

Sandra Zimmer

IT'S
YOUR
TIME TO
SHINE

How to Overcome Fear of Public Speaking,
Develop Authentic Presence and Speak from Your Heart



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PART I

**HEALING SPEAKING ANXIETY
& DEVELOPING PRESENCE**



CHAPTER I

Congratulations, You've Got Stage Fright!

You won't believe me now, but it's a good thing to have [stage fright](#). In fact, the more stage fright you have, the better presenter or performer you can become, and the more potential you have to be a deeply impacting communicator and speaker! The reason is that you have the feelings. Your feelings are at the surface where they can be used to create a genuine emotional connection with the audience.

In my [Speaking from the Heart classes](#), it is always the person who has the most stage fright who becomes the most affecting and inspiring speaker. Take Brenda Wind for instance. Brenda came to my class after a long court battle over sexual harassment that had destroyed her self-confi-

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dence. In her first class, Brenda was so terrified to speak in front of her eight classmates (most of whom were just as anxious as she was) that her whole body trembled uncontrollably. To stand in front of her small group was at first deeply frightening, because so much past emotion from the court battle was brought to the surface of her awareness. Her body was wracked with the intensity of her emotion.

Slowly, over several weeks of classes, Brenda began to give herself permission to experience all her feelings and to share them with her classmates. Most felt similar discomfort, so they accepted her intense feelings and accepted her for having them. As she embraced all her emotions, Brenda felt safe to experience them in front of her group. Those emotions, that seemed so negative and created such tension, loosened into a flow of feeling that turned into excitement, enthusiasm and passion to share. She freed her [pent-up passion](#), making it available to use in her speaking.

Just a few months after her first class, Brenda strode confidently onto the stage of the elegant Wortham Theatre, home to Houston's world-class opera and ballet companies. She was there to share her story with 300 women and a handful of men at the "Women Supporting Women Conference," which she had co-produced. As Brenda stood on stage, receiving support from her audience, she consciously chose to claim her space at the center of their attention. To her amazement, she was filled with the emotion of excitement

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as she began her story. The next day, the *Houston Chronicle* declared her talk “the most affecting and riveting of the entire conference.”

For the rest of her life [Brenda](#) will be able to share her insights and ideas with groups of all sizes, and her story is similar to hundreds of other transformations I have witnessed as people go through the [Speaking from the Heart process](#). It can be your story too.

SEEING STAGE FRIGHT IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT

Begin to imagine your stage fright as emotional energy or passion that is not flowing freely through your body, and then you can learn to channel that pent-up passion into a genuine connection with your listeners. That may sound impossible, but it is what you can learn through [this book](#).

Every symptom of stage fright and every bit of tension that you experience provides a piece of information to help you to become more free to be yourself – no matter where you are, who you are with or how many people are present. You are literally going to [transform your stage fright into a powerful presence](#) that radiates to others. You are going to become someone who speaks with such authenticity that your very presence touches others on an unspoken level and gives them permission to be as genuine as you are.

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If that sounds like something you want for yourself, then let's get started!

THE MIND-BODY-EMOTION CONNECTION

Stage fright is fear of feeling in front of others. It is the fear of revealing that you are human and that you have human emotions that are not always positive. It is fear of being seen for who you truly are. Becoming the center of attention also

triggers feelings of shame – shame simply for being who you are.

Stage fright is the fear of feeling in front of others.

In sum, stage fright comes from the belief that you *should* be perfect, and not only are you not perfect, you are not even nearly good enough. These feelings set up the devastating expectation that you are going to be judged as lacking or less valuable than others. The voice of stage fright says, "*Something is fundamentally wrong with you. Everybody else is OK, but you are not.*"

If you have a lot of stage fright, you have absorbed this belief and expectation at a deep level. Therefore, you will need to change them at a deep level. It is important to understand that you did not absorb this belief and expectation because there is something wrong with you. Rather, you absorbed them because there is something very right with you: you are sensitive, and your sensitivity is a valuable gift that you have to give to others. Your task is to claim your sensitiv-

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ity and passion, putting them to work for you, so that you can give your gifts to others, sharing your ideas, awareness, expertise and talents.

David Wheaton is a very sensitive man who participated in [*Speaking from the Heart*](#). A gifted salesman, he was terrific with people one-on-one, and was so likable that he effortlessly closed million-dollar sales of drilling equipment. Powerful executives sensed his integrity and trusted him enough to make huge investments on his recommendation.

