

Foreword by Darren La Croix
WORLD CHAMPION OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

Naked People Won't Help You



Keep Your Cool,
Capture the
Confidence,
and Conquer
the Fear of
Public Speaking

S T E V E O Z E R

Naked People Won't Help You

Steve Ozer

Copyright © 2003 by Steve Ozer

ISBN 0-938716-32-8

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by information storage or retrieval system without written permission from the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review. All rights are also reserved for translation into foreign languages. No liability is assumed with respect to correctness or use of the information herein.

Dr. Julie Weiss has reviewed the author's explanations and his quotes of her teachings, and has edited them for inclusion in this book. Dr. Edmund J. Bourne has given the author permission to reprint parts of *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook*.

Published by

Possibility Press

possibilitypress@aol.com

www.possibilitypress.com

Manufactured in the United States of America.

Dedication

To Mom and Dad (aka Harriet and Ted Ozer), on the occasion of their 50th wedding anniversary.

Acknowledgment

Despite my incredible excitement and enthusiasm about the subject matter, 180 literary agents and editors still rejected the book proposal for *Naked People Won't Help You*. The staff at Possibility Press immediately recognized the potential of the book and bowled me over with their energy and enthusiasm. My heartfelt thanks for their warmth, spirit, and encouragement throughout the project.

A special thanks to Bill Salmon, who gave me years of encouragement and inspiration to keep on writing. I miss you every day, Bill.

Alex and Kira, you're too young to read this right now, but someday you'll see how Daddy thanked you in this book. Thanks for the laughter, the craziness, the joy, the peaches on the ceiling, the Cheerios® on the floor, the fun, and everything you've done to turn my life upside down, inside out, and everything in-between, in ways I'll cherish forever. I love you with all my heart.

Go for It!

“The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with strong and active faith.”

—Franklin Delano Roosevelt—

In 1987, I stood up in front of nine classmates at a public-speaking phobia class in Philadelphia and delivered my first “speech.” If you had been in that room, you would have seen a human being on the edge—a heart-thumping, lip-quivering, voice-quavering, head-dizzying, knee-knocking, palm-sweating, face-reddening mass of misfiring nerve endings. I could have been a heart attack in training.

Less than one year later, I stood on the stage of a theater-in-the-round, microphone in hand, and delivered a knockout, 30-minute comedy routine in front of 1,000 people at an outdoor summer festival.

This book is the result of everything that happened in-between.

May all that I share enrich your life and help you make your goals and dreams a reality. Go for it!

To your success,

Steve Ozer

Contents

What Do Naked People Have to Do With It?	6
---	---

Part I—The Naked Truth

Chapter 1	Naked People Won't Help You	9
Chapter 2	Naked and Back Again—My Story	23
Chapter 3	The Fear of Being Different	37
Chapter 4	The Fine Art of Avoidance	49
Chapter 5	The Challenge of the Symptoms	59
Chapter 6	The Things You May Be Telling Yourself	71
Chapter 7	The Power of “Brain Training”	79

Part II—The Five Stages of Conquering the Fear of Public Speaking

Chapter 8	Stage 1—Assessing the Threat and the Opportunity	83
Chapter 9	Stage 2—Preparing for Action	93
Chapter 10	Stage 3—Speaking in Levels	105
Chapter 11	Stage 4—Building Self-Confidence	115
Chapter 12	Stage 5—Conquering the Fear Forever	127
Chapter 13	Unleashing Your Potential	137
	Share <i>Naked People Won't Help You</i> With Others	143
	Who Is Steve Ozer?	144

What Do Naked People Have to Do With It?

Out of 180,000 Toastmasters worldwide each year, only one person is crowned the World Champion of Public Speaking. In 2001, I was fortunate enough to be that person.

When I returned home after winning the contest, I was greeted by my colleagues with praise and congratulations. The one comment that will always stand out in my mind is, “You are so lucky to have ‘the gift’ of speaking in front of people.” My head almost exploded. Lucky? No way! Gift? Hardly! It dawned on me that this person saw only the end result. He had no idea how scared I was when I first started speaking. It was my desire to move ahead in life that drove me to do it.

