

# Why We Struggle With High-Stakes Speaking & How To Become A Master

**Jacob Morgan** 00:00

Well, I'm excited to announce that my brand new book leading with vulnerability is now officially available for pre order is vulnerability for leaders the same as it is for every buddy else? The answer to that question is no, I argue that you should not be vulnerable at work. But instead, you should lead with vulnerability. And there is a key and crucial difference there. But if you want to find out what that is, and how to do it, you will need to order your copy at lead with vulnerability.com. And if you preorder a copy, you're gonna get access to some really cool bonuses, including some exclusive CEO interviews, including those with the CEOs of GE, American Airlines, Edward Jones, and a couple others, you're gonna get a sneak peek of the book before it comes out. And you will get a private invite to a webinar that I am hosting, where I will be sharing some of the concepts and ideas from the book before it actually comes out. So head over to lead with vulnerability.com. Thanks, everyone, for tuning in to today's episode of great leadership. My guest today is Matt Abrahams, he is the author of a brand new book and I actually got an advanced reader copy, you can see it right there. Look how beautiful that is. It is called Think faster, talk smarter. He's also a lecturer in organizational behavior at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, and the host of his own very popular podcast called Think fast talk smart communication techniques. Matt, thank you so much for joining me.

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I am thrilled to be here with you, Jacob. Thank you,

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I am very excited to talk to you. So I had the opportunity to go through a lot of the different components of your book. And before we dive into some of these things, why don't we begin with just some background information about you and why you even decided to write this book to begin with.

01:56

So there really two major influences on the book. One is from my my life, you might have noticed my last name starts with a B, my entire life I have been called on in the moment and put on the spot to speak I always knew in classes from elementary school all the way through high school, where I would sit and whenever the teacher asked a question. As a former high school teacher, I taught high school for a couple years, many of us can get lazy and we just do things alphabetically. So I always went first. So the book is all about how to speak effectively, in the moment answering questions, giving feedback, fixing our mistakes, making small talk, and that really initiated in me when I was a kid, and just like wow, every time I'm on the spot, and and then later teaching at Stanford Business School, where I've been for over 12 years now. I teach a class on strategic communication. And the deans of the school several years ago came to me and said, Can you help us? Our students who are some of the best and brightest young leading minds, are struggling with cold calling, you know, when the evil mean Professor

looks at you and says, What do you think, and you have to respond on the spot, these amazingly brilliant students were struggling, they would literally not be able to respond. And so they asked me, Is there something you can do to help them so my own personal experience struggling with it, and then being asked to look into it led me to do a deep dive academically doing research, looking at a myriad of fields, from psychology, to anthropology, to improvisation, to create a methodology that today, every Stanford MBA has the opportunity to go through this content, and we find that it helps them to feel more comfortable and confident in their communication.

**Jacob Morgan 03:37**

Yeah, it's so interesting, I remember when I was younger, sighted drama and acting and all that sort of stuff in classes. And there used to be these competitions, I can't remember the organization that would put it on, but they would do a series of different competitions, you would have to do math. And so one of the things would be for example, they would give you a couple of sheets of paper, and then you would get up in given groups of teams. And they would say, build the highest tower, you can out of these groups of paper. And one of the contests that they would actually do is they would have students pick a topic out of a hat. And then you would have three to five minutes to prepare something that you wanted to present to a panel of judges. And I'll never forget the topic that I pulled out of a hat was something on earthquakes. And I was sitting there thinking I must have been, I don't know, 1314 steps, I was young, and I'm thinking holy shit, like earthquakes decide to basically spent three to five minutes preparing some sort of BS about giving a talk on earthquakes. And so from a young age, I really understand same thing if you're acting right, and if you forget your lines, the audience doesn't always know that you forgot your lines unless you act like you forgot it, right? If you freeze and go, oops, I forgot my lines. Everyone's gonna know. But if you kind of make something up that's in the flow and keep going with it. A lot of people are never going to know the difference. So I understood from a very young age, the importance of being able to You not just communicate and speak, but also, you know, boasted a little bit here and there when you when you have to. So I love that you used to get called on as a kid and you know the a, b? And what do you find? Is the big struggle here? Is it when people get called on? Is it more fear? Is it more just genuinely, I don't know what to what to say, because I don't have the information? Like, why is it that so many people struggle with this?

