

MANAGING PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

Annie Connett annie.connett@yahoo.com

WHY DO WE EXPERIENCE NERVOUSNESS WHEN PERFORMING?

1) IT IS A NATURAL RESPONSE TO AN 'ATYPICAL' SITUATION/FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN – FLIGHT OR FIGHT: Your brain is constantly scanning for danger – and will try to 'protect you' if it recognizes something out of the ordinary, by initiating the 'flight, fight or freeze' response in your body. This response can be felt in many different ways throughout the body, and to lesser and greater degrees depending upon the individual. This is a natural reaction that everyone has and it is actually a great thing, should you ACTUALLY be in danger!

2) IF YOU'VE HAD A BAD EXPERIENCE IN THE PAST

If you have had a negative experience when performing or rehearsing, the memory of this can become a focal point and worry about it re-occurring can affect your level of nerves and enjoyment of your performance.

3) A REACTION TO NEGATIVE OR PRESSURE-FUL THOUGHT PATTERNS

If you are filled with thoughts of doubt, a low confidence or self-esteem level or worry about needing to achieve a certain outcome, this can add to your level of anxiety about the performance experience.

4) NOT FEELING PREPARED ENOUGH/BEING VERY ANALYTICALLY-MINDED

If you do not feel confident (whether you *actually* know your stuff or not) when you hit that stage – this can really enhance nerves. If you are super-analytical all of the time, and find it hard to get past the small details and focus on the joy of the performance, this may affect your ability to feel grounded and relaxed.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF PERFORMANCE ANXIETY:

Racing pulse and rapid breathing
Dry mouth and tight throat
Trembling hands, knees, legs, lips, and voice
Sweaty and cold hands
Nausea and an uneasy feeling in your stomach

Vision changes
Dizziness
Tingling in your extremities

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT!:

TIP 1: LIMIT CAFFEINE AND EXCESS SUGAR

TIP 2: SHIFT YOUR FOCUS FROM YOURSELF AND ANY THOUGHTS OF ANXIOUSNESS, TO THE MESSAGE OF THE SONGS AND TO THE ENJOYMENT YOU WILL BE PROVIDING TO THE AUDIENCE MEMBERS – IMAGINE THEM CHEERING, SMILING AND CARING FOR YOU!

TIP 3: DON'T FOCUS ON WHAT COULD GO WRONG – ALLOW POSITIVE THOUGHTS ONLY!

TIP 4: BREATHING, BREATHING, BREATHING!

TIP 5: BE YOURSELF, LET YOURSELF GO AND KNOW THAT YOU ARE GOOD ENOUGH!

EXERCISE 1: PROCESS VISUALIZATION

This can really enhance your feelings of preparedness for the performance, and help you feel more comfortable with the whole experience (and therefore less prone to feeling 'out of your box').

Take a quiet moment and sit or lie comfortably.

Close your eyes and take 3 deep, slow breaths.

Allow yourself to begin visualizing the entire process of performance day – start with makeup time, include warm-ups, walking to stage, standing side of stage, walking on, performing your songs.

Visualize everything going smoothly and perfectly as you KNOW you can achieve. Be non-judgemental.

If you feel your mind wandering off-topic, acknowledge this and gently bring your thoughts back to where you left off in the process. It doesn't matter how many times your mind wanders, just be kind to yourself and come back to the plan.

When visualizing, focus on the tiny, wonderful details – things you will see, hear, feel, and smell.

Feel the appreciation of the audience as they cheer for you at the close of your performance. See their smiling, joyful faces!

Take 3 slow deep breaths and allow yourself to come back to the present.

Repeat this exercise daily for as long as you need.

EXERCISE 2: BOX BREATHING

This technique is an example of 'Mindfulness' – which encourages you to be present in the moment and minimize intrusive thoughts and worries. It is incredibly grounding! It should help slow your breathing, increase oxygen to the brain, allow your brain to know that YOU are in control and not the nerves. I find this one really affective for minimizing the shakes and generally feeling more centred and calm!

Take a quiet moment and sit comfortably.

Close your eyes.

Picture a square shape or "box" in front of you. It can be any size, texture or colour – go crazy with your imagination!

Take some gentle deep breaths and take a good look at that box for a few moments. Let your eyes come to rest on the bottom left corner.

Inhale to the count of 3 – as you do this, allow your eyes to travel upwards along the side of your box.

Hold your breath to the count of 3 – as you do this, allow your eyes to travel along the top of the box.

Exhale to the count of 3 – allow your eyes to travel down the next side of the box.

Hold your breath to the count of 3 – allow your eyes to travel along the bottom of the box.

You should be back where you started.

Repeat as necessary until you are feeling good!

If you can't hold your breath – feel free to adjust this to simple inhale/exhale.

If your mind wanders at any point, allow yourself gently to come back and pick up where you left off.

EXERCISE 3: SELF-SOOTHING – USING THE 5 SENSES

Always start your exercise in the same way – sit or lie comfortably, close your eyes and take 3 deep breaths. Allow yourself to focus on 3 things that you can feel, think non-judgmentally about the shape, size, texture, temperature. Allow yourself to focus in 3 things that you can hear, and again, think non-judgmentally about volume, timbre etc. Allow yourself to think in the same way about scents, and then open your eyes and focus on 3 things that you can see. The aim of this exercise is not to analyze what you feel, see etc., but to just notice, and move along. I like to do this when I am holding a coffee or snuggling with my cat!

