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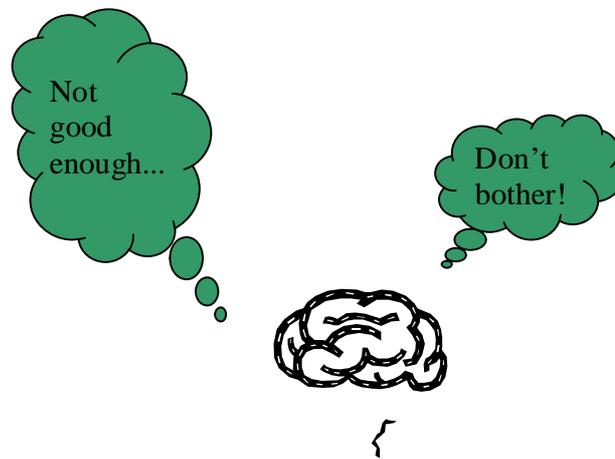
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ARE YOUR SUBPERSONALITIES SABOTAGING YOUR SPEAKING?

A simple process to help you to create a confident public speaking mindset

You know that negative voice inside your head that pops up sometimes, telling you that what you're doing won't work, or that you're wasting your time, or somehow incapable?



We all hear that carping or whining voice sometimes, and it's often strongest when we want to try something new. So as an example, we can go to a workshop on living a healthy lifestyle and be whipped into a frenzy of energy and zeal (also known as New Year's Syndrome!) only to find ourselves lying slug-like on the couch a week later eating chocolate biscuits and wondering where our motivation went.

I can tell you where it went – a blanket of resistance smothered it. And that 'blanket' was woven with the different threads of our negative commentary, telling us why change is useless, or unsafe, or that we look *really* unappealing in lycra (plus other peoples' opinions – or exhaustion – may have gone into the weave).

Lying on the couch is just one example: we all have something in our life that we'd like to change, where we struggle to make headway, especially if the issue has been around for a while. If that challenge for you is any level of discomfort about public speaking – from unease to complete avoidance – then your self-battle plays out in the public arena (unless you avoid speaking to groups altogether). This makes it doubly painful.

You're going to feel on some level exposed, vulnerable or inadequate, and suffer from strong self-criticism to defeatist thoughts like "this will never change".

I say all this from my own experience: I used to suffer from self-doubt around performing and public speaking that used to hound and often stop me completely. And while I'm not a psychologist, I can tell you a very effective way to thwart your negative spiral; it's simple, and you can do the exercise in the next 10 – 15 minutes. *There is so much out there for you*; I want to encourage you to remember that you can always choose a new thought, and with that thought comes hope and possibility.

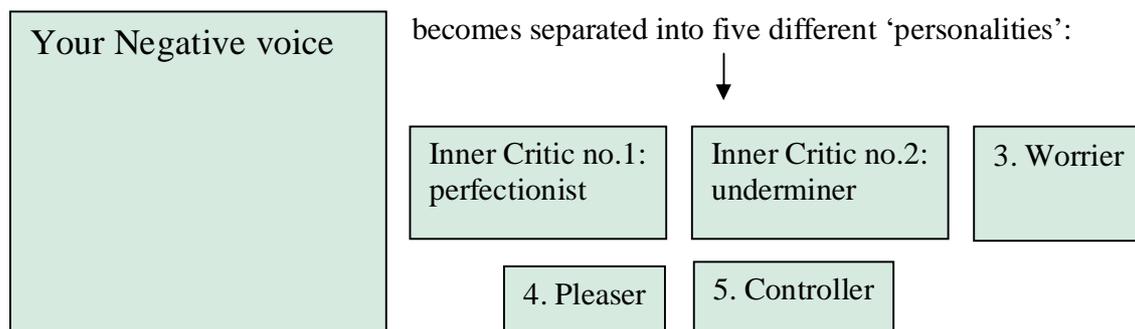
Your negative voice

So where is this negative voice coming from? Perhaps you just think it's "you" talking. However, the fact that you can tune into its daily commentary means, if you think about it, that one part of you is talking and another part is listening. So of course this voice *is* you, but only one part of you – your *mind*: the part of you that perceives, thinks and reasons.