Most people don’t believe the fear of public speaking can be conquered. Believe me, it can. Steve Ozer, the author of this wonderful book, and I are living proof.

When I teach public speaking classes, I always show a video clip of my first time on stage, in 1992, at a Boston comedy club. I was terrible. My voice was squeaking as though I had just hit puberty. The video clearly shows the fear I had that day. In my early days of comedy, I was a wreck with stage fright for a whole week before every show. I’m still not quite sure how my friends and family put up with me.

In my 12 years on the platform, I’ve seen and heard many people teach public speaking, and many gave bad advice. The classic example is the old “Just picture the audience naked and you will relax.” What? If I did that, I would feel just as embarrassed as if I had just walked in on someone sitting in a men’s restroom stall! I would be even more anxious!

Steve Ozer has learned the art of public speaking the hard way, and he’s presented his lessons well. This book is filled with inspiring real-life examples of ordinary people who overcame the

fear. As you read the book, you'll know that you are not alone and that you can do it too.

Overcoming the fear of public speaking is worth everything you can do to accomplish it. Steve points out how it affects most areas of your life, from your relationship with that special someone, to reaching the pinnacle of success in your job, business, or profession.

This book gives you a step-by-step program and useful tools to conquer the fear. My favorites are Steve's *Baloney Sheet* and his *Hierarchy of Fears*. Both are potent tools you can use to soar to the top in speaking.

If you fear public speaking, follow Steve's plan. Doing so will enable you to change your life. I only wish this book had been available when I first started speaking. It would have helped me a great deal in overcoming my own fear. It would have also dramatically shortened the time it took me to really start succeeding in all areas of my life

Thank you, Steve, for this breakthrough book, which I know is going to help a lot of people.

Steve is right. Picturing people naked *won't* help you—but this book will. Read it. No—devour it! Get on the fast track to a better, richer, more rewarding life.

Much success,

Darren LaCroix

*“‘T*oday, conquering
the fear of public
speaking stands as my
single greatest accom-
plishment, and continues
to bring me tremendous
personal and professional
rewards. When it comes
to the fear that once
paralyzed my life, I’m a
free man and you can be
free too!”

—Steve Ozer

Chapter 1

Naked People Won't Help You

“Millions of people take the fear of public speaking to their graves. They sacrifice happiness, maximum success in their careers or businesses, and ultimately their potential.”

—Steve Ozer—

Imagine how you would feel in the following situation: You're on the 100th floor of the Empire State Building, where you step onto an already-crowded elevator. With a whoosh, the door closes and the elevator silently begins its descent. All of sudden, it goes into a free fall. Your stomach is in your throat. Your face goes pale. You feel a sickening knot of fear deep in your abdomen. Perspiration glistens on your forehead. Within a few seconds, the intercom crackles. The lobby guard announces, “Ladies and gentlemen, I have terrible news. The cable has snapped.... There's nothing we can do.... Your death will be relatively painless.... God bless you all.... Goodbye.”

That's how I used to feel when faced even with the mere thought of public speaking. Sweating, heart racing, knees shaking, voice quavering, I'd feel dizzy and disoriented, like I was going to faint. Every nerve ending in my body sounded an alarm. Gasping for breath and gripped in a state of panic, my brain would shut down, eliminating any hope of rational thought or action.

My mother's expression was: “You could just plotz.” Frankly, I was never quite sure what it meant to plotz, but I assumed it was some kind of nervous breakdown. The dictionary defines it as—“to collapse or faint as from surprise, excitement, or exhaustion, to crack, split, burst.”

Whenever I anticipated speaking, I felt like I was plotzing—losing control of my emotions, and the capacity to think. For

nearly two decades, I suffered from an irrational fear that nearly ruined my life. It affected my education, stunted my career options, limited my recreational activities, and suffocated me in ways I still can't believe.

For 20 years, my life was a jumble of missed opportunities, shameful avoidance, and limited career growth. The fear of public speaking haunted my waking hours and disturbed my sleep. It robbed me of confidence and hammered at my self-esteem. It exhausted me physically and mentally, and filled my waking hours with fear and anxiety. For a long time, it never dawned on me that life could be any other way.