EXERCISE 5 (FOR SIDE OF STAGE!): BREATHE-AFFIRM-BREATHE

As you stand at the side of the stage:

Take a slow inhale to the count of three.

Make a positive affirmation about yourself....such as:

“You got this, girl!”

“I am AMAZING and I truly believe that”

Etc etc!!!!

Take a slow exhale to the count of three.

Repeat as necessary.

EXERCISE 6 (FOR MID-PERFORMANCE NERVES!):

If you feel a big pang of nerves partway through a performance....try not to focus on it too much! Just take a second to acknowledge it, appreciate it for trying to keep you safe, and move along! Always try a positive, appreciative thought....remember your affirmation from the side of stage!

HOLISTIC THERAPEUTIC TECHNIQUES

MINDFULNESS - <https://www.psychologytoday.com/basics/mindfulness>

REIKI - <http://www.reiki.org/faq/whatisreiki.html>

CRYSTALS - <http://www.crystalwellbeing.co.uk/introcrystalhealing.php>

REFLEXOLOGY & PRESSURE POINTS - <http://www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu/explore-healing-practices/reflexology>

TALK-THERAPY - <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-a-z/t/talking-therapies/>

COGNITIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY - <http://www.anxietybc.com/cbt-home>

MEDICATIONS

VALERIAN ROOT (HOLISTIC): Available from drug stores and herbalists

ESSENTIAL OILS: BERGAMOT, FRANKINCENSE, LAVENDER, ROSE

BETA BLOCKERS (MEDICAL): PROPRANALOL (These are available from a medical practitioner only and should only be taken on the advice of a doctor. Beta blockers act by reducing some of the *physical* symptoms of anxiety, but not the thoughts or emotions. They can slow your heart rate slightly.

Again – always check with your doctor before trying these!

BUILDING SELF-CONFIDENCE AND READINESS FOR STAGE PERFORMANCE

Annie Connett annie.connett@yahoo.com

Self-esteem is an integral part of personal happiness, and a good sense of self can really help to build successful relationships, enjoy personal achievement and experience a well-balanced life. For those who struggle with poor confidence can find it particularly challenging to put themselves in any performance situation, particularly contest, for fear of criticism, judgment or just a fear of having a negative experience that will make them feel badly.

Most women would admit to experiencing challenges with their self-confidence when it comes to performing, at all levels of our organization. The extent of these challenges can be small or devastating, depending upon the individual and their life experiences.

Is this something that we can change?

It is definitely possible to give your self-confidence a boost! It takes a little work, time, patience and commitment, but it IS possible! I have used the following exercises in the past and I love them. I'm happy to pass them along to you....

EXERCISE 1: 21-DAY POSITIVITY CHALLENGE

Conventional wisdom states that it takes 21 days to form a new behaviour, so if you want to make a change in how you think and feel – in relation to a specific thing OR in general, why not commit to a 21-day positivity challenge. I encourage you to push through that ‘I feel awkward’ phase and go right through to day 21!

- 1) Each day, make a list of things in your life, and about yourself and your skillset that you LOVE!
- 2) The list can be written, typed, or just thought about!
- 3) Try to notice when you have a negative thought or judgement, and try to spin it to a more positive approach.
- 4) Lots of people use social media platforms to help with this challenge...some people post a photo of something great every day, some people list things that they are grateful for, some people just post a happy thought every day.
- 5) If you specifically want to improve your confidence around singing, you could choose to make your thoughts related to your awesome singing and performing skills. EVERYONE has talent, some in different ways than others, everyone contributes in some way and is important.

EXERCISE 2: POSITIVE SELF-TALK

We are our own worst critics, and I work on the premise that “what you think, you feel”. So it would make sense that, if you are constantly berating yourself for not being good enough...you are going to struggle to feel good enough! Conversely, if you try to think more positively about yourself and freely give yourself compliments, and ACCEPT those compliments, you are going to start believing yourself at some point! Try this exercise.....

Look yourself in the mirror, hold your stare, smile, and give yourself a compliment.

Say “I love you!”, “You are a beautiful person”, “You are good enough to achieve your goals”, “You are uniquely wonderful and I LOVE you!” Anything you want! Again, these can be singing-related or not, it is totally up to you.

It can also help some people to imagine that they are talking to themselves as children – as in, what would you want your child-self to know about themselves? It can feel a bit weird at first, but go with it!

EXERCISE 3: DECIDE

Decide and tell yourself that, actually, you have all the confidence that you need....you are a confident person. Try it for a few days!

EXERCISE 4: REDUCE THE NEED FOR EXTERNAL GRATIFICATION

Lots of women rely on compliments or feedback from others – from those we care about – for permission to feel good about, or proud with ourselves. It is awesome and lovely to receive a compliment, but as explained in the exercises above, you can give compliments to yourself EVERY day! Then YOU are taking control of your self-esteem and you don’t have to wait for feedback from others and give control over to another person. This is very empowering!

EXERCISE 5: JOIN PINTEREST!!!!

I LOVE looking at pins on Pinterest...such as the ones below! If you are a visual person, these can help with your positivity and inspiration on a daily basis, and they are accessible in an instant if you need a boost!

www.pinterest.com