**05:34**

That's a big question. And it's got lots of components to the answer. So I'll try to I'll start at a high level, and we can dive deeper, if you wish. So anxiety is one thing for sure. Many people, most people are nervous in high stakes speaking situations, regardless of if they're planned, or spontaneous. So anxiety certainly looms large. We also have a desire to do well, we want to do our best some of us really, really, really want to do it right? There is no right way I tell all my students, I've been doing this for a long, long time, there is no right way to communicate, there are better ways and worse ways, but no right way. But we are constantly evaluating and judging ourselves as we are speaking. And that can get in the way as well, because we only have a fixed bandwidth, our brain can only do so many things at a time. And if part of me is judging what I'm saying, while I'm saying it, it reduces what I can do. We also tend to see these situations as threatening, we see them as challenges as threats and therefore become very defensive. We retreat both physically and even mentally. So if we can reframe these as opportunities, potential good things could come. And so all of these combined together to make these situations really, really challenging, and we're afraid we're not going to have the right thing. You know, we don't

know what to say. So add all that to the fact that we might not know you didn't know, when you were a young kid, everything you needed to know about earthquakes. So that made it even more stressful. So yeah, there are a lot of reasons that these things are that these situations are very nerve wracking for us. But there are things we can do at each and every one of those points to make ourselves feel more comfortable and confident.

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I have two young kids, a son who just turned three and a daughter who's about to turn seven. And even I noticed from them, and I don't know where the stress and anxiety necessarily comes from. But even with kids, if I just ask them something, and you know, some sometimes they're okay with just how was your day and things like that. But if it gets to, you know, what, what do you think about something, or something that they have to think a little bit more, they get a little bit shy, and it's like, I don't know, this and that. And it's, it's funny, it's almost like speaking goes against our biology. It's almost like you're supposed to be scared, and you have to get through that. So it's funny that I just noticed that with my kids too. And I'm always trying to tell my daughter, especially when she's speaking, especially if she's asking for something that she wants. I say you have to speak up so people can actually hear what, alright, even if you're asking for dessert, you know, tell me what you want. Daddy, can I am desserts like No, tell me, Hey, Dad, I ate dinner, I deserve some dessert. So it's,

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well, I applaud your daughter for wanting dessert. I think that's the best part of the meal. I have two teenagers. So my kids are at the other end of the spectrum and the fact that your kids still talk to you. That's a great thing. Those of us who study this, we believe that it's evolutionary, we believe that it is in our evolutionary best interest to be nervous about speaking. And here's why. It's as a species, our relative status in an interaction really matters. And I'm not talking about who drives the fanciest car who's got the most social media followers. I'm talking about status in a hierarchy. And when our species was evolving, we would hang out in bands of about 100 150 people were you ranked in among those people mattered a lot. If you had higher status, you got food, you got shelter, you got reproductive opportunities. If you were low person in that group, things were not good for you. Your life was at risk. You might not get food, you might not get shelter, and that's ingrained into who we are. So when we risk speaking up, we risk our status. And that's why so many people we believe, have this ingrained fear and we see it in kids. We see it across all cultures. So we really believe there's a strong biology to it. We think it's built into being human is to be concerned about our communication.

09:47

You all know that I've spent a lot of time talking about themes like leadership and the future of work. But there needs to be a company out there that's actually powering the future of work. A company out there that's designing build and managing the systems that the world depends on. Without those types of companies, there is no future and there is no future of work. And that's why today's episode is sponsored by Kindle. They are a technology services company that advances the vital systems in the world depends on every single day. Kindle is the heart of progress at Kindle progress starts by standing up for something with intention, being pro something with your whole heart. And those of you who've been listening to my program, know that I talk about being able to take a stance for something being able to fight for something, and not just being passive and playing in the gray areas. So one of the

things that I love about Kindle is they are pro something. Kindle stands up for progress by committing to help their customers digitally transform technology systems with a global team of curious and diverse minds. Again, both themes that I have talked about on this show quite a bit, because there's nothing better than taking a step forward together. You can learn more by going to [kindle.com](https://kindle.com). That's [kyndryl.com](https://kyndryl.com). It's interesting. Is there a difference in speaking up when you know something versus when you don't? Right? So obviously, if somebody's asking you for a fact, you can give the fact I mean, maybe you're still nervous, you just having to share what that fact is, versus when you have to talk about an opinion. So obviously, if you were to say, Hey, Jacob, what's the weather like today, I could easily look outside and tell you what the weather is. But if you were to say, Hey, Jacob, what do you think about what Elon Musk is doing at Twitter? Or what do you think about, you know, this leader over here? And it's more of an opinion, is there any kind of a difference there as far as the pressure or the anxiety between the two?

