with the intention that the reader will return to it multiple times over the duration of the self-development project, and read it along with other recommended books simultaneously. This is also called syntopical reading.

Indeed, here is a sample recommendation. I recommend that you procure a book called *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading* by Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren, and read that book in parallel with *Necessary Bridges*. You will extract much more value out of *Necessary Bridges* if you follow this approach.

It is my hope (dare I say vision), that someday in the not too distant future, project managers and engineers will routinely be thought of not only as smart and educated individuals, but as excellent public speakers and storytellers too; the way Apple products are thought of as marvels of engineering and are beautifully designed, too. Why? Because these are essential skills to move any human endeavor along. Public speaking and storytelling are essential skills to (using a line from Apple's Think Different ad) "*to push the human race forward.*" Public speaking and storytelling skills are lubricating oils that keep the machinery of engineering, project management and relationship management running super-smoothly. And engineers and project managers have moved — indeed, pushed — the world forward as much as or more than any other profession.

It is my hope that engineers and project managers increasingly communicate in a way that leaves everyone around them experiencing the same final emotion I felt at the end of the *Invictus* movie scene; inspired and committed to exceeding their own expectations.

It always seems impossible until it is done!

Chapter 7

The Fear of Public Speaking

“There are two types of speakers: Those that are nervous and those that are liars.”

— *Mark Twain*

I’ve heard it many times, way too many times. *The Fear of Public Speaking is Greater than the Fear of Death.*

My reactions have changed over the years from “This is humorous, I should remember the line,” to “sort of cute and quaint, but not really true,” to “oh no ... not again,” to “what utter rubbish!”

So I will unequivocally state my thinking. The proclamation “*The Fear of Public Speaking is Greater than the Fear of Death,*” is utter rubbish. Or to restate this diplomatically, the assertion is simply not true. And this one statement, this urban myth, has probably done more disservice to aspiring public speakers, those genuinely desiring to take the first step, than I care to think about.

Do you, dear reader, fear death less than you fear having to speak in public? Really? Please may I ask you again? Do you fear death less than you fear public speaking? Really? Truly?

I do not deny that the fear of public speaking is very real. It is. I have experienced its overpowering presence occasionally, and know that in the future, I will have to cope with it occasionally. I acknowledge that for some it can be debilitating, even crippling. No, I do not disrespect it or deny it at all.

Some of the most compelling speeches I have ever heard are those given by a speaker who is experiencing real fear while speaking, and yet speaking anyway.

Case in Point: TED Talk by Megan Washington titled, “Why I live in mortal dread of public speaking.” In this talk, it is clear that everyone in the audience is on Megan Washington’s side. How can they not be? This is the very definition of courage right before our own eyes. (*The original definition of courage*

when it first came into the English language — it's from the Latin word cor, meaning heart—was to tell the story of who you are with your whole heart—Brené Brown, TED Talk). How can we not be filled with admiration? How can we not cheer this speaker on? (http://www.ted.com/talks/megan_washington_why_i_live_in_mortal_dread_of_public_speaking)

Let's take this a step further. I have been coached by Sandra Zimmer and have read her book *It's Your Time to Shine: How to Overcome Fear of Public Speaking, Develop Authentic Presence and Speak from Your Heart* many times. The reason I have read it many times is not because I have any abnormal fear of public speaking, but because I felt I had stumbled onto the work of a trailblazer. I kept having this feeling “she is onto something here” ... “she is onto something right here.” This will one day be validated by new knowledge and by science. The wannabe detective in me was triggered. She reflects, that after having coached thousands of people, over decades, she has observed that those who start out with the most stage fright have the potential to be the most compelling speakers. Frequently they do end up being the most compelling speakers. I dare say that the Megan Washington TED Talk makes this case compellingly. Indeed the first chapter of Zimmer's book is titled *Congratulations, You've Got Stage Fright*.

Zimmer's coaching and method focus on getting the body fully prepared for the necessary work of public speaking; on getting into an “optimal state of body.” Of course there is much more to her coaching, but to my mind, this is its most unique and valuable offering.

