Introduction

If you asked me what I came into this world to do, I will tell you: I came to live out loud.

EMILE ZOLA

Fear of public speaking consistently tops every list of human fears.

In an often-cited 1993 study done by the polling firm Bruskin-Goldring, 45 percent of those surveyed said they feared public speaking. Thirty percent said they feared death.

In a study of 3,000 Americans published in the *Book of Lists* (David Wallechinsky, Little, Brown, 1995), the number one fear cited by 41 percent of those studied was speaking to an audience.

And a similar study by A. Ronald Seifert of the Behavioral Institute of Atlanta indicated that "40 million Americans hate speaking so much, they'd do almost anything to avoid it, and perhaps as many as 40 million who speak all the time feel anxious and do not want to give a talk!"

If you are one of those millions who have been plagued all their lives by fear of public speaking . . . if you feel that fear has impeded your career and diminished your life . . . this book can help you.

The Seven Steps to Fearless Speaking explained in these pages are the culmination of more than 30 years of teaching the art of communication—at the New School for Social Research in New York City, at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, at Hunter and Brooklyn Colleges, in private sessions in my studio, and in corporate conference rooms all over America.

The Seven Steps . . .

Experience Your Voice,
Get a Response and Structure Your Thoughts,
Establish a Dialogue,
Tap Your Creativity,
Learn to Persuade,
Achieve Your Higher Objective, and
Give the Gift of Your Conviction

. . . are a road map to a place where you can freely and fearlessly say what you know and what you believe. A place where you can truly be yourself as a public speaker and communicate from the depth of your convictions.

My alumni, who number in the thousands, include broadcasters and businessmen, stockbrokers and senators, homemakers and heads of state. Many of them suffered from fear of speaking. Our work together taught me how to help you.

"Why Are You Here?"

I begin each private session and class by asking the question, "Why are you here?" My students give me answers like these:

"I feel I have limited my life because of my fear of public speaking. I have managed so far to fast-talk my way out of most presentations. But the excuses are running out. I'm tired of living like this."

"I get petrified the night before I have to speak before a group, and can't sleep all night. It's as if no matter what I do, I have no control over my thoughts or body. At the same time, it's something I long to do. Something I want desperately. I envy people who can. I want to be one of those people."

"I get very hoarse in my throat. It's not dryness. . . . I can't eat or drink. I bring the water to my mouth and I can't swallow. . . . Thinking on my feet, when I'm very nervous, all I can think about is how I'm standing in front of a large group of people and

they're all paying attention to me. How can I possibly even remember what the person asked?"

"I have spent the last 20 years at work controlling situations and talking my way out of public speaking. I do fine when I choose to enter a conversation, but when I have to get up in front of the group or get called on . . . I've been very good at getting out of it."

My students are of all ages and from all walks of life. Their common denominator is their shared feelings of frustration, fear, and confusion. They confirm the fact that fear of speaking is an equal-opportunity affliction. It does not discriminate because of gender, age, religious belief, socioeconomic class, job description, or ethnic origin.

Fear and the Famous

The famous aren't immune, either. The roster includes James Earl Jones, Barbra Streisand, Carly Simon, Willard Scott, and Maya Angelou.

James Garner, a lifelong sufferer of fear of speaking, once paused during the filming of *The Rockford Files* to admit to a newspaper reporter that he was extremely nervous about delivering an upcoming commencement address at the University of Oklahoma in his hometown of Norman.

"It's been driving me nuts," he said, "thinking about the speech while I'm trying to finish this movie."

Cellist Pablo Casals has had to be physically pushed on stage on several occasions. Once, after injuring his hand while hiking, he happily announced, "Thank God, I'll never have to play the cello again." (Fortunately, the injury wasn't permanent.)

Laurence Olivier is said to have suffered stage fright so acutely, he asked his fellow cast members not to look him in the eye while he was performing.

Thomas Jefferson was terrified of speaking in public and never did overcome it. Near the end of his life, he confided to a friend that he was outraged by what he regarded as the Continental Congress's heavy-handed revision of his carefully written Declaration of Independence—but was unable to speak up and defend his work.

Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter was bedeviled by fear of speaking, too. Most of her life, she managed to avoid public speaking. But as First Lady, she couldn't.

In her autobiography, *The First Lady from Plains* (Houghton Mifflin, 1984), she explains:

> The idea of standing up in front of people absolutely terrified me . . . speeches were impersonal, and I was certain I would be struck dumb if I ever had to make one.

But, on the campaign trail, there was no place to hide. And hiding wasn't her goal. Helping her husband get elected governor of Georgia, and eventually president of the United States, was her goal. So, speak up she did, over and over again:

> I started practicing at small coffees and receptions, making a deliberate decision to say a few words at each. I always arrived very nervous and headed straight for the bathroom, locked myself in, and said my lines (which couldn't have been more than two minutes long) over and over. . . . For a long time it was torture for me. I never knew when I opened my mouth whether any words would come out or not. My knees shook. I was always afraid I would go blank in the middle of my remarks . . .

However, as time passed,

> It got much easier for me . . . and before the campaign was over I was making brief speeches often.

Her fortitude, her careful preparation, and her willingness to go back again and again, practice and practice some more, eventually paid off.

