

## The Big Freeze & Excited to be Here! - By Tom Gray

One of the greatest fears in public speaking is what I have coined as The Big Freeze. This is when your mind goes blank while in front of an audience, and you don't remember what to say. We consequently, are then so badly embarrassed that we never want to be seen in public again — let alone speak. This fear can become so strong that we actually then create what we fear the most. Famous author and speaker John Gray (Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus), no relation to me, actually took this fear one step further in his first speaking experience. He said that he passed out! Yet today he thrives in the public speaking arena.

The Big Freeze actually seems to occur most often with the overly prepared speaker. It is when we have practically memorized our speech word for word. This kind of preparation can be dangerous and allows little room to ad-lib. If we get off track or forget what comes next, we panic, become fearful, lost and frustrated which makes the situation worse. (I know - I have been there.) The problem is, we have no contingency plan or don't know how to ad-lib or improvise our way back on track. So there we are, feeling completely exposed in front of the audience! This terrible feeling can be avoided.

It is best to be thoroughly prepared by knowing the material. Most important is to practice, repeatedly. Give the speech using a brief outline, or notes that highlight the main points. Refer to them when needed instead of memorizing word for word. It is important to know that we humans think in images rather than words. Therefore, it is better to "picture memorize" the speech in a logical sequence, much like movies are put together. Once visualized, share the speech by describing in sequence of memorized images. In addition, get comfortable with pausing. Realize it is OK to pause, to look at notes or to gather thoughts. This makes it easier to relax and enjoy being in the limelight.

I will stress again, silence and pausing in a presentation is OK. In fact it is desirable! Most speakers do not pause enough or use silence as effectively as they could. Pauses that seem interminable to the new speaker actually look natural and conversational to the audience. We do not necessarily pause because we forgot what to say. Believe it or not, the reason we pause may be because we have so many things to say. The pause allows the mouth to catch up with the mind — a way to "sync" everything up so to speak. The pause is an opportunity to sort through the information and decide what to say next. It also allows the audience time to visualize the speaker's movie of the mind without a freeze frame!

### Excited to be Here!

Trish Bordon, a treasured Toastmaster friend, once advised me "don't get nervous before you speak, get EXCITED!" I have never forgotten her sage advice. It has been invaluable. I believe that almost everyone has experienced nervousness before a speech. But not everyone turns that nervousness into excitement. This shift in thinking can be the difference between a successful speaking experience or a less desirable outcome.

I often experience nervousness before speaking. The more invested I am in the outcome of the speech experience, it seems the more nervous I feel. When I notice my nervousness, I remember what Trish said. I think, "This feeling is not my enemy, but a friend" that I can transform into EXCITEMENT! Then I consider all the things I am excited about at that moment. I am excited about my message, the opportunity to present it, and the honor to address the audience. I am also excited about my knowledge, the information, entertainment or humor I may provide. I realize the privilege of being where I am. As I concentrate on these positive aspects, my ambivalence and nervousness disappear and I find I have become enthusiastic! I can't wait get up to the lectern to speak! This shift in belief makes all the difference in the world. When I convert the belief in my mind from "I am nervous" to "I am excited" my body follows suit and gets excited too. Suddenly the extra shot of adrenaline is a wonderful benefit. It helps me with confidence. I find myself thinking more clearly, positively and faster. When I speak, talking is easier, with more intensity, emotion and emphasis. Consequently, I make a more positive emotional connection with the audience. Actors and athletes often say, "I was on" after a good performance. You too will feel "on" about your performance as a speaker.

Remember a simple message to yourself that "I am excited to speak" does not work on its own all the time. You must do the groundwork ahead of time. Preparation and practice are important. In impromptu situations following this advice will transform your natural nervousness into excitement and help you deliver a more successful speech.

I cannot over emphasize how this little shift in thinking can enhance your public speaking performance! Try it! Let me know how it works.