11:56

So first, I would be very curious about your perspective on Elon Musk and Twitter. But we'll do that for another time. But yeah, of course, there is so so when we're talking about things that we believe are more objective, then we can tend to have a little more confidence. When you communicate, you have to there are two key components to focus on what you're saying and how you're saying it. And if I am confident in what I'm saying, like a fact, what's the weather like? What's one plus one facts, that we can have more confidence in what we're saying? When it's an opinion, where we're less sure where there's more debate, we can be more anxious about it, because we don't know how others will receive it. Now, it used to be. And I don't mean to be getting political here. It used to be that facts were things that most people agreed upon, and we didn't have to worry about it. That's changing a little bit today. So sometimes facts are bleeding into this idea of opinions that you're talking about. But certainly, if I have confidence in what I'm saying, regardless of if it's fact or not, the less anxious I tend to be.

13:01

Hmm, yeah, that's interesting. And I'm also curious, is it different for leaders versus non leaders? Like, do you find? It's obviously you have a lot of very smart people that are at the Stanford Graduate School of Business? When you look at people who are in leadership positions versus people who are not? are they struggling with different things as far as communicating? Or would you say it's pretty similar across the board?

13:26

So I think the answer is actually both yes to both. So foundationally I think most people struggle, struggle with similar things. Am I being clear? Am I being concise? Are people taking me seriously? Am I credible? It doesn't matter if you're a leader doesn't matter if you're a line employee new to employment. But I do think there are other challenges. So if, in many cases, there are people who have chosen, either consciously or through their lack of confidence, it has been chosen for them, not to give them opportunities for leadership? Yep. community, to my mind. Communication is operationalized. leadership, I think you can't be a good leader without having effective communication skills, full stop. As a leader, there are certainly issues that people worry about and need to work on. Am I being clear? Am I being accessible? Am I being finding that right balance between warmth and immediacy, and being very clear and direct? So there are lots of challenges for those who are on the leadership path. And for

those who aren't, that are different, but there's also a foundational level I think all of us need to focus on and worry about in our communication.

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When you look at either current or aspiring leaders, are there certain mistakes that you think are common or certain challenges that are specifically common amongst leaders. One for example, and I don't know how, what you would call this and I don't even know if this fits into the same category, but it's actually something that I have going up fairly soon. And it's a story that a CEO shared with me about how she was visiting one of her locations. And they were doing an office redesign through many of their locations in the United States. And she went to go visit one of their locations, and she's getting a tour. And she's giving the tour, she sees the art that's hanging on the walls, and she says, Wow, that's great art, I really like it. And then a couple of days later, she's doing a tour on the East Coast, and same things happening. And she sees the exact same art hanging on the wall. And it's a very different vibe. It's a very different environment there. But she's like, Hey, I was just on the West Coast. And I saw that same art here.

**Jacob Morgan** 15:36

How can you guys have it here? And the person giving the tour basically said, Oh, you said that you really loved it and wanted it to go up everywhere? And the CEO is like, no, no, that's not what I said, I just said that I really liked it. I didn't mean for you to just put it in all the offices that we have. And I love that story. Because I don't know if it's a communication issue, if it's a culture issue of not speaking up if one stems from the other. But that, to me seems like a big challenge for leaders is not taking opinions and thoughts, and having those turned into directives and law.

