



How to Perform Flawlessly Under Pressure

Get Rave Reviews When
Speaking in Presentations,
Meetings, and Sales Calls

Lisa Lane Brown

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To perform flawlessly under pressure, you must learn exactly how to handle fear and performance anxiety in your most important moments. Whether you are facing a meeting, presentation, or negotiation, it is comforting to know how to get rave reviews under pressure.

Of course, the confidence you gain from your newfound mental toughness will give you the courage you need to pursue your true career purpose and make the kind of money you deserve.

How to Deal With Stressors

In the world of mental toughness, anything that distracts you from a confident frame of mind while performing known as a stressor, because it moves you away from your best performance. Right now, because you have not been training in mental toughness yet, *every time your personal 'stressors' show up, you tend to lose confidence and your performance suffers.*

To effectively manage distractions, your very first job is to get to know your performing self when speaking in presentations and meetings.

Many years ago, the sport psychologist for Team Canada asked me to write down all my stressor in a game. The first thing on my list was: "Not scoring early."

That's right. If I didn't score a goal early on in a ringette game, I would decide I was having a bad game, lose my confidence, stop trying to score, and play worse and worse.

This discovery shocked me. I didn't know this about myself, but apparently everyone else did, including my coaches. In fact, my coaches used to say on the bench, "That's it...she hasn't scored, so she's finished now."

This simple little Action Assignment woke me up to my biggest weakness in performing. I decided to dedicate my entire first season of mental toughness training to managing my reaction to this stressor.

What are *your* stressors?

Now it's your turn. Your very first job is to identify your stressors-- those things that bother you most while performing. To do this, you begin by listing in the space below your top 7 stressors. Here are some examples people often cite:

- Getting off to a poor start
- People are negative or unfriendly to you
- The task involves potential rejection, e.g., cold calling
- Receiving criticism or complaints

- ➔ You must make a major decision
- ➔ Speaking to a group or panel
- ➔ Dealing with superiors or authority figures
- ➔ Having to provide criticism or feedback to someone
- ➔ Equipment, supplies, or logistics have gone wrong
- ➔ Your team or colleagues are having conflict
- ➔ Being pre-occupied with problems outside of the performance, e.g., personal problems
- ➔ Being late or given a schedule change
- ➔ Feeling sick or unusually tired
- ➔ Being bullied or dealing with an aggressive person
- ➔ Having to sell an idea, product, or service
- ➔ The task is outside your comfort zone

In the space below, list the top seven stressors that trigger a loss of confidence in you:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Now, put your stressors in the order from *most* to *least* bothersome.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

Now you know what your *rock* is. Your *rock* is your #1 stressor. It is the event that has the most potential to cause you to lose confidence, choke, or under perform. It is the first thing on your second list. This is very powerful exercise, because now you have the opportunity to transform your game by carefully working with your reaction to your *rock*.

3 Strategies for Conquering Your “Rock”

There are three strategies you can use to conquer your rock and develop unshakable confidence under pressure. These strategies are different ways of dealing with fear, because fear is the opposite of confidence.

Fear created by your imagination

Sometimes a stressor becomes your “rock” because you use your imagination to think in catastrophic ways. Basically, when your “rock” occurs, you create evidence in your mind to believe you will fail. Here are some examples:

- You are about to make a presentation. Ten minutes prior to starting, you wonder if your content is sophisticated enough for your audience. You become agitated as the start time approaches; instead of talking to the audience, you retreat to the bathroom and think of ways to cancel it.

- You are on a date with someone you like when she becomes quiet. You immediately assume she doesn’t like you. You stop talking, and the relaxed mood turns awkward.

- Your boss corrects an error in your work. You start to panic; you comb your mind for examples of times he was dissatisfied with you. Anxious, you continually ask for re-assurance about your job.

- Your son is out late. You begin to review all the possible hazards he could encounter until you’re in a frenzy of worry. When he comes

home, you grill him for an hour about his whereabouts, damaging the trust in the relationship.

This type of thinking—in which we lose perspective and draw dangerous conclusions—is so common we all have a little ‘humble pie’ to eat about it. Simply put: there are conclusions we draw that exaggerate fear vs. reduce it. When learning how to conquer your *rock*, you will need to become highly aware of the catastrophic conclusions you draw when your *rock* shows up.