So if you feel the fear of public speaking is one you must confront or overcome, you cannot go wrong picking up this book. It has my high recommendation. There are nice short videos on her website too articulating just this.

No, I do not deny or disrespect stage fright or the very real

and ubiquitous fear of public speaking—not at all.

A task I am giving myself in this chapter is to put distance, a lot of distance, between these two statements:

Statement One: The fear of public speaking is very real and it is universal. (TRUE)

Statement Two: The fear of public speaking is greater than the fear of death. (FALSE)

I've probably heard Statement Two five to ten times more frequently than I've heard Statement One. Indeed, I recently did a fantastic memory workshop and there too, when the trainer was teaching methods for remembering speeches, I heard the same old song. What a pity. It all sounded so genuine and real. As if there were real surveys and this was based on real data. It's just plain wrong. An unfortunate urban myth.

Believing that *The Fear of Public Speaking is Greater than the Fear of Death* is true does not help anyone. This statement is best removed from the vocabulary and thinking of public speaking, public speakers, and aspiring public speakers. Again, are you more afraid of public speaking than you are of death? For real?

Where did this nonsense (Statement Two, not Statement One) originate?

Statement Two seems to have been spread mainly from three sources: Comedians Jay Leno, Jerry Seinfeld and the 1977 *Book of Lists*

The Book Of Lists (which has sourced its content from Sunday Times, London (Oct 7, 1973)) gives us a list in response to:

“What are you most afraid of?” a team of market researchers asked 3,000 U.S. inhabitants. Many named more than one fear:

- 1. **Speaking before a group (41%)***
- 2. Heights (32%)*
- 3. Financial problems (22%)*

3. *Insects and bugs (22%)*
3. *Deep water (22%)*
- 6. *Death (19%)***
6. *Sickness (19%)*
8. *Flying (18%)*
9. *Loneliness (14%)*
10. *Dogs (11%)*
11. *Driving/riding in a car (9%)*
12. *Darkness (8%)*
12. *Elevators (8%)*
14. *Escalators (5%)*

As Jay Leno quipped, *“I guess we’d rather be in the casket than delivering the eulogy.”*

And here’s a famous version from Jerry Seinfeld.

According to most studies, people’s number one fear is public speaking. Death is number two. Does that seem right? That means to the average person, if you have to go to a funeral, you’re better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.

From a comedian’s laugh line, this assertion has been transformed to the status of a believed truth. What a pity. What next? People are more afraid of heights, insects and bugs, financial problems, deep water and sickness than they are afraid of death? Enough said!

This article gives more detail toward debunking the myth:
<http://tmvision.org/speaking/people-fear-public-speaking-death>

Clearly there is a fear of public speaking. This fear is a common and universal one (Statement One). That being said, public speaking and oratory have been around for thousands of years. Millions of people have spoken publically. Surely any aspiring speaker can do the same. Surely every engineer and every project manager can do the same.

Anyway, what causes this fear? And how can we manage it?

Turns out that this fear is an evolutionary bequeath, triggered by ancient parts of our brains, responding to perceived threats. The trigger is founded more on the “Public,” than on the “Speaking.” The trigger is the observation of the subconscious mind that the attention of a lot of other people is on the speaker. This is the same trigger associated with any public appearance or performance, be it singing, or acting, or competing in sports.

Here are a couple of more detailed and authoritative explanations from two credible sources: TED-Ed and Psychology Today.

**The science of stage fright (and how to overcome it)—
Mikael Cho**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K93fMnFKwfl>

or

The Science of Stage Fright: TED Blog

<http://blog.ted.com/2013/10/16/required-watching-for-any-ted-speaker-the-science-of-stage-fright/comment-page-2/>

A similar explanation comes from Psychology Today. If you have online access, it is much better to read this online. If not here is the content.

