

SUMMARY

TED

TALKS

CHRIS ANDERSON



Summary of “TED Talks” by Chris Anderson

Written by Alyssa Burnette

Public speaking top tips from the founder of the TED
Talks.

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Introduction

When did you first learn to be afraid of public speaking? For most people, it happened in elementary or middle school, when we realized that speaking in front of the class offered a host of new opportunities for other kids to laugh at us. Sadly, this is also the same time of life when we learn to doubt what our parents and grandparents told us growing up: that we might not be the smartest, prettiest, or coolest kid around. That's because human beings are intensely social creatures; we learn by observing the behavior of others and their responses to our own behavior. From these cues, we determine what is "normal" or socially acceptable and what isn't. Thus, these early learning opportunities have a profound impact on our social development and on the things we come to fear. Unfortunately, public speaking quickly becomes one of these fears.

It often follows us into adulthood as well, causing us to cringe at the mention of a big presentation at work. It can even hold us back from pursuing opportunities that might be great for our careers simply because they involve public speaking. In fact, the author's research has shown that public speaking is the number-one fear of most American adults, ranking high above spiders, heights, or the fear of being alone. And that fear is exactly what the author seeks to abolish! As the founder of the famous TED Talks, he knows just how powerful public speaking can be. And he believes that if you have a powerful story to tell, your fear of public speaking shouldn't hold you back! So, over the course of this summary, we'll take a look at the actionable tips the author has offered to many compelling speakers and how this advice has helped them to conquer their own fear of public speaking. We'll also explore how you can put this advice into practice in your own life!



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Why People Are Afraid of Public Speaking

In the introduction, we discussed the fact that our fear of public speaking is characterized by social stigma and shame. But in this chapter, we're going to unpack that concept and learn why these fears are so powerful. On the surface, it's easy to look at that fear and say, "Shake it off! You shouldn't care about what people think!" But of course, that's more easily said than done. As we mentioned in the introduction, this fear is powerful because we learn from other people. Shame, bullying, and humiliation motivate us to conform to social norms because we quickly learn that we get laughed at when we deviate. No one likes to feel embarrassed, after all, and no one likes to be made fun of. As a result, we often conform-- even when we don't want to-- to avoid the unpleasant experience of being ridiculed.

This is what drives our core fear of public speaking. Because public speaking, by its very nature, is an isolating and uncomfortable act. Rather than hiding in the safe anonymity of a class or a group of co-workers, the act of public speaking requires you to step boldly into the spotlight. It makes you vulnerable and exposed. When you are the sole figure on stage, with everyone waiting to hear what you have to say, it can be unnerving to know that all eyes are on you. As a result, this can be an anxiety-inducing experience for many people. But if the fear of public speaking is so relatable and universally human, how is it possible to get past this fear? Why should we even try to transcend it? Well, for starters, the author argues that in this case-- as in pretty much every other case-- standing up to our fears can be empowering! That's because it's all about replacing your fear with confidence. And in the next chapter, we're going to learn more about how you can do just that!



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Connect With Your Audience

So, now we know that successful public speaking is all about confidence transcending your fear. But how can you do that? (Hint: imagining the audience naked is not the cure-all answer you're hoping for!) Instead, the key is to connect with your audience. This is crucial because it attacks the core elements of your fear and your audience's skepticism. To understand how this works, you can start by imagining yourself in your audience's shoes. This should be pretty easy to do because we've all been in the audience of a public speech at some point. Whether it was your commencement address at graduation or your classmates' presentation about their summer vacation, we've all been in the audience waiting to hear someone else's words. And in most cases, you're not there because you want to be! So, as a result, your mind is full of skepticism rather than interest. Instead of being excited about what the speaker has to say, you're sitting there thinking, "Why should I care what you're talking about? When will this be over? I wonder what I'll grab for lunch?"

This intrinsic boredom and skepticism means that you're predisposed to being critical. You're not interested in what the speaker has to say, so you're more likely to notice if they stumble over their words, if they have something in their teeth, or if they just sound awkward. You know that you feel that way as an audience member, so it's not surprising to discover that your audience feels the same way when the roles are reversed. So, how can you fix that? What can you do? Well, to put it simply, connection is the key.

Having said that, it's important to acknowledge a couple of things first. For starters, your connection with your audience is not dependent upon them liking you or even on them liking what you have to say. And you also can't assume that your audience will be the same every time; they could be either more or less receptive, depending on the crowd. So rather than banking on any of these factors, your connection with your audience depends on your ability to employ some techniques that will help them to relate to you. Your relationship to your audience is crucial because it determines whether or not

they will be receptive to what you have to say. To conceptualize this, let's return once again to the hypothetical scenario of yourself as an audience member. When you're listening to a presentation delivered by someone you don't know, your first instinct is always, "Why should I care what you have to say?"

That's because you don't know this person and therefore you don't trust them. But if you were having a conversation with a friend, your outlook would be completely different. Because you know, like, and trust your friend, you would automatically be more interested in what they have to say. You would also be inclined to listen with kindness and respect. Likewise, you would probably assume that your friend has your best interest at heart. But if you're dealing with someone you don't know, you wouldn't assume any of those things, especially if the speaker is saying something you dislike or disagree with. So, if you want to connect with your audience, you should start by making friends with them. Now, that's not to say that you have to create a lifelong bond of love and trust in the fifteen minutes you're on stage, but it does mean that you need to achieve a certain level of intimacy and vulnerability. Because that's what the audience needs in order to connect with you.

