



The Obstacles

*How to Un-F*ck Your Mindset for
Successful Public Speaking.*

By Mark Westbrook

PUBLIC SPEAKING COACH SCOTLAND

The Obstacles

*How to Un-F*ck Your Mindset for Successful
Public Speaking.*

By Mark Westbrook

© 2023 Mark Westbrook

THE OBSTACLES

This eBook may be shared in its complete original form, printed solely for personal use or distributed directly via email.

Please do not reprint or copy the text onto websites, forums, blogs or any other media.

It is not to be posted or embedded on any other forums or public websites without the express written permission of the author.

Mark Westbrook
2nd Floor, Clyde Offices, 48 W. George Street,
Glasgow, G2 1BP.
www.publicspeakingcoachscotland.com
+44 0141 29 15 100

INTRODUCTION.....6

OBSTACLE 1: THE BATTLE FOR YOU9

OBSTACLE 2: YOUR INNER CRITIC12

OBSTACLE 3: THE FIXED MINDSET.....18

OBSTACLE 4: YOUR STORY23

OBSTACLE 5: FEELING LOST26

OBSTACLE 6: FEAR.....30

OBSTACLE 7: LIMITING BELIEFS.....34

OBSTACLE 8: CONFIDENCE40

OBSTACLE 9: SEEKING APPROVAL.....47

OBSTACLE 10: PERFECTIONISM50

OBSTACLE 11: PESSIMISM52

OBSTACLE 12: SELF DOUBT53

OBSTACLE 13: DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE`59

OBSTACLE 14: FEAR OF FAILURE.....61

About the Author65

“Hope for the Best, Plan for the Worst.” **Cicero**

INTRODUCTION

Give me just 60 minutes, and you'll understand many of the mental obstacles which are preventing you from speaking confidently in presentations and public speaking activities.

How often do you avoid the chance to speak in public? Or you become overcome with nerves, or suffer with low confidence? How many times did you know you could do better, but somehow you were your own worst enemy.?

We are our own worst enemies.

We sabotage our own presentations without a clue as to how to get out of our own way. We mind-f*ck ourselves before we even get started. The presentation isn't the problem, *we're* the problem. The presentation isn't the obstacle, *we're* the obstacle. You are the solution.

Thankfully much of the hard-work for helping you overcome this problem has already been done by coaches, researchers, performers and psychologists in other fields. And luckily, the answer isn't far away. In fact, it's sitting between your ears.

Whether in sport, the military, music, business, or law - individuals are required to deliver high quality

performance under highly stressful conditions, sometimes with life, livelihood or living at stake.

In most fields, the role of mental skills training has been accepted. Sports, music and the military are just three diverse areas where outside consultants are employed to assist with managing the mental game of 'performance'.

It has been accepted by these areas that success or failure in a particular field can come down to whatever 'inner game' is occurring within the 'performer'. In sport, 'mental coaches', (experts in peak performance) have become a part of successful teams. The Seattle Seahawks have their own resident performance psychologist. The Royal Academy of Music has its own MSc in Performance Science, an attempt to engage with the peak performance of musicians scientifically.

The intention of this book is to introduce the public speaker to a range of obstacles that might impede them and some of the strategies we can use to overcome them.

One of my own heroes, performance expert W Timothy Gallwey said that: “

Your best performance equals all your potential minus Interference.”

Or:

$$\mathbf{Pe = Po - I}$$

Our potential can be damaged by the mental interferences that we meet on a daily basis.

I wrote this book because I found that my clients are often impeded by the same interferences like self doubt, negative self-talk, perfectionism, approval seeking and many more.

I wanted to create a simple way to help you identify and tackle these reoccurring obstacles to achieving your true potential. The secrets to unlocking your exceptional public speaking and presentation success are in your own **hands head.**

Using some of tools of performance psychology, mental game coaching and The Inner Game, I will help you to overcome the obstacles inside that will hold you back from the success in public speaking and presentations that's within your reach.

If you enjoy this eBook, please feel free to pass it on to a friend or colleague. I fully endorse your right to share this book in its entirety.

Mark Westbrook

Presentation / Public Speaking Coach.

Glasgow, May 2023.

OBSTACLE 1: THE BATTLE FOR YOU

OBSTACLE 1: THE BATTLE FOR YOU

Introduction:

When it comes to presentations and public speaking, there's an internal battle taking place within your mind. Two opposing forces are vying for control, each with its own distinct characteristics.

You may not know it, but there's a battle going on in your head. There are two forces competing with each other.

One is a drill sergeant, a bully, a strict instructor - it tells, it demands, it criticises, and brutalises.

The other is an instinctive, intuitive and talented public speaker.

Performance Coach W. Timothy Gallwey called them 'Self 1' and 'Self 2.'

You'll recognize them.

Self 1 is the voice in your head. It's mean, it's brutally mean. It tells you that you're useless and you'll screw up the next presentation.

Self 2 is that moment when you do something instinctively brilliant but you write it off as a fluke. It is silent and highly capable.

Both Selves are necessary. But Self 1 has a habit of getting in the way of Self 2. Self 2 is just fine getting on with whatever it has to do. But Self 1 doesn't trust Self 2 and tries to interfere. The result is the battle between your conflicted Selves which creates an obstacle to performing at your best. With one self impeding the other Self's natural ability - we simply cannot get out of our own way.

Under the pressure of an important speech or public presentation, this leads to a failure.

But if Self 1 and Self 2 are in harmony - that's when you shine.

How To Win This Battle?

The secret is that Self 1 can be distracted. If you can find something that will absorb your whole attention, Self 1 will become quiet and act in harmony with Self 2.

But whatever that activity is, it must immerse you completely.

If you want to win the battle in your mind, you must find an immersive activity that will absorb all of your attention. As you do so, your Self 1 will become distracted and silent.

Conclusion:

The battle between Self 1 and Self 2 is a common struggle for many individuals when facing the challenges of public speaking. By recognizing this internal conflict and finding ways to distract the critical voice of Self 1, you can empower your instinctive public speaking abilities. Through practice, mindfulness, and immersive activities that absorb your attention, you can achieve harmony between the two selves and unlock your true potential as a confident and captivating speaker.