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-real-story-risk/201211/the-thing-we-fear-more-death>

The Thing We Fear More Than Death

Why predators are responsible for our fear of public speaking
(Published on Nov 28, 2012 by Glenn Croton, PhD in “The Real Story of Risk”)

Surveys about our fears commonly show fear of public speaking at the top of the list. Our fear of standing up in front of a group and talking is so great that we fear it more than death, in surveys at least. On one hand I understand, having sweated myself about getting up in front of a group. On the other hand, it seems odd that we're so afraid—what are we afraid of, anyway? What do we think will happen to us? We're unlikely to suffer any real or lasting harm—or are we? The answer seems to lie in our remote past, in our evolution as social animals.

Humans evolved over the last few million years in a world filled with risks like large predators and starvation. Based on the fossil evidence of predator attacks on our human ancestors (as described in the book “Man the Hunted” written by Robert Sussman and Donna Hart), and on predation rates on large primates today, early humans were probably commonly hunted by a wealth of large predators. One common defense to predation displayed by primates and other animals is to live in groups. In a group, other group members can alert each other to predators and help to fight them off. The advantages of living in a group probably are the reason why early humans and other large primates evolved to be social, and why we are still social today.

Humans were not the largest, fastest, or fiercest animal—early humans survived by their wits and their ability to collaborate. Those that worked together well, helping others in their group, probably survived and passed on traits that contributed to social behavior.

Failure to be a part of the social group, getting kicked out, probably spelled doom for early humans. Anything that threatens our status in our social group, like the threat of ostracism, feels like a very great risk to us.

“Ostracism appears to occur in all social animals that have been observed in nature,” said Kip Williams, a professor of

psychological sciences at Purdue who has studied ostracism. “To my knowledge, in the animal kingdom, ostracism is not only a form of social death, it also results in death. The animal is unable to protect itself against predators, cannot garner enough food, etc., and usually dies within a short period of time.”

The fear is not just about public speaking, but is also faced by many others who are faced with getting in front of a crowd and performing like athletes, actors, and musicians. As a social psychologist, teacher, and a sufferer of social anxiety, Dr. Signe Dayhoff suffered through intense fear of public speaking every time he got up to teach a class. “My tongue stuck to the roof of my dry mouth and I couldn’t swallow, I blushed, sweated and trembled,” he said. Eventually it got so bad that it interfered in his ability to do his job. Getting help, he found he could deal with the situation better. “As I recovered 12 years ago, using cognitive-behavior therapy, patience, persistence, and practice, I found that nearly 20 million individuals at any one time suffer from some form of social anxiety. They fear being negatively evaluated in anything they do; fear being rejected; fear being abandoned.”

When faced with standing up in front of a group, we break into a sweat because we are afraid of rejection. And at a primal level, the fear is so great because we are not merely afraid of being embarrassed, or judged. We are afraid of being rejected from the social group, ostracized and left to defend ourselves all on our own. We fear ostracism still so much today it seems, fearing it more than death, because not so long ago getting kicked out of the group probably really was a death sentence.

To sum up:

1. Stage fright is triggered by an ancient part of our brain, which registers threat when receiving attention from large groups.
2. Stage fright results from the primal fear of being

ostracized from a group as a result of being judged unfavorably by that group.

3. Stage fright is the fight-or-flight response activated.
4. Stage fright can be managed. It has been managed for thousands of years, by millions of speakers.
5. The notion that the fear of public speaking is greater than the fear of death is an unfortunate myth, with unfortunate staying power, resulting from a misunderstood list and a couple of laugh lines.

I hope all of the above will allow you to put some distance between Statement One and Statement Two. Between truth and urban legend.

To the reader, to the project manager who needs to be an effective speaker, to the engineer who can only benefit by being an effective presenter and persuader, I am suggesting that if you anticipate experiencing stage fright, or experience stage fright, the first thing to do is not study techniques and methods to cope, but to decide, absolutely decide, that stage fright will not impede your PS&ST voyage.

Deciding to manage the fear of public speaking is probably more difficult, and certainly more essential, than the actual managing of fear.

Let me return to an argument I made in chapter 3 based around this quotation: *It is harder to decide—really and truly decide—to become a millionaire, than it is to actually become a millionaire.* A modified version of this quotation would be: *It is probably harder to decide—really and truly decide—to overcome the fear of public speaking, than it is to actually overcome the fear of public speaking.* I am not offering this as an exact science type of statement, but more as a means of recognizing that these are two very different things.