We are not our mind. *We have a mind, and can choose to listen to and react to our thoughts, or we can dismiss or change them.* We all know this, but it's easy to forget, especially when our self-talk is familiar and *supposedly* realistic and sensible.

Now let's take this idea a step further...

Think of your negative voice on the topic of public speaking: telling you that you don't have anything worth saying, or that you're not smart/funny/attractive enough. Now imagine that commentator as not just one voice, but a committee of five voices with different attitudes, attitudes which often cause stress and resistance in public speaking. These five voices are:



Chairing your own committee

Dividing this voice inside your head into different energies and then separating yourself from them – like chairing your own committee of different personalities – is a well-known clinical tool,* and in this report I'm going to discuss using this idea to help you with public speaking resistance or fear. While my method is obviously not as in-depth as when used therapeutically, don't underestimate its power. If it makes a difference for you, and it does for most people, using it can *change your life*.

How does it work?

You're going to:

1. **Listen:** Deliberately tune into your strongest negative voice(s), giving each 'the floor' to be heard, as if you were chairing a meeting, while detaching yourself from the voice
2. **Understand** and acknowledge each voice's purpose
3. **Balance:** choose new voices and/or responses

Just by doing Step 1, and becoming more aware that *you* have the chair in this meeting, and that it's an aspect of your mind making the comments – *not who you are in total* – may be enough to give you some mental freedom. You can take charge! Then if you want, you can create action steps to reinterpret and neutralize the negative voices.

Remember that suppressing or fighting them will only make them more determined and insistent: I'm sure you know how that feels! That's why our first step is to listen to, and acknowledge them.

Step 1a: identifying your dominant voice(s)

Here's a list describing the five 'voices' from the chart on p.2 which commonly cause public speaking stress and resistance. There's also an exercise to identify your voices using imagery at the end of the report, if you prefer visualizing.

* The technique referred to is called working with your subpersonalities, energies or parts. The term subpersonalities comes from the founder of *Psychosynthesis*, Roberto Assagioli (1888 – 1974). Other methodologies using subpersonalities are *Voice Dialogue*, created by Hal and Sidra Stone www.voicedialogue.org and IFS or *Internal Family Systems* developed by psychologist Richard Schwartz (where they call voices 'parts'. See www.selfleadership.org for more information). The concept is also appearing more frequently in the popular press such as the magazine *Psychology Today*

N.B. All of these voices can also be ‘messengers’ for e.g. parents, teachers or friends, whose suggestions (well meaning or not) and expectations can add to your burden.

As you read the list, notice how much each one affects you in your public speaking role. You might like to rate each on a sliding scale of relevance.

Inner Critic No. 1 The Perfectionist

The perfectionist voice is keen on “shoulds” and “have-to’s”, fears failure, and creates and perpetuates stress in your system, handicapping performance and dampening your spirit. It has developed to earn love and gain you acknowledgement in the world. It might say to you: “if you don’t get this 100% right, you’ve really failed”; or “this is how it ought to be done”.

You might have dreams that you’re unprepared for an event, or naked going into an important meeting.

You may:

1. procrastinate and go into mental paralysis, finding a myriad of excuses ‘why not’
2. fear failure, and make tasks too complex or easy in order to fulfil this prophecy
3. have an all-or nothing mindset

Inner Critic No. 2 The Underminer

Your underminer is downtrodden, and feels that things are pretty hopeless. “You’re not going to make it, may as well give up now”; “Brian’s much better than you, don’t even bother”; “you’re hopeless at this”; “how can you possibly think you’re attractive/funny/smart enough to speak in public?” It’s the part that tells you that there’s no point in trying to improve things, as you’re not going to make it anyway. There’s something wrong with you, and you won’t change for the better. It’s big on the phrases “yes, but...” and “I can’t”. It also tends to over-generalize: “I always...” or “I never...”

