

# THE #1 FEAR THAT HOLDS PEOPLE BACK IN THEIR CAREERS

By Scott Brown  
Weekly Newsletter Editor, HireSites.com

Surveys have shown the average American is more afraid of public speaking than they are of death. No wonder many people have let promotions at work pass them by for fear of having to speak in public. It may not even have been a conscious decision, but public speaking fear has been shown to be the cause of missed opportunities for many people. As someone looking to move ahead in your career, working on your public speaking skills even before you need them in the workplace can be a smart move. Having public speaking skills could boost your confidence level so that you would be comfortable volunteering to give a presentation that could earn you extra prestige, or give you the assurance you need to apply for a particular job.

## Developing Public Speaking Skills

Public speaking is something that does not come naturally for most people. Instead, it is a learned skill. Especially with the prominence of politicians these days, it can be easy to get the impression that good public speaking skills come naturally to many people. This is not really the case. Even politicians work on their public speaking skills, and have the benefit of giving speeches on a regular basis over the course of a long career. The most visible politicians and business leaders often "cheat" by using speech coaches who help them pinpoint specific things they can do to deliver speeches more effectively, plus they often use speech writers and teleprompters.

As an individual interested in getting ahead in your career, you don't need to go to the extreme of using a teleprompter or a speech coach. But committing to improving your public speaking skills over the long term can have a major impact in terms of your overall career success. Toastmasters is a great organization that has spent decades perfecting a system of teaching people how to speak effectively in public. Their program is designed so you can get as little or as much out of it as you want. Each Toastmasters meeting gives everyone a chance to practice their public speaking skills through various parts of the meeting, such as the Table Topics, where each attendee can give a brief two-minute impromptu speech based on a topic given to them by the host. Most Toastmasters clubs also have mentorship programs where a more experienced speaker will work with you one on one to help you improve your skills.

We recommend visiting your local Toastmasters club to see how it works. To find out more about Toastmasters, visit their web site at this address: <http://www.toastmasters.org>.

## Quick Tips for Conquering Your Fear

- Everyone gets nervous before a speech. Even former President Clinton has talked about how he still gets nervous before speeches, even after having spoken in front of all kinds of audiences all over the world. Experienced speakers talk about harnessing that nervousness and using it to energize and inspire yourself to give a better speech. Plus, they say the nervousness generally goes away after the first couple of minutes of speaking and turns into a feeling of excitement and exhilaration.
- There usually isn't as much at stake as you think there is. People often make the mistake of assigning an unreasonable amount of importance to people in their audience. The truth is most audience members in any given situation are preoccupied with their own thoughts: what they're going to do later that day, their relationship with their spouse, their kids, personal problems, etc. Your speech is much less important to them than it is to you. And they will be much less critical of your performance than you are. Plus, no matter who is in your audience, they are not more important than your family members and people who truly care about you.
- The speech does not have to be perfect. As mentioned earlier, there's a tendency to compare yourself

with polished public speakers you see on TV. Your audience will not expect you to be at that level, and you should not expect it of yourself.

- The most important ingredient in a good speech is preparation. This often requires investing time in researching the topic ahead of time so that you have enough material that you could speak for at least twice the amount of time allotted. If your speech has information that the audience finds interesting or that they did not know before, you will have done a good job as a speaker.

---

*In addition to editing the weekly newsletter for HireSites, Scott Brown also was responsible for the development of its flagship services, ResumeDirector and ResumeArrow. HireSites specializes in resume distribution and posting services to help job seekers streamline the search process. For more information, Scott can be reached via email at [sbrown@resumedirector.com](mailto:sbrown@resumedirector.com) or by phone at (212) 545-5318.*