OBSTACLE 2: YOUR INNER CRITIC

What is the biggest obstacle to your success as a public speaker?

I would say that it's the same obstacle that prevents EVERYONE from achieving success in any field. It is the small, omni-present but dominating voice in your head.

You know that voice, full of brutal criticism, feeding your self-doubt, talking you out of achieving your dreams by maximising your fear of failure.

In Psychology, they call that voice Negative Self-Talk and it is a powerful form of self-interference. Interference acts like a fog between you and your ability, obscuring your opportunity to shine.

W. Tim Gallwey in his book *The Inner Game of Tennis* called this voice SELF 1, and I call it your **INNER CRITIC**.

Before, during and after your speech or presentation it never stops talking. During your preparation, it fills you with self doubt. Walking up to speak, it questions your competence. During the speech it makes you second guess yourself instead of trusting your preparation, and afterwards it brutally chimes in with “*Well, that was a load of shit wasn't it?*”

Here's a picture of my Inner Critic:



Most people already know precisely what I'm talking about, but I'll give you an example.

I once gave a Mental Game workshop at a big Expo event in London. Before the workshop, I asked a staff member if she could help me to gauge the distance that someone would have to throw a screwed up piece of paper into a waste paper bin. I handed her the paper and started to walk away. Before she'd even taken a shot, she said *"I don't know if I can help you though, I'm a rubbish throw, I'll probably miss."*

I didn't need her to throw, it wasn't going in now anyway.

In the workshop, I put £500 in cash in a metal waste paper bin and then invited 10 different people to throw screwed up balls of paper into the bin. I invited the ten people up in front of the others - now they had an audience.

I then spent five minutes raising the volume on their inner critic. I made them visualise what that £500 would mean, I asked them to imagine missing the shot. I got the audience of 100 other people to drum on their knees, and we repeated that several times to add pressure. I fed their Inner Critic by asking them questions that made them doubt themselves.

No one won the money.

But someone did hit the side of the bin.

The crowd insisted that since she hit the side of the bin (when has hitting the side netting ever been a goal?) that she get another chance. So I let her have another shot - because I was sure I could make her Inner Critic louder than ever.

I asked her to imagine what she would spend the money on. I asked if she was a good shot normally - she said no. I asked how she managed to hit the side of the bin, she confessed it was a fluke. I made the audience drum their knees and shout louder than ever.

This time, on throwing the paper ball, her hand opened a little too early, the ball fell from her hand and dropped and hit her on the shoe.

“I’m rubbish at throwing.” She confessed to me afterwards.

And when you have something to lose - like £500 cash or presenting in a room full of potential clients - the voice of the Inner Critic is going to be almost deafening. Whatever story your internal narrator tells is going to affect your external performance. So quietening down your little ‘friend’ is a priority.

I don’t want that voice to be the only thing that’s holding you back from success, and I guess you don’t either.

They have been addressing this in sports psychology for almost 40 years, but only now is it really being introduced in the arena of public speaking

Here are my tips on reducing the interference and removing the biggest obstacle to your success as a public speaker.

ONE: Give the **Inner Critic** a name. Something silly. Something that you struggle to take seriously. A client of mine calls hers CHARDONNAY - nothing wrong with the name, and a very nice wine it is too - but it has certainly hilarious connotations to my client and so it was the perfect name

CHARDONNAY is like a friend who is very well intentioned, but entirely unhelpful. Actually, she's the worst friend you've ever had, because in order to save you from pain, she'll do anything. She'll criticise, scold, mock, ridicule, brutalise, distract, lecture, scare, unsettle, undermine and distract - to name but a few tactics.

When you give your Inner Critic a name, you learn to separate yourself from it. And when you hear that voice in your head, you'll know it's CHARDONNAY, or ALAN, or PHOEBE, or CASSANDRA (sorry to all the people with those names).

TWO: You do not need to believe your **Inner Critic**. The negative voice is spinning a narrative, an inner dialogue that isn't necessarily accurate.

Start a new story.

Begin telling yourself an objective story about what is actually happening in front of you.

“My hands are shaking because I'm full of adrenalin, that's because my heart is preparing me to do my best up there.”

Raising your awareness in a non-judgmental way will vastly reduce the **Inner Critic's** presence in your life.

THREE: It is - what it is. Hamlet says “there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.” Shakespeare knew something about the **Inner Critic**.

Everything is perspective. This is either the biggest disaster that ever happened and will end your entire career in X due to the abject failure and public humiliation - or you stumbled on one word in a sentence. One is laden with emotion, the other is - what it is.

FOUR: The enemy of all mental interference is focus. Focused attention. Absorption.

W. Timothy Gallwey, creator of the Inner Game reasoned that “*focus is whatever distracts us **from** whatever distracts us.*”

The Inner Critic distracts us and so to silence that most unhelpful voice in your head, you need something to take up your attention.

Pour your attention into something other than yourself. As you walk up to the podium to speak, sing your favourite song to yourself - you’ll be amazing at how hard it is for your Inner Critic to get a word in when you’re mentally rocking out to Aerosmith in your head.

This trick is powerful enough to completely silence the **Inner Critic**, but I’m sure you can come up with your own variations.

OBSTACLE 3: THE FIXED MINDSET

Developing the right mindset is vital for anyone to succeed and grow.

If you have a Growth Mindset, you believe that positive change is always possible. Someone with a Growth Mindset has a 'Succeed or Learn' approach to new and challenging situations. There is no failure because if you don't succeed, you get to learn something significant. It doesn't stop it hurting, but you seek out the chance to grow and your experience reinforces that mindset.

Unfortunately, if you have a Fixed Mindset, you have conditioned yourself to avoid damage to your Self-Image and how others see you - at all costs.

You will not put yourself in a situation where the result may reflect badly on you. If you do, you react strongly, and attention is deflected away from you. When you meet a challenge or obstacle, you approach it in a way that will do the least potential damage. Little or no growth comes of it. Your experience reinforces that mindset.