Conclusions in the Background

Over the course of this week, I want you to record the mental conclusions you have drawn every time you feel unusually stressed out, emotional, or numb.

Here are some examples:

“Senior management know more than me about this topic.”

“The team doesn’t listen to me in meetings.”

“I don’t know enough about being funny or entertaining to keep people’s attention.”

“Calling people for sales appointments is pushy.”

Record your conclusions below:-

Strategy 1: Empathy (The Batman Strategy)

The obvious way to reduce fear created by your imagination is to become rational in the face of these conclusions. One of the best ways to become rational is to use empathy.

In *Batman Begins*, Bruce Wayne learns a secret to conquering fear. Bruce was intensely afraid of one thing: bats. His fear overwhelms him until his mentor says, *“To conquer fear, you must become the thing you fear.”* Soon after, Bruce empowers himself and becomes the very thing he fears most: a bat.

Ok, so Batman is a comic book...but there is a lesson in all this:

When you truly, deeply understand other people, your tendency to draw distorted conclusions—and your fear--will dramatically diminish.

‘Becoming your fear’ means acquiring empathy. Empathy is the ability to feel the emotional experience of another person.

A Typical Example: Taking Things Personally

It is easy to amplify the fear of rejection using our imagination. We do this by perceiving that someone else’s behaviour is personal towards us. We become overly sensitive, overreact to minor things, and blow their behaviour out of proportion.

We can reduce our fear of others by learning the art of genuine empathy.

A client sought me out because she had accepted a job in library science, which had an enormous learning curve.

On her first day, she experienced a thirty minute anxiety attack because she could not find a CD for a customer and had to ask her boss for help.

Her conclusion? “My boss thinks I’m an idiot. He’s going to get rid of me.” For half an hour she ruminated over the

event, certain she had made a disastrous impression. I asked her to mentally ‘put herself in her boss’s shoes.’

She quickly realized that her boss did not seem disturbed by the question and was probably glad to help. Her anxiety faded into the background. By the end of two weeks she was graduated to the next level of training.

How to De-Mystify the Fear of Sales

When you are gripped by a fear of selling (a product, a service, your ideas, yourself as an employee) it’s virtually guaranteed that you have lost empathy for the person you are dealing with.

I recently worked with a woman named Beth who owned her own business in human resource consulting. Her business required that she attract clients who needed help in recruiting people for executive finance positions. Very quickly upon starting her business, she became paralyzed by the thought of making sales calls.

Beth had two extraordinary strengths. First, she had been an accountant for years and therefore knew the technical requirements of the positions she was

placing. Second, she was a born nurturer. She loved alleviating the stress of others. In our session, Beth realized that she had been so focused on the fear of rejection that she had forgotten about the clients' needs. By thinking about her clients in an empathic way, she realized how grateful they would be to find a professional to remove their hiring stress. Empathy was magical for Beth. From that day forward, she used whenever she felt reluctant to make a sales call.

Empathy Success Story & Exercise

Write a success story in which you were able to gain empathy for a key person in your life. Describe how your ability to understand the emotional experience of this person calmed your fears. And, how can you apply this principle to your current goal / challenge?

Fear Created by Learned Helplessness

This second strategy you can use to conquer your “rock” is old fashioned optimism. You should use this strategy when your fear is created by learned helplessness. Learned helplessness is a giving up response based on your belief that *your actions do not matter*.

The discovery of learned helplessness

One of the major breakthroughs in psychology in the 20th century was the discovery that most people become helpless when adversity hits.

The landmark experiment that proved the phenomenon of learned helplessness was conducted by Martin Seligman and his researchers. Seligman's team began with three separate groups of eight dogs. The first group was the control group, so nothing was done with them. The second group was put in a cage one by one, and repeatedly shocked with electricity. However, the second group's cage had an escape panel. By pressing the panel with their nose, these dogs could turn the shock off.

The third group of dogs was placed in a cage and also shocked. But, their cage did not have an escape panel. No matter what they did, the third group could not turn off the shock.

Next, the researchers put all three groups of dogs in a shuttle box, which is a box with two compartments. The first compartment's floor was lined with electric shock. The second compartment was a safe zone. The cages were separated by a very low barrier that the dogs could easily step over.

The first group of dogs, the control group (who had not been shocked at all), were placed one by one in the shuttle box and shocked. They quickly jumped the barrier into the safe zone.