Of course, I didn't start out plotzing. As a kid, I was playful, outgoing, and pretty normal. At eight, my parents would prop me up in front of family and friends to entertain them. My goofy jokes, silly stories, and assorted inanities would always elicit gales of laughter and healthy applause.

But the first panicky symptoms of public speaking phobia that came over me at 11 were enough to mute the laughter, muzzle the humor. It snuffed out my creativity as I avoided public speaking for the next 20 years. I watched in horror as those first unpleasant symptoms transformed themselves into a rat's nest of catastrophic terror, neurotic retreat, and destructive behavior.

If You Fear Public Speaking, You Are Not Alone

I found out I wasn't alone. Millions of people suffer in silence and hide in shame from this common fear. *The Book of Lists* cites fear of public speaking as the single greatest fear. Forty-one percent of the 3,000 people surveyed were more afraid of speaking before a group than of getting cancer! They were more afraid of it than of flying, heights, financial challenges, darkness, bugs, and even death.

The fear of public speaking is epidemic. It cuts across all demographics—from administrative professionals to aeronautical engineers, from plumbers to public figures, from cashiers to clergy, from scientists to salespeople, and from bus drivers to business owners. According to a National Comorbidity Study, 13 percent of the more than 275 million Americans will experience a social phobia, such as the fear of public speaking, during their lifetimes. That would

make social phobias the third most prevalent anxiety disorder in the U.S., after depression and alcohol dependence.

CEOs to Cattle Ranchers

John Nance, president of the Speakers' Counsel, a speechwriting and coaching firm based in Denver, Colorado, has seen his share of terrified public speakers, ranging from CEOs (chief executive officers) to politicians to cattle ranchers. "The majority of my clients exhibit some of the earmarks of stage fright," says Nance. "Even those people you would assume are comfortable speaking in front of groups—like national politicians or corporate executives—suffer from the fear."

Nance comments on the diversity of people who come to him for help in overcoming the fear of public speaking. He describes one well-known politician who had no fear of public speaking until he was asked to speak at a national political convention: "Despite the fact he had given hundreds of speeches, the thought of standing on what looks like the bow of a ship, in front of 20,000 people, was absolutely terrifying to him."

In another case, there was a CEO of a Fortune 500 company who had always been comfortable speaking in front of groups. But he changed his tune when confronted with the task of communicating a major change in strategic direction to his stockholders. Another example involved a cattle rancher who, after being elected to the local school board, finally faced up to the fact that he was terrified to speak at meetings.

Why Do Many People Quietly Live With the Fear?

If so many people from all walks of life suffer from the fear of public speaking, where are the support groups and the 12-step and government programs? Where are the talk show "victims"? Why aren't more people crying out for help?

After experiencing the fear myself, and interviewing dozens of people who continue to struggle with it every day, it's clear most people just *resign* themselves to living with it. They're not sharing their plight on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. They don't write to their elected officials about it. They don't form support groups or seek out professional help.

There are five main reasons why people continue to live with the fear of public speaking:

Reason #1: They're ashamed.

Reason #2: They feel better avoiding it.

Reason #3: They believe they're alone.

Reason #4: They believe there's no cure.

Reason #5: They listen to questionable advice.

Let's explore them one at a time:

Reason #1—They're ashamed. Just as I suffered silently for nearly 20 years, most people who are terrified of public speaking don't talk about it. They are concerned about what others think of them, and are mortified at the thought of appearing weak or incompetent. So, to appear confident and in control, they often mask inner turmoil beneath a facade of self-confidence, firm handshakes, and can-do attitudes. They weave tightly knit cocoons around their fears, safely tucking them away from family, friends, colleagues, and associates.

Ironically, those terrified of public speaking are often exceptionally talented. They can be brilliant businesspeople, effective networkers, beloved public servants, empathetic counselors, successful entrepreneurs—even heads of major corporations and other industry leaders. They are people you would least expect to be afraid. One-on-one, they can dazzle you with eloquent conviction. At social gatherings, they can charm with panache. But in front of an audience, a strange metamorphosis occurs—the confidence dissolves, the charm withers, and the shell cracks. Left behind is a frightened, quivering, and ashamed person with public-speaking phobia.