16:12

Yeah, so I think it is, I think it is both a culture and communication issue, as you described it, from a communication point of view, I think it's very important for those in power, those who have higher status, be they leaders or not, that you need to be very clear in your communication when you are seeking action. And when you are simply sharing thoughts, ideas and opinions. Because as somebody with high status and power, people will take your musings, your thoughts as requests for action, and you have to be very clear. And that's incumbent on anybody, I think who is in power. Now, the first part of your question was, are there fundamental things that people leaders do, and I think this is true of most people, the biggest mistake people make is they don't take the other person's perspective. They, we, when we communicate, we think here's all the stuff I need to get across or I want to get across. In fact, you need to take the other person's perspective and think what is it they need to hear from me. So it's not about what you want. It's about what they need. It's audio being audience centric. The other piece that happens most often is when you have an opportunity to do planned communication. People don't take the time to actually practice they're so busy, they throw things together, and then they just deliver it. And they lose an opportunity to be very clear and concise. Now, that's different from spontaneous speaking, which the new book is about, which is where you didn't really have a chance to put your thoughts together. But for many leaders, they have time to do an all hands and think about it, they have a pitch where they can sit down and think about it. And we don't do it. So being audience centric, and not actually preparing and practicing enough, I think are the two foundational mistakes that most people make, but especially leaders,

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I remember the one time I had to practice the most is when I was giving a TED talk in Greece. Oh, my goodness, six years ago, seven years ago. And obviously, you know, you get 15 minutes, they're very strict on time. And so I was rehearsing this 15 minute Schpeel every chance I got, I was bathing the kids and rehearsing it, I was driving and rehearsing it to the point where my wife was able to give, like she knew she could have given the talk for me if I didn't go.

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And I know Blake, and she's a good speaker. And so are you. So you're lucky.

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Yeah, she could have substituted for me. So it's, it is very important. And I think there are a lot of times to your point where, especially in important situations where you're giving a presentation, or maybe speaking up for the first time, where we don't take the days in advance and just go over things in our head a little bit. Because sometimes, if you're giving a speech or a talk for the first time, you could even be surprised by your own slides and be like, Oh, I forgot that was there. And then it kind of throws everything off.

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Absolutely, you and I and this is this is the biggest ironic part of the new book, you can actually prepare for spontaneity. And that's really what the book talks about. But you certainly should be preparing for the planned opportunities. You have been at a TED Talk company all hands a one on one meeting that you have, it's very significant, you should be preparing for them in practicing.

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Do you think the role of technology has changed our ability to speak like it's kind of funny, right? Because, like I'm wondering 1520 years ago, before we had smartphones, and before we had so much connectivity with each other and screens, were we writing books about how to communicate about how to speak like, I can't remember any like books from two decades ago that taught us how to do this and it seems like it's become almost a lost skill and a lost art to talk to somebody, right? Everyone's just in their screens. Everyone's on Instagram. Do you think that technology in our phones specifically have made us? What's the right word? A little, a little dumber, a little a little less? Asked to communicate?

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So, you know, I think there have always been, there's always been advice on how to communicate better. But technology is it's a two sided sword, really. I mean, there are many amazing things technology has enabled us to do in communication. That said, it has fundamentally changed the way in which we interact in person face to face with each other. And I see it in younger generations, more than I see it in folks of our generation. And I think I'm even a generation older than you are. But the point is that, yes, technology is influencing our communication. And in many cases, it's breaking down immediacy, connection, the the, the the subtle, nuanced aspects that that we that we get. But at the same time, you know, I don't want to speak only poorly of technology, I mean, we are now able to

communicate to more people in more ways. So there are benefits, but we certainly have to work on it. And I do think we need to continue giving advice, guidance, teaching ways to be better at it.

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Because I mean, to me, it's right, it's much easier for a lot of people to send a text or an emoji than to say like, Hey, let's grab coffee, There's something important I have to talk to you about. Or be leave a toast, or you know, anything like that. It's, you know, I think a lot of people really struggle with that, in today's world, but Sure thing, the elements of speaking, I think when a lot of people think of speaking, they just think of the words that are coming out of your mouth. But obviously, there's more that goes into it, right? There's your body language, there's the words that you use, there is the tone. Like if you had to break down the most important elements of speaking, what would those elements actually be?

21:59

So if we put aside the content, which is absolutely critical, there are there are other parts of it, presence is really important. So what you how you comport yourself what you do with your body, your voice, your eyes, that matters a lot. Now, it's very culturally specific. And when I say culture, I don't just mean physical location around the world, although that's very important. But different organizations can have different cultures. My two teenage kids have a very different cultural way of communicating than I do. Sometimes it lines up and sometimes it doesn't. And it can be very frustrating. You know, Jacob, if you and I were talking, and I got a text in the midst midst of our talk, you would find it incredibly rude if I responded to that text.

