

Secrets From the Stage I: In The Zone

Conquering Stage Nerves & Developing Relaxed Confidence in Speaking

Iain Duncan

www.iainduncanconsulting.com

iain@iainduncan.com

Overview:

Everyone gets stage nerves - performers, athletes, and speakers, whether rank beginners or world class pros. And for public speakers, out-of-control nerves significantly diminish the impact of our presentations. But there are solutions. In this session, we examine the neuroscience and physiology of stage anxiety and discuss concepts and techniques from the performing arts and performance psychology to get us relaxed, confident, and in the zone.

Bio:

Iain Duncan's transformative sessions on the intersections of performance and business combine deeply researched content with exciting performing demonstrations and engaging comedy. In the *Secrets From The Stage* seminar series, Iain draws on his experience on stage and in the boardroom to help audiences become more confident, eloquent, and influential public speakers. Iain has been performing as a circus entertainer, musician, and variety comedian for over 25 years, and has worked for 15 years in software, as a consultant, manager, sales person, and start-up director. His background uniquely qualifies him as a trainer and speaker able to bridge the worlds of business and soft skills. Participants learn, improve, and have fun!

Learning Objectives:

Participants will learn about the physical, mental, and neurological effects of stage nerves, and why learning to handle them is critical for public speakers. They will gain an understanding of the concept of *optimal level of arousal*, and be introduced to different types of training and rehearsing used in both the arts and competitive athletics to achieve this. They will leave with concrete techniques they can use on an ongoing basis, in preparation for specific presentations, and prior to and during performances. These practises will result in both immediate gains and in lasting improvements, better enabling them to speak confidently and naturally under pressure.

Technical Details:

The session may be presented as either a talk, round-table discussion, or interactive workshop, with length ranging from 1 to 4 hours depending on format. The content in the detailed outline will be adjusted as needed for session length; the outline targets a 1.5-2h presentation. Slide projection is optional as participants will receive a paper hand-out with notes, exercises, and further reading.

High-Level Outline

- **Introduction**
 - Overview and purpose of session, Iain's background and work
- **Performing Demonstration**
 - Circus skills demonstration and discussion of nerves
- **Stage Nerves and Public Speaking**
 - Successful speaking, the science of stage anxiety, and what it means for speakers
- **Performance Psychology: Getting "In The Zone"**
 - Performance and sports psychology, achieving optimal arousal levels
- **The Play-to-Performance Spectrum**
 - The 7 Types of training, and the importance of each of them
- **Technique 1: Practicing Improvisation**
 - How to master improvised delivery, the key to relaxed and spontaneous speaking
- **Technique 2: Preparing with Simulations**
 - Get bomb-proof with performance simulations and distraction training
- **Technique 3: Performing In The Zone**
 - Pre-show routines, the power of visualization, and owning the space
- **Conclusion**
 - Building a life of relaxed confidence on stage

Detailed Outline

- **Introduction**

- Purpose of the session
- Iain's introduction, his work in the performing arts and in business
- Iain's training and education in performing arts of various disciplines

- **Performing Demonstration**

- Circus skills performance and demonstration
- Discussion of stage anxiety, why listen to a performer
- Iain's approach to helping speakers develop relaxed confidence

- **Stage Nerves and Public Speaking**

- Defining success: what constitutes a successful and influential talk
- Acute Stress Response: triggers, evolutionary roots, and purpose
- Elevated Arousal: physiological, neurological and psychological effects
- Effects on speakers and audiences, both positive and negative
- It's supposed to happen: reframing as a normal part of the process

- **Performance Psychology and Getting "In The Zone"**

- Discussion of effects of over-arousal and under-arousal on performance
- Concept of Optimal Level of Arousal, core purpose of sports psychology
- What happens when we are "In The Zone"
- Target self-talk for achieving ideal focus and arousal level
- It's a learned skill: work we can do to enable getting in the zone

- **The Play-to-Performance Spectrum**

- Introduction to the 7 types of practise, rehearsal, and performing
- Differences between the Play & Drill side vs the Simulation & Performance side
- Determination of session goals, approach to mistakes, optimal arousal level
- Importance of working skills across entire spectrum, common blind spots
- Introduction to 3 types of work we will do across the spectrum:
 - Play/Drill: Practising fundamentals skills for improvisation
 - Rehearsal/Simulation: Preparing with simulated performances
 - Performing: Mental visualizations and pre-show routines

- **Technique 1: Practicing Improvisation**

- Ongoing practise across the Play/Drill points on the spectrum
- Attributes of this point of spectrum for goals, mistakes, arousal
- Scripted, improvised, and semi-improvised delivery

- Concept of pre-hearing in improvised content
- Effects of pre-hearing on performance delivery and arousal level
- How to practise pre-hearing in improvisation, demonstration
- **Technique 2: Preparing with Simulations**
 - Rehearsals across the Rehearsal/Simulated Performance points on the spectrum
 - Attributes of this point of spectrum for goals, mistakes, arousal
 - Simulated Performances: what they are, importance of, why they work
 - Distraction and Disaster Training: what they are, importance of, why they work
 - The use of simulations in the arts and athletics
 - How to use simulations, demonstration
- **Technique 3: Performing In The Zone**
 - Techniques we will discuss for day-of and during performance
 - Owning the space: importance of knowing performance conditions and walk throughs
 - Mental Visualization: mental rehearsal of exact performance conditions
 - Personal pre-show routines, what they are, why they work
 - Physical warm up, stretching, cool down
 - Self-talk and cue affirmations
 - Choosing and addressing our relationship with the audience
 - How these practises affect our focus and arousal level
- **Conclusion**
 - Recap of what we covered
 - Acclimatization, importance of logging the miles, opportunities to do so
 - Building a lifestyle to support development of relaxed confidence