Reason #2—They feel better avoiding it. When someone who's afraid of public speaking even thinks about it, he or she may feel like a “basket case.” The act of avoiding it can bring immediate relief—but may have serious long-term consequences.

Take Jack for example. A bright, articulate man in his 40s, he is a prime example of why some people choose to live with the fear of

public speaking. Jack believed his purpose in life was to help people. Fresh out of college at 21, he set his sights on a career in social services. He knew it wouldn't pay well, but he felt it would give him the satisfaction of using his knowledge and people skills in service to others.

Eventually Jack was hired as a counselor at an agency that helps troubled adolescents. It was a dream come true. He was doing what he was trained for and, more important, he loved it. Being compassionate, he felt very sad about the families' lives and living conditions of the kids he counseled. Nonetheless, he was confident in his capacity to help. He had chosen the right profession. Jack excelled as a counselor and soon made his mark on the agency. His family marveled at his eagerness to go to work in the morning, and at his energy and enthusiasm when he got home. Jack loved his job, and it showed.

But, regardless of appearances, all wasn't well with Jack. Secretly, he harbored a tremendous fear of public speaking. Early on in his job, it wasn't an issue, because he just dealt with people one-on-one. Whether he was counseling a troubled teenager or discussing a case with his supervisor, Jack was an excellent communicator—passionate, articulate, reasoned, and confident. But when the agency instituted weekly meetings for counselors to share their case studies and compare notes, things began to unravel.

Jack was terrified. At the first meeting, as he watched his associates gather in the conference room, chatting amiably and filling their coffee cups, he felt a sickening lump in his throat. His heart raced. His mouth was dry. He felt light-headed and gasped for breath. After everyone was seated, the supervisor asked each counselor to spend five minutes updating the group on the most challenging cases.

Jack sweated profusely beneath his sport coat. His head throbbed and his hands shook uncontrollably. Finally, it was his turn. With a quavering, barely audible voice, he talked for about 60 seconds before trailing off mid-sentence. Then it was on to the next counselor.

Jack was devastated. Although no one seemed to be complaining about his report, he was sure his career had ended in that conference room. He was concerned that people could see he was weak,

helpless, insecure and even a discredit to his profession. Surely, he thought, whatever confidence his boss had in him until that point must have vanished with his pathetic 60-second performance. In Jack's mind, he was a stone-dead loser.

Jack continued to shine as a counselor in his individual sessions. However, when he found himself stuck in that conference room every week, he dreaded his turn to speak. He fought dry mouth, and had a quavering voice as he would barely squeak out his report.

Finally, he could take the anguish no more. After months of suffering in silence at the weekly meetings, Jack resigned from his job. In doing so, he no longer had to endure the panic and anxiety of these meetings. He was free.

But that freedom carried a heavy price. By avoiding his most dreaded fear, Jack had quit the profession he so desperately loved. Distraught, and filled with a deepening sense of gloom, he sought out a job where he would not have to talk to any group—a job where he would be left alone to carry out his duties. He found a position as a mail carrier. Unfortunately, this story does not have a happy ending. Today, Jack hates his job, himself, and the way he treats his family after each long, weary day at work.

Like many people who develop a phobia about public speaking, Jack chose avoidance as the antidote to his poisonous fear. By avoiding a job which required him to speak in front of groups, he felt physical and mental relief. He had found the lure of a panic-free existence simply too tempting an escape to let reason stand in the way.

Avoidance, however, became a double-edged sword. It brought him welcome relief from the anxiety and, in this sense, removed him from "harm's way." But, over time, he began to attach even greater significance and consequence to his fear that was already blown out of proportion. So, was he *really* any better off? Hardly.

Sally also found temporary relief through avoidance. At 39, she seemed the epitome of the successful career woman. As a customer service manager for a major pharmaceutical firm, Sally was smart, competent, outgoing, and focused on success. She was confident, aggressive, and even tough. But beneath that facade beat the heart of a woman in mortal fear of public speaking.