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What are you doing? My friend is where we're together and they're on their phone. I'm like, What are you doing? Like, yeah, exactly

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what's but teenagers today, they will stop, they will stop a conversation, respond to the text, pick up the conversation, totally socially acceptable. In fact, it would be rude not to respond to the text. I'm just using that as an example that there are cultural, contextual variables that we have to take into account. Let me give you a couple of bits of advice about nonverbal presence. Really important how you hold your body three things big balanced. And still, we want to make ourselves big to show confidence to show that you're competent, you make yourself big, single best thing you can do when you're virtual, or when you are in person, pull your shoulder blades down, it makes you broader, you're not puffing your chest out, you're just pulling your shoulder blades down, that makes you big, you want to keep your head straight, a lot of people tilt their heads when they speak, it lowers your status. And then finally, you want to be still a lot of people, when they get nervous, they move around a lot. And that can be very distracting. So big, balanced and still is critical. You want to make eye contact, the most challenging thing we have with technology is you have to look at the camera. Because when I look at the camera, it looks like I'm looking at you Yeah, even if your video is on the screen, I want to see your response. But in fact, when I look down at you look to get your response, you see me looking down, which makes me look less involved and less confident. Which means the response I'm seeing in you is that you think I'm less confident. So the best thing to do is just look at the camera. So those are some

fundamental things we can do. Regardless of our of our message to help us appear more confident and more competent in our communication.

**Jacob Morgan 24:22**

It's funny, I was having dinner with some friends the other day, some some new friends, some old friends and some new friends. Were there some acquaintances and some people I've known for a while. Sure. And then after the dinner, I was having a conversation with some of my friends and then was like, you know, what do you think of so and so? And their feedback was like, Dude, how come this person can look me in the eye when they're speaking to me? Like they're talking to me and they're, you're off to the side, or they're just looking down or straight ahead. And at that point, it didn't matter what the person was saying. But the fact that they were not able to look at the other person when speaking completely We turned everyone off from having the conversation and from engaging and it's, it's funny, and this is where I think and again, I could be wrong, where I think maybe technology has played a role that we forgot how to look, people in the eye had a good handshake, how to, you know, do some of these very basic things. Like, you know, I never thought that I would have to tell somebody, look them in the eye when you're speaking to them. But I mean, that's the world we're in now.

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That's right. That's right. And, and it, I worry and wonder, what, 1020 years from now it's gonna look like it might be the norm. I mean, I remember in my business school classes, eight years ago, I, for the first time asked the question, are emojis appropriate in business communication? And eight years ago, it was 75%. No, 25%? Yes. Now people are like, why are you even asking the question, right. So we've had this evolution and I and I wonder what eye contact nonverbal presence is going to look like 1520 years from now, as we evolve? I don't know. I don't know. I am saddened by the fact that it might be no eye contact, no handshakes, no immediacy, yeah. But it's an experiment that we're all part of.

**Jacob Morgan 26:16**

How important is it to know the medium that you're using to get your point across? Because incredibly, yeah, like, I think when a lot of people think of communicating, speaking, they think of maybe in person, right. But if you look at all the different channels that we have at our disposal, you could be in person, you could be virtual, you could be sending a text, you could be a phone call, you could do a written note, you could do an email, you could do emojis, like you are communicating across so many different platforms. And I think the expectation of leaders especially is that you have to be good at all of those platforms, like whether you are all hands meeting in person, or whether you're sending an email to somebody, you have to make sure that your point gets across. And it's, it's tough, because I mean, I've even seen firsthand, as I'm sure you have, there have been a lot of leaders who are so charismatic, and they're so good at in person communication. And they don't need a script, they can, you know, maybe they have some notes, but they're really good at just commanding a room. And then you stick them behind the screen, like to do something virtual. And they're just a completely different person. And all of a sudden, they're reading something that charisma has, has lost, like, everything's gone. And the perception of the employees is like, wow, like this is the leader here, or sometimes even get an email from a leader. And it looks like a letter that should be written to a therapist. Right? So like, we forget that we're not communicating the same way across every platform. So can you talk a little bit about the importance of knowing the medium of communication?