When it came to speaking to groups, however, his anxiety made him feel like he would jump out of his skin. His blocked-up passion generated great heat in his body, and he sweated profusely, a source of great humiliation over the years. During his *Speaking from the Heart* groups, he began to bring towels to class to mop up the puddles of perspiration. It became a class joke, and as he learned to make fun of himself, he realized nobody cared about his sweat. It was not a big deal to anyone but him. He had so much fun with his sweating that it ceased to be a humiliation and became the source of self-deprecating humor. Now he doesn't sweat the sweat. All the warmth of his likable personality comes across in his talks to groups, just as it had in one-on-one sales presentations. His attention is now focused on telling his delightful stories about sales success, and he feels free to speak in front of groups.

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When you become the center of attention, your body responds automatically to your preconditioned beliefs and expectations. Your body is flooded with feeling. Your adrenal glands produce adrenaline which rushes through your body to help protect you from potential danger. Your central nervous system fires off intense sensations. You feel overwhelmed and out of control when your body is flooded with so much sensation. Then, to make matters worse, you may experience a secondary wave of negative sensations when you interpret your feelings as being “wrong.”

None of this sensation is bad in itself. It is just emotional excitement felt in your body – energy that is trying to flow through your body when you become stimulated by being the center of attention. If you had been well-nurtured emotionally and had been given a lot of acceptance and approval for feelings and emotions, then you would have learned to experience being the center of attention as pleasurable and exciting. You would not be experiencing the sensations as stage fright. There would be no shame associated with being the center of attention or with having strong feelings. Instead, you would receive the attention as love and support and you would feel excited about receiving it. It would feel like your birthright.

The problem is that very, very few of us received the kind of emotional nurturing that is needed to support us for simply being who we are – human beings with lots of

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emotional sensitivity. Most of us did not receive enough positive acknowledgment for being emotionally sensitive. We did not learn it is okay to be the sensitive people we are. It may even be that we were actually criticized and diminished for our thoughts and feelings, and sensitivity.

Now, as a result, most of us do not experience being the center of attention as anything but uncomfortable and shameful. The feelings seem too intense and out of control because we have not learned to contain the excitement in our bodies. The excitement of attention feels vulnerable and has become associated with judgment and humiliation. Because we don't realize that vulnerability is compelling and attractive to others, we avoid any experience such as public speaking where we might stir up the feelings.

When you do become the center of attention, there is only one thing to do: try to exit the situation by leaving your body. If you can't get out of the situation by avoiding the event, then you try to avoid the sensations felt inside. The way to avoid the sensations is to leave your physical body by abandoning your awareness of it. This abandonment of the physical self occurs instantly and unconsciously.

The feelings seem too intense and out of control, because we have not learned to contain the excitement in our bodies.

What happens is that your mind withdraws full awareness from your body in an attempt to avoid intense emotions. You

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“go into your head.” Energetically, your awareness is drawn up into your head, so that it becomes over-stimulated with energy and sensation. Your head literally feels like it is swelling. From the neck down, you tighten the body in order to freeze the flow of feeling. If the body gets tense enough, it will shake in order to restore a flow of energy through the body. And it all happens so quickly that you can't stop it. It is as if you are trying to zoom out of the top of your head to get away from the sensation of stage fright.

Suddenly, you are no longer present; you no longer have awareness of being in your body. Your awareness is somewhere else. Your body is standing there and your mouth may be speaking the words, but you are gone.

I remember the first time I experienced these sensations. I was in the fifth grade and I had decided to join the band. My parents bought me a shiny silver flute which I tried to learn to play. But, try as I might, I could not understand the concept of notes. Every day at practice, the band director would stop practice and try to explain. He would kneel in front of me and focus all his attention on trying to explain notes to me while all the kids watched. I was embarrassed and humiliated. Each day, I had the same strange reaction to the situation. It was as if the room filled up with water and he was talking to me underwater. I could not hear him because I could not stay present and face what seemed to be a humiliation.

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Since then, I have experienced many uncomfortable and strange reactions to being the center of attention. Almost always, I would tremble and shake with a terrible force. Sometimes, my awareness would seem to be outside my body as if I were watching myself from a distance. Often I just became stiff and wooden, robot-like in my presentation. Sometimes I felt as if I were struck dumb. Now I understand these were all ways of avoiding the situation by leaving my body. I would simply go “un-present” whenever I was faced with a difficult situation.

In becoming un-present, you choose not to be there. The mental part of your awareness withdraws from the physical and emotional parts.

In becoming un-present, you choose not to be there. The mental part of your awareness withdraws from the physical and emotional parts, because you cannot stand to experience the fear, discomfort and shame felt in your body. Your mind perceives the situation as a dire threat to your very survival. This splitting off of your mind from body and emotions leaves you feeling disoriented and dis-integrated. Your head may feel swollen and fuzzy, so filled with buzzing energy that you cannot think clearly. Your body loses strength and stability. Since your muscles are not relaxed, your body begins to shake and tremble in an attempt to get energy flowing. I am sure you can describe many more symptoms that occur, including sweaty palms, fat tongue, neck and face flushing, heart pounding, loss of breath and a high, squeaky voice.