Truthfully, I think that the goal, “I will overcome the fear of

public speaking” may not be optimal. There is no telling when this fear will show up. There’s no telling when the fight-or-flight response will get activated. There’s no telling when the fear of being judged or ostracized will surface. A better goal may be. “I will learn and use processes and techniques that will help me manage the fear of public speaking as and when it does surface,” or “I will practice and practice and practice, in front of audiences, till I become more and more comfortable within my body when speaking in public.”

And in the event that managing this fear on a regular basis turns out to be harder than expected, think about this from the late actress Helen Hayes. Befriend your fear, say “hello old friend” to yourself every time it does show up. And let it remind you; motivate you, to prepare even more.

“Fear is not a foe but a friend—a familiar companion that nagged me to do my best. Don’t think of fear as a deterrent. It’s a kick in the rear to prepare.” — Helen Hayes, *First Lady of American Theatre*

Once you’ve committed to managing and befriending this famous fear, (the harder part) then proceed with whatever techniques work for you (the easier part):

- Meditating
- Listening to music
- Deep Breathing
- Exercising in the morning
- Moving your body—dancing or similar
- Power posing (http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are)
- Moving focus away from yourself to your audience
- Being thoroughly prepared
- Arranging for friends / support in the audience.
- Prepare, prepare, prepare
- Practice, practice, practice

- Visualize yourself on stage, feeling whatever you are feeling, and proceeding to do a splendid job nonetheless
- Make your own Pre-Speech Check List or Notes (see mine in Appendix 4, page 286)

Darren LaCroix, a world-class public speaker, entrepreneur, and coach extraordinaire, sums it up accurately in this mantra “*Stage time, stage time, stage time.*”

Here is another Sun Tzu modification that may help you along the way. *Know your glossophobia (fear of public speaking), and know your speech thoroughly, and in a hundred speeches you will never be in peril.*

I have learned to prepare for stage fright, confident that mostly it will be minor and manageable—and it has been. Yet every now and then, it comes on with a fleeting ferocity and suddenness that I will do well to acknowledge, recognize, and cope with. The symptoms are different. Most recently it has been (1) a pounding chest, and (2) a shaking laser pointer beam.

Now I watch it, experience it, try and study it. I regularly ask for feedback from my audience, especially after one of these increasingly rare bouts, and know, basis this feedback, that my audience did not notice any of it.

The engineer in me thinks of my body as an engine with lots of mechanical, electrical, and chemical processes occurring simultaneously, in a biological context. It is my responsibility to tune this engine and to make it function optimally—not anyone else’s.

Sometimes I think of stage fright as an excess of stress chemicals that has been set in circulation in my body—a neurobiological evolutionary bequeath/glitch of sorts. Any generic stress management technique may be effective in helping reduce this fear. Below is a list of stress management

habits I have compiled over the last few years. It is worthwhile noting that these habits also result in increased willpower. These habits are, however, not the same thing as pre-speech preparation. These are exercises and routines that must be done on a regular basis, for a lifetime, whether you are speaking in public or not. They help with lots of life's general challenges by reducing the dominance of stress chemicals in my body. Tweaking and tuning the engine that is my body and me.

Building a few of these options into daily routines will probably help with the fear of public speaking, too.

- Breathing slowly and deeply (one to two minutes every hour: maximum three breaths per minute)
- Meditation (any attention training: spiritual or secular)
- Regular, healthy sleep
- Nature walk
- Good conversations
- Excellent and loving relationships
- Gardening
- Dancing
- Poetry
- Music (deliberate relaxing by deep listening, as opposed to zoning out)
- Singing
- Playing a musical instrument (<http://ed.ted.com/lessons/how-playing-an-instrument-benefits-your-brain-anita-collins>)
- Watching inspirational or motivational video clips
- Any flow-generating activities
- Focus on gratitude: especially first thing in the morning and last thing at night
- Mental exercises (crosswords, Sudoku, Lumosity games)

A task I set out to accomplish in this chapter is to put distance between these two statements:

Statement One: The fear of public speaking is very real and it is universal. (TRUE)

Statement Two: The fear of public speaking is greater than the fear of death. (FALSE)

Let's recap and recommit.

