

TEN TIPS FOR HANDLING STAGE FRIGHT

Vivien McKnight

OVERVIEW

Stage fright affects countless individuals. The degree varies from person to person, but the symptoms are the same, and include a desire to flee the scene or perhaps a sensation that you might die whilst performing. In our past, being observed could have meant us being on someone's menu that day, so it was safer to hide within the group, and avoid that awful possibility. Standing alone still ignites our flight response and so we need to face up to what is happening and develop our own strategies to bring our emotions up to date. Here are ten tips for facing up to, and dealing with, stage fright.

TIP ONE: ACKNOWLEDGE THAT YOU SUFFER FROM STAGE FRIGHT

This is fundamental. If you can't acknowledge the fact that stage fright affects you, how on earth will you handle it? Stage fright may come upon you suddenly, it may be with you from day one of your career, it may disappear as quickly as it came, but whilst it is with you, you have to look it squarely in the face and challenge it regularly.

TIP TWO: CHANGE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS TO POSITIVE ONES

Often negative self-talk gets the better of you, preventing you from performing at your optimum level. Thoughts like: "I can't do this; I'll collapse halfway through" race through your mind and then the physical symptoms kick in and you feel paralysed. Catch your negative thoughts as they make an appearance and quickly switch them to more positive ones. Thoughts like: "I'm doing what I'm passionate about." Negative thoughts become negative behaviours; positive thoughts become positive behaviours.

TIP THREE: TELL YOURSELF THAT WHAT YOU ARE DOING IS IMPORTANT

You have chosen to perform because it is something you love and therefore it is important. Never, ever, let this be far from your mind. It's easy sometimes to make excuses for not attending an audition or a meeting with your agent. Very often the true reason is that you are afraid. Reverse this trend by constantly reminding yourself of the value to you of what you are doing. You have a serious case of stage fright when excuses take the place of action.

TIP FOUR: USE BREATHING TECHNIQUES

Deep breathing is good at any time to keep your heart rate down but it's even better when you are under stress. Make breathing the focus of your attention. While preparing to perform, focus on your breathing, counting the inhalation and the exhalation together as one breath. This takes your attention to your breath and helps you forget any ideas you may have about throwing up or wondering if people have noticed the sweat on your forehead.

TIP FIVE: DEVISE SOME MANTRAS

Just like the breathing technique, mantras are great 'quick fix' to use when you are about to perform. I like to think of mantras as little statements that keep up your spirits – things like "I am in control; I feel great; I can do this." Mantras are short, are always in the affirmative and reflect what you want to achieve. Simple but effective.

TIP SIX: CARRY SOMETHING SPECIAL

In many cultures people carry a charm or talisman in order to keep evil spirits at bay. Is there anything so wrong about carrying a special object or wearing a particular piece of jewellery? I don't believe there is. Carrying or wearing something special and touching it from time to time can remind you to be positive. With positivity comes greater confidence and you feel you can achieve great things.

TIP SEVEN: EXPECT SUCCESS AND VISUALISE IT

Visualising a successful outcome is a great way to prepare for a public performance of any kind. Take some time to think about the situation that provokes your anxiety symptoms. Ask yourself: “Where am I? Who else is there? Am I warm or cold? Are there any special sights, sounds or smells?” Then see yourself as you would wish to be in these circumstances. See yourself performing and delighting in the moment.

TIP EIGHT: CONGRATULATE AND CELEBRATE

Always remember to congratulate yourself afterwards however you feel your performance went. Whatever the outcome, you looked your fear in the eye and went ahead despite feeling vulnerable. This is a wonderful achievement and is cause for celebration. Devise a celebratory ritual or activity which you should carry out after each performance.

TIP NINE: EXPRESS GRATITUDE

Always be grateful for the opportunity you have had. As with congratulating yourself, the outcome may not have been exactly what you had wished for on that particular occasion, but be grateful for the opportunity to test your wings. You may want to write a short ‘thank you’ note (without sending it!) to someone, thanking them for the part they have played in bringing you to where you are now.

TIP TEN: REWARD YOURSELF

It is important to know what really makes us happy. List fifty things that make you happy. This takes time and it usually starts with exotic holidays and luxury cars. By the time you get down to number thirty-five, you are beginning to get in touch with the smaller (and more important) things in life that give you pleasure. After each performance choose an item from your list and enjoy it – you deserve it.

RESOURCES

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ABOUT VIVIEN McKNIGHT

Vivien McKnight is a life and creativity coach living on the Mediterranean coast of Spain and dividing her time between UK and Spain. When once asked “What would you most like to know about yourself?” she replied “I would like to know what I am capable of doing, what I can really achieve.” She uses that same question to get others to search inside themselves for answers. Vivien works with groups and individuals in UK and in Spain. You can contact her at vivienmcknight@gmail.com or visit her website www.vivienmcknight.com