The second group of dogs (those who pushed a panel to escape the shock), were then placed one by one in the shuttle box. These dogs looked for the escape panel; when they couldn't find one, they jumped the barrier into the safe zone.

The third group of dogs—the dogs who could not escape the shock in the previous experiment—gave up. Six out of eight dogs made no attempt to escape into the safe zone. They had learned to be helpless. In fact, they became so helpless that the researchers had to physically drag the dogs back and forth across the shuttle box to show them that it was possible to escape the shock. This experiment was later replicated with people using loud noises instead of electric shock.¹

Learned helplessness is a “giving up” response

Learned helplessness is the conviction that our actions do not matter. Since we have tried and failed in the past, we believe nothing we do will make a difference. We cannot win. Learned helplessness is also known as pessimism and fear.²

Sometimes your poor performance happens because when your “rock” shows up, you’ve been infected by learned helplessness: you’ve become convinced that nothing you do will make a difference. You cannot win. Learned helplessness is also known as pessimism.

Strategy 2: Optimism (The Muhammad Ali Strategy)

I call this strategy the Muhammad Ali approach because Ali was famous for psyching himself up using unbridled optimism. Ali, considered the most successful athlete of the past 100 years, would call himself “the Greatest.” He’d also tell anyone who’d listen that he was going to win. (However, you don’t need to be outwardly boastful the way Ali was; it is sufficient to use optimism in the privacy of your mind). ☺

In fact, the simple optimistic phrase “I can do it” immediately calms us down and reduces the fear of failure in our minds. The core of optimism is really finding hope. Hope is the stuff of champions. When faced with your rock, hope might be the antidote to your fear.

Hope: The Stuff of Champions

The key to finding hope using optimism is to convince yourself that *whatever stressor you are facing is temporary*. Note: optimism is not positive thinking. It does not mean that you try to find an advantage or “silver lining” in every bad event. Sometimes this is just not possible.

For example, let’s imagine your mother-in-law consistently undermines your parenting methods. An example of *positive thinking* would be, “I’m so glad this is happening because the kids are getting a third parent who cares.”

Optimism is finding a legitimate reason to believe that the situation is temporary. For example, you might say to yourself, “If I work to communicate better with my husband about what we need from her, he will be able to convince her to be more supportive.”

When you can find a way to believe the setback you are facing is

temporary, you create hope. To begin, write down the pessimistic thoughts each stressor triggers in you in the left hand column. Then, in the right hand column, write down why the stressor is only temporary. I have completed the first stressor for you as a sample. Note that the optimistic response is not necessarily positive; *it merely suggests that the negative situation is temporary*.

Please write out an optimistic thought for every major stressor you identified earlier in this lesson.

Sample Chart

Stressor	Pessimistic Thoughts	Optimistic Thoughts
<p>My boss is critical of me in meetings.</p>	<p>“He has no respect for me. Everyone here thinks I’m incompetent.”</p>	<p>“He does have a tendency to criticize in meetings. But he’s only frustrated because he’s not getting the data he wants. If I prepare for the meeting by showing him everything I’m going to present first, I will get a better reaction from him.”</p>

Your Chart:

Stressor	Pessimistic Thoughts	Optimistic Thoughts

Fear created by your imagination

The final strategy is effective when your fear is rooted in performance anxiety.

Performance anxiety is extreme nerves prior to an important event. To succeed in any challenge, you need to know exactly how to handle performance anxiety.

Here's why:

High achievers are not people who perform well under pressure.

Nobody performs well under pressure.

High achievers are people who create an internal environment for themselves in which they do not feel overwhelming pressure.

High achievers know instinctively that superior performance requires relaxation.

To succeed, you need to be functioning at the best of your ability. And to bring out your best, it helps to feel relaxed. Here is a simple, five step method you can use to relax and calm performance anxiety.

Strategy 3: The Five Step Method (The Lisa Brown Strategy)

Here is a simple, five step method for getting rave reviews when speaking in a meeting, presentation, or negotiation. You can also use it just as easily for

negotiations, interviews, dates, sports competitions, and performing arts performances.

1. Pre-Performance Preparation

Before the event, plan and rehearse out loud the EXACT words you are going to use to present your ideas. Most people assume that articulate people are spontaneous. This is rarely the case.