Your mindset is made up of a set of inner narratives or stories you tell yourselves. It is possible to change them, but how? Success has moments of failure built in. Every single successful person has the most tremendous failure

stories. Public Speakers with a Growth Mindset are inspired by that fact. Public Speakers with a Fixed Mindset are already telling themselves a very different story.

LEARN TO HEAR THE STORY YOU'RE TELLING YOURSELF.

HOW THE FIXED MINDSET RESPONDS TO CHALLENGES: Whenever a challenge arises, listen to your inner narrative. What does it say when a challenge arises? It may speak very quietly. It thinks that it's protecting you. It tells you a story about the potential negative outcomes of the challenge. It creates a story and you imagine it coming true.

You are asked to prepare a presentation to a hundred potential investors at the last minute. Your experience tells you that you find challenges like that very difficult. You're going to need to work super hard to win over these investors. You tell yourself some stories.

"I'm not the kind of person who can just get up and present."

"I'm not an extrovert, I've never been good at that kind of thing."

"This presentation should take months to prepare. How can they expect that of me?"

“Oh God, real leaders can do this - why can't I?”

“Really good coaches can do this - I'm clearly not a good coach if I can't”

These thoughts have immense power over us. As we approach the date of the presentation, your Self-Image doesn't want to be confronted with the failure it associates with these challenges, so we put off preparing.

AND WE AVOID THE CHANCE TO GROW BY AVOIDING THE CHALLENGE.

HOW THE FIXED MINDSET RESPONDS TO OBSTACLES: Whenever an obstacle presents itself, listen to your inner narrative. What does it say when you meet obstacles?

*“I am not a natural public speaker, I'm not a show off, even at school, Oh god, there was that disastrous history presentation about the Industrial Revolution... I'm going to say that I can't do it. I'm not the right person for it, I'll only f*ck it up.”*

AND WE AVOID THE CHANCE TO GROW BY AVOIDING THE OBSTACLE.

HOW THE FIXED MINDSET RESPONDS TO FEEDBACK:
Whenever feedback is offered, listen to your inner narrative. How does it respond?

“If they understood my reasons, they wouldn’t be saying this. Let me just explain...”

“Jeez, he hasn’t got a clue what he’s talking about...”

“No, that won’t work. They keep giving me that note, but it won’t work.”

AND WE AVOID THE CHANCE TO GROW BY AVOIDING THE FEEDBACK.

YOU HAVE A CHOICE

You cannot change what happens to you, but your personal interpreter can be trained to respond.

It is currently set to respond in the way that your mindset dictates. You can choose HOW you respond to challenges, obstacles and feedback.

You can train yourself to STOP. Listen to the fixed mindset story, and then CHOOSE to answer back with a GROWTH MINDSET.

FIXED: “Really good coaches can just get up and present, they know their stuff.”

GROWTH: “I can understand why you might feel like that, but there’s a big difference between working 1-2-1 and getting up in front of an audience. This is my first time

doing something like this - what a GREAT LEARNING OPPORTUNITY.”

Because that’s what happens isn’t it? The Growth Mindset says “what a great learning opportunity”, while the Fixed Mindset says: “what a terrible opportunity to fail in front of other people.”

When you mindfully practise this enough, you’ll turn the growth mindset into a habit.

But start by listening to the stories you are telling yourself. Perhaps you’ve told yourself a story about this obstacle already.

How would the growth mindset answer that?

OBSTACLE 4: YOUR STORY

We all have stories we tell ourselves and I'm afraid those stories are usually bullshit.

We shape our lives according to the script in our heads and unless we can learn to change those stories, we may never find success.

Telling stories is an important part of human culture. Stories are all around, from the cave paintings in Lascaux to Instagram Reels. We tell stories to ourselves and to others. Other people tell us stories too.

- **Marketing departments tell parents that if they want**
- **to make their children happy, they will buy them X.**
-
- **Most Western societies tell a story that successful**
- **people go to college.**
-
- **The business world tells us that successful CEOs and**
- **leaders are great public speakers.**

Whoever gets to tell the story, gets power over the listener, and this includes you over yourself.

If you want to get good at something, if you want to achieve success in public speaking, you may need to take a look at

the story you're telling yourself, and perhaps change that story.

I have a story to tell you...

I had a client, a footballer, recently moved into presenting. With little experience of working on camera, he told me he had started to tense up and become rigid when he had to speak to camera. He told me "I've played for my club and country in front of thousands of people. I don't get it. I **should** be able to do this - it's ridiculous"

The belief that with all his playing experience, he 'should' be able to do this was creating a story that was inducing shame in him. That shame was piling more pressure onto him than the job itself.

Many people find acting for camera stressful. When this player changed his working environment, it rattled him, but what was damaging him even more was the story he was telling himself.

First, we worked together to change the story that he told himself. We started with exploring his relationship to the camera. I asked him to describe what he saw when he looked into the lens and he said he imagined the thousands of people watching. I asked him if we could try an extra with a camera. Indeed, he was stiff as a plank. I asked who was his best friend, someone who loved football too, he named another player. I asked if instead of presenting to

the thousands, he could just have a chat with his buddy instead. Treat the camera like your buddy.

Suddenly the story was changed. The camera was a friend, a mate, someone with whom he had history and rapport. It was like switching on a light - suddenly he was filled with personality and life.

What story are you telling yourself about public speaking? What story are you telling the people around you? Will your boss ever send you to represent him at BNI if you're still telling the story that you're terrified of public speaking?

One last story. A lawyer was asked to go to a BNI networking group. She was terrified of the idea. So we worked together. We established what the critical elements of a good BNI experience would be for her. We made a list of 10 things. After the BNI, I called her to ask her about the event, and she said it was a nightmare. I asked her to take me through the list of 10 critical elements of a good experience for her. I asked her to tell me how many she had achieved. Once she got to number 7, she was laughing. 7 was the number we had defined as an 'outright success' for her.

But she was telling all who'd listen a story about the nightmare she had at BNI. But she hadn't.

These stories become your beliefs.

OBSTACLE 5: FEELING LOST

If you have no goal for your presentation - you are literally 'aimless'. You are without somewhere to aim your energy. That's when you start to get in trouble. A goal for your presentation makes sure that your content,

That's okay, if there's nothing to achieve, it doesn't matter. If you don't want to:

- Communicate your message.
- Demonstrate your leadership in that field.
- Improve your chances of promotion.
- Raise your credibility.
- Represent your company.
- Convince people to believe in you or your brand.

