

This is an edited transcript of the December 31, 2014 SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast interview titled [David Lee >> How to Conquer Your Fear of Public Speaking and Win More Clients in 2015](#).

Announcer: Are you a hard-working, self-employed professional striving for small business success? There is help. Welcome to the SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast featuring candid conversations about successful self-employment.

Stephen Lahey: Welcome to the SmallBusinessTalent.com podcast. I'm Stephen Lahey, and I'll be your host.

[David Lee](#) is my guest on the podcast today. David is a seasoned self-employed professional with some powerful advice to share on how to conquer your fear of public speaking. But more than that, David is here to help you move people to action with your presentations, and of course that's what effective public speaking is all about.

The back story? Well, David has been a solo consultant, speaker, and corporate trainer since 1995. He's an internationally recognized authority on optimizing employee performance; and in that capacity he has served a variety of interesting organizations, including large international companies like Accenture and Unum Life Insurance, government agencies such as the US Department of Health and Human Services, and educational institutions including Southern New Hampshire University, and others.

David has authored nearly 100 articles and book chapters on employee performance and has been published in trade journals and books in the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia. He's also the author of a recent book titled [Powerful Storytelling Techniques](#) published by the American Society for Training and Development or ASTD Press. This results-oriented book is based on his 20 years of experience using storytelling in business and in a variety of other settings.

The practical communication and public speaking techniques that David teaches today are tailor made for people like us who sell services in the business-to-business space. So get ready to take some notes!

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Welcome to the podcast, David. Thanks for making the time to be here.

David Lee: Thanks for inviting me.

Stephen Lahey: To kick things off, can you tell us a bit about your business, when you started it, who you serve, and so on?

David Lee: Sure. I have two businesses. The first one, [HumanNature@Work](#), I started about 15 years ago and that focuses on helping business owners and leaders have the conversations they need to get the business results they want.

In the last, I would say, three or four years, I started another business that's teaching, whether it's consultants, entrepreneurs, or leaders inside of corporate America, how to use storytelling to become a more compelling and persuasive speaker.

Stephen Lahey: Right up front because I want to make sure that people get to know you what are the URLs for those two businesses, David?

David Lee: Sure. The first one is [HumanNatureAtWork.com](#) and the second is [StoriesThatChange.com](#).

Stephen Lahey: You've been doing this a long time. It's your bread and butter. And of course, doing some public speaking can benefit my audience greatly. There are so many benefits of public speaking for a consultant, for example, or for any professional who needs to be seen as an expert.

In your experience, how can busy solo entrepreneurs who probably have no desire at all to become *professional* speakers, in fact, that idea probably makes them cringe, but how can they benefit from at least speaking more often and getting good at it?

David Lee: A couple thoughts related to that. One is that if you get good at it, it can be the best way to get new clients. In fact, some of the marketing people that I respect the most say that is the best way to do it. And interestingly enough, one of the things that they'll often joke about is how Internet marketing experts often get their best clients by actually showing up live and speaking as opposed to through the Internet.

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Speaking is a great way for people to get a sense of who you are. And over the years, I would say most of the consulting gigs I've gotten have been through speaking at industry events, association meetings, et cetera. The key though—and this is where I see a lot of times consultants having a challenge—the key is you need to be a good speaker for it to serve you, and that's a whole different skill set than being skilled in your particular area of expertise.

Stephen Lahey: Let's start with what I consider to be the main issue, and that's fear. There's the old saying that people would rather be in the coffin than give the eulogy. Well, that's a bit of an overstatement, but there is a lot of fear around speaking.

One of the things that stands out for me when I've seen you speaking is that you're centered, calm, and confident. That's how you come across, David.

First, was it always that way for you or did you just sort of get up in front of your first group and say, wow, this is where I live, this is my element?

David Lee: Definitely not. In fact, in some ways I think I sometimes wonder why I wanted to do speaking because I first entered a speech contest in high school and I was shy, low self-image, the last person in the world you'd think of as a speaker. And even to this day just—and hopefully this helps some listeners—that although it might be a stretch to say I'd rather be in the coffin than give the eulogy, if it's not something that's part of my work directly, then I'm shy and averse to getting up in front of a group and talking. So, if I'm at a seminar, I'm never the one to pontificate from the audience or even ask a question. I can very much relate to the discomfort that a lot of people have.

There were two moments of truth that really were the turning points for me from going from being an anxious speaker to feeling more comfortable. The first was, it was interesting, as a grad student I was part of a group where our job was to give talks throughout the college. First, we had a psychology professor come in to talk to us about the fear of public speaking. One of his specialties was dealing with phobias, and he said that the best thing you can do to get over your fear of public speaking is to speak a whole lot in a short amount of time. And I just happened to have multiple talks every day of the following week at the local middle

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school. And so I did my talk a couple times each day. Sure enough, by the end of that week I was infinitely more comfortable. I just felt like I had been there, done that.

