

Achieving the LOOK & SOUND of LEADERSHIP



**ESSENTIAL
COMMUNICATIONS**

TELE 818.788.5357
info@essentialcomm.com
www.essentialcomm.com

EXECUTIVE COACHING TIPS



Listen to this Podcast

Managing Nervousness ▶ 03/30/06

Of fifteen division presidents at a worldwide entertainment conglomerate, Marla is one of only two females. She's always been a nervous speaker but presenting at her first president's meeting took her to new heights (or depths!) of nervousness.

Everyone swiveled towards her as she stood at the end of the long, polished conference table and began to speak. Twenty minutes or so later she finished. Gathering her papers she saw a note in her assistant's handwriting. She was certain it hadn't been there when she started and she wondered where it had come from.

Later, her assistant told her that while Marla was speaking she, the assistant, had entered the back of the conference room, walked the entire length of the conference table, handed the note to Marla and waited while she'd read it. After Marla had thanked her, the assistant again walked the entire length of the room before exiting.

What completely spooked Marla was that she had absolutely no memory of any of that ever happening!

Marla's blindness isn't that unusual. One night I was onstage with an actress who was saying her lines to me. I could see her lips moving but couldn't hear her because my nerves had made me deaf.

At that moment I decided I would never be ruled by my nerves again. And I never have. Here's the technique that saved me. You can use it to manage your own nervousness.

I couldn't hear that actress because my nerves were taking up all the space inside my head. They were saying things that frightened me so badly I couldn't stop myself from listening. Horror always holds us captive, doesn't it?

In order to survive, I knew I would have to get those scary words outside my head. So I created my sock puppet.

I chose the image of a sock puppet because I wanted to imagine something ridiculously non-threatening. In my mind, my sock puppet looked pretty silly. But the words it spoke were ferocious. "You're not an



actor, you're a faker! And that actress never liked working with you. She *knows* you're faking it!" Those barbs might not have hit home with another actor but they sure found an easy target with me.

But once I put those words into the mouth of my sock puppet they were outside me. Now I had a choice. I could choose to listen to my nasty little sock puppet whispering in my ear or I could choose to stay focused on what was really in front of me and listen to the actress. Having that choice changed everything. Now I had power again.

Choosing to let your sock puppet prattle on is freeing. It means you don't have to kill your nerves but you don't have to listen to them either! The words become like a car alarm in the background of your thoughts—they're there but they're no longer overwhelming. You can be nervous and still do your job.

That's what you need to tell yourself about your nerves. "I can be nervous and I can still do my job." Adopt that sentence as your mantra. And then, do your job.

Once you learn to co-exist with your nerves, they're much less scary. You no longer have to respond to every message they hiss in your ear. Have you ever gotten hungry during a meeting? Did you immediately run from the room and race to your stash of snacks? No. You managed yourself in the face of that message. And you can manage yourself when your sock puppet shows up, too. You can be nervous and still do your job. Just be sure that when your sock puppet starts talking to you that you don't talk back to it!

Read a related Tip:

[Eliminating Distractions](#)

To SUBSCRIBE or to CONTRIBUTE an idea for future Executive Coaching Tips, email us at:
info@essentialcomm.com

To SUBSCRIBE to the Podcasts, [click here](#).

To VIEW the entire archive of Executive Coaching Tips, visit:
<http://www.essentialcomm.com/tips/execcoachtips.html>