

Public Speaking in a Thinking Environment

The number one phobia listed on a poll recently conducted in the U.S. was public speaking. Death was second. Which begs the question whom should you feel most sorry for at a funeral, the person who died or the person doing the eulogy?

The ability to speak effectively in public is becoming an increasingly important requirement for people in business. Making formal speeches and presentations and contributing with power and presence in meetings are skills that people in the business community are expected to have with little or no training whatsoever.

For most people, however, the thought of standing up in front of a group of people is a terrifying experience. Fear of failure, fear of forgetting what to say, how to stand, breath, what to do with your hands -- these things can dominate a speaker so much that any chance of communicating effectively and with authenticity become almost impossible.

By using the principles of The Thinking Environment, however, it is possible to view speaking in public from a different perspective. By following the Ten Components of the Thinking Environment speakers can remove many untrue assumptions that they have about themselves and about their audience. Nancy Kline, President of Time To Think Inc says in her book of the same name: 'Between you and a wellspring of good ideas is a limiting assumption. The assumption can be removed with an Incisive Question.' What is also true is that what stands between you and becoming a powerful public speaker is a limiting assumption which can be removed.

The Ten Components can also be used by a speaker while they are speaking. In a Thinking Environment, the employment of the Ten Components allows "the thinker" to think freely for themselves. In a similar way, if during their speech a speaker can think of the audience as "the Thinker" and can employ the Ten Components during the presentation, they can create an atmosphere in which the audience feels valued and will open up to the speaker.

For example, in a Thinking Environment if you are the listener (the Thinking Partner) you give Attention, the first of the Ten Components, by never taking your eyes off the thinker, giving the thinker total, palpable respect. The public speaker can create the same effect by giving their audience that quality of Attention, always making eye contact, always thinking of their audience, rather than of themselves, as the most important "person" in the room.

In similar ways the speaker can apply all ten of the Components to the way they relate to their audience in order to create an environment in which the audience will become fully engaged with and attentive to the speaker.

Speakers need a set of tools to achieve this. But these are available. I think these tools are best learned from actors who are also trained in the Thinking Environment. Actors are properly trained to stand up in front of large groups of people and be heard and effective and powerful. They are given a three year intensive training and in Drama school they learn the management of nerves, the science of breathing, the necessity of correct posture, poise, voice projection and how to make sure that they are completely prepared mentally and physically before they meet an audience.

Serena Evans and I, actors who are also fully qualified Consultants of Time To Think, are developing and delivering a new programme that trains people in corporations and organizations to enjoy public speaking by creating a Thinking Environment for the audience and for themselves as they speak. We are getting exciting and sustainable results from this work. People in the business world finally can receive the training they need to become the kind of presenters that they want to be. And their audiences finally can look forward to the presentations.