No. 3 **The Worrier**

This voice is very common in public speakers, not surprisingly, and its portents of disaster can seriously affect your performance. Your worrier is always alert for potential disaster in your future. It's big on the negative "what-if" scenario, and can be especially prevalent at 3am when it eagerly springs to life. Here are some of its possible messages: "what if this presentation goes really badly, and I stand up in front of everybody and can't get a word out?" "What if they laugh at me?" "I'm going to look like an idiot!"

If you relate strongly to the worrier, then you'll know how it feels to be unable to completely relax from the moment you know you're going to be speaking to a group. There's an ominous dark cloud hanging over the horizon, and you feel permanently uneasy or stressed out.

No. 4 **The Pleaser**

This is another very common voice. It seeks approval, acceptance and inclusion – which is totally natural, given that it's how we survive in the world. This voice shows up as a soft, edgeless energy, leaving you vulnerable.

Growing up, you probably learned how to constantly monitor and care about how other people were feeling. As a result, you tend to wait for permission before you do things, and you probably feel like there aren't clear boundaries between you and others. You are also very 'nice'. This can cause you problems when you try to speak in front of others, because:

- you don't get the usual cues from others which you rely on to change course if you feel that you're not being approved of in some way
- you have a hard time being opinionated in case you offend or exclude someone – and you need to have an opinion to be an interesting speaker
- You notice and over-react to any possible hint of a slight, or conflict: you belong to the "it's not *you*, it's *me*" school of jumping to conclusions

If you're a people pleaser, you're going to have public speaking anxiety, no question. You may say to yourself "what are they thinking about me? Are they going to hate what I'm saying?" "I'd better not sound too certain here, in case I get it wrong and someone shoots me down."

No. 5 The Controller

This voice wants to control everything around it: the environment (the weather, neighbour's noisy party, the temperature of the room where you're speaking); other people (that insensitive person who's wearing strong perfume, and you're allergic, the audience member who's not smiling). The controller's energy feels hard and pushy, as it fights for control, fearful that it won't get it. A frequent feeling is that if you lose control you've somehow failed.

You may say to yourself "I need to stay fully on top of this project/team or it's going to be a disaster." "This has to be done my way or it means I'm not good at my job".

If you have a strong need for control, you will have a difficult time with experiences where there are many variables – and an audience fits that bill perfectly!

Ok, those are the five voices, you probably recognized yourself in some of them. Now let's flesh out some details:

Step 1b: exploring your dominant voice: six questions

1. **Who:** which of the four voices above did you identify as your strongest subpersonality?

2. **When:** when does it go on the attack? Does it have a favourite time to appear?

3. **What:** what does it say to you – about your speaking ability, and confidence in general? (I would suggest adding to this list in coming days.)

Step 2: the purpose of these voices – what are they trying to do?

Ironically, all these voices are trying to be helpful. Really.

They're trying to get to you before the world does!

They don't want you to feel hurt, or shamed.

They think that by pushing you endlessly, or warning you off attempting new things – either by reminding you of past times when things didn't work out as you wanted (the Inner Critic), or by suggesting possible future failures (the Worrier) – that they will keep you safe. The Perfectionist and Controller are trying to give security to your inner child by creating order and structure. This can be useful, but is obviously not helpful when you plan to grow and challenge yourself by expanding your comfort zone – in other words, to become your own architect.

In trying to keep you safe, or push you to succeed, these voices mean well – but at a cost. The thing to notice is that:

1. they're always anxious underneath their words
2. they're not actually powerful, they just think they are

That's why they get frustrated, and clamour or attack to try to get your attention.

4. **Purpose:** your dominant voice is trying to help: what is it aiming to achieve? (safety, success?)

5. **Potential outcome:** what *does it believe* the outcome will be if you don't listen to it?

6. **Responses:** when you're curious and open towards it, how does it respond?

Step 3a: choosing new 'voices'

Now that you've identified your strongest voice, you might like to access another voice to counterbalance it and create new possibilities for you.

