



Self-Consciousness

People often confuse “nerves” with “self-consciousness”. It is understandable but the two are quite different. Self-consciousness is being excessively aware of oneself as the object of the attention of others. It is often focused around a single aspect of a person.

At its mildest it leads to a sense of embarrassment (and the nerves people worry about). At its worst it leads to extreme social anxiety or paranoia.

Self-consciousness is debilitating in a speaker

It means you are focused on yourself and your own worries rather than the audience and its interest.

Self-consciousness is often what people really mean when they say they have "nerves"

It begins in childhood and adolescence for a lot of people because they become more aware of themselves as individuals.

People also have experiences that shape beliefs without the maturity to put it all into perspective. Most people spend their entire lives in anonymity without having a mass of people staring at them so have no experience of how to react to it.

The conscious mind might rationally say there is nothing to worry because no-one will harm but the subconscious does not work that way. It takes a lot longer to process experiences.

This is very different from nerves that are something that will never entirely go away because it both hardwired and a learned experience

The lesson with nerves is to change the story. And it is the same with self-consciousness. It does fade with time and practice although you can accelerate the process.

Reducing self-consciousness is tied directly into your sense of self-esteem. You cannot base self-esteem on being any of the following:

funny	healthy	employed	status
acknowledged	attractive	money	fame
loved	a particular weight or height	number 1	success



It is endless but the commonality here is that **none can be guaranteed**. Self-esteem has to be independent and a balanced sense of your strengths and weaknesses.

This is relevant to speaking because self-consciousness is tied your sense of yourself. To be happier on stage is to reduce self-consciousness and key to that is to be aware that you have as much right to be listened to as anyone else.

That you are safe.

That the audience is not going to be hostile.

But even if they are or don't care for what you have to say or think you foolish or boring, you have worth as a human being.

This matters a lot. You cannot have respect for others without good level of self-respect for yourself.

There are three things to do to reduce self-consciousness:

1. Maximise Attendance

The sub-consciousness needs to be told repeatedly that it will be ok. That can only be done by maximising both stage time and attendance. People underrate the value of being in the audience. Simply by being there, the mind is learning confidence. It is watching people who are no better than you, progress and develop and that is hugely powerful lesson that is absorbed.

2. Warm Thoughts about Audience

Giving a speech is about the audience not about yourself, the moment you think it is about yourself is when all those things you worry about yourself in the background come to the fore and the "nerves" i.e. self-consciousness assert itself.

It feeds into self-criticism. Self-criticism is by and large not helpful. This does not mean being unaware of things you can improve upon or poor behaviour, but the sort of self-talk that undermines a positive sense of self. The problem with self-criticism is that it starts at early age as demonstrated in the aphorism "spare the rod and spoil the child" (one must be critical and not mollycoddle children).

By adulthood this can end up being prejudice against yourself and prevent people from having that balanced perspective about themselves. At its worst it denies basic humanity that people are not perfect and do something well but not others.

It is important to wary of it and not fall into the trap of thinking that if I am not critical I will be become egotistical.

The audience is not your enemy.



3. Warm Thoughts about Yourself Through Visualisation

Visualising yourself on stage giving a good speech and it being appreciated is essential to relaxation. Thinking warm thoughts about yourself and not to be a prosecutor looking only at evidence that condemns is really important to reducing worries about coming across to other people. To be kind and helpful to support yourself by having balanced perspective about your own strengths and weaknesses is really important.

Visualise as the warm person you know are and the audience as helpful and appreciative are tools that help with self-consciousness, self-belief and ultimately with coping with nerves.