"I had an absolutely terrifying experience in church when I was 17," she remembers. "Every Sunday, I would sing in the choir, and

feel comfortable in front of a large audience, because I was part of a group. One Sunday, however, our soloist called out sick, and I was chosen to be her replacement. I was mortified. I felt sick to my stomach. I was in a panic. But I did everything I could to hide the fear.

“When it came time for me to sing solo, I froze in place. I couldn't make a sound. I was absolutely terrified and totally embarrassed. Somehow, though, the choir managed to stumble forward without me. And when the services ended that Sunday, I went home totally humiliated.”

Today, more than 20 years later, Sally still associates “performing” before a large group of people with panic, anxiety, and humiliation. It's been a rocky road. “After being with my company for five years, I was promoted to administrative assistant to the president,” she recalls. “In that position, I was responsible for presenting employee safety statistics to the company's executive committee. It was a terrifying responsibility, not only because I had to speak in front of a group, but because the group was so powerful. I had seen the way this group tore into each other, and I could only imagine what they would do to me. I thought they would eat me alive.”

She recalled those sessions with acute discomfort. “My hands would be shaking and my knees knocking,” she says shuddering. “And I would insist on sitting, rather than standing. My voice would be quavering, and the only way I could get through it was to remember that I was speaking on behalf of all our employees, that I had an obligation to do it.” Although Sally made it through each presentation intact, she found it an agonizing experience and loathed to repeat it.

She admits that she has avoided opportunities for advancement because of her fear. “I've turned down positions in marketing research, sales, and public affairs,” she laments. “Although I knew I had the skills for those jobs, I knew each of them involved some amount of public speaking, and I just couldn't handle that.”

Sally confesses she's used her creative energy to avoid speaking before groups. “I remember when my boss asked me to make a presentation to a group of customers on the subject of our company's cash management practices,” she says. “But I didn't just try to avoid it, I *actively campaigned* against it. I argued with my

boss that it was a terrible idea— that it would be airing our dirty laundry in public. I was very convincing and, in the end, he canceled the session.”

Sally has used other techniques to get out of public speaking and one, in particular, is very effective for her. “I’ll charm someone else into doing a presentation,” she says mischievously. “I’ll make them think it was their idea to do it, that they would be perfect for the assignment. To be honest, I don’t feel like I’m being deceptive. I give 150 percent to my company in other ways, so I don’t feel so bad.”

Is she being dishonest? Has she compromised her integrity to avoid public speaking? Unfortunately, she and many others are doing just that—in their efforts to dodge speaking responsibilities. Perhaps you are among these people. If Sally looks at her behavior truthfully, she may realize it’s time to stop playing the games and look for help in conquering her fear. The challenge is that people like Sally often don’t believe they *can* be helped. Since avoidance is such a big factor in holding people back from speaking, we’ll cover it in depth in Chapter 4.

Reason #3—They believe they’re alone. Sally’s story is not unique. People who have developed a fear of public speaking believe they are alone, and invest an incredible amount of energy in hiding their predicament. To make matters worse, they are surrounded by people who seem to be comfortable at public speaking—their bosses, associates, colleagues, friends, and family members. Even people interviewed on the street during TV news programs seem comfortable, confident, and at ease in giving their opinions in front of thousands of viewers. For the person with public-speaking phobia, everyone else seems well-adjusted! They are misinterpreting what may be false fronts of bravado, with their own quaking insides, probably covered by their *own* falsely projected self-assurance! Believing others have it all together only makes them feel even more ashamed, helpless, and incompetent. They need to remember all people are not as they appear—*by far*.

Kevin, 63, is someone who knows what it’s like to feel alone, to carry the shame of his speaking phobia with him every day. Now a retired police chief in Florida, Kevin remembers the anxiety and helplessness he felt when he first experienced the fear of public

speaking at 22. “I was a narcotics officer, involved in physically dangerous situations every day,” he recalls. “But nothing compared to the time I was asked to speak in front of a group of 300 doctors on the subject of ‘Drugs on the Street.’ From the moment I was asked to speak, I became completely distracted from my regular life. I couldn’t sleep, eat, or think straight. I suffered anxiety every day for three weeks before the event.