Instead of your negative voice, you could choose to listen to an:

- inner mentor
- inner supporter
- inner nurturing parent, sibling or friend
- wise, spiritual energy
- detached, rational observer

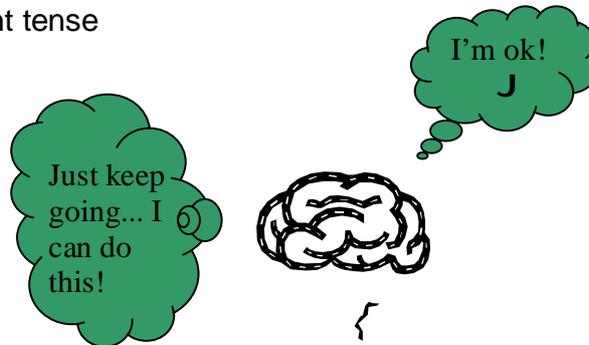
Just pick an 'energy', a quality which feels right to you.

Step 3b: creating counteracting statements to the ones you wrote in question no.3 on page 7.

What can your inner mentor/supporter/best friend say to support you and ease your concerns?

Your counteracting statements should be:

- short and direct – a few words only, and easy to remember
- positive
- in the present tense



Examples:

Perfectionist:

- If you push yourself: "it's ok to relax a bit" or "I don't have to do everything"
- For procrastination: "Just keep going, you're doing fine"

Underminer:

- "I am worthy of respect"
- "I have value to offer others"
- "I'm doing fine, just keep going"

Worrier:

- "So what? I can cope with _____"
- "I can still move forwards"
- "I can do this!"

Pleaser:

- "It's ok to make a stand for something"
- "I can listen to my own needs"
- "I can please myself some of the time"
- "I can just be myself"

Controller:

- "I can take this more easily"
- "I can let this go"
- "that's just how it is, move on"

This is where you might become hung up on the fact that what your ‘voice’ says to you has been true in the past. If this is the case, then say to yourself that what it’s telling you was true then, but it’s over now, only a memory. It doesn’t have to stop you now. But if you’re struggling to say your positive self-statements with any degree of belief, try changing the wording slightly – add something like:

“I am willing to move towards _____(being able to let go/believing I can take this more easily)”

Or

“I am learning _____(that it’s ok to keep going despite my fears/make a stand for something)”

To sum up

By separating yourself regularly from your negative identity, you weaken its power. So if instead of believing that you’re e.g. an inept public speaker, you start to listen to your ‘new’ voice and create some positive self-statements, before long a new more positive identity will take shape. Taking action from this positive base will then start to feel more natural and become easier to do.

So start from where you are right now: acknowledge your voices, your doubts, don’t try to fight them. Say to yourself the equivalent of “yes _____, I hear you” – and then switch to your new supportive voice instead, then following it up with taking action if required. With a more encouraging perspective, your progress then becomes inevitable.

This method is simple, but takes ongoing ‘chipping away’ – it’s worth it. So when that voice inside your head tells you this exercise is a waste of time or not to bother, remember this: *it can change your life!*

Appendix: Imagery Exercise

As I mentioned in the introduction, you can also use imagery to communicate with your most dominant voice if you enjoy working visually:

- In a relaxed state, perhaps when you first wake up, or sitting calmly in a place where you won't be disturbed, think of your most dominant voice. See if you can let an image of it come to your mind's eye, without strain. If you were watching a movie screen, and up came your most strongly identified voice, what would it look like? It can be anything – either gender, old or young, you in a different form, an animal, symbol or object.
- Let it be as it is, without trying to change it. Just notice: what is the main energy coming from it?
- Allow it to talk to you and tell you why it needs your attention, what it's trying to gain by talking to you
- Open your eyes again, and consider what it's told you. You may want to give your image a label or name

You can then go on to create a more positive, helpful substitute for this image: a different animal, symbol or object that encourages you. Plus add new statements if you find this useful.