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There is no way to do a great presentation or performance or to communicate effectively in this un-present and dis-integrated state. To regain your potential, you must begin to re-integrate the different aspects of yourself amid the intensity of being the center of attention. You must learn to stay present so that you have your whole self, with all your parts working together, when you present, perform or communicate in front of others. This is the task, and though it seems daunting, it is not as difficult as you might expect.

Inside yourself, you can relax into the tension and discover a new, safe ground within your own body, a quiet place of power and presence that has always been there, waiting for you to access it.

The secret is to focus attention into your fear, into the sensations of tension inside your body. Once you do that, you will find that the experience is not as bad as you expected. Inside yourself, you can relax into the tension and discover a new, [safe ground within your own body](#), a quiet place of [power and presence](#) that has always been there, waiting for you to access it. And when you do make connection with this internal realm, passion-energy starts to flow through your body and you are freed up to speak, perform or communicate from a deeper level.

If you pay close attention to how you feel during stage fright, you will notice that the feeling is very familiar, and about as old as your earliest memories. It is the same feeling that you had when you were a small child – powerless, overwhelmed by the larger world and totally dependent on others

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for your very survival. The only possible survival strategy was to please those who could nurture and protect you, and more often than not, that meant hiding your true self, lest anyone become displeased or disappointed with the real you.

Tune in carefully, and you will experience that you actually feel like a small child when you become the center of attention. I think it is this “small child” feeling that people are so reluctant to experience in front of others. It feels so powerless, like we have no control. When we bring our mature consciousness to the same situation, the feeling of helplessness is almost too much to bear, so we leave our bodies.

Without realizing it, we often automatically project the image of a critical, negative parent onto the audience, granting them tremendous authority to reject us (most assuredly, we believe) or accept us (hardly a chance of that, we feel). We just assume they will respond to us with the same critical judgment we experienced as children, no matter that the audience is most likely friendly and excited to hear what we have to say!

[To heal stage fright, you have to relax at the center of attention](#) and reclaim the openness and innocence of a small child. Even someone who faced the worst barrage of criticism as a child still has a primordial place of innocence within, waiting to be uncovered and re-energized to empower the adult he or she has become.

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Reclaiming this state of innocence simply means accepting the truth of your feelings and thoughts in front of others. It means to drop the mask of adulthood so that you can stand present as you are before a group and really be there. When you can drop the mask, you feel free to share your real thoughts, feelings, insights and awareness with others.

To heal stage fright, you have to relax at the center of attention and reclaim the openness and innocence of a small child.

Only then can you truly [heal stage fright](#), as Kathy did when she took a *Speaking from the Heart* course.

Kathy is a bright, warm and friendly nurse who had taken a job in the medical field as an educator and consultant. She had great expertise in her area of nursing, yet she kept avoiding actually teaching the programs, always managing to get someone else to teach them for her. For the first several weeks of the course, Kathy cried every time she stood in front of her group. Try as she might to control it, the tears poured forth every session. Her group kept gently urging her to cry when she felt it, not to hold back the tears. One class session, she finally told a story about a childhood experience that she thought she had handled and put behind her.

When I was five years old I was sexually molested. I told my parents, who supported me as best they could. The problem for me actually happened when I had to go to court to testify against the perpetrator. My parents had told me to get on the witness stand

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and tell my story. They warned me to be sincere, tell the truth and to be polite because this was a very serious issue. As I sat on the stand, I began to tell my story. I felt okay to tell it and was doing fine as I spoke. Then I looked through a window at the back of the courtroom and saw my family. I was so afraid that I would begin to laugh that I could not go on with my story, and I stopped talking. I remember having the sensation that I was observing myself from above the courtroom. The attorney could not get me to finish my story. Since that experience, I would freeze up, shut down and want to run whenever I had to speak in front of others.

Kathy's classmates were stunned at the pain of her story and the passion with which she finally shared it. Years of pent-up emotions of fear and sadness seemed to be released in telling her story, and her peers showered her with praise for her courage.

The week after Kathy told this story to her *Speaking from the Heart* group, she came into class with a different attitude and a [presence](#) that the whole group noticed. She seemed to have a [personal power and strength](#) that we had never seen in her. She was able to truly be there with us. She was visibly and palpably more confident about getting up in front of her group, and she never cried again in class. Instead, she spoke with a mature depth of feeling that awed and inspired her

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group. Within a month, Kathy taught her first in-service nurse training.

