



"With tights this loud, no one will hear a word I say."

How to speak in public like a true pro... without having to imagine anyone (particularly your boss, thank God) naked. Talk about giving you the willies...

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Your mind's racing, your heart's pounding, and the audience shuffles in their seats as the room grows silent. It's showtime. But just as you open your mouth, the words simply don't come out. Ah, crapsticks.

Public speaking can frighten the bejaysus out of even the most fearless among us. Let's face it, for many it's just about as much fun as running into your ex and his hot new girlfriend at the supermarket and you've got an armful of tampon boxes. (Yep. Shoulda got a basket.)

So, we've called in the experts; Tadhg Twomey, President of the Dublin South Toastmasters and psychotherapist, Michaela Fitzpatrick, who runs courses in assertiveness and confident communication, for some tips to make us louder and prouder than we ever thought possible.

LOUD & PROUD

YOU'RE ASKED TO MAKE A PRESENTATION AT WORK:

It's a request you can't refuse, you know it and so does he/she who must be obeyed. Imagining the crowd starkers might work for some, but you also run the risk of dry-retching after you imagine Bob from accounts in his birthday suit. So, instead you stand silently, willing the words to come out as you turn 50 shades of puce. Buh-bye promotion.

"If you have time to prepare, write the speech and practise it," says Tadhg. "If it doesn't sound right, rewrite it. Practise is truly the best way to feel relaxed. Also don't try to memorise it, instead remember the salient points and the order, and this will help stop you forgetting it."

According to Michaela, the key is to challenge the nerves in order to overcome them.

"When we're nervous our breathing usually becomes quicker and more shallow," she says. "Learn to take slow deep breaths in through the nose and exhale through the mouth. Deep breathing has been proven to lower stress and anxiety levels and promote relaxation. Confidence is a skill you can learn. People who are good speakers are

good because they have applied these skills. Usually, it's not the fear of giving the presentation that scares people; it's the fear of getting up and failing. Change your thoughts from 'I can't do this,' or 'I'm going to go blank,' to 'I can do this, I'm calm, relaxed and confident.' This programmes the mind for success."

YOU'VE BEEN ASKED TO MAKE A SPEECH AT A WEDDING:

You're thrilled when one of your best pals asks you to be bridesmaid at her wedding. After all, how hard can a bit of slow-paced walking, some train adjustments, and smiling be? That is, of course, until she drops the S-bomb. She's asked you to make a speech after Best Man Mike (aka, funniest guy in Ireland) makes his. Ah, double crapsticks.

"Failing to prepare is preparing to fail," says Michaela. "The preparation of a speech involves breaking it down into different parts: the introduction, the people you need to acknowledge, and then a conclusion. Do a run-through at least three times, in front of a mirror or a friend. This is done so you can get used to hearing the sound of your own voice. Don't let the first time you hear this aloud be in front of a room full of people."

YOU'RE MEETING HIS PARENTS:

It's all going very well. So well in fact, he's decided to bring you home to meet the parents. Result. But after the initial delight wanes, reality dawns; you're going to have to speak with Mammy Dearest and her approval matters.

"It's just as important to prepare for speaking to people in a social setting as it is in a work setting," says Michaela. "If it's a prospective mother-in-law, what are her interests? Think about conversations you can have with her beforehand and maintain good eye contact, which will establish a connection between you. Make her feel you're interested in what she has to say."

The Toastmasters hold regular 'Entertaining topics' meetings, which involve club members being picked at random to talk about an impromptu topic for one-to-two minutes, which could help in this department. "It's perfect for the aspiring politician or just to keep the conversation going with newly introduced in-laws!" says Tadhg.

For more information check out www.toastmasters.org or you can learn more about Michaela Fitzpatrick's confidence and communication courses at www.aspirecounselling.com 