Virtually every top performance is heavily rehearsed. I learned this from one of Canada's top comedians, Irwin Barker, who writes for the TV show *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*.

Irwin confessed to me that the real genius of live performers is that they can deliver rehearsed material in an off-the-cuff way...as though they just thought of each joke.

You can do the same by preparing your words and then delivering them in a casual, relaxed way.

You need to do the same. Do not worry about spontaneity; the more prepared you are, the easier it will be to be spontaneous, because you'll be more relaxed.

2. Pre-Performance Visualization:

What You See IS What You Get

There's nothing like an excellent start to put you in a confident frame of mind. *Your pre-performance visualization gives you the confidence you need to relax before the event.*

Sylvie Bernier

One of the most inspiring accounts of pre-performance visualization comes from Sylvie Bernier, who won Olympic gold in springboard diving. Sylvie spent years being in the top ten divers in the world, but would always miss one dive out of 10 and end up coming in 8th or 9th in world-class competitions.

About a year and a half before the Olympics, Sylvie turned around her career using pre-performance visualization.

My mental preparation for the Olympics was really different from the preparation of other athletes in my sport. That year I didn't dive as much as everybody else. I didn't train 6 hours a day in the pool. I probably did 2 hours a day...so I had to work on my mental preparation a lot.

I did my dives in my head all the time. At night, before going to sleep, I always did my dives. Ten dives.

I started with a front dive, the first one that I had to do at the Olympics, and I did everything as if I was actually there. I saw myself on the board with the same bathing suit. Everything was the same. I saw myself in the pool at the Olympics doing my dives.

If the dive was wrong, I went back and started over again. It takes a good hour to do perfect imagery of all my dives but for me it was better than a workout.

It took me a long time to control my images and perfect my imagery, maybe a year, doing it everyday. At first I couldn't see myself, I always saw everyone else, or I would see my dives wrong

all the time. I would get an image of hurting myself, or tripping on the board, or I would “see” something done really bad.³

Sylvie was especially nervous about the scoreboard. Whenever she would complete a dive and come out of the pool, she would look at the scoreboard and her heart would go crazy. Sylvie knew she couldn't control her reaction to the scoreboard, so she developed a pre-performance visualization routine for every one of her 10 dives that would get her to stop focusing on the score.

Here was her visualization routine between each dive:

Between dives my coach says ‘Good’ or with movements what was wrong with it. I go back, I listen to my Walkman. ...I always listened to the same thing on my Walkman - “Take your passion, make it happen,” from the movie *Flashdance*. I don't know why this song...maybe because my best friend gave it to me just before I left. She said, “Listen to this song and make it happen for real.” It was in me, and I listened to it all the time.

Usually I look at my dive in slow motion on the TV. I keep warm, walk for about 10 minutes and then come back and jog just to stay warm until I have to go. Then I do my exercises and think about my dive at the same time. Then I take my clothes off and just walk.

I carried my music on my last two dives right up to the ladder and left it on the table. I was so nervous then. I went on to the board. The crowd yelled. I thought of my dive. When I think of my dive, there's always an image, even today if I think of a dive I 'see' it. It's like walking for me now. It's part of me.”⁴

This is the concept of Emotional Visualization, or “E.V.”, and all professional speakers do it. In emotional visualization, you use the screen of your mind to prepare for your important performances. The brilliance of visualization is that it gives you a sense of control over your high-pressure day. You may not be able to control much, but you can visualize and then execute your plan.

When speaking to a group, you can visualize the room, the group, who is there with you, what you will say, and the wonderful connection you will have with the people in the room.

3. Accept Your Nerves

When you get to the site of your performance, you may experience some anxiety. At this point, it is important to accept your nerves if you are having any. Here is a personal example.

In 2001, my team was on the verge of a major victory in ringette.

We were playing Edmonton, our rival, for a berth to the National Championships. They had been winning consistently since 1999, and the tournament was as close as any sporting event could be.

I had been cut from the National team the previous summer, which led me to doubt my ability for a few months. I decided to come back the following season and extract some revenge.

I was nervous. At 34 years old, I was the veteran on the team—a player my teammates might expect some courage from.

My nerves surprised me a little. They were as strong as I could remember in 28 years of competing. I was having trouble just swallowing normally in the warm up. I decided I needed a short-term strategy to manage the anxiety.

