



New Trends
in Psychology

Emotion and Public Speaking

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Abstract: The fear of public speaking surpasses the fear of heights, snakes, and sometimes even the fear of death. Why? Because as “social animals,” we care (sometimes too much, I would say) about what others think of us. I wrote this article as part of my personal quest to understand and overcome the emotions I experience every time I have to give a speech in front of an unfamiliar audience. Managing emotions has become an increasingly debated topic in recent years, and as we evolve in terms of emotional intelligence, I believe that the first step to overcoming an obstacle is recognizing it.

Keywords: emotions; public speaking; reactions; identification; control; emotions

1. Emotions – What Are They?

According to the dictionary, emotion is a medium-intensity affective reaction of relatively short duration, often accompanied by changes in the body’s activities, reflecting an individual’s attitude toward reality. Although there is currently no scientific consensus on a clear definition of emotions, if we analyze the statement above, we can observe that emotions are, among other things:

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- Reactions that appear and disappear quickly, based on real-time events.
- Reactions that can lead to physical changes, such as an increased heart rate or accelerated breathing.
- Reactions that depend on internal or external stimuli to which we are exposed.

Emotions arise when we experience different situations in daily life. Whether it is a job interview, a meeting with a loved one, or a dangerous situation, we will feel a certain emotion depending on the scenario we are in.

Over time, various researchers have studied the emotions we experience based on the environment we are exposed to:

- **Paul Ekman**, a psychologist and professor at the University of California, identified seven fundamental emotions: anger, surprise, disgust, joy, fear, sadness, and contempt.
- **Psychologist Daniel Goleman**, author of *Emotional Intelligence*, classified eight primary emotions: anger, sadness, fear, joy, shame, love, surprise, and disgust.
- **Robert Plutchik** went further and identified eight fundamental emotions (and their opposites), along with eight complex emotions (formed by combining two fundamental emotions).

In *The Emotionally Intelligent Manager* by **David Caruso** and **Peter Salovey**, emotional intelligence consists of four skills:

- **Identifying emotions** (recognizing and expressing emotions);
- **Using emotions** (allowing emotions to influence thinking and using the right emotions to accomplish tasks);
- **Understanding emotions** (analyzing emotions and asking “what if?”);
- **Managing emotions** (accepting emotions and integrating them into thinking).

Identifying Emotions

The idea is that emotions contain information that draws our attention to important events happening in our world. It is essential to accurately identify emotions, both in ourselves and others, to express ourselves and communicate effectively.

Using Emotions

What we feel influences how we think and the opinions we form. Feelings direct our attention to significant events, ensure we are prepared to act when necessary, and allow us to use our thoughts appropriately to solve problems.

Understanding Emotions

Feelings are not random; they have precise causes. Once we identify them, we can use emotions to better understand what is happening or is about to happen around us.

Managing Emotions

Since emotions contain information and influence thinking, we must intelligently integrate them into our analysis and problem-solving process. This means being receptive to emotions—whether welcome or not—and choosing strategies that consider the wisdom associated with our feelings.

Thus, everything begins with recognizing emotions. It is evident that what we do not recognize, we cannot control. We often say, “I was overwhelmed by emotions,” but we need to learn to label our feelings more accurately so that we can decide whether they are appropriate for a given situation. It is a mistake to believe that emotions are inherently bad. **In fact, they are vital.** They serve as important activation signals. People with weak emotions lead limited lives and struggle with interpersonal relationships. In our case, we seek the right emotions that guide us toward favorable outcomes.

Once we become accustomed to identifying and labeling emotions, we will find it much easier to respond appropriately to them.

Daniel Goleman once said: *“When I say ‘emotional control,’ I mean those truly stressful emotions that make you incapable of reacting. Having emotions enriches your life. You need passion!”*

2. Where Does the Fear of Public Speaking Come From?

Each person is different, and a complete and precise diagnosis is impossible. However, if we manage to understand the causes and factors that most frequently trigger the fear of public speaking, we have a good chance of overcoming it. Just as a doctor makes a diagnosis and its accuracy influences the effectiveness of the

treatment, identifying the exact source of the problem is essential for overcoming the fear of public speaking.

This fear is not singular but rather a combination of anxieties grouped under the same label. Some of the most common fears include:

- Fear of losing control;
- Fear of vulnerability;
- Fear of the unknown;
- Fear of being the center of attention;
- Fear of making mistakes, failing, or being ridiculed;
- Lack of an interlocutor;
- Fear of rejection or being judged;
- Timidity.

There are countless explanations for the origins of these fears. Often, emotions stem from past negative experiences, such as moments in school when we were called to the front of the class, our classmates laughed at us, and the teacher criticized us in public. However, we cannot always blame the past—especially since we cannot change it.

A significant cause of the fear of public speaking is **the fear of being judged**. If we perceived the evaluation of our speech merely as an analysis of its content rather than a personal rejection, the situation would not seem so serious. The problem arises when we associate criticism of our speech with rejection of ourselves. This is, in fact, the **real** source of the fear of public speaking!

“I won’t perform well > I will be judged > I will be rejected > I am worthless > I don’t deserve to be loved.”

It may seem absurd, but the mind’s primary role is to protect you from any suffering (physical or emotional), so it will immediately jump to these conclusions. As ridiculous as it may seem, it is completely normal: we are human, and we have our fears. But the more we resist these fears, the stronger they become.

3. The Paradoxical Solution

Expose yourself to the experience of public speaking and allow yourself to make mistakes and feel emotions!

According to research conducted by Mediafax, only **19%** of study participants claim they can express their ideas clearly and coherently. The fear of public speaking is most commonly manifested through voice trembling (**44%** of respondents), difficulty maintaining eye contact with the audience (**26%**), losing their train of thought and stuttering during the speech (**17%**), or shaky legs and uncertain hand movements (**14%**).

An influencing factor is **the size of the audience**:

- **63%** of participants report experiencing strong emotions in front of an audience larger than 10 people.
- **13%** feel uncomfortable even when speaking in front of just two people.
- **24%** say that speaking becomes difficult only when the audience exceeds 100 listeners.

What is concerning is that **75%** of survey participants do not know methods, strategies, or techniques for controlling emotions, which often leads to the speech's message not being conveyed effectively.

4. Self-Motivation – A Personal Antidote

In my case, **self-motivation** acts as an antidote to fear. However, self-motivation requires **practice**. You must train your brain to adopt new, more emotionally intelligent ways of thinking, and this happens only through **repetition**. Sheer willpower is not enough in the long run—it is the hardest way to convince yourself to do something. Instead, you should tap into the **unlimited power of your own mind**.

One exercise I use to overcome emotions before public speaking is to quickly answer these questions in my mind:

- What important thing am I missing by not doing this?
- What do I gain by doing this?

- Why is this important?
- How does this make me feel?

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