When the dreaded day finally came, I was a nervous wreck. The event was held at a fancy hotel, and I had to get up in front of a huge audience in an auditorium. Staring out at the sea of people, I was completely intimidated. I couldn’t catch my breath, and I found it extremely difficult to get even the first word out.” Out of sheer panic, Kevin decided to scrap the talk and simply take questions from the audience. Although he managed to get through it, he left the hotel embarrassed and ashamed.

Many years later, Kevin managed to contain his fear and was eventually able to make presentations without panicking. But unfortunately, the fear came rushing back. “I was a police chief by then, and I was called upon to make many presentations,” he remembers. “Some of them were to angry crowds, and that’s where all of the anxiety would return. I started bringing other police officers with me to these presentations, and I would point to one of them to handle the questions. Pretty soon, I was delegating the talks to other officers; I avoided them altogether.”

Three months after completely avoiding his first talk, Kevin suffered a nervous breakdown, part of which he attributes to the fear of public speaking. He has since retired, and has written two novels. “I really enjoy being a writer, but I am a little nervous that if my books sell and become successful, it will force me to do some public speaking.” At 63, Kevin *still* remains a prisoner of his fear.

Thousands of people like Kevin take the fear of public speaking to their graves. In doing so, they sacrifice their self-esteem, careers or businesses, and their ultimate potential for success.

Reason #4—They believe there’s no cure. *You can be cured.* If I had known that 20 years ago, I would have had hope, seen a way out, and spared myself the paranoia, terror, anxiety, and helplessness that came from this life-altering phobia. But, at that time, I

believed as thousands of others do today, that the fear of public speaking is incurable. I used to believe it was a sad twist of fate. It seemed to be almost a cruel joke that someone like me, who was so outgoing, energetic, and filled with enthusiasm for work and play could be locked inside four walls of fear.

Twenty years ago, I would have given anything to have had the confidence to get up in front of an audience, to make them laugh, cry, and move them to take action. At every meeting, every class, every gathering, I would look at each speaker with a sense of awe and envy. I wanted to do what they could do, with every bone in my body. But I had resigned myself to a life spent *among* the audience—not in front of it.

If only I had met someone who had actually conquered the fear, I might have found hope. I knew people who had overcome the fear of flying. I saw people on television who had been victorious over the fear of driving. I even knew someone who had triumphed over the fear of snakes. But never did I read, see, or hear about anyone who had faced up to the fear of public speaking and conquered it forever.

Today, I'm paid to give speeches in front of software designers, communications professionals, newspaper editors, police officers, entrepreneurs, and thousands of others. I've performed stand-up comedy in nightclubs, amphitheaters, and auditoriums. I've spoken in front of enormous crowds, and I have been hired to speak to dozens of large gatherings at conferences, banquets, meetings, and conventions.

Although I still experience "butterflies," i.e., a little nervousness before speaking, frankly it helps keep me sharp. I have won out over my old fear of public speaking once and for all. I no longer dread it, lose my appetite weeks before a speech, or suffer from overwhelming anxiety at the mere thought of facing a group.

Now, I actually *look forward* to speaking in front of groups. It's restored my sense of confidence, repaired my self-esteem, and given me a life I never knew I could have. Today, conquering the fear of public speaking stands as my single greatest accomplishment, and continues to bring me tremendous personal and professional rewards. When it comes to the fear that once paralyzed my life, *I'm a free man and you can be free too!*

Overcoming the fear of public speaking has also given me the opportunity to bring hope to people who are still trapped by their fear. In my presentations to corporations, business owners, professional organizations, civic groups, and others, I've talked candidly about my struggle to overcome the fear of public speaking, and how it has dramatically transformed my life. In doing so, it seems I've broken an unspoken taboo—talking about personal weakness and emotional challenges in the business world.

No matter how enlightened an organization is today, it still seems that, by and large, we are expected to have consistent emotional strength in business without consideration for human frailties. In many cases, we're expected to check our feelings and emotions at the door, put on a mask of confidence and competence with our colleagues, associates, and leaders, and appear strong at all times.

