

Coaching for confidence in delivering presentations

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Purpose

Ask a group of business leaders if they look forward to giving presentations to large audiences and the majority will respond negatively. Many individuals panic, feel self-conscious, have physical reactions and ultimately lack confidence in this area of leadership. This is linked to a concept called 'self-talk', also known as 'internal dialogue'. This is derived from Tim Gallwey's studies and publications on 'The Inner Game' where he reviews the impact of the mindset upon performance.

Description

There are several good approaches to addressing negative self-talk, with a blend of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), positive psychology and neuro linguistic programming (NLP) working well in achieving sustainable shift. The approach is based on reframing existing negative thoughts into positive ones and focuses on addressing the components of Kant's paradigm of see → think → feel → do (see Peltier, 2001).

Process

Start with an enquiring dialogue into what the client goes through before, during and after the presentation. The power of playing inner-thoughts on a loud speaker, that is, making the implicit explicit, can often be revealing in itself.

I had a senior client talk for the first time about her brothers laughing at her when on stage as a child. Another became emotional when he recalled how a previous manager constantly criticized his ability to speak in front of a group. These anchored experiences were inhibiting their presentation performance and pointed to the cause of the respective pre-presentation and on-stage anxiety.

Having identified where the negative self-talk is at its greatest, take the client back to their last presentation and start to relive it. On a piece of paper (see Figure 3), invite the client to capture on the left of the page the negative thoughts that were experienced at this time. Below that, ask them to state how they felt and behaved as a result of this self-talk. Once these current thoughts, feelings and actions have been captured, shift and positively reframe them into ones they would like to experience. Ask the client for their desired reactions and emotional approach, using the bottom right hand space to record their answers. Moving upwards on the

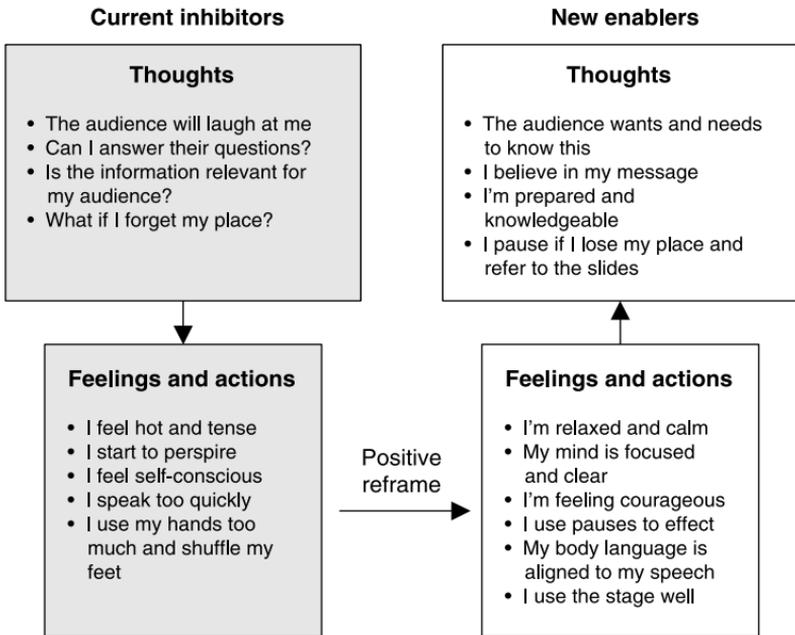


Figure 3 Reframing for presentation confidence

paper, now ask your client what their new self-talk should be to invoke the new feelings and actions described. It is important to use the present tense when reframing so that the desired outcome is experienced 'now'.

Having completed the exercise, ask your client to visualize the next speaker opportunity using the new enablers identified. Ask them to state what they now see, think, feel and what they are now doing in the presentation. Ask them to talk it aloud to re-enforce their new self-talk. You can also incorporate an NLP anchor point, inviting your client to squeeze their thumb and forefinger together, for example, as a signal attached to the new positive cognitions and emotions. This can be used to recall the reframed state at the next presentation.

Pitfalls

A lack of confidence in giving presentations may be related to a past experience. If this is revealed during the coaching session, be mindful as to how you address it and be aware of the boundaries between therapy, counselling and coaching. While deep exploration can be powerful in creating sustainable change for your client, to remain within the sphere of coaching, any historic content should be used to identify what impact it has for the client in the present.

Bibliography

- Gallwey, W. T. (1975, 1986) *The Inner Game of Tennis*, London: Pan Books in association with Jonathan Cape.
- Peltier, B. (2001) *Psychology of Executive Coaching*, London: Routledge.