

## DAILY REPORT

# AT ISSUE

The single most important thing that you can do to overcome nerves is rehearse extensively. Practice out loud from beginning to end without stopping. Pretend it's a play.



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## Need to beat stage fright? Rehearse.

WITH REPEATED REHEARSALS, self-described 'terrible speakers' discover they can deliver great presentations

AN INVESTMENT-COMPANY executive had to deliver a speech before 1,000 people at a convention. She was introducing a new product. Wall Street would be there. So would the media and her competition. The chairman of her company would be in the audience as would many of her colleagues. It was a big deal.

"I'm terrified," she told me. "I'm a terrible speaker. I get so nervous that I literally forget everything I'm going to say. I have panic attacks and I feel like I'm going to faint. You've got to help me."

How this investment-company executive overcame her anxiety to give the presentation of her life is a lesson in beating stage fright. And it's a lesson that can help any lawyer who wants to overcome fear of public speaking and give great presentations.

### 'How exactly do you rehearse?'

"You say you're a terrible speaker," I said to this executive. "Tell me, do you practice?"

"Yes," she said. "I always practice."

That answer bothered me. You beat fear and achieve mastery by practicing. Yet, here was this executive telling me that she "always practices" and still was overwhelmed by anxiety and was a terrible presenter.

"How exactly do you rehearse?" I asked.

She said she would flip through her PowerPoint slides and "go over it in my head." She would then close the door to her office and lie down on her couch. "Then I close my eyes and meditate on my presentation," she said.

That, I told her, sounded "more like a nap than a rehearsal."

### Rehearse out loud, like it's a play

Let's be clear about something. The

single most important thing that you can do to overcome nerves and become a good speaker is to rehearse extensively. Practice out loud from beginning to end without stopping. Pretend it's a play.

Yet most people don't rehearse at all. An attorney told me that after years of delivering presentations effectively, he was having panic attacks before speeches. He said he recently stood to deliver a presentation in front of his partners and felt his heart beating so hard that he had to sit down. "I thought I was having a heart attack," he said.

The first question I asked was, "Do you rehearse your presentations?"

He said he used to rehearse, but he felt he didn't need it anymore. I told him that he needed to start rehearsing again out loud. When we spoke about a month later, he told me that he was delivering his presentations with far less anxiety.

### Exercise and 'attitude shifts'

Of course, rehearsal isn't the only cure for nerves. Exercise helps. When I'm nervous, I walk around the block. I was in Charlotte, N.C., last week and did several laps around the building before speaking to a large group at Bank of America. The exercise flushes out the adrenaline and helps you relax.

"Attitudeshifts" also help. Try to remember that a presentation is about helping listeners achieve goals. Say to yourself, "I'm going to do everything I can today to help these people with my ideas." That "listener-focused" attitude helps alleviate nerves. Focus on helping your listeners rather than your anxiety.

But nothing helps more than rehearsal. We had that investment company executive rehearse her 10-minute presentation 25 times over the course of two weeks. She went out to California and delivered the presentation of her life. Yes, she admitted,

she was nervous. But she had practiced so much that it didn't matter. Her CEO took the stage next and called her a "tough act to follow."

P.S. This executive—this woman who

told me that she is debilitated by her anxiety and is a terrible speaker—is now a leading speaker in her company. She tours the country and promotes the program with presentations.

Contrary to her initial belief, she wasn't a terrible speaker. She just didn't know how to practice. That's the beauty of rehearsal. It doesn't just help you beat anxiety—it makes you shine. ☞