

Overcoming Interview Nervousness: reality and perception shifts

by Joshua Kreig

Being nervous is something we all experience yet think it is only us. But we do not have to let it be a paralysing event. Whenever we enter an unfamiliar situation we will experience nervousness. Being nervous increases the stress of any situation. The next time you are feeling nervous before an interview or a meeting here are five things to say to help move from paralysis to action:

1. *This is normal. I was built for this.*

Reality – Feeling nervous is part of the human condition. We simply get nervous: an interview, a date, an exam, a review, or a presentation. We actually have biological systems that deal with stress and nervousness. There are complex physiological systems responsible for the stress response.

Perception shift – Nature would not provide us with a system that was not required. We are an adaptive species. Our sympathetic nervous system is part of our fight or flight response system. It is there to help us cope. Feeling nervous is normal, stop fighting it. We were built for it.

2. *I am taking this seriously. It means something to me.*

Reality – Nervousness is part of our early warning system that lets us know we are doing something that matters to us. When we care about something we naturally invest more emotional energy into it. This emotional energy has the potential to cause great stress. When we know there is something to be gained or lost by the quality of how we present ourselves we should be nervous; it means something.

Perception shift – Acknowledging the seriousness of an endeavour for ourselves is part of the challenge to dealing with nervousness constructively. This means something to you. You want to do it successfully. Accept it. Listen to the warning.

3. *I am prepared.*

Reality – Stress is felt when one thinks or feels they do not have the resources to meet the demands of the situation. When we prepare well there is a confidence achieved thereby alleviating nervousness.

Perception shift – If you can say you are prepared, anyone listening to you will get the right information. Knowing one's stuff is more important than a flashy presentation style. The prepared speaker will go further than one of all style and no substance. Be prepared!

4. *I am respecting the people and the work.*

Reality – We are not islands. We are connected individuals. Part of that connection causes us to be nervous around each other. We compete and have high expectations of colleagues and classmates. There is great pressure to maintain the integrity of the work we are doing. Personal integrity and work integrity are closely related.

Perception shift – Acknowledging this pressure as respect for the people you are communicating with and the work and knowledge you are representing will help reduce nervousness. A great athlete always has respect for his competition for they know exactly what it took to be facing each other. Let nervousness be a reminder of the respect that earns.

5. Breathe.

Reality – When we are nervous our breathing becomes shallow, our heart rate increases, and we begin to sweat. These are the real-time physiological responses humans have to stress.

Perception shift – By consciously turning our breath rate deeper and taking the time to simply count our breaths we begin the process of stimulating our parasympathetic nervous system to help us calm down. Start by blowing all the air out of your lungs for at least five breaths. Your breath is an amazing bottomless energy source that is one half responsible for keeping you alive. You can use the breath to help deal with nervous energy. The breath will help return the heart rate and body temperature back to normal, release muscle tension, and calm the mind.

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