Statement Two = WRONG!

Statement One = TRUE. The fear of public speaking is as real as the fight-or-flight response is real. This is biology at work—really. The fear of public speaking is as real as the fear of being judged and being ostracized is real. Think Edgar Allan Poe. Think *“Only this and nothing more.”*

This “I will overcome the fear of public speaking” is a suboptimal commitment.

These may be better commitment options:

- I will learn and use processes and techniques that will help me manage the fear of public speaking as and when it does surface.
- I will practice and practice and practice, in front of audiences, until I become more and more comfortable within my body when speaking in public.
- I will build stress management best practices into my daily routine.

This kind of thinking may help:

- “I am afraid of public speaking” can be converted to “I am experiencing fear in my body. This is natural and it will pass.” The first statement makes it seem like a permanent condition. The second statement recognizes that it is a temporary condition.
- “Every day (even right now) thousands of people are

speaking in public—so can I.”

Taking this thinking a step further, “I am experiencing fear in my body” can be converted into more specific thoughts and observations:

- I am experiencing sweaty and clammy palms.
 - I am experiencing breathlessness.
 - I feel my body going rigid.
 - I am experiencing tightness in my throat.
 - I am experiencing dryness of my tongue.
 - I am experiencing wobbly and shaking knees.
 - I am experiencing shaking hands.
 - I am experiencing a pounding chest.
 - I am experiencing knots or butterflies in my stomach.
 - I am feeling flushes in my face—feeling red in my face.
- Welcome to our club! These are all (and nothing more than) “fight or flight response” related sensations.

It may be best to come up with your own rondo statement and alternate it between the above. I sometime use this as my rondo statement.

Only this and nothing more. This too shall pass. I am here to serve! This presentation is not about me.

Now it feels very different and much better.

- I am experiencing sweaty and clammy palms.

Only this and nothing more. This too shall pass. I am here to serve! This presentation is not about me.

- I am experiencing breathlessness.

Only this and nothing more. This too shall pass. I am here to serve! This presentation is not about me.

- I feel my body going rigid.

Only this and nothing more. This too shall pass. I am here to serve! This presentation is not about me.

And so on.

If the fear still remains overpowering and unmanageable, consider this approach. Give up! Let the thoughts and fears run wild and listen to them. There is some serious emerging science here. For more on this give-up approach, check out chapter 9 of the book *The Willpower Instinct: How Self-Control Works, Why It Matters, and What You Can Do to Get More of It* by Kelly McGonigal, Ph.D.

Here is a brief explanation. Apparently it is very difficult “not to think” about something, once you’ve been instructed not to think about it.

This is sometime called the white bear problem. When Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy was young he had been told by his older brother to sit in a corner until he could stop thinking about a white bear. His brother returned much later to discover Leo still in the corner, paralyzed by his inability to stop thinking about a white bear.

Daniel Wegner, a Harvard psychologist, went on to study this white bear problem, experimenting with many students, and dubbed this effect *ironic rebound*. It seems that trying to eliminate a thought or an emotion can trigger this rebound, because of the way our brains handle “not to” commands. The brain splits this command into two parts. One part is tasked with directing your attention to anything but the prohibited thought. This part is called the operator. Another part of your mind is checking to see if you are indeed thinking what you are not supposed to be thinking. This process is called the monitor. The operator is enabled by the brain’s hardware and software for self-control; it is deliberate, and it requires a good deal of mental resources and energy. Unlike the operator, the monitor is more closely related to the brain’s threat-detection system and runs automatically without much mental effort.

Under ordinary circumstances the operator and monitor work in parallel and in cooperation. When mental resources are available and high, the operator does its job. When mental resources are not readily available, when you are tired, or stressed, or distracted (alcohol, illness, etc.) the operator cannot do its job.

From the book:

How can you find your way out of this dilemma? Wegner suggests that an antidote to ironic rebound is: Give up. When you stop trying to control unwanted thoughts and emotions, they stop controlling you.

