



How President Gorbachov Helped Me Overcome Social Anxiety

9 Powerful Techniques To Use In Any Stressful Situation Without Being Detected

Anxiety can be really incapacitating. In my psychotherapy practice, I often encounter social anxiety or fear of public speaking as a complaint because it affects a majority of us in different situations.

I can still see myself entering the room a few steps behind the Premier of Ontario Honorable Bob Rae. I am his interpreter and we are about to meet one of the best-known people on Earth – Gorbachov.

My knees are shaking, heart is beating fast and I forget I should be breathing, a textbook example of a panic attack. Photographers flash their cameras...



Upon my arrival to Canada in 1991, I worked as a professional simultaneous interpreter and translator. It is not surprising that when I started getting my first jobs, it was not only the language or terminology I was super nervous about but my "stage fright" as well.

In my circle of family and friends, I was always considered a rather shy person. Ironically, my work required me to be in the limelight at times.



As a psychotherapist, I know now that we all play certain roles in any group we are in and mine was that of a shy and blushing girl, good student eager to please in the patriarchal tradition of Russian society. I learned later that “shy” could be a synonym for social anxiety.

One day, the office of Protocol of the government of Ontario asked me if I would like to translate for Mr. Rae during his one-on-one meeting with Gorbachov.

Just like this! Me, a recently arrived 20-something?! Naturally, I said YES!!! But minutes later I became overcome with an extreme sense of worry. I didn't even have a suit worthy of such an occasion.

.....So back to the beginning of the story - I found myself in the Royal York Hotel looking for the suite where the meeting was supposed to take place.

As we enter the room and M. Gorbachov and Bob Rae pose for the official pictures, I am supposed to move to the background and not be in the photo. They meet one-on-one, interpreters are invisible. At that moment - oh horror! – Mr. Rae moves his chair in such a way that it blocks me from leaving, I freeze, it all happens very quickly. My work is still ahead – the conversation starts when the press leaves the room. Will I be able to utter a word? This was pure ANXIETY with all capital letters. I was frozen in my spot. I *was* anxiety itself.

Fortunately, in the next moment, the man, who broke the Berlin Wall, breaks the silence and quickly says in English something about offering a lady a chair – and



I am that lady!

He keeps me in his gaze for one more second and seeming to notice my unease, gives me a warm, reassuring smile and as if to say softly, "It's all right kid".

That support was all I needed to relax.

Everybody smiles. Mr. Rae welcomes Gorby and the meeting starts as I transform into a professional and do my job seamlessly in some Zen-like state. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to thank Mikhail Sergeevich after the talks as he had to rush to another meeting.

But needless to say it was unforgettable. And because of that chair that was in my way – I am captured “hovering nearby” in the picture in Toronto Star. What a memento!

What that moment really gave me, was the feeling that I can overcome my anxiety, any fear of public speaking. I would never be intimidated or star struck when meeting anybody “famous” or important again. In such a natural way, this man showed me his humanity and helped me transform my state from uncomfortable anxiety to one of easy professionalism.

While it is very important to find the roots of anxiety in each individual case, there are ways to ease it. Here, I have prepared for you a selection of techniques that worked best for me and continue to work for many of my current patients.

It's important to understand that these techniques work best with certain levels of anxiety and others in different social situations. For example, try to do a calming visualization in the middle of the panic attack while in a subway! But if you have an upcoming job interview, then a calming visualization done the night before gives the best results. Check out this link from Ted Talks by Amy Cuddy for more ideas: http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are?language=en

Some of the calming methods work best in a court room, according to one of my lawyer clients, others when making a presentation in front of the class, or approaching somebody you are attracted to, before a job interview [read more on my blog at www.katyatherapy.com/blog], etc.



Below are the techniques that my patients find to work best when dealing with social anxiety:

1. Try taking a deep breath. Breathing is the most ancient technique of calming down. It is easy and available at any moment. Deep diaphragmatic breathing is the most helpful, as it activates the body's relaxation response. There are a lot of different simple ways of doing it.

2. Accept that you are anxious. That it is an emotional reaction. Acceptance of anxiety is crucial because ignoring or fighting anxiety often worsens it. It is not a pleasant feeling, but it is part of your reality and is not intolerable, so accept that. You don't need to be anxious about being anxious, in other words.

3. Realize that your brain is playing tricks with you. It can look and feel like a heart attack, for example. Reminding yourself that you are not dying and that it will pass helps remove the shame, guilt, pressure and judging yourself.

4. Question your thoughts. When people are anxious their brain comes up with all sorts of outlandish ideas, scary scenarios. Reminding yourself that nobody died approaching a girl he likes, or making a toast at the wedding can help. The worst thing that can happen that a few people, most of whom you will never see again get a few chuckles and forget it by tomorrow.

5. Using a calming visualization. Another time-proven technique. The brain does not distinguish reality from the image we make it see by the force of our imagination. Doing any meditation or mindfulness practice can help with that. You can simply imagine yourself in a favorite calm place, a park, a riverbank, a deserted island in the ocean – and see how the clouds are flowing in the sky above you. Imagine assigning your troubling thoughts and fears to clouds and see them float away. Not judging any of them, not thinking they are bad or good, just seeing them melt away in the sky.

6. Practice observing your thoughts and emotions without judgment, with compassion.

7. Use positive self-talk. Anxiety produces negative chatter that you can try neutralizing. Even saying to yourself that you can manage it can help.

8. Focusing on this very moment. We are usually afraid of what might happen in the near or far future. Instead, pause, take a breath and pay attention to what is



happening around right now.

9. Focus on meaningful activities might help. If you were doing the dishes – do it. The worst thing is sitting around and just giving yourself to the feeling of anxiety. Getting out of your head feels better. And you get things done! Trying to get busy with the business of life instead of focusing on feeling anxious.

Reassurance from a friend, a doctor or a therapist – or a former president in my case – can help you snap out of it. But these people are not always there when you are caught by that anxious feeling. That's why learning and practicing some of these techniques can be your first aid kit in dealing with anxiety. I can always get to that moment in the Royal York Hotel in my mind – and it works like a charm.

I hope you feel inspired to tackle anxiety and make some healthy changes in your life. If you would like to get more personalized advice on any problems that bother you right now, you can call at **416 616 5077** or email at: [**katya.razumova@gmail.com**](mailto:katya.razumova@gmail.com)

Whatever your journey, whatever your personal goals or issues, I wish you well.

Katya Razumova, M.A., Member of Canadian Association for Psychodynamic Therapy (#525)

