

# Overcoming Nervousness as a Learning Disabled Person

By Robert Ward



**A**s a person with a learning disability I have a tendency to get nervous. Even positive compliments from the audience can make me nervous. And if I am caught off guard and don't know

how to respond—well, that just makes me more nervous. I realize that other speakers may not have this particular problem to same degree; that is all the more reason for you to keep right on reading. If I can make strides to overcome nervousness, and stay calm, positive, and encouraging to others, you can do it, too!

Often I speak fast and run my sentences together, making it hard for people to understand me. I have to take my time, speak slowly, choose simple language, and control my nervousness. The way that I have learned to overcome being nervous is by first rehearsing my presentation several times and making sure I use the right words, ones that are easy for me to say. If the language is hard for me to pronounce, then it is difficult for my listeners to understand. For example, I have a hard time saying words with R's and L's, so I look for similar words to replace them.

Also, I need to know if I am being clearly understood, and if not, what my listeners didn't understand. I tell them up front not to be embarrassed to say they didn't understand what was

said, and from time to time I check their comprehension. I also depend on visuals to get my message across better, meaning, transparencies and handouts that not only outline my speech, but which contain each important, technical term that I use, so the audience can follow me better.

At Sage Skills my data entry students have been either injured on the job, have had their work replaced, or else have learning disabilities. As such they, too, are nervous— nervous about the future. Before our first class meeting I mail a Speakers Program Questionnaire to find out about the students and their needs and concerns. When I speak to them, I then have an idea of what to say and what not to say. I tell my students what skills they will need to do data entry work and the prospects for employment. I remind them that each student will improve at his or her own pace, that they will be working with other workers who are better and faster keyers than they are, but not to focus on that or be intimidated by it. I tell them that they are in training to make sure they learn the skills they will need to get hired. Accuracy and timing are more important than knowing the computer software; what counts is doing the job right with an attitude of excellence and pride. I emphasize that they need not be ashamed to ask for help when they need it.

The way that I gain audience confidence in me is by making sure I know what I am talking about, taking the time to talk to the students one on one, answering questions as best as I can, talking to them during break and, after the seminar, asking them how they are doing in their training. It encourages them and builds their confidence in me.

I use an "I can relate to you" approach when I am speaking to my students. It goes like this: "I sat where you sit now. I have taken the same training that you are now taking. I completed the training you are taking now. I am now working

at Sage Computer Services doing data entry work." By vocally affirming the positive outcome of the training program, it gives them the assurance that they can do it, too. I also use testimonials from others who have completed their training and been hired at Sage or other local places. This builds their confidence further and lets them know that there are others beside myself doing it.

I also tape record my speeches. I want to make sure that what I say is helpful. Taping my speeches enables me to hear what I sound like, to know what I forgot to mention, and to answer their questions. Another reason I use tape is to find out what words gave me difficulty and to choose better words the next time I speak.

To be successful in life and work takes self-control. What really matters is how you use your time and skills at the job. I am learning to control my nervousness and to stay focused at my job. In each area of my life I have learned that I need mentors to guide and help me. Being a person who learns things at a slower rate isn't always encouraging, but there isn't any shame in it, either. If someone is able to do something that I am not able to do; that is ok, too.

Learning to do my best and be my best at what I do has brought me pride and contentment. I am able to control my nervousness by realizing that I can only do what I am able to do, not worrying about others, focusing on what I can do, and by not comparing myself with others-- to do what I can do with a positive attitude and with excellence. "I know others who have done it, I have done it, and YOU can do it too!"

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