Stage Fright, Anyone?

If you suffer from stage fright, it may surprise you to learn that even the most accomplished speakers feel some anxiety before and during their talks. In fact, without anxiety the talk would be flat and lifeless. So, if you are fearful of giving talks before an audience, it helps to know you are not alone. It's also important to not remove all levels of stage fright. Effective speakers simply accept the fear, then use it to give energy and vitality to the message they wish to convey.

Here are some other ideas that accomplished speakers use to ease their concerns and provide a dynamic and interesting presentation for their audience:

✓ Remember to breathe. Most people who are nervous restrict their breathing. As a result, they become tense and that leads to even more anxiety. Remember to pause from time to time during the talk. Take a deep breath, exhale, and go on. It may seem like the pause is taking a very long time, but, actually only a few seconds will have passed, and the audience most likely will not have even noticed. Also, if you're nervous, it’s all right to admit it. That will take the pressure off and you can go on with your talk feeling more relaxed. The audience will know exactly what you're going through and respect you for your courage and efforts.

✓ Don't read your speech. Use an outline and organize your thoughts in a logical sequence. Don't try to memorize your talk either. That makes it sound canned and unreal. Instead, know your subject and practice. Give the talk beforehand with someone you trust or use a tape recorder and listen to yourself. That will give you confidence and set you more at ease.

✓ Be sure to maintain eye contact with your audience. Look around for the friendly faces. You will always find some. Then talk with them as individuals on a personal basis. Shift from one person to another and don't forget to move around. Use gestures to make a point or add emphasis to what's being said.

✓ Use illustrations to make a point. It helps if these examples are funny or clever, but, don't tell jokes that are not related to the topic. The uses of examples make the talk more interesting and help the audience to listen better and learn more from what you have to say.

✓ Be familiar with your audience and try to present your message on their terms. Like any other formula for success, a good speech must be individualized not only for the speaker, but for the occasion as well. Stay within the established time limit and if you finish early, that's fine. Don't try to drag it out for the full time allotted. Just close with a brief summary or comment and relax. With each talk you give, you will grow in self-confidence and ability.