**State of Public Speaker**

Your state is the way that you feel. It is the condition you are in---psychologically, physically and emotionally, at the moment you step into the spotlight and begin to make a speech. Your state determines not only your ability to communicate, but also your ability to lead, bond and respond to what is happening around you. When it is show time, you are under stress, tired or angry, you must be able to readjust your state. Put yourself in the driver’s seat so that you are having your emotions. Instead of your emotions having you.

These are three core things that consistently affect your state and that you can control on a consistent basis. They are you body, your mind’s eye and your beliefs. In the following essay, we will walk you through the ways that you can shift your body, mind’s eye and beliefs that pull you forward to a state of readiness that promotes peak speech performance.

**Body**

The fastest way to build up confidence is to change what you’re doing with your body--- the way you move, stand, breathe, use your facial muscles and gesture with your hands. We have ways of standing and breathing that correspond to different emotions. For example, if you are breathing shallow and quick breaths with your chest collapsed in and your eyes darting around, it is physically impossible to feel happy. We only breathe in this way if we are under threat.

The great secret to the brain is that the mind-body connection works both ways. Move and breath the way you do when you are scared, and your brain will assume fear. We now know that the brain fires off the same chemical reaction, whether the threat is real or imagined[[1]](#endnote-1). When you change your body, you change your emotions as well. On the other hand, if you move and breath the way you do when you feel confident, passionate and determined, your brain associates that movement with a corresponding emotion, and it will obediently supply that chemical reaction. Try this before you give a speech: stand up. Lift your shoulders and your head. Look up. Put a big smile on your face. Feel any different?

Imagine that you are backstage before a high-powered event, and you are nervous. What are you doing? If you are pacing back and forth, shoulders slumped, rubbing your hands together, muttering under your breath as you try to recall your opening, you are defaulting to negative patterns that are destroying your state. The message your brain is receiving are all ones that will create an amygdala hijack--- and before you know it, you will be standing onstage with your eyes unfocused and your mind blank, trying to remember what you are doing up there.

Once you know how you move breathe stand and smile when you are experiencing emotions of joy, confidence, you can produce that emotion on demand by reproducing that pattern in your body, breath and face. The following are physical triggers that will stimulate a positive emotional response from the brain:

1. Posture: lift your head and your sternum, as if you were being pulled up by a string.
2. Breathe: take long, slow, deliberate breaths that fill your belly with air.
3. Face: Find any excuse to put a smile on your face. Laugh, lift your eyebrow and widen your eyes.
4. Movement: move through the room (if possible), walking the way you walk when you feel confident, strong and generous.
5. Gesture: use your arms and your hands as you do when you want to share something. Recreate the movements associated with the feeling you want to generate. For example, to feel joy, confidence, lift your arms and hands up over your head, with a huge smile on your face. To feel generous, use your hands the way you do when you give a gift, with open palms moving toward the person in front of you.

*Q1: What is your personal performance pattern? The way you stand/move/breathe is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.*

**The Mind’s Eye**

You can only have a feeling about something if you are paying attention to it. What determines how you feel are the things on which you choose to focus. Think about it as the mind’s eye.

Most of time, we just let the mind’s eye wander around. In this setting, our brain will choose its focus primarily based on fear. It’s for much the same reason that you are predisposed to fail in stressful situation through amygdala hijack. We are built to look for danger. Your brain is not designed to automatically think happy positive thoughts. Your brain is designed to keep you alive. When you are standing in front of group of people, you reveal yourself. Nothing feels more threatening than facing a mass of human beings, staring at you in the dark.

We focus the mind’s eye through the questions we ask[[2]](#endnote-2). When you ask a question, the brain immediately sets out to answer it. The trouble is when facing an audience, most people ask questions that cause them to focus on their fear, rather than their objective. Think about a typical question you might ask yourself as you get ready to give a speech. “Will they ask me hard questions?” The brain primed to lean toward the negative, searches for an answer. Brain says “Yes!” You start to get nervous with sweaty hands. “Am I prepared enough?” Brain searching… searching… answer is No! Now you’re really losing it. Defaulting to negative patterns, frowning slightly, pacing up and down, taking short, shallow breath. Questions like “What is missing?” “Will I forget what to say?” and “Will they find out I’m not as smart as they think I am?” are actually all sabotage questions. The answers to these questions can only produce a negative state.

So, what’s the answer? Ask a different question. the way you control the focus of the brain is by changing the internal questions that you ask. Ask questions that have powerful presupposition in them. For example, “What is the best part of this speech?” contains the presupposition that there is, in fact, something great in this speech that you haven’t noticed yet. Similar questions are as follows: “What am I most passionate about in this material?” “What is the most powerful way I can impact this audience?” “How can I best inspire them?” Asking the right questions before you go on is a very powerful way to manage your state. You’re directing the capacity of your brain to search in the right file drawers. You are programming it purposefully, so that it will come up with answers that pull you forward, rather than hold you back.

