

Overcoming Stagefright (Exclusive excerpt from RAISE YOUR VOICE, 2nd Edition)

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Vocal Coach Jaime Vendera ("Ultimate Breathing Workout") stops in with an exclusive excerpt from his newly updated vocal strengthening bible, "Raise Your Voice, 2nd Edition." Wanna learn how to overcome stage fright when you perform (who doesn't right?), then read on...

Like Jim Gillette of Nitro and Vocal Power DVD fame once said, the mind is a powerful thing, which means that the mind can affect your voice and performance in negatives ways as well. So although I know that after this last section that you are all on your way to changing your lives for the better, I still think it is very important that we discuss situations that can affect you negatively and explain to you how to overcome your thoughts and fears and turn the situations into positive ones. Let's start with stage fright.

Stage fright is the fear of performing before an audience. Feeling nervous before a performance is not uncommon. Many well-known singers have commented on stage fright in interviews. They have found ways to deal with their fears and so can you.

If you are developing fear or nervousness before performing, follow these three simple rules: Breathe, Vocalize, and Visualize.

First, re-establish your breathing; when the nerves kick in, your breathing speeds up. Deep breathing calms the nerves and relaxes the body. Try slowly inhaling through the nose and exhaling out through the mouth. Repeat the process ten times. Next, vocalize by performing the exercises from the Vocal Stress Release program, which is explained in Part Three of this book. Nervousness tends to produce a shaky tone in your voice. By reconnecting to your voice, you help to eliminate the waver. Finally, visualize a perfect performance and repeat some positive affirmations. Above all, believe in yourself.

Are you having trouble with the visualization process in step three? Do you want to know the secret to successful visualization? All you need to do is close your eyes and focus only on your desired result for four minutes! When I say focus, I mean hear it, think it, feel it and see it in your mind for four minutes! That's it! Sounds easy, doesn't it? Well, four minutes is tougher than it seems. If you can actually focus on your goal for four minutes without letting your mind drift to another subject and avoid the senseless thoughts that will drift into your mind then you will accomplish your goal. When thoughts drift into your mind let them float right out. I guarantee that you'll start thinking about things like, "I wonder what time it is?" or "what should I eat for dinner?" So set a timer, focus on your goal, and let the unimportant thoughts float right by! Don't forget to feel it. You've got to feel the situation to turbo charge your mind to bring it into reality. If you don't have the feeling of the experience, you don't have the fuel needed to obtain that experience.

So you are applying all three steps and you are still having butterflies. There's no need to worry because it can be a good thing. It can bring forth the fight or flight response, which is a sudden rush of adrenaline in the body that occurs when you become extremely afraid or mad. Learn to use the butterflies in a positive way, like pumping yourself up for an awesome performance instead of upsetting your stomach to the point of throwing up and mentally talking yourself out of singing. The choice is yours: you can either give the performance of a lifetime or you can clam up. The adrenaline rush is under your control; it will work either way you tell it to, so make it a positive. It's all in the way you perceive the situation.

Know Who You Are!

Fear and anxiety can affect you mentally and physically. The week before I flew to San Francisco to film the MythBusters episode, I became ill. I had been taking my usual supplements for vocal health, but nonetheless, I still developed a terrible cold. I couldn't even talk two days before my flight, and even considered canceling at the last minute. As soon as I arrived at the hotel in San Francisco the day before the shoot, I went directly to bed. The next morning when I arrived at the theater for the shoot, I was still hoarse and my sinuses were clogged. If you listen to the way I sound on the show, you can tell I had a sinus infection. So how did I deal with the situation? I realized that I was picked because I was considered the expert at breaking glasses. By that time, I had already broken 15 glasses. I walked up on to the stage and looked around the hall at the hundreds of empty seats. I realized that these seats were going to be filled by millions of viewers. Associate producer Linda Wolkovitch asked me if I was nervous. My reply? "Nervous? Not at all! When I

am on stage, I'm home! I knew I was ready and wouldn't let anything prevent me from succeeding! Believe and you will achieve!!!

A similar situation happened to me during the filming of the Japanese television show, The Amazing Human Program. It was right after Christmas and I must have caught a bug from being around tons of relatives. I was in bed for six days before filming the show. On the first day of filming I had a 102 degree temperature and could barely speak, but when film started rolling I came alive and put on my best performance. I visualized the outcome I wished to achieve. I am not going to say it wasn't rough, because it was. But the point is, you can achieve what you believe and I believed that I would do fine. I don't feel like my illness was from nerves because I did the job, but you never know. I could have subconsciously, created the situation. But I know from years of experience that you can sing with a sore throat, fever and stuffy nose.