However, this might contradict everything you've ever believed about public speaking! In the previous chapter, we mentioned that public speaking is an inherently vulnerable act because it leaves you exposed and out in the open. And because we fear the ridicule that sometimes comes with exposure, our instinct is to close ourselves off as much as possible. For example, if you're nervous, you might think that you should mask that by projecting a facade of extreme confidence. You might think that you should avoid showing weakness at all costs. But this means that you're automatically approaching the audience from an "us/them" mentality that puts you at odds with one another. And that's never a great way to connect with people. So, if you want your audience to know, like, and listen to you, you should start by getting rid of all your public speaking instincts.

Instead of projecting false confidence, be vulnerable! If you're nervous, tell your audience that. And don't be afraid to display physical manifestations of nervousness like blushing. As a kid, you might have instinctively feared physical symptoms like stuttering, shaking, blushing, or sweating because you quickly learned that other kids would notice and laugh. But as an adult, these visible indications of anxiety make you more relatable to an audience. When you show an audience that you're nervous, it helps them to connect with you. Because everybody can relate to that fear! You should also smile and make eye contact with your audience because these signals also make you appear more human and relatable. After all, if we were trying to make friends with someone new, we would also smile and make eye contact. So, when we display friendly behavior towards an audience, it helps them to see you as a friendly face rather than an impersonal and unknown figure of authority.



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Confidence is Key

At first, that might sound contradictory. (Didn't the last chapter literally say to show that you're nervous?) But the truth is that these pieces of advice aren't as opposite as you might think! In fact, you can do both! That's because it's totally possible to be confident and nervous at the same time. Here's how it works: confidence is defined simply as "the feeling or belief that one can rely on someone or something." Therefore, self-confidence means that you feel as though you can trust yourself. It means approaching a situation and saying, "I can do this!" At the core, that's all self-confidence means! But our society has stretched and overexaggerated this definition until we've come to believe that confidence means the absence of fear. However, the author argues that nothing could be further from the truth.

So, let's take a look at his top tips for employing self-confidence in your speeches. For starters, you want to focus on what makes you feel like you. This is a guiding principle that you can rely on in many key aspects of your speech. For example, consider your choice of clothes. As a high-schooler or college student, you might not have given a lot of thought to your attire for your presentation. If you commonly wore sweat pants or pajamas to class, then that's what you wore for your class presentation. But if you're giving a TED Talk or an important speech at work, then you need to be a little more careful about your clothing choices. The author observes that asking about a dress code is a good place to start. For example, if you're speaking at a conference or on a committee, then you should always check to see if the hosts have a dress code in mind. If you're delivering a presentation at work, then your usual dress code at work probably applies.

Knowing the dress code from the start will help you make a good first impression and contribute to your connection with your audience. It might not seem like a big deal, but if your audience is in black tie attire and you walk on stage in sweats and sneakers, you're going to be at an instant disconnect. This will make it much harder for your audience to relate to you because they may instantly assume that you are lazy or sloppy and therefore

undeserving of their attention. By contrast, if you're speaking to a worker's union and everyone is dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, they might get the wrong message if you show up in a tuxedo. So, when you're thinking about the dress code for your event, you want to avoid attire that will instantly alienate your audience.

But how does this relate to self-confidence? What does fashion advice have to do with delivering a compelling speech? The author observes that, although dressing appropriately is important, being authentically you is even more important. In the previous chapter, we discussed the importance of being genuine with your emotions by letting your audience see your vulnerability. But it's also important to be genuine in the way you present yourself through your attire and body language. So, in practice, this means that you should ask about the dress code and know what's appropriate for the occasion, but you should also be prepared to reject this advice if it isn't right for you. For example, let's say that the dress code is formal. But you're a jeans and t-shirt kind of gal. And when you put on a suit, you feel phony and fake. The author has seen time and time again that these feelings will show through. Even if you know your stuff and you're ready to present, if you feel unnatural in your clothes, it will really throw you off your game!

So, remember that confidence is key, but not in the way that you might think. Confidence doesn't mean faking it and it doesn't mean that you're not nervous. Instead, it's about being true to yourself-- whatever that means for you-- and approaching each situation with an "I can do this!" feeling.



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Final Summary

Public speaking is the number-one fear of most adults. But the author's experience as the host of TED Talks is proof that it doesn't have to be scary! Although he can't offer a "one size fits all" solution, he does have some practical, actionable tips that will help you to transcend your fears and deliver a compelling speech. For starters, it's important to take everything you know about public speaking and throw it out the window. If you think you're supposed to fake it till you make it or imagine the audience in their underwear, get rid of that idea!

Instead, focus on building a genuine connection with your audience through positive body language and good eye contact. And don't be afraid to let your audience see that you're nervous! If you're blushing or feeling a little flustered, communicate that to your audience. It makes you more relatable. And lastly, remember that confidence is key. Be authentic and genuine above all else and remember that confidence is not the absence of fear. Confidence is about being nervous and thinking "I can do this!" anyway.



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