

**AECL-9811**

An introvert's guide to presentations

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Public speaking is feared more than dying (Chapman Survey of American Fears, 2023) and is often an issue for much of the population, particularly introverts (Diephaus, 2022). Here are some strategies you can use to help you cope with presenting: 1) avoidance, 2) preparation, 3) exposure therapy and 4) deceiving myself.

Avoidance

Extraverts are more driven to interact with others (McCabe & Fleeson, 2012). By contrast, introverts are not going to have that same drive to be in front of people and crowds.

Presenting can take energy away from introverts. You can avoid crowds before presentations. This can help you fill up your internal battery. Then afterward, you can go somewhere quiet to recharge.

Next, avoid thinking. Mental distractions can vary by person, but you can try music, exercise and reading for fun. Basically, find something that keeps your brain from dwelling on the stress of presenting.

On a related note, avoid the presentation the last few hours leading up to the presentation. Think about cramming for a test. It usually does more harm than good. Sometimes, it is best to let the stress wait somewhere else instead of in your head.

Preparation

Avoidance does not mean you are not prepared. The most important thing is to know your stuff. It is easier to be confident when you know what you are talking about (Raja, 2017).

Preparation also means preparing for technology to be a jerk. One way to get rattled is to have technology throw you a curveball, so if you can have backup plans in place, then you are less likely to get stressed in the moment. Assume the internet will not work in the room. Assume the slides may go down. By being ready to adjust, you can be less stressed when things go awry.

Exposure therapy

Sometimes the more you do things, the easier they become. That's the basic goal of exposure therapy: You repeatedly engage in the thing giving you anxiety so you can get used to it, kind of like an allergy shot (Craske et al., 2014).

You have to give yourself opportunities to practice if you are going to get more comfortable presenting. Practicing presentations in front of friends, especially early in your career, can help you do that. As you present more professionally, you should get more comfortable.

Tweak the circumstances

Ultimately, everyone is different. While watching successful presenters can be a good source of inspiration, what works for them may not work for you. Do not be afraid to try new things to figure out what is your best-case scenario presentation style. Some people like speaking to larger groups versus smaller meet-and-greet scenarios.

Deceiving myself

Confidence is key, and when you do not feel confident, you have to "fake it til' you make it." Pretend you are awesome until other people think you are awesome, and then maybe one day, you will think you are awesome too.

Another way to think about it is you are putting on your red cape. When you are presenting, you are not your normal self. You are your superhero persona. It is you, but it is a version of you that that can do amazing things.

Summing things up

To boil this down to four easy steps, 1) find a good mental space, 2) know your stuff, 3) do it again and 4) put on your red cape. Presenting may never be easy, but it does get easier over time.

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