*Q2: What is a question with powerful presupposition? Could you change the following questions into questions with presupposition?*

*E.g. Will I succeed?*

*e.g. Will they ask me tough questions?*

**Belief**

If you’ve felt fear when facing an audience in the past, chances are that it was your beliefs, not the audience itself, that tied your stomach in knots. Your belief about yourself as a speaker will determine how you show up.

If you perceive that you are in danger of being judged, attacked, or ridiculed, that perception is all that counts. The receptors in your brain respond the same way, whether or not the attack is real. If you close your eyes and imagine biting into a lemon, you will salivate. Whether or not it’s really happening, your brain sends the same signal, and the identical biochemical reaction fires off. Cellular biologist Bruce Lipton, put it this way in his award-winning book T*he Biology of Belief*: “Your beliefs act like filters on a camera, changing how you see the world. And your biology adapts to those beliefs.” You can’t always control the bad things that happen to you. But you can control your belief---the way you interpret those things. And controlling belief will change your emotional state. For example, you could look at the setbacks, problems, and tragedies in your life, and justifiably prove that you were victimized by the events. Or you may look at the adversities in your life and tell a story of how the problems you encountered drew out your strengths and made you who you are today.

Peak performance expert Anthony Robbins says that a belief is like a stool; it is held up by legs. we call these legs “references”. If you want to believe that people are going to judge you, you can look for and find many references, or legs, to support that belief. If, on the other hand, you choose to believe that people are eager to learn and you have something valuable to offer them, you can find an equal number of references to support that belief.

There are two distinct types of beliefs: positive beliefs that pull us forward, and negative beliefs that hold us back. A negative belief might be “Because I’m introvert, I can never be compelling in front of a large group of people.” A positive belief might be “Because I’m introvert, I can bring more emotional depth and sensitivity to the topic.”

As human beings, we have the ability to creatively construct beliefs that are aligned with our intentions. You can rebuild your beliefs in a way that fortifies your character and confidence. The confidence doesn’t come from talking yourself into something that isn’t true. It comes from transforming negative beliefs that are holding your back into empowering beliefs that drive you forward.

How? To begin with, identify the belief that is holding you back. If your belief is “I’m a poor speaker” then you have a perfect excuse to keep from ever finding your voice. If you have a belief that drawing attention to yourself is bad form, then you will do anything to avoid the spotlight. Then define your outcome. You have a different need --- you need to step forward and speak out. You need to be heard. You need to dramatically raise your level of influence on the people around you.

Your beliefs are a choice. Align them with your intentions or need.

Here’s a list of common negative beliefs that you might encounter in your speech experience and how they can be converted into positive beliefs that will pull you forward.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Negative beliefs | Positive beliefs |
| Because I am poor in spoken English, I won’t sound attractive when I speak. |  |
| Because I’m shy and nervous, I won’t |  |
| Because I’m not from a big city like Shanghai, |  |
| Because I’ve already sent them data, I don’t need to give a presentation. |  |
| I don’t have time to prepare |  |
| I am a science/data guy, and data is boring. |  |

*Q3: Do you agree with the statements that a belief is like a filter or a stool? How does your life experience (speech experience) support or refute those statements?*

*Q4: What are the negative beliefs that prevent you from achieving the state you need for peak speech performance? How could you transform them into positive beliefs that pull you forward?*

*Q5: What do you want to achieve in the speech class? And what are the beliefs you need to hold to accomplish those goals?*

**Difficult terms**

**Amygdala**

The amygdala is the area of the brain that is responsible for triggering the “fight or flight” response that comes with the feeling we get when we feel threatened or in danger. It’s an automatic self protective survival impulse that is engaged when we are reacting to fear. Whether real or imagined. Our amygdala releases stress hormones that prepare our bodies to either fight the threat or to flee from it. Common emotions that trigger the amygdala hijack response are anxiety, fear and aggression.

**Amygdala Hijack CF Pictures**

Daniel Goleman, psychologist, first referred to “amygdala hijack” in his book published in 1995, Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ.It is based on the idea that the amygdala region of the brain can sometimes irrationally take charge of a person’s ability to respond to a threatening situation. So that the person overreacts in an emotional and intense manner that is not proportionate to the situation. It reduces the role the prefrontal cortex should play in mitigating a proper response. Which would be a more rational, controlled and logically processed response.

So, in essence the amygdala overrides the frontal lobes which would normalize the information gathering network in deciding what the appropriate reaction should be. The end result is a classic fight or flight reaction. That is amygdala hijack.

1. John H. Riskind and Carolyn C. Gotay, “Physical Posture: Could it Have Regulatory or Feedback Effects on Motivation and Emotion?” (1982): 273-98 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. As detailed by Richard Bandler and John Grinder Reframing: Neuro-Linguistic Programming and the Transformation of Meaning (Moan, UT: Real People Press, 1982)

   Adapted from Chapter Three State*“As We Speak ”* by Peter Meyers & Shann Nix [↑](#endnote-ref-2)