Mrs. Carter triumphed over her fear because her objective was clear and her desire to express her convictions was strong—so strong that her need to say what was on her mind eventually replaced her fear.

Fear and the Real You

There is no relationship between fear of public speaking and personal resourcefulness, education, or imagination.

Far from it. I am continually impressed by the intelligence and creativity of the people who come to me for help, and how much

they have to offer. They are CEOs, doctors, lawyers, authors, artists, designers, accountants, financial advisors, computer experts, homemakers active in their communities and their houses of worship, professional volunteers, administrators of charities and nonprofit organizations, architects, and middle-management executives.

They are like you, people who can make a difference. What a shame, then, to hear statements like this, from one of my students: "I had something to say and didn't. I might as well not have been there."

When you don't say what you know and feel, when you withhold yourself, the world is poorer for it.

A Fear Inventory

When you have a speaking chore to face, do you procrastinate? Do you avoid preparing, because to do so just seems to make you more nervous? When you visualize yourself in front of the audience, do any of these thoughts run through your mind?

- "They'll think I don't know what I'm doing."
- "I'll make a fool of myself."
- "I'll look stupid."
- "They'll know more about this than I do."
- "My hands will shake."
- "My voice will crack."
- "They'll think I'm disorganized."
- "I'll go blank."
- "I'll lose my place."
- "I'll be boring."
- "I don't know how to do this."
- "I'm not prepared."
- "I don't know how to prepare."
- "I'm no good at this."
- "I can't do it."
- "They'll ask questions I can't answer."

The Cost of Fear

The toll in lost opportunities and frustration exacted by the fear of speaking is enormous. It can thwart your career advancement. In an era of corporate restructuring and downsizing, it can be the difference between keeping and losing a job.

Face it: If you can't orchestrate a meeting, you're of little use to a corporation.

But the cost runs even deeper than that. It keeps men and women from fulfilling their potential and sharing their unique knowledge, skills, and passions.

Fear of speaking can do the following:

- Lead you to believe you are less competent and worthy than you are.
- Keep your ideas from being heard.
- Keep you from applying for the position you really want.
- Become a glass ceiling on your career.
- Cost you your job in a downsizing or corporate restructuring.

What I Teach and Why

I have devoted my life to teaching people to communicate effectively in public—to overcome fear, to find and use their voices, to plan and say what is on their minds and in their hearts.

The Seven Step Program teaches you to replace fear with a deeper, more meaningful involvement in your message. It is an alternative to the method that uses artificial inflections, mechanical gestures, and any other superficialities.

Realizing the difference between these two methods is what turns an ordinary talking head into a competent broadcast communicator who is listened to, believed, and sought after.

Realizing the difference is what turns a forgettable drone into an effective business speaker whose information and ideas energize his or her listeners.

Realizing the difference is what enables a lifelong fearful speaker to become fearless at last.

Because the Seven Step Program is rooted in human values and not performance mechanics, it is unlike any other you may have undertaken in an effort to overcome your fear of speaking.

In this program, you will *not* be taught to:

- Worry about when and how often to make eye contact with your listeners, as if eye contact were a substitute for making a *real* connection with them.
- Practice putting your hands in and taking them out of your pockets, or using other prescribed gestures for effect.
- Vary your vocal modulation, pitch, and tempo for variation's sake.
- Pretend that your listeners are so many heads of cabbage, or that they are all naked, or some other nonsensical fantasy that denies the reality of one-on-one communication. (One of my students, who stuttered as a child, told me, "People were always giving me brainless advice like that.")

In this program, you *will* be taught to:

- Breathe properly.
- Hear and enjoy your real voice.
- Get an immediate response from your listeners.
- Sustain that response and make your presentation a give-and-take that is as stimulating for you as it is for your listeners.
- Speak, at all times, from your intelligence, experience, and beliefs.

Like all teachers, I had teachers, too. And two of them changed my life. What I learned from them formed the foundation for what I teach.

The first was the late Professor Lew Sarett of Northwestern University, who taught me that an "able speaker" is also an "able person"—a person of character.

"An able speaker," Professor Sarett wrote, "is one who possesses or is achieving the power to speak excellently." At the same time, an able person is one "who possesses or is achieving excellence as a human being, one who is developing his own best potentialities in the art of living."

The able speaker, Professor Sarett taught, has something of value to say and has as his or her purpose the communication of those feelings and ideas "toward the achievement of some productive end."

Recognize yourself as a person of character who has something to say, and what you have to say will become more important than your fear of saying it.

My second great teacher was Lee Strasberg, the immensely influential acting coach whose teachings are still practiced.

As a young actress, I learned from him his famous acting "method," which is based on two liberating emotional exercises: the Private Moment and the Affective Memory. Both are designed to help the actor bring his or her own memories and life experiences to bear on the portrayal of a character. That connection to real life brings a compelling dimension of reality to the performance.

You are not here to learn to act, of course. But bringing your own experience, your own sense of reality to bear on your public speaking connects you to your subject and your audience as nothing else can.

So I adapted both of these exercises to my teaching. They form the basis for the work we will do in Step Seven, Give the Gift of Your Conviction.

The real you as a public speaker is there, behind the fear, just waiting to be brought out. All of the work we are about to undertake together is aimed toward that wonderful objective.

But first, let's talk about the fear that has caused you so much pain.