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Absolutely, it is, it is critical. I am often brought in as a consultant to companies that are struggling with having too many channels for communication. And one of the first things we do I do to try to help them is to help them prioritize, and to define which channel is appropriate for which type of communication. So do we send a slack? Or do we call the person? Is this an email? Or is this a company broadcast message? What what type of communication warrants what type of channel? So absolutely, you'd have to figure that out first and foremost. And then you have to be prepared and skilled at using those different tools. So the way I write a Slack message should be different than the way I write an email, which should be different than the way I would speak it if I were speaking to you. So we have to become adept at that. And all of us experiences this. So for example, you know, we're still doing lots of virtual communication. There are lots of different tools out there. And certain tools work differently than other tools. So I might be a black belt in zoom, but you get me on teams and meet and all of a sudden, you know, I'm fumbling and bumbling. Yeah. So what's really important for all of us to think about is one, building up our expertise in whatever medium or channel we're using. And then to practicing with that, so that we become good at it. And I also believe it's incumbent on us to help people. So I think the most underutilized communication tool for is a meeting invite, we can do so much in a meeting invite. For example, if I know I'm going to use a polling feature or a shared whiteboard, in my meeting, invite I will say that I'll say as part of this, we're going to do this and I put a link to a YouTube tutorial for it. So if somebody comes to zoom there or meet user and they come to zoom, and I'm saying I'm using the whiteboard, they can click on it and they know how to do it for the meeting so they feel prepared. And what's interesting is we have some research, Jacob, that says, just by virtue of me putting that in there, you think of me as a more credible and compassionate leader, because I took the time to say hey, if you don't know this, you could go Learn this. And even if you know it, you're like, Oh, that was nice to him to do that, right. So. So there's a lot of benefit to knowing your channel, knowing the medium, practicing it and preparing other people for it.

30:12

This episode is made possible by Kindle. They are a company that is designing, building and managing the systems that the world depends on. There is no future of work without companies like Kindle that are out there making all of these things happen. Kindle is a technology services company that advances the vital systems that the world depends on every single day, they help their customers digitally transform, have a global team of curious and diverse minds, you can learn more about them by going to [kindle.com](https://kindle.com). That's [kyndryl.com](https://kyndryl.com). I like that tip actually, for especially virtual meetings. Any other you mentioned one of the distinctions between virtual and in person. Are there any other things that people should be paying attention to? When it comes to virtual speaking, one, for example, to me that comes to mind is just making sure that you have good hardware. And this is like, it's a weird thing to even say because a lot of people would never even think of this right. But you have to imagine that if you're giving a virtual presentation, a virtual all hands, a virtual Keynote or a webinar, if people can't see you and hear you. It doesn't matter what you're saying. And I've been on some of these meetings before where you have like a top executive at a company that looks like they're talking from the bottom of a fishbowl. And you just you can't see them. They're pixel. And it's, you know, at that point, who cares? So I think at the very least my tip for people would be invest in a decent quality mic, and a decent quality camera. But absolutely, but from a presence perspective and a communication

perspective, what are some of the differences that you think are worth paying attention to between in person and virtual and any suggestions on what we should do in a virtual setting?

32:04

Absolutely, let me give you three. First, when it comes to content, you need to be more concise, and you need to be more engaging people's attention is I think, the most, the most precious commodity we have in the world today is attention. Our attention is pulled in lots of different directions. So I need to keep get your attention and then keep it I call that engagement. So I have to be concise. If I go on too long, you wander off, you're sitting on a device, you can go check lots of other things I have to engage you. So I can ask you questions, I can have you giving me reactions responding in the chat. By keeping you involved, you are more likely to pay attention and be engaged. So concision and engagement are critical content wise. In terms of nonverbal presence. I agree you need to have good equipment. In addition, few simple things. These are almost pet peeves of mine of mine, one frame yourself. Well, some people sit so far away, they look like a constellation in the sky. We like to read what's on people's faces if I can't see your face. I don't know if you're telling me the truth. We all learn this during the pandemic when everybody was wearing masks. So show your whole face. Raise your camera up. I can't tell you how many people do these things on their laptops. So the angle of the camera? Oh, yeah. Yeah, no one looks good like that. Jacob, when I was a kid, and we wanted to scare people, we take a flashlight, shine it under our chin, so we would look scary. That's how people look. And then finally, get good lighting. I can't tell you how many people I'm on virtual calls with it look like they're in the witness protection program. They're sitting in the dark. I tell everybody get a ring light. If you don't know what a ring light is find a teenager ask them about tick tock because tick tock is all about ring lights. So you have to be seen, that's the nonverbal presence piece. The last thing I'll say, record yourself, all of these tools, have recording features. Practice recording yourself, even if it's going to be a q&a. Have somebody throw out some questions for you record yourself and then watch does it look like you want it to look, it's painful as all heck to watch yourself, I get it. But better you see what you're doing, then so you can change then you don't I mean, I always when people say I hate watching myself, I say do you want to be in the middle of a meeting with some spinach in your teeth? And I said no, no, no, no, no. Don't you look in the mirror before you go in the meeting. I see that. Yeah, record yourself. So those are the three bits advice, concise and engaging for content. Make sure you are seen literally with your setup, and then record yourself. Those are the big tips for virtual communication. Yeah, I

