

As a sample of what you can expect from *The Face & Tripod*, there follow –

- The Foreword, and then one of the shortest chapters...
- Chapter 26: Harness Your Nerves

Foreword

For many years I have been helping business leaders get the most out of their public speaking; and the process nearly always begins with a pattern that has become so familiar as to be instinctive.

I will previously have had a meeting with him/her, during which I was being evaluated. Meanwhile, of course, I was conducting my own evaluation, asking questions and gently probing to learn key things. Immediately after the meeting I will have scribbled copious notes.

When we get together, before getting down to business, there is a certain amount of apparently inconsequential chit-chat. And all this serves to guide me in my approach: helping me find the right buttons to push¹.

And now, here I am, about to embark on the first part of the course with you – the theory lecture that precedes the practical session. But I have to do it ‘cold’. We have probably never met: so I don’t know whether to be formal or chatty or anything else about the style I should adopt. I can’t watch you to monitor how quickly you are taking on board each point I make, thus governing when or how to move on to the next².

My solution is to keep this book super-tight. For reasons that you will understand when you have read the volume, when I am lecturing or conducting seminars I scatter reminiscences and anecdotes all over the place. For our purposes now I have almost entirely abandoned that practice.

The reason is that once you have read through the book linearly – which I recommend, ignoring footnotes that refer you to other places (there have been a couple already) – it should subsequently become a source of quick and helpful reference. And that’s when all those cross-references will come into their own. This is why I have kept the chapters starkly, almost monastically, short. This is why I have devoted each chapter to just one subject. This is why I include a fairly detailed Contents Page.

¹ You might find all this rather familiar when you reach the second of the Cardinal Rules at the beginning of this volume (but don’t look now).

² You might likewise find this rather familiar in several places in this volume when I discuss the importance of focusing on your audience (but don’t look now).

Lies

If you calibrate the skill of Speaking on a percentage scale, with 0 being a frightened little rabbit, and 100 being an inspired and inspiring orator, the key to my getting you to around 80 is to keep it simple and for me to restrict my advice to instilling good fundamental habits. Once you have reached that 80% point I can then open a Pandora's Box containing things that can lift you into the stratosphere, but which would have been counter-productive and dangerous for you to dabble in before you had the other principles firmly nailed. And some of those things even run slightly counter to advice in this book! What I am saying is that there are certain places where I have had to be a little economical with the truth.

This then may be the first advertisement for the volume that will follow...

Glossary

Speech/Presentation. What's the difference? At the risk of my opening myself to the first accusation of truth-economy, let's just assume that there is no difference and that the terms are therefore interchangeable.

He-or-She. I'm sorry if this is found to be politically incorrect, but I really don't want to waste your time and mine on my forever adding riders to smooth over gender-specific pronouns. I did it in the second paragraph of this foreword, as a gesture of goodwill. Could we now have a deal that I always mean both genders, no matter which I use? Actually there are a couple of gender-specific pieces of advice which you will spot when you reach them.

The Face & Tripod. What's this ridiculous title? It sounds like the name of a pub! Whenever I utter the name to someone who has done a course with me, they smile and nod knowingly. So will you.

***I'd like to dedicate this book,
with sincere gratitude,
to those with whom
I have conducted courses over the years so far.
Their searching questions compelled me to find
answers.***

Brian Robinson
December 2009

Chapter 26: Harness Your Nerves

- and Exploit Them

Butterflies in the stomach are no problem, provided they are flying in formation.-

(attributed to Lawrence Olivier)

All the preceding chapters in this section have been aimed at suppressing nerves: coping with them: treating them like naughty interlopers that should be banished. Now finally I want to look at a more positive approach to them.

You will never get rid of all the butterflies in your stomach – nor should you. (The day that you stop feeling nervous is the day you will start getting boring.) But it doesn't matter because you can exploit them and make them work for you.

The butterflies are there because you are anxious. But what are you anxious about?

- About appearing in front of so many people?
- About the possibility of making a fool of yourself?
- About being a failure?

I could go on in that vein, but that is a big enough sample for you to look and see the direction of the focus that generates those anxieties. You're thinking about yourself: you're being *self-conscious*.

I've said it elsewhere in this volume, but I'll repeat it as often as necessary.

Don't think about you: think about the importance of your message: think about your audience, and how important it is that they grasp the importance of your message.

What if they don't? What if you aren't marshalling your arguments clearly enough? What if you don't lay out the case strongly enough? What if...?

You see what I'm doing here? I'm taking your anxiety and, rather than trying to eliminate it, I'm diverting it: replacing it with a more constructive version. Now you are becoming message-focussed and audience-focussed, so your anxiety and its attendant nervousness are channelled towards your making the best damn speech the world ever heard, whereas previously they were feeding a destructive victim mentality.

And now your butterflies are starting to fly in formation.