If you don't want to achieve anything, then do nothing and please don't create a goal for your presentation.

But if there are things you'd still like to achieve, it's time to take action.

Creating a goal will ensure that the content, structure and delivery all line up to help you achieve the result you seek.

Be clear about what your goal is for the presentation.

Be clear about what you want the audience to FEEL, REMEMBER and DO as a result

To have a goal means becoming aware. You have to become aware of what are the critical variables for success are.

To have a goal means becoming aware. If your goal is to see improvement in the quality of your performance in audition scenes, you have to become aware of the critical elements - the variables that make for a cracking audition scene.

Look, I don't know if you can achieve everything you ever wanted. But I do know that having a goal and breaking down the critical elements required to achieve that goal will certainly improve your chances of achieving it.

So what makes for a great presentation? What are some of the critical variables?

- Clear line from your presentation goal through the structure and content.
- Eye Contact.
- Warm Smile.
- Shifts in Energy and Pace throughout.
- Shifts in Pitch and Tone throughout.
- Speaking like you're talking to your friends.
- Body language supporting intention.

These are just some of the variables of a good presentation. Knowing the right variables is part of the business of being successful at anything. But I'll let you into a secret. It's a lot easier to move towards your goal if you can put a number on it.

Let's take: **SPEAKING LIKE YOU'RE TALKING TO YOUR FRIENDS.**

What would you expect to see, hear and feel if you were speaking like you were talking to your friends?

- **Loose, relaxed physically.**
- **Easy rapport.**
- **Lots of smiles.**
- **Plenty of eye contact.**
- **Calm voice, easy**

Out of 10, how easy was the rapport with you and the audience? Around 4 or 5? And you work through each criteria. You work to improve those critical variables each time you present.

Building an awareness about those variables when they are 10s, and acknowledging with self awareness where you are now, allows you to see what needs to be done to improve. By raising your awareness of these things, you're already closer to your goal.

STEP 1: Decide what you want to achieve with your presentation.

STEP 2: Write it down and put it somewhere you can see it while you prepare the content and structure of the presentation. It won't help at the back of a drawer!

STEP 3: Work out the most essential criteria of achieving that goal.

STEP 4: Describe the perfect version of a '10' for that goal. Do the same for a 5, and a 0.

STEP 5: Compare where you are in relationship to your 0-5-10 goals.

STEP 6: Consider what options you have for improvement. Get coaching if necessary. Take any actions necessary to bridge the gap.

OBSTACLE 6: FEAR

One of the greatest inhibitors to success in any field is fear. It arises out of the feeling that we are under threat. In the West, we still live in the safest period in recorded history, where the level of physical threat is relatively low. But the feeling of fear is a response to emotional threats too.

Although fear may be imagined, it is a very real feeling. Many careers have been ruined by fear's sabotaging influence. I know that I have made decisions in the past out of fear of imagined future consequences. We all do.

There are various types of fear that performers encounter:

FEAR OF FAILING/FAILURE (Fear of Screwing Up)

The basic fear of failure and what it means to you. I've known clients so fearful of performing poorly in presentations they've come up with excuses to miss it.

COACH ON FEAR: Everyone fears screwing up. But it's when fear causes us to freeze and fail that it becomes a problem. Failure is something that you should actually embrace. It is a necessary part of the journey to success.

Think of it like this:

If you were driving from Glasgow to Edinburgh, you have to drive through Falkirk to get there. When you pass through Falkirk, are you suddenly *from* Falkirk? No. When you're on the road to Success and you drive through Failure, you don't become failure! The thing is, when you become okay with the idea of screwing up as a part of succeeding, you fail less. Much less actually.

FEAR OF FALLING (Fear of Social Embarrassment)

Fear of Falling is the social fear that you will fail in front of others. This often prevents people from taking risks and makes them play very safely. Imagine someone skiing while their friends watch, they try a new trick, but they are so concerned with what their friends think, they can think only of messing it up. So guess what happens? They fall over. Social fear is paralyzing. Since you do not want to be excluded from the group, you avoid situations where you might fail in front of others.

COACH ON FEAR: What others think is really none of your business. When you act from your fear of falling you focus on what's happening outside of yourself. The focus should be on improving what you're doing and not concerning yourself with what others think. You do not need social approval. Check out **Obstacle 9** for more on this.

FEAR OF FAILING OTHERS (Fear of Letting Others Down)

This type of fear is when you are afraid to let others down. Your boss, or someone, a trusted contact in your network

has arranged for you to speak at a big international conference and now you're afraid of letting them down.

COACH ON FEAR: This is another type of social fear. You cannot present for other, s - you can only focus on giving the best presentation that you possibly can - for yourself. If you do the best you possible can, then you can't fail anyone. Fear of Failing Others is really a need for their approval. I've devoted a whole chapter to that in **Obstacle 9.**

FEAR OF FLYING (Fear of Success)

We are sometime worried about what success will bring. Particularly how it will change the relationships they have with others.

COACH ON FEAR: You have an inherent fear of being ostracised from your social group. When we are successful, we fear that this will happen too. Marianne Williamson has this to offer us:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the

same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Performing fearlessly means reducing the impact of fear on your life and your career. To escape fear, you must see things as they are and not follow the story that your fear response creates for us. Things are as they are. Focus on doing the best you can do and let the chips fall as they will.

EXERCISE: MIND DUMP

One of the most successful tools that we can use to calm the Inner Critic is the Mind Dump. This is best done a few days *before* the presentation itself.

Instead of trying to stop any negative chatter in your head from the Inner Critic, we’re going to allow it the time to vent. Instead of wasting your time and energy trying to combat the Inner Critic, give it the chance to spill its guts at a safe distance from your presentation.

Sit down and type out whatever the Inner Critic has to say. Go into glorious negative detail. After you’ve finished, take a short break, get a cup of tea and then come back and marvel at your own mind’s amazing ability to be utterly brutal to you.