That was one moment of truth. So, one of the things I really recommend to people, whether it's through Toastmasters or other venues, is to try to get in as many talks as you can in a short amount of time. That's number one.

The second turning point for me was that for a while I paid my dues being a contract trainer for a national training company. Before that point, I had spoken internationally in the mind, body, medicine field, and one of the challenges of that was I did a lot of one-off presentations at conferences. So, I'd spend weeks preparing for this presentation and I would give it and then that would be that and I never really had the chance to do version 2.0, 3.0, et cetera.

But with this seminar company gig, I'd deliver the same program over and over. I did train the trainer work on customer service, and so on. And three or four times a week I delivered the same content to the point where I could do it in my sleep. But, because of that, I could pay more attention to group dynamics and stylistic differences and how to phrase things better. And so that was another real turning point for me.

Another turning point was watching a video of myself presenting. That was pretty humbling. I learned later from talking with somebody who was really into personality styles that one of the things for introverts like me to keep in mind is that when you think you're being really expressive, you're probably not. And it was really humbling to see this video of me where I remember how passionate I was about my topic and I was psyched about sharing it with the audience, but in looking at the video, it looked like I had just come back from a wake. I'm thinking, man, I've got to lighten up here and like, okay, you can be intense, but don't be frowning all the time. So that was also a real help in terms of just being a better speaker.

Stephen Lahey:

What great advice. I worked for Dale Carnegie & Associates years ago, and the Dale Carnegie Course is focused on public speaking. You give a talk every week for 12 weeks. There's a supportive

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group dynamic in that course because all of the people in the audience will eventually be taking their turn speaking to the group.

I know a lot of people have also enjoyed Toastmasters, as you mentioned. Just finding some place where you can get out and just speak repeatedly is a big help.

You also mentioned video. When I was first working for Dale Carnegie, I spoke in front of a camera because they also have a course where you get recorded that way. And I thought, wow, I was really on fire. But, as an introvert, I wasn't as animated as I thought I was.

David Lee: Right.

Stephen Lahey: It's really funny how we see ourselves. The perception from the outside looking in can be so different.

David, I think a lot of speakers experience nerves. What are some things that you do, either in terms of breathing, pacing, whatever else, to kind of get to the right level of nervousness where it gives you an edge versus just being like, wow, I'm a sweaty mess?

David Lee: Okay. So I'll divide these up into before the presentation, the preparation piece, and then when you're getting up there to do the presentation.

First, and this may sound obvious, yet people know it but they don't do it enough—and that is to remember that nothing takes the place of practice and preparation. I think one of the best ways—and again, everything I'm going to share is from personal experience—one of the best ways to feel confident is to be so prepared that it's like, hey, bring it on.

I love that Navy SEAL quote. Something like – you sweat in training so that you don't have to bleed in war. The more effort you put into the preparation, the more confidence you'll feel and then obviously the better you'll be. .

As part of my preparation, I practice the opening many, many times. Depending on how hard it is for me to get the words together I might rehearse the opening anywhere from like five to 20 times. So somebody could wake you up from sleep and you'd

launch right into it. That being said, when I practice it, it's not like I use the same words each time. It's always different in some way. But what's happened is it's created neural connections so that when I do stand up, something useful comes out. It may be version 3.0 of my practice, or, it might be a combination of 2 and 7 and 9; but whatever it is, the neural pathways have been stimulated.

Related to that, let's say as I'm driving to the event or I'm leaving my hotel room and walking down to the venue. I will do one more run through, saying it out loud so I really activate and prime those neural networks just before going on. So, just keep rehearsing your opening.

Another point, for fellow introverts especially, is that we need time to process. Thinking out loud is not our thing. So, no cramming allowed if you want to be good. I find that if I start jotting down ideas a few weeks out that helps. So, let's say I'm working out and I'm thinking, okay, I've got this talk next month, and I mention working out because you know how when your physiology is pumped up, you've got the dopamine flowing, you're focused, and some of your best ideas come. But, I'll just jot down ideas, take a second, jot down an idea, et cetera, and then start working with it.

So starting far enough out time-wise is important. That way you can clarify and refine your ideas which can make a huge difference. And you notice that we're now talking about things that will make you really good at speaking, because competence breeds confidence.

Another practical thing that I find is when I'm practicing what I'm going to say, I'll walk around. In some ways this replicates the real talk, even though you're not going to pace back and forth like a caged tiger, you're going to be on your feet when you actually speak. So just walking around is another way to make it feel more real as you practice.

Another key point—and this will be where we'll segue from before you get ready to go on stage to actually getting ready to go on stage, so we're still in the preparation phase and then we're going to switch gears—is to focus on the audience, not just yourself, as you're preparing. How can you help them? How can you serve them?