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think those make a lot of sense. And they're easy and simple and practical things for people to remember, which I think is the best part. Are there any leaders out there where people were to say, you know, what, who, who does Matt think is a great communicator, whether it's virtual, whether it's in person, somebody that you think other people can emulate? Who comes to mind for you

35:01

There are many leaders that I really, really respect. Let me share too with you. I think Mary Barra of GE, wonderful, right, right, right. I'm sorry, Mary Barra of General Motors, and let's edit that correctly. And then John Janek, of Interscope Records. Both of them I think, are really, really good leaders. And here's why. They're very, they're very audience centric. They are focused on the needs of their audience. They are good listeners. And they are able to bring their personal passion and style to their

communication so it doesn't feel scripted. So there are many, many leaders I coach. There many, many people I respect. I think those two are really good examples of people to pay attention to and listen to

35:53

me, I'm gonna have to check out some clips of John. What was his

35:56

last name? Janek Johnson. Yeah,

35:59

I've never seen him give a talk. I'm gonna have to check them out. And see, see what he does. You mentioned that you coach a lot of leaders. So I'm very curious when when leaders come to you? What exactly are they asking for? Are they Is it fear of speaking like, what, what's the main thing that you help them with?

36:23

There are so many, so many different things that bring people to meet to work with anxiety is is often part of it. Interest, people are either finding themselves having to communicate in circumstances that they haven't before. And they want to do well. Okay, so I've helped people who speak at Davos or give TED talks, I've worked with a Nobel Laureate, these are these are people who are good speakers, but they're finding themselves in circumstances that are different and uncomfortable for them. So part of it is the the anxiety and pressure they put on themselves there. There are some people, some leaders I work with who are new to leadership, and they're just uncomfortable having to communicate so broadly with the variety of audiences. So it's really helping them get comfortable there. For some, it's very specific tics and troubles that they have that need to be worked on. For example, a lot of people I work with are either very scientific, very technical, and they have to now talk to broader audiences and make their content accessible. So there are a whole slew of reasons that people come to me, I wish I could say it was just one, but all of them come with the desire to get better, and the willingness to appreciate that they can improve,

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keeps you busy, for sure. Are there any? Are there any situations where I don't want to say it's hopeless? But you know, you don't see or you can't see the improvement? In other words, can anybody become a better speaker and communicator? Or are there some people? For example, if you're an extrovert? Are you automatically going to be a better speaker than if you're an introvert? And if you're an introvert, does that mean you're doomed and you're, you know, you're never going to get good at this.

38:06

So I'm gonna take those as two separate, separate questions, I would not be a teacher, I would not be a coach if I did not believe everybody can improve. The only time I have ever worked with people who do not improve are people who do not want to improve, you can't force somebody to change and to work. But otherwise, I firmly believe communication skills are things that we can learn, develop, and hone. We all come at it from different perspectives. We're all at different places in our journeys, but

everybody can improve and hone their skills for sure. Now, do some people have advantages over others? Perhaps your your willingness to take risks your tolerance for ambiguity, your extraversion, those can all put you perhaps a little farther down the path, but that doesn't mean others can't improve. And by the way, I think it is a miss. Judgment to think that introverts aren't good communicators. Often I would argue introverts are better communicators than extroverts. Introverts listen first, before they speak, extroverts speak first before they listen, and I'll tell you, you know, somebody who's got as much gray hair as I have seen extroverts fail miserably because they didn't read the room. They didn't take time to read the document. They didn't listen to the answer to the question. I have living proof of this in my household. My wife is very introverted. I am very extroverted. She has saved so many situations and conversations because of her introversion really so Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, I I have gotten myself in a lot of trouble because I start talking before I actually really understand what's happening. I am much better than I used to be in large thanks to her. But no, I think it is a it's a mistake to think introverts are not good communicators. In all my years of doing my podcast of doing my work. Research of teaching communication skills, I have come to believe that the most important communication skill is listening. And, and that's might seem antithetical, but if you listen and understand what's needed, you will be a much better communicator,