Paradoxically, by allowing your Inner Critic to have an unrestricted rant, you become temporarily desensitised to its effects.

OBSTACLE 7: LIMITING BELIEFS

“Whether you think you can, or you think you can’t, you’re right.”

Henry Ford

What you believe becomes your reality. Belief is an incredibly powerful force in your life, shaping the way that you see the world and your place in it. Having faith in yourself is a vital factor in achieving success as an actor, dancer, musician - or in any field.

But venture beneath the surface and most of us have beliefs unconsciously limiting our behaviour. You may not even be aware of them. A well known story about fleas is a good illustration.

Fleas have a tremendous capacity for jumping. They can leap incredibly high. If you put them in a jar, they will easily jump out. But if you put the lid on, something strange happens. The fleas will continue trying to jump out for a few hours, but then they will stop to avoid the pain of hitting the lid.

If you then remove the lid, the fleas will not try to escape. They can no longer tell the difference between their real limitations and those imposed upon them. Limitations placed upon them become self-imposed limitations.

In that sense, you are no different from the fleas. Our perception of reality limits our behaviour. And the biggest influence is exactly like the fleas, it is your environment.

Your environment is the biggest factor effecting your self belief and your limitations. Where you have spent the most time and who you have spent it with, is the most impactful influence upon your self belief.

IF you grew up in a highly motivated household of professional actors who worked constantly and were proud of their contribution to the world, you'll have little trouble believing that you too can be a professional actor, work regularly, and be proud of it.

IF you grew up in an environment where your parents were lawyers and doctors, you'll have no problem believing that law and medicine are suitable professions for you if you wish to enter them.

IF you grew up in a low income but highly supportive environment, where although your parents didn't earn much, they truly believed in the power of education to change lives, the chances are that you'll go to college.

IF you spend most of your time around people that spend most of their time pursuing their goal of becoming a successful actor, the chances are you'll believe that it's possible and your behaviour will follow suit.

IF you spend most of your time around people that place creativity and art as highly as simply making a living, the chances are you'll believe that art is important too.

BUT if you spend most of your time around people that do not believe that people can achieve their dreams.

IF you are surrounded by negativity.

IF your parents chose financial security over their dreams

IF your friends went the safe route in college

IF the people that you surround yourself with mock and deride your attempts to better yourself, or place no value or belief in doing so, - the chances are that even with the all the willpower in the world, eventually you'll believe that too, and you'll give in.

Behaviour follows our beliefs.

IF you spend your time in drama school being made to feel that you aren't good enough to be there, then you will believe that, and you will act accordingly. **BUT** if you spend your time surrounded by like-minded people, in a supportive environment, in which staff and students all believe that being extraordinary is possible, the chances are that you'll believe that too.

Just like the fleas, your beliefs are limited by whichever environments have the biggest impact on your life and your behaviour follows your beliefs.

We act in line with our beliefs.

So how do you then jump beyond the behaviour that is caused by self-limiting beliefs? The answer is surprisingly simple.

Surround yourself with the kind of people that you wish to be like. People that have already achieved some of their goals, because those people already believe that it's possible, and that belief will quickly rub off on you too.

But I understand that there is an obvious problem.

You want to be a world famous movie star. But they've stopped hanging out at your local cafe recently, or they don't come round to your place to play PS4 as often as they used to.

Well, there is a second option that's entirely in your control. Surround yourself with them in other ways.

- Read their books
- Watch their interviews
- Listen to their podcasts
- Put up their photos.

In other words create the kind of environment that reinforces the belief that it's possible, and guess what happens? It becomes possible.

A few examples from my own life. In 1999, I dreamed of becoming a university lecturer. I placed a colour photo of the campus of an American university on the wall in front of my computer. In 2003 I became a university lecturer.

From 1998 I chose to read and watch everything written, made, or about David Mamet. Today, I've trained at the school he founded and I now teach acting using the basis of the technique that he created.

Since I was 15 years old, I have obsessed about Constantin Stanislavski. I have an entire bookshelf (more like two actually) devoted only to books by or about him, and he has influenced acting more than anyone else in history. He changed how the modern world saw acting. What has become my professional goal? To change how people see acting.

Coincidence? I don't think so. My limits were set by my beliefs and my beliefs were set by my environment.

You are no different. How will you liberate yourself from the limits imposed upon you? Spend as much time as you can with like-minded successful people. Or start with a

book, an interview, a picture, an infographic, a quotation - reinforce that belief in any way you can.

The toughest part is that as we grow older, we collect beliefs that are based on our experience. If you believe that you cannot get cast in a major network television series, why is that? Because if each audition you had ended with the same result - no network television roles - then with each new experience you stop believing that its possible to achieve that goal. After all, your experience has taught you this, and experience is the best teacher.

Confidence comes from many things, but past experience is a huge factor. So when your past experiences suck, you will carry them around with you as proof that you cannot do it this time. And guess what? That's going to affect the next audition, and the next? Each will bring you proof for the next time.

So how do you escape that negative cycle of bad experiences causing more bad experiences? Let's look at **CONFIDENCE.**

OBSTACLE 8: CONFIDENCE

Most people believe that self confidence is a quality you get when you are good at something.

The word confident comes from the Latin con+fido. Meaning *with trust*. Confidence comes from trusting yourself that you can do something.

It's true that the better you are, the more likely you are to trust your own abilities. Without confidence it's hard to be good at anything.

EXERCISE: CONFIDENCE CHECK-IN

Consider how you feel about the following sentences. Decide if you Completely Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, or Completely Disagree.

- 1) If I do poorly in a presentation, it affects my confidence.
- 2) If I do really well in a presentation, it affects my confidence.
- 3) My confidence is based on my successes and failures.
- 4) I have more confidence when I have lots of experience of something.

Your responses should tell you something about your confidence in public speaking. If your confidence is easily

affected by your success and failure, your confidence is reactive.

Successful public speakers have proactive confidence. They have a mindset that doesn't dwell on mistakes, or doubts.

A reactive confidence can change from moment to moment and doubts and negative thoughts frequently impact the quality of their presentations.

Most people do have confidence when they have positive past experiences. The past is well of evidence that proves to you that you can do well.