I knew fighting my fear would never work, so I quietly said to myself, “Lisa, it’s OK to be afraid.”

Skating on to the ice, I said to myself, “Lisa it’s OK to be afraid.” In between the first few whistles, I said to myself, “Lisa, it’s OK to be afraid.”

Every time I said this, I relaxed a little more. I scored a goal on the first shift, and the rest is history. My team went on to win the Provincial and National Championship.

When my name was called for the team all-star award at the Nationals, my coach leaned over and whispered in my ear, “No one deserves this more.”

I guess it is OK to be afraid.

By saying that it is OK to be afraid, I am not suggesting you will enjoy your fear.

You will come to view nerves, lack of confidence, performance anxiety, insecurity, and fear as natural responses to challenging situations.

If you are nervous, try saying the following to yourself: *"It's OK to be nervous. It's OK to be afraid of making mistakes."* This will relax you because you aren't trying to force yourself to feel confident when you aren't. You're just trying to accept yourself.

Put a Good Name to Your Nerves

John Molo, a professional drummer who has performed with many successful singers including Bruce Hornsby, agrees that the name you put to your nerves has a huge impact on how you experience them.

Consider his experience at the Grammy awards:

**So the night of the Grammy awards, I'm pretty nervous
as Gary Shandling introduces us. When you get really
nervous, no matter what the situation is, just equate it**

with excitement. Seeing nervousness as excitement has worked for me, but it is an acquired skill. You need to practice it.⁵

Singer Celine Dion says the same thing as Molo. She calls her nerves ‘the respect I pay to my audience.’

The ability to put a good name to your fear often separates people who reach their goals from people who do not. I have worked with many high achievers who abandoned their goals because they thought there was something wrong with them for getting anxious and stressed out before challenging situations.

4. Repeat a Positive Affirmation

Three to five minutes before the start of the presentation, you’ll want to take control of your thinking. The easiest way to do this is to develop *one* positive affirmation you can repeat to yourself as the start time approaches.

Research shows that your unconscious mind will accept whatever you tell it—and go about making this affirmation a reality as long as it is *positive* and in the *present tense*.

Your affirmation should be based on your strengths. Be very specific. For example, if you are giving a sales presentation, your affirmation could be: “Deep in my soul, I have a sense for how to listen to people’s needs and address their concerns.”

I cannot express what a profound effect an affirmation can have on your personal confidence. I have personally used this technique for years, and I am still surprised at how much it can psyche you up before performing. 😊

5. Bring Yourself into the NOW

Once you start the performance, your #1 job is to bring your focus into the present. Remember, the event is the focus—not your emotions. This is another way of saying that you must bring yourself in the present moment, or the Now.

When you are in the meeting, stop paying attention to how you feel. Instead, pay attention to what’s happening. What’s being discussed?

If you are giving a presentation, you can interact with the group by asking them questions about your ideas. Then you can get your focus absorbed in what they are saying. When you are in the NOW, you don’t get stressed out about success or failure. You just enjoy the moment.³

This takes practice, so I suggest you cultivate the habit of being in the Now a little bit each day. This will make it easier to do when you are under pressure.

Your Five Step Formula

Select a situation that you will have to face this week that may cause you nerves, anxiety, insecurity, or stress. Here are potential scenarios you could choose from:

- ➔ You want to ask for a raise
- ➔ You want to sell an idea in a meeting
- ➔ You have to give a presentation to senior management
- ➔ You need to make some cold calls

Now, create an affirmation to assist you for the next time you have to face this event that will help you accept your fear without resistance. Here are some models you can use:

- ➔ “It’s OK to be afraid.”
- ➔ “My nerves are completely natural.”
- ➔ “I acknowledge I am tense and this is perfectly understandable.”

Write your affirmation here:

This week, try the five-step formula. Record how it went for you and what was helpful to reduce your performance anxiety.

Final Reflections

Write a description of the insights you have made about yourself as a result of taking this training. Please include behaviour changes and future steps you are going to take to win in your life challenge.

It's been a pleasure working with you. If you would like to contact me about any part of this training, please do so at the address below. I hope to work with you again. To learn about new books, audio programs, and personalized coaching opportunities using Courage to Win success principles, go to <http://www.thecouragetowin.com/tools.html>

Peace and love,

Lisa Lane Brown

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