In my presentations, I'm always amazed to hear business people open up about their fears, and voice the embarrassment and shame they've lived with for so many years. It reminds me of how hard it was for me to hide my fears from my colleagues, to appear upbeat and in control, week after week, but secretly dreading the day I would be exposed for my weakness.

Reason #5—They listen to questionable advice. I feel uncomfortable telling you this, but I did at least one really stupid thing when I first endeavored to conquer my fear. I made a doctor's appointment at a local medical center where several doctors work together. The physicians there participate in an HMO (Health Maintenance Organization) and their facility was set up much like my bank. In the waiting room, patients were lined up in single file between two velvet ropes that snaked through the office up to a nurse's station. When I got to the front of the line, the nurse escorted me to see whichever doctor was available at the time—not necessarily an appropriate one. For example, the first time I went, I saw a gynecologist!

After awkwardly telling the doctor about my fear of public speaking, he recommended two things: 1) "Relax!" and 2) Take some heart medication to slow down my heart rate. Frankly, I would have lost all confidence in this doctor had it not been for his

progressive office policy: If you die at any time during the course of treatment, he cheerfully refunds your five-dollar copayment!

I'm joking here. But perhaps the greatest tragedy for those who suffer from the fear of public speaking is this: When you eventually reach the breaking point, and you finally get the courage to turn for help, instead of finding the compassion, support, and guidance you need, you are often met with well-intentioned—but questionable—advice.

Psychiatrists generally want to spend years probing your childhood history, scouring your psyche for the parental relationships that may have laid the foundation for the anxiety. Family doctors often treat only the symptoms, prescribing magic pills from their pharmaceutical arsenals. The most unfortunate part is that these and other certainly well-intentioned but perhaps uninformed professionals often reinforce the belief that there is no cure. The sad irony, perhaps unbeknownst to these caregivers, is that the fear of public speaking is a very treatable disorder.

People who turn to published experts may not fare much better. Books written on public speaking tend to concentrate on speaking techniques rather than on ways to conquer fear. Often, they stress preparation as the antidote to anxiety. Concentrate on what you are going to say, they tell you, and your fears will magically disappear. One author claims he cured a lifelong fear of public speaking by spending a weekend preparing for a speech. Preparation, mind you, is certainly key to effective public speaking. Yet, unless your fear is totally based on your concern about not being prepared, preparation is not going to be the cure-all.

Another author espouses three secrets to banishing the fear of public speaking: 1) Know your subject; 2) Believe in your subject; and 3) Practice, practice, practice. And yet another author recommends three fear-reducing activities to do before giving a speech: walking around the block, wagging your jaw back and forth, and dangling your arms at your sides. To be honest, I've walked, wagged, and dangled, and it didn't do a thing for me!

My favorite piece of questionable advice involves relaxing by picturing your audience without a stitch of clothes. If there is one thing I have learned in nearly 20 years of trial and error, it is this—*naked people won't help you!* I'm sorry, they just won't. They may fill the

auditorium in all their naked splendor. They may give you their undivided, unclothed attention. They may even nod approvingly, wearing nothing more than a hairdo and a smile. But in the end, they simply *won't* help you.

What *will* help you, however, is an understanding of why you're so scared in the first place, along with a step-by-step plan to conquer the fear of public speaking forever. Part I of this book gives you the understanding. Part II gives you the plan.

I still look back in amazement at the road I traveled to overcome this common fear. I unloaded my troubles onto psychologists. I put my faith in hypnotists. I read dozens of books and hundreds of articles. But nowhere did I see a clear path out of my anxiety. However, through a combination of self-study, group therapy, trial and error, and sheer dumb luck, I managed to conquer the fear of public speaking and turn my life around. In doing so, I uncovered the facts and fallacies that surround this common fear, and the methods that work, and those that don't, in overcoming it.

Naked People Won't Help You is the result of my experiences. I see it as my chance to give back to others what I so desperately craved 15 years ago. It is written for those whose fear of public speaking has drastically or even somewhat affected the quality of their lives. It is for people who think they are alone. It is for those who have looked for help but have lost all hope. It is for people who want to help others overcome this fear. And it is for those who don't want to go to their graves thinking how it *might* have been.