PROACTIVE vs REACTIVE CONFIDENCE

Take a look at the table below. If you are focused on the left column, your confidence will be proactive. If you are focused on the right column, it will be reactive.

WITHIN YOUR CONTROL	NOT IN YOUR CONTROL
The amount of preparation	Whether the audience laugh
The quality of your preparation	Whether the audience enjoy it
Receiving coaching for the event	Whether it goes down well

Feeling Confident on the day.	The outcome of this presentation
Visualises having a successful public speaking event.	Intimidated by quality of other speakers
Awareness of Strengths	The Speaking Order
Thorough Warm Up	Poor Warm up
Bouncing back from mistakes	Letting mistakes derail you.

EXERCISE: CONFIDENCE REVIEW

Whenever someone struggles with their confidence, when they are filled with self-doubt, I ask them some of the following questions. These are aimed at reminding and reiterating the individual's strengths. Ask yourself these questions.

- What would you say was your greatest strengths as person, as a professional, as a speaker?
- What positive comments have you heard from others about your public speaking?
- What have you done in your industry of which you are most proud?
- What can you say about your training as a speaker that will give you confidence?
- What would you say about your work ethic?

- If you took a positive perspective, how would other industry professionals describe your work?

FIGHTING BACK AGAINST LOW SELF CONFIDENCE

Self-confidence often comes from how you interpret what has occurred. Your thoughts become your beliefs and those beliefs transform into your reality and from there you make decisions and take actions.

The things we think become our reality and that affects our behaviour.

You tend to believe your thoughts and lay them down like tracks to follow. Those tracks then guide the decisions and choices you make. It's impossible to have self confidence in your performance if the tracks you've laid are negative.

If we want to build self-confidence, it is at this construction stage in our thinking that we must **lay different tracks**.

Your Inner Critic is often responsible for generated a lot of negative thoughts around your work. It is trying to save you from the embarrassment of failure, but in doing so, it almost always ensures failure. There are some tools that can help defeat the Inner Critic in this situation.

EXERCISE: PIZZA PIE

One tool to use can use to allow your mind to consider different elements *before* making beliefs is called the Pizza Pie exercise.

Imagine you are walking in the street when you see a good friend, you wave, but even though they are looking directly at you, they do not wave and turn away.

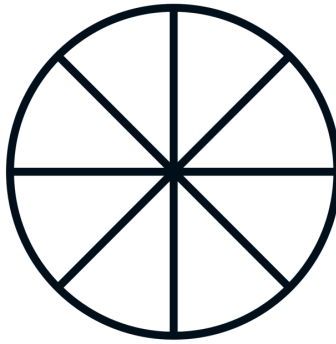
Why did this happen? Because they hate you? Possibly. Because they genuinely didn't see you. Possibly. Because they have a lot going on in their lives at the moment and they didn't register you. Possibly. That they were late for an important meeting at the doctor or the bank. Possibly. That they have found out some dark secret about you and want to keep away from you. Possibly.

Now go back through that list and list the reasons in order of likelihood that they are accurate.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

What you quickly realise is that some of these are possible, and some aren't likely. When we use the Pizza Pie exercise, we write down eight reasons (one for each slice) why something happened or didn't happen.

Imagine you have given a presentation and it didn't seem to go well, there is little audience reaction, no laughter, and the energy of the audience is low afterwards. What are the 8 reasons this could be the case?



1. The audience didn't enjoy my presentation.
2. The audience were hungry as it happened before lunch.
3. The speaker before me had good news to deliver and I had bad news to deliver.
4. My jokes weren't correctly chosen to meet *this* particular audience. (Audience Analysis is vital).
5. The topic wasn't as relevant to this audience as I thought.
6. I didn't prepare as well as I could.
7. I'm a terrible presenter.
8. The audience hate me.

Now you would go back through that list and list the reasons in order of likelihood that they are accurate. You will quickly find a list of things to do to improve your presentation next time, and a few things that might be true but aren't very help.

“The will must be stronger than the skill.” - Mohammed Ali

OBSTACLE 9: SEEKING APPROVAL

We often hope to overcome self doubt and rebuild our self confidence by looking in the wrong place. We look for external validation: our clients, our colleagues, the audience, our boss, management, fellow speaker,

But the need for approval drives very damaging behaviour for us all. Being focused on other peoples' approval means you are focused on pleasing them. What would please them? Do you even know?

And so we begin to associate how we feel about ourselves and how we see ourselves as a person, with how we think other people see us. The root cause of our need for approval is not how others see us. The cause is our own self-image, how we see ourselves, and additionally - how we feel about ourselves. If we see ourselves negatively, if we talk to ourselves negatively, the chances are we feel negatively and begin looking for external validation.

The trouble is that searching for approval leads to behaviour focused on results and creates a kind of protective behaviour. We don't want to fail in front of those we want approval from - and this leads to a drastic reduction in our ability to take risks. This can cripple you in the rehearsal room when you should be exploring freely, or on set between takes, when your need to get the director's

approval is squashing your ability to take creative risks and deliver phenomenal results. All the focus becomes about getting a successful outcome.

We get tight. We try to avoid mistakes at all costs. Your energies are taken up by telling yourself to do more, try harder, to do your best. And in that place, you are not at your best. In that place, we are conservative at best.

In order to be exceptional, you have to be able to take risks. To be exceptional, you have to be completely absorbed in what you are doing. Not self consciously aware of your efforts, but completely immersed in your performance.

When you are looking for approval, you stand outside yourself and watch yourself AS-IF you are the approval-givers, and deliver a constant negative narrative of your failures.

If you want to become completely absorbed, you need to have something thoroughly absorbing to take up your attention. As you remember, Tim Gallwey said *'focus is whatever distracts us from whatever distracts us.'* The obvious way to achieve this is to put your attention entirely on your scene partner and do something to them.

Needing approval from others is about needing to feel good about yourselves through others. But to overcome your need for approval, you must discover who you are as a person, not as an actor.

You are a person first, and your job is second. Do you like who you are as a person? Do you like your own characteristics? Most people can find many positive characteristics if they look.

Liking who you are as a person outside of work, accepting who you are as a person - that's how you overcome the need for approval elsewhere.