This brings me to my next point: Quit making excuses! If you are sick, you can still perform just as good. Quit telling the fans, "Oh, I'm sick tonight. I have a cold and my throat is sore." The only time you shouldn't sing is if you have laryngitis, and if this was the case, you would definitely know. It feels like you are swallowing razors. I see and hear the "sick" excuse all the time. Don't follow suit.

CRITICISM: POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE

One thing that I learned in my teens is that criticism affects your performance. But how it affects your performance is up to you. I have been in a couple of situations where I let another person's comments bog me down so much that it affected my singing voice.

I remember being about seventeen and a rival band came to see me play. At the beginning of the night everyone got along fine, but as the night progressed and the other singer got drunk out of his mind, he persisted to tell me how I really couldn't sing that well and he was a dozen times better than me. Keep in mind that I was seventeen and this guy was about thirty. Needless to say, it made me doubt myself as a singer. He was a good singer and maybe I didn't compare?

Years later when I actually had confidence, I ran into a buddy who was playing in a band with Mr. Vocal Guru himself. I went to one of their practices and they asked me if I wanted to jam on a song and I ended up singing "Immigrant Song". Needless to say, he tried to sing along and when he realized he couldn't hit the notes quite as well as I could, he got mad, stormed out and left. This story isn't about revenge or ego. It is about the fact that you must realize fact from fiction and I should never have let him make me doubt my singing abilities, so learn to shake off negative comments.

Another childhood memory that drove so deep that I quit singing in front of people for over a year happened during my freshman year in high school. We were at a marching band competition (yes, I was a band geek who played the saxophone) and I was waiting for my friend who had to run back to the bus. I started singing a song called "Oh Sheila" by the band Ready for the World. My friend looked at me and said, "James, you suck, give it up. Let me sing it and show you how it is done." My feelings were destroyed by the sarcasm in his voice and I became very self-conscious of my singing voice. I came to find out from a mutual friend that he was very jealous of me and meant to be hurtful. Our friendship lasted a few more years and as I figured him out more and more, I realized that it wouldn't have mattered what I did, he always believed he was better.

I am not saying to disregard constructive criticism, but learn the difference. You have got to learn to divorce yourself from your emotions in order to listen and observe the criticism and to decide if it is beneficial or not. There is a lesson to be learned in all criticism.

Okay, here's another story. The year was 1988 and I was drunker than a skunk onstage, singing "Talk Dirty to Me" by Poison and bringing down the house or so I thought…

The song ended and as I staggered offstage to take a break, I looked around the room and I knew people loved me. Our light man, Gary Gamble, took me to the side to teach me the best lesson I have ever learned during my time in that band:

He said, "Are you rocking out, kicking butt, sounding amazing tonight?" I was like, "Oh yeah. I sound amazing!" He replied, "You sound like shit!" The next thing I know, Gary was all over me like white on rice in a glass of milk on a paper plate in a snowstorm. In a very intimidating tone, he then said, "When are you going to wake up and realize you've been given a gift? I just cannot believe you are throwing away such a talent by letting these guys influence you to drink and smoke. When are you going to grow up and be the singer you are meant to be?"

I swear to you that I immediately sobered up and I felt so terrible that the realization of how bad I sounded made me want to be the best I could be. I quit drinking and smoking and that is the night I decided I wanted to learn as much about singing and the voice as I possible could. So wherever you are, Gary, thank you for saving me. This was the time when constructive criticism meant everything in the world. Pay attention to what people tell you. You'll genuinely know

who is trying to help and who is trying to hurt you.

Become the Master of Your Own Mind

Before moving on I want to share one last personal experience because I believe it demonstrates the power of the mind. When filming le’ soiree’ de’ L’Etrange, in Paris France, I was in perfect voice. I felt vocally incredible, had complete range and power and was well rested even after an eight-hour flight. However, during our glass breaking rehearsal, I could not for the life of me, shatter a single wineglass. I went through about forty wineglasses and thirty minutes of intense continual screaming before one actually broke! It was a bit stressful because this was just rehearsal before the big show. Vocally, I felt fine because of my technique. A few cool downs and some hot water kept me in tune.

Right after rehearsal, the producers of the show asked me to make sure I wore the exact same clothes during the live filming…Just in case I could not break one live, they would show the footage from earlier. I told them not to worry, I WILL break the glass live; that’s the money shot. Still, they weren’t as sure as I was.

So, now I am back stage and I can see the crowd through the curtains. Yes, I wore the same clothes, although I KNEW it was not necessary. What did I do? I did my four-minute meditation, followed by an intense almost meditative visualization of my performance. I saw, in my mind, the most amazing show performance I could fathom, over and over and over again until I walked on stage. In my mind, the act was done. What happened? Go to my website and watch the show;) I achieved what I conceived. The crowd went nuts and my agent was totally blown away. Oh ye, of little faith, haha. Point is, all of this mind stuff REALLY WORKS!!!