

# Do you suffer from glossophobia?

 By [Marion Scher](#)

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You've probably never heard of glossophobia before. Neither had I till I looked it up. The definition: speech anxiety - fear of public speaking or of speaking in general.

I know only too well from the many people I train for media, presentations and speech giving, this is a common fear. Media training is particularly scary as very few people are natural on camera and the same goes for giving presentations and speeches.

Just recently public relations company Gullan and Gullan asked me to train a young man who they had taken on as a pro bono client. His name is Philani Dladla - otherwise known as the Pavement Bookworm ([www.pavementbookworm.co.za](http://www.pavementbookworm.co.za)). He had picked himself up from drugs and homelessness to not only selling books on the street but giving reviews of each book purchased.

After a Youtube video had been posted, Tedx South Africa had asked him to appear, alongside a stellar line up of professionals, including ex-politicians, scientists and authors. This is where I came in. My job was to prepare him for this event and I was warned beforehand that he was extremely shy and had a hard time even looking people straight in the eye when he was spoken to. Can't be that bad I thought - until I was introduced to him at G & G's offices. This was going to be harder than I thought...

I asked if we could just be left together over a cup of coffee for half an hour to break the ice and for Philani to tell me his story. Over our coffee his remarkable story unfolded. He laughed and cried and decided his story was safe with me. All I had to do was capture that emotion he'd just shown into the fifteen minutes allotted by Tedx.

We had around four or five two hour sessions, where I worked him quite hard and told him how important rehearsing was to his success. The hardest part was getting across his story in just 15 minutes and using this time to capture the audience.

After just one rehearsal with Tedx, Philani's big day arrived. Nervous but excited and with a number of instructions from me ringing through his head (don't forget to pause when you say "All I had was a bag of clothes - BIG PAUSE - and a pile of books") the result was that he bought the house down - getting one of the only standing ovations of the day with people clamouring to speak to him and offer him resources.

## Tell a real story

So what got him the standing ovation? Simple, all he had to do was tell a real story from the heart. Did I change him from a

shy, introverted young man into a superstar? No, I just gave him a few pointers along the way of his own story.

So just what makes a great speaker? Something some of you conference companies might want to check out before you hire certain people...

It's really simple - passion, commitment and conviction and knowing when to shut up...

That may sound harsh, but we've all sat through presentations where we wondered how long was it going to take before the speaker got to the point of their talk. Philani only had 15 minutes to put across 25 tough years.

**So here are a few pointers to help with your fears:**

- Don't bother thanking anyone for being there or say how nice it is to talk to these lovely people. Just jump right in with a great anecdote relating to your topic.
- You're there to entertain - not read off slides or drone on in dull monotone. Rehearse your story and talk from the heart - using slides to point the way. Remember one good picture paints a million words.
- Engage your audience - move around and try and make eye contact with people.
- Smile - if you look nervous and worried your audience will follow suit. Look like you want to be there and are having fun. Try taking three deep breaths before you go on stage and shake yourself out to relax.
- Keep an eye on your time - don't run over and don't be tempted to elaborate on any one point too long. Shorter is better.
- If you're doing a PowerPoint presentation consider doing a Tweet for each slide - you never know the audience could pass it on.

## ABOUT MARION SCHER

Marion Scher ([www.mediamentors.co.za](http://www.mediamentors.co.za)) is an award-winning journalist, lecturer, media trainer and consultant with 25 years' experience in the industry. For more of her writing, go to her Bizcommunity profile or to Twitter @marionscher.

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