You have to find harmony with who you are. When you are happy with that, the approval of others becomes less and less important.

OBSTACLE 10: PERFECTIONISM

We can all experience Perfectionism. Many of us confess to being “a bit of a perfectionist”, without ever realising that this humble brag can actually be an obstacle to our success.

We think of perfectionism as someone who strives tirelessly for success. In sports psychology, they disagree. They believe that our perfectionism is actually rooted in our fear of being less than perfect.

It is tough to convince people whose aim is to be the best, that perfectionism is damaging and holds them back. They often believe that their perfectionism contributed to past success and so are reluctant to let go of their attachment to it. I know many Perfectionists who will argue with me that they are 1) Not Perfectionists 2) It doesn't harm their development.

- 1) They are.
- 2) It does.

A high level of determination combined with a lack of capacity to be satisfied with the outcome creates a Perfectionist cycle.

Perfectionists experience binary thinking with perfection and mediocrity as the only two possible outcomes. This

leads people to impede their own potential because fear of failure accompanies the desire to be perfect in their presentation.

In presentations or public speaking, we struggle to separate the presentation from the presenter. Because of this, perfectionist presenters set high expectations and experience considerable mental turmoil if their results fall short of those expectations.

Instead of a necessary part of the journey to success, failure becomes a place to avoid at all costs. Our fear of making mistakes and our need to be consistently perfect, can lead to poor performance, loss of motivational drive, and even a complete loss of the desire to present altogether.

TACKLING PERFECTIONISM

1. Remember - Practise does not make perfect, practise gives you experience, practise makes improvement, practise allows you to trust yourself.
2. Give yourself permission to make mistakes - peak ability is often released when you take away the need to be perfect.
3. Consider the negative consequences of perfectionism. How does the desire for perfection impede your performance? What does it cost you?

OBSTACLE 11: PESSIMISM

Things happen in life. We tend to see those things through a negative or positive lens. Our response to what happens to us is heavily influenced by our explanatory style - the way that we explain to ourselves why something has happened.

We can have EITHER pessimistic or optimistic explanatory styles depending upon our bias. A person who sees their experiences through a negative bias tends to have a pessimistic explanatory style, which in turn makes them more negative. A person who sees their experience through a positive bias tends to have an optimistic explanatory style, they explain why things happen to them positively - which tends to make the more positive.

OBSTACLE 12: SELF DOUBT

“Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt.” - William Shakespeare

Anyone can experience self-doubt. Self doubt is on a continuum with confidence.

Self Doubt -----**Confidence**

When you experience more self doubt, you experience less confidence. When you boost your confidence, your self doubt shrinks.

Self doubt is strongly connected to your fear of failure. Self doubt can appear at any time, but prior to presenting or speaking is the most common occurrence. It is also likely to appear there is a stumble during the presentation. Even the very best speakers in the world can be affected by self-doubt.

Overcoming Self Doubt

Self doubt is the biggest confidence killer. While confidence makes us loose and energised; self doubt makes us tight and tense. Confidence is belief in our abilities; Self Doubt is when that belief is impaired.

But you can learn to destroy doubt by reframing your thinking. A thought is just a thought. It is neither true or

false. You can choose to see things positively or negatively. By reframing your doubts, you can counteract their effects on you and your presentations.

EXERCISE: IDENTIFY YOUR DOUBTS

Make a list of the top 5 doubts you have about your presentation or public speaking abilities:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

EXAMPLES:

1. I'm an introvert, I'm not a natural public speaker.
2. I'm afraid of getting up in front of groups of people.
3. I don't have the same amount of confidence as X has.
4. I will probably make a fool of myself.
5. What if they don't like me?

I will now use a technique called Reframing. Reframing, or Cognitive Reframing to give it its full name, is a tool for helping someone see things from a different point of view. The 'frame' is the way that the person views a certain situation and the meaning that they derive from the perspective they have. When the frame is adjusted (reframing), the meaning of changes with the point of view.

I will now reframe these examples to show you how to do this for yourself.

REFRAMING SELF DOUBT

I'm an introvert, I'm not a natural public speaker.

Yes, I am an introvert, just like about 50% of the population. And yet many of them are effective public speakers. This is because public speakers are made and not born.

I'm afraid of getting up in front of groups of people.

When I get up in front of groups of people, I get very nervous. But I know that about 70% of people have a fear of public speaking, so it's only natural. I will work to manage the symptoms of my anxiety in my mental preparation for the presentation.

I don't have the same amount of confidence as X has.

We're all different and X has a ton of public speaking experience because of his job. I have confidence in what I'm talking about and the preparation that I am doing for the presentation. When I have the same amount of experience as X, my confidence will be even greater.

I will probably make a fool of myself.

Things might go wrong but most people are very generous towards presenters, particular nervous ones. What's the likelihood that I will make a fool of myself? What is a fool anyway? The real fool would be someone who thinks they can just get up to the podium and just wing it. I've worked very hard to prepare for this presentation.

What if they don't like me?

It's impossible to control whether someone likes me or not. It's not relevant whether they like me or not. And I'm not really doing this to be liked. There are lots of friends in the audience, I will keep my focus on one of them. I will do the best presentation I can, learn from the experience and take feedback from trusted memberships of the audience.

To reframe our doubts, we simply need to argue back on our own behalf. This reminds me us that there is more than one perspective on a situation and your mind starts to take your doubts less as something written in concrete and more like just another thought to be considered.

BELIEF CONQUERS DOUBT

There are 6 stages of belief.

1. I hope I can do well in my presentation.
2. Maybe I can do well in my presentation.
3. I think I can do well in my presentation.
4. I know I can do well in my presentation.
5. I believe I can do well in my presentation.
6. I will do well in my presentation.

One of the ways to help move down the stages of belief, is the establish further foundation for confidence.

FOUNDATIONS FOR CONFIDENCE

Whenever you prepare yourself for an audition, I suggest you ask yourself the following confidence building questions:

1. Out of 10, how much do you believe you can do well in the upcoming presentation?
2. What could YOU do (within your control) to improve on that number today? What could YOU do to improve that number before the presentation date?