The child-like part of you is the creative potential of your soul. When your inner child or authentic self has been frozen, it will surface as stage fright any time you are in a position in which you are feeling judged. One of the greatest gifts to come from transforming stage fright is to reclaim your authentic creative spirit. Then you can be who you are wherever you are, warts and all, without pretense, without image, without apology. If you have a great deal of stage fright, you are being called upon to learn to accept yourself for who you are and to give yourself more freely to others. Stage fright is an indication that you have a lot of passion and creative energy that needs to be freed up, so that you can share the gifts of your soul with others.

Freeing up your creative expression releases an enormous amount of power within you, often leading to empowering new accomplishments that go far beyond the immediate goal of wanting to improve your public speaking. That's what happened with Carol, a tall, quiet and very sweet accountant who came to *Speaking from the Heart*, as she said, "to discover her confidence and creativity."

When she started class, Carol seemed smaller than her elegant height, and her face and demeanor seemed much younger than her 28 years. Carol knew she had much more

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to share with the world than she was allowing herself to give or to show. Her creativity was trapped inside her, and she was a lioness hiding in the skin of a mouse. It took all of her courage to come to class and stand in front of her group, but Carol was committed to opening up her creativity.

As she deepened her awareness of herself by facing the feelings brought up by being the center of attention, she began to connect to her heart's desire: publishing a magazine. Not long after she connected with her dream, Carol and another classmate, Ginger, founded *The Indigo Sun*, a New Thought magazine based in Houston. Within three years, the magazine was circulating in five cities throughout Texas, and Carol and Ginger had a radio show and website. Since then, Carol has become an influential leader in the New Thought movement, giving her gifts with passion and open-hearted abandonment, and helping to transform others along the way.

AUTHENTICITY & STAGE FRIGHT

The process of transforming stage fright and fear of public speaking is all about [developing authenticity](#). In a real sense stage fright is fear of authenticity because it is fear of feeling in front of other people. So let's try to define authenticity and what it means to be authentic.

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Authenticity means that your outer expression matches your inner reality. That is, what you are thinking, feeling, perceiving, believing and wanting are all expressed to some degree in what you say and do. Authenticity is giving yourself permission to express your inner life genuinely to the outside world of other people. It is permission to feel your real feelings and think your real thoughts and share those with others in some way that seems appropriate to the relationship and situation.

Authenticity means that your outer expression matches your inner reality.

The reason that authenticity is important is that our degree of comfort is related to our degree of authenticity. The more willing we are to be genuine with our expression, the more comfortable we feel with ourselves. Conversely, our fear and anxiety is locked up in our reluctance to be real with our thoughts and feelings. People who are anxious and uncomfortable in the world are simply not giving themselves permission to be genuine. They somehow believe that it is dangerous to be real. Often they have had experiences where being real was not allowed or supported, so they have learned to hide or mask their real selves from others. The habitual behavior of withholding their authentic feelings and thoughts shows up as stage fright and fear to speak in front of others. So, a commitment to authenticity is imperative to heal stage fright. My hope is that [this book](#) will give you some courage to risk being more authentic in all situations, whether in front of others or in daily life.

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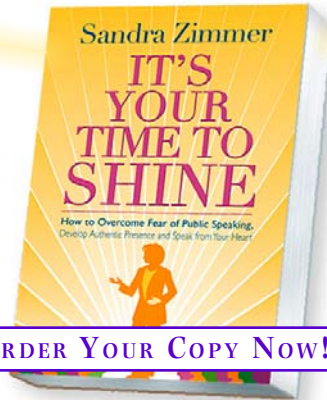
Tyrone Moncriste, a criminal defense attorney, uses the power of authenticity in the opening moments of his jury trials. Tyrone, an award winning speaker, says that juries have a sixth sense and can perceive when a lawyer is not authentic. He had this experience in trial not long after he started attending a *Speaking from the Heart* group.

Going to trial on a murder case, I started my voir dire in my usual manner, intent on establishing my position of authority. I had been taking Speaking From the Heart, and something said in class sprang to mind. I looked out at my potential jurors and saw their fear and tension. I stopped cold and began to tell them about my fears as an attorney representing someone who could lose his life if I did not do a good job. I saw them relax and lean forward toward me. Suddenly they were with me. We were "one." I experienced a connection that was awesome. From that day on, I have always created a connection with my jurors. We establish such a relationship, that they always seek me out at the end of a trial to discuss the process we have been through together. I can't begin to express the power of connection to your listeners.

If you found Chapter 1 of

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intriguing or helpful, there is much more!



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Here are some more helpful resources and links:

- [Transform Stage Fright into Authentic Presence Weekend Workshop](#)
- [Speaking from the Heart 6-Week Courses](#)
- [For Individual Coaching with Sandra Zimmer by phone or Skype from anywhere in the world](#)
- [For Individual Coaching with Sandra Zimmer in person](#)
- [Video of Sandra Zimmer in 1995](#)
- [Listen to Sandra speak about stage fright and fear of public speaking \(5 minute audio\)](#)

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