If you have a very high anxiety when it comes to public speaking, consider studying chapter 9 of the book *The WILLPOWER Instinct* very sincerely.

I reiterate my basic argument: *It is probably harder to decide—really and truly decide—to overcome the fear of public speaking, than it is to actually overcome the fear of public speaking.* Once you've decided, really and truly decided, to overcome/manage/cope with/confront the fear of public speaking ... you've done your bit. Help will come! Help will come! Have patience. Have unyielding faith. Nothing less will do!

Another option. Every time you feel anxiety overtaking you when thinking about an upcoming presentation or speech, view it as an attention challenge. By default, your attention has been captured by ancient hardware and software. You have the option and capability of deliberately directing your attention to something else. Yes, attention training is required, but it can be done. If you view the onset of anxiety as a trigger, then you can immediately follow up with a planned response. For example, play a song. And give that song your full attention. And when attention wanders away from the song, gently bring it back to the song with loving-kindness to

yourself. This is no more than a standard meditation practice. A song with supportive lyrics may be even more helpful. A suggestion; “If I Were Brave” by Jana Stanfield has wonderfully supportive lyrics. The goal here is to be able to convert default attention to deliberate attention at will. This is a benefit of regular meditation; the ability to keep bringing a wandering mind back to topic.

If all else fails, and I really and truly mean if **all else** fails, try this last-resort approach. All other approaches are better. Here is a scene from the movie *Invictus*. The championship game has just started and one player from the New Zealand team, Jonah Lomu, is dominating the South African team. The South African team captain calls for a huddle, “*Come boys. What the heck are we doing? Lomu is culling us. Forwards ... we must start scrumming. We must disrupt him at the first phase ... we can’t allow Lomu to get the ball in space. He’s freaking killing us. But listen ... if Lomu gets the ball ... whoever’s there ... James ... Joost ... hit the fucking guy ... hold onto him ... hold him. Help will come. Help will be there.*”

Have a similar huddle and conversation with yourself. Face down your nemesis, glossophobia, the way champion rugby teams face powerful opponents. Help will come. Help will be there; especially if you are a member of a Toastmasters club. Help will come. Everyone in these clubs has faced and will continue to face glossophobia. You are not alone! Do not grant glossophobia permission to be a power that is freaking killing the best version of you. Don’t let this happen.

Good luck! You have us on your side.

Modify this Eleanor Roosevelt quote and say it out loud: “*Nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent.*” **“No one can make me feel frozen (by the fear of public speaking) without my consent.”** Say it to your sponsor and to your support system. Print it out and stare at it—then stare

it down. Help will come. Help will come.

Visualize glossophobia as an adversary with a definite shape and form, and when he/she becomes too disruptive to your life-plans, hit the f-ing guy. Help will come. Help will come.

Here is my *eighth wish* for you. “May you always see the very natural fear of public speaking for what it is: An Inevitable Bridge; not an Impregnable Wall.”

Let’s begin closing now. This is EXERCISE #7. Say this aloud. “Fear is a familiar friend—always reminding me to give my best.”

“To give anything less than my best ... is to sacrifice my gifts.”

And allow me to close out this chapter with one last message. If there is only one memo that remains from this chapter, let it be this: Once and for all, the correlation between Statement One and Statement Two is a joke.

About the Author

Rashid N. Kapadia, a marine engineer and project manager for decades, discovered the transformational power of public speaking, storytelling and oratory after joining a Project Management Institute (Houston) sponsored Toastmasters club.

He also discovered, to his surprise and dismay, that too many engineers and project managers seriously underappreciate—even shun—these transformative skills.

Having always seen himself as an ambassador for his storied and challenging professions, he has made it a personal mission to evangelize PS&ST to engineers and project managers around the globe.

Connect

To book the author to speak at your event or to learn more about his work and how he can help you, please visit NecessaryBridges.com or rashidkapadia.com.

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As an engineer & project manager for decades and a public speaking & storytelling aficionado in recent years, Rashid N. Kapadia has made it a life mission to bridge these two estranged worlds.

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