40:14

who decides if you're a good communicator, because there, there have certainly been situations, at least for me, where I would think that I do a good job at something I've gotten my point across. I've said something the right way, whether it's text, whether it's giving a speech, or whatever. And then I get feedback. That's like, Dude, we didn't understand anything that you were talking about. Like, it was so confusing, or that was rude. And I'm like, what, what, what, I thought I did an amazing job. So how do you? How can you get better? I mean, do you need to find people that you trust that can give you that honest feedback? Because the subjective versus the objective opinion can be very different as far as improving and getting better. So what do you recommend that people do?

40:57

So there is a disconnect between what we feel and what's real, we are not the best judges of our own communication. Part of it is because we have way too much access to information that others don't. One of the most powerful learnings that comes early in my MBA class, my strategic communication classes, we have students give tell a story leaders have to be good storytellers. So we have them tell the story. And we digitally record them. And we have them watch the recording in three ways with sound only no sound. So video only, and then both together. And then by far, the number one thing most students if not all students realize is I came off more confident than I felt. And it's this notion that you have that we can't feel your heart rate, we can't know what you wanted to say versus what you did say. So we are not the best judges. So your question was, how do we know if we're a good communicator? Well, I think hearing from others is important. I also think having a goal before you communicate is critical. And to me a goal has three parts. What do you want people to know? How do you want them to feel? And what do you want them to do. And if you are done at the conclusion of your communication, if people know what you want them to know, are feeling the way you want them to feel and are likely to do what you want them to do, then I would say you are a good communicator. So I think there's a content piece to it, an experiential piece to it, and a realization that we are not good

judges of our own communication. So with that in mind, we can then create a baseline from which we can then focus on areas to improve. Oh, I love

42:32

that. It's actually very interesting to kind of walk the talk with with audio with sound with both. Yeah, it's sort of like everybody thinks they're a better driver than they are right. I think there's a famous experiment psychology experiment around that as well. So I want to transition to a section of the podcast called The leaders toolkit, where we give listeners and viewers some specific action items that they can apply. And I thought for that we could follow one of the frameworks you have in your book, which is the six steps for better spontaneous speaking. And we can go through what those six steps are. The first one that you have on your list is one that you've mentioned a little bit previously. And that's taming the anxiety beast. And I'm assuming when you talk about anxiety, in this case, it's not just kind of like, Oh, I'm nervous, but people get like physical, physiological symptoms, right. You know, my heart starts beating. I started shaking. I'm like, like, it's an actual, physiological uncomfortable. Yeah, exactly.

**Jacob Morgan** 43:29

So how do you? How do you manage that? Okay, everybody to hear the rest of my conversation with Matt Abrahams, you are going to have to become a paid subscriber, which you can do by going to great leadership.substack.com and hitting the subscribe button. And if you subscribe, you will get access to a lot of amazing things including this bonus episode is leaders toolkit episode with Matt, where we are going to go over the six steps to better spontaneous speaking which include taming the anxiety beast, maximizing mediocrity, minding your mindset, don't just do something stand there, structure, your spontaneity and an F word of spontaneous speaking game. This is only going to be available for paid subscribers at great leadership dot sub sect.com. If you subscribe, you'll get access to one of these bonus episodes, these leaders toolkit episodes every week, you will get access to an in depth leadership guide that I personally write every week exploring a trend or an insight. And the last thing that you're gonna get is a five minute leadership hack, a video that I record for you, which teaches you a leadership hack that I learned from a CEO that I've interviewed or I have worked with over the years. All of this at Great leadership.substack.com Thank you so much for tuning in. If you get a couple of seconds, hey, you know what, I will love a review on Apple podcasts or your preferred platform. So again, thank you so much for your support, and I will see you on the next episode.