3. What is your current Belief Stage regarding your preparation?
4. What is your plan to prepare for the presentation?
5. What does success in the upcoming presentation look like to you? Describe it in detail.
6. What's your main goal for the presentation?
7. What's an acceptable level of success for this presentation?
8. Have you built up any expectations that could damage your confidence?
9. What's your motivation behind wanting to do well in the presentation?
10. What have you done well in previous presentations?
11. How will you look, act and feel on the day of the presentation?
12. What are you telling yourself in your head about the upcoming presentation?
13. What will you tell yourself on the morning of the preparation to support yourself that day?
14. What will you tell yourself during the audition?
15. What will you tell yourself after the audition?
16. If something goes wrong during the audition - what will you tell yourself?

Remember confidence is whether you believe in or trust yourself. Start cultivating your insurmountable confidence.

OBSTACLE 13: DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE`

The mindset of someone who is disqualifying the positive is completely negative. There is no silver lining to any cloud. It's all cloud. This is called Disqualifying the Positive.

In class after class, I see someone respond to positive feedback negatively. In show after show, take after take, I see someone respond negatively to any positive comments. D the P is a type of distorted thinking where we cannot accept a positive. What is happening? Our old friend Fear of Failure is back.

If you were to accept the positive feedback, you may be required to do it again. If you don't know how you did what you did, this will cause a massive attack of the Fear of Failure.

So you dismiss it as a fluke, making a negative comment. You discount the positive, it wasn't deserved. You are rationalising positive feedback in order to make it fit your Fear of Failure viewpoint.

You wouldn't believe the number of times I have heard someone swat away my positive comments about their performance. Your self-defensive mind is protecting you from the positive in case you lose it again. Then it sets

about not only diminishing the positive, but sometimes even failing to see it!

How Do You Begin to Overcome D the P?

Writing about this particular obstacle will help. Write down whatever positive you are being offered. Susan, the Director said that my performance today was right on the money, but she's only saying that because she wants me to feel better about screwing up last night."

Now analyse what you've written. Is Susan so keen to make you feel better that she randomly came up with a compliment? Probably not. Is it possible that you did something that Susan liked? Yes, she liked it enough to say something - people are quick with negative feedback but slow with positive feedback. Don't be afraid to turn it around. If you had said to Susan that she had been right on the money tonight and she had responded like you did, how would you feel? Hurt probably. Why? Because Susan did a good job and you wanted to tell her. It was important to you to tell her.

When you experience Disqualifying the Positive. Stop. Imagine you're giving that feedback. You would mean it wouldn't you? Okay. Now accept it with a smile and let it go. It is not proof of anything. It is what it is, it was what it was, and you can now get on with the next thing.

OBSTACLE 14: FEAR OF FAILURE

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts."

Winston Churchill

FEAR

A significant obstacle to your success as a presenter is fear of failure. Fear of Failure is a *real* thing. It's called ATYCHIPHOBIA and its effects can be devastating to presentations and careers.

The base of all public speaking and presentation anxiety is a fear of failure.

WHO DOES IT AFFECT?

Success doesn't inoculate us from the amount of fear of failure that we experience. Success causes fear of failure to escalate, because now we have more to lose than before.

SYMPTOMS OF A FAILURE MINDSET

You worry about what other people think about you.

You worry about your ability to pursue the future you desire.

You worry that people will lose interest in you.

You worry about how capable or talented you are.

You worry about disappointing people whose opinion you value. (You tend to tell people beforehand that you don't expect to succeed in order to lower their expectations.)

When you fail at something, you have trouble imagining what you could have done differently to succeed.

You often get last-minute headaches, stomach aches, or other physical symptoms that prevent you from completing your preparation.

You often get distracted by tasks that prevent you from completing your preparation which, in hindsight, were not as urgent as they seemed at the time.

You tend to procrastinate and "run out of time" to complete your preparation adequately.

FEAR OF FAILURE

Failure is all around us. It's always possible. It's inevitable. Fear of failure is the mistaken belief that you can somehow avoid failure.

I once had a client, a young girl, a singer. She had singing lessons every week and she was the toast of every holiday karaoke and singing competition. As she got older, she started to care about what other people think of her singing. And out of this started to develop a fear of failure.

Fear of Failure called also be described the “what if?” Disease. Your mind seeks all of the possible “what if” nightmare scenarios, and rather than help us to overcome them, it dangles them in front of us, taunting us and causing us anxiety.

To overcome a Fear of Failure, we use the If/Then technique:

EXERCISE: IF/THEN

This is a very useful exercise for dealing with fear of ANY kind. But it will specifically quieten down your fear of failure, and silence your Inner Critic. I’ve used it many times with different clients with a range of backgrounds.

Since fear tends to stimulate your imagination to create powerful negative ‘If’ situations, we counteract these situations with ‘Then’ actions.

If this happens then I will do that.

If opens a mental loop and your mind fills it with potential mental consequences. *Then* closes it by introducing certainty of action.

If I lose my place in my presentation: Then I will tell my ‘filler’ joke until I find my place.

If I start to feel myself shaking before I go up to present,
Then I will breathe in my abdomen and reduce my heart rate.

You get the idea. Make a list of all your potential *What If...* scenarios on one side of a sheet of A4 and all of your *Then* solutions on the other side.

Now, no matter what scenario happens, you will be ready and prepared to face it.

Mark Westbrook
Glasgow, 2023

hello@publicspeakingcoachscotland.com



About the Author

Mark Westbrook is a Public Speaking and Presentation Coach based in Glasgow, Scotland. He trained at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and was educated at the universities of Kent, Utrecht, Nottingham, GCU and Dundee.

Mark began his career in theatre and film directing, before becoming Scotland's only full time professional acting coach. He has worked with everyone from beginners to Oscar winners. His clients can be seen in hit Netflix series, major motion pictures like Tomb Raider and The Avengers and in BBC dramas and comedies. He was Principal and Head Coach at Acting Coach Scotland, a private acting school based in Glasgow.

As a Public Speaking Coach and Consultant, he has written mayoral speeches, designed presentations with a VP of a major aviation company, coached the CFO of Bruichladdich Distillery, and the CEO of a major legal software company.