I just did a talk yesterday, it was on storytelling for entrepreneurs, and I have to admit I'm thinking, okay, what stories can I tell so it will be really fun and entertaining and useful. I want to make sure I do a great job. But then I had to remind myself, it's not about you, it's about them. What would be most helpful to them? And so having that on your mind as opposed to I hope I don't blow it, I hope I don't look like an idiot, or how can I look good?

And that's the segue into right before you stand up. I remember like it was yesterday, I was in my middle 20s and I was speaking to a group called Divorce Perspectives. It was my first public presentation as a professional. I now had a real job after grad school and I'm giving this talk to this group called Divorce Perspectives and my heart is pounding. I have almost that dizzy feeling from rapid, shallow breathing. I am petrified. And then fortunately I was able to get a grip and there were two things I said to myself. One was this is not about you. These folks are in pain here. You're here to be helpful to them. And just that shift, that alone made a huge difference in my anxiety level.

The other thing that really hit me was I could label it as fear or I could label it as excitement because it's basically the same. I think I'm going to tell myself I'm really excited. I'm really pumped. And so one of the things that I recommend, if you're feeling scared is tell yourself I'm psyched, I'm pumped, rather than trying to calm yourself down so much so you're like the speakers who have no energy. Use that energy. Bring power and energy to your presentation.

Stephen Lahey:

I remember a story, and it was about a comedian. It might have been Carol Burnett. But, anyway, it was someone who was sort of a trailblazer for female comedians. She was always nervous getting up on stage. But then one night she wasn't nervous. Well, guess what? That was the night that she bombed, and she realized afterwards it's because the nervousness she usually felt did come across as energy and excitement and the audience needed that. And when you're a little too relaxed, especially for those us who are introverts, when we're relaxed, we oftentimes are too relaxed when it comes to expressing ourselves.

David Lee:

Yes.

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Stephen Lahey: I think it's so important to realize that nervousness really can work for you. And you mentioned calling it excitement. That never really worked for me. But just saying to myself that this nervous energy is my fuel. This is what's going to help me move people. That seems to help me. So, I guess we all have to approach it in our own constructive way.

But, again, I do think that if we're all honest with ourselves, then we can say, hey, I'm a little afraid of public speaking. David, what are some other things we can do besides what you've just mentioned in our moments of anxiety?

David Lee: Absolutely, I will share some suggestions on that and then I want to loop back to the competence / confidence connection because there are some other things related to being a *good* speaker that makes it less anxiety producing. I highly recommend listeners try different things and some will work for you, and some won't. Also, though, if you try something and it didn't work that one time, I encourage you not to write it off as something that will never work for you. Maybe there's a tweak that needs to happen. So experiment.

A couple of other things that I do to be calm. The classic approach is slow deep breathing. In fact, I just did a talk this week on resilience, and one of the things we talked about was what's called square breathing or combat breathing.

I do this when I'm surfing and I'm either anxious about big surf, or just flat out hyperventilating from exertion. I'll breathe in for four seconds, hold it for four seconds, breath out for four seconds, and keep the empty lungs for four seconds. So four, four, four, four. Hence square breathing. And that's a proven way of getting your physiology from sympathetic nervous system, aka fight or flight, to parasympathetic nervous system kicking into gear, aka the relaxation response. So that's one thing.

One of the other things, I recommend that you check out is Amy Cuddy and her TED Talk about how posture and movement affect physiology and therefore your emotional state. Her takeaway message is that if you consciously get into a strong, confident posture, so your feet are shoulder width or even a little wider apart, no rocking back on your heels, that will trigger a biochemical shift, a physiological shift that makes you feel strong.

I'll share just one quick thing with you. I think people will get a kick out of this. The power of it. One of the things that she talked about was research showing that people who have power tend to take up a lot of space. And so she showed pictures of a senior executive sort of lounging back on a chair and the, quote, underling people, sort of crunched up in a very "I don't want to take up any space". She talked about how if you want to project power, then take up more space.

It was funny to hear that because a short while after I saw Amy's TED Talk, I gave a presentation at a hospital and I was noticing that these two surgeons in the group were just sprawled out and really dominating the airwaves before the program started. I was writing stuff on my clipboard, but I noticed that even though you're not feeling like small and intimidated, when you're hunched over writing stuff you're small. So, I consciously started to sprawl out in a more take up space position. And it's funny, it really—even though I knew what I was doing—I could feel the difference. So, power posture, Amy Cuddy's TED Talk, do check that out.

I also have done—and it depends on how hot the venue is—I've gone into the empty room and done a whole bunch of pushups. I say how hot the venue is because obviously I don't want to get all sweaty if I'm in a suit. But if you can just do something—you can do squats, just some kind of physical activity that burns off some of that adrenaline and therefore that anxiety. So those are some of the things that I've found to be helpful.

Now, some of the things related to being a good speaker so you've got that confidence coming from competence. A couple suggestions. One is to start off your talk with a story about something you've experienced that's relevant to the topic. The reason why, one of the things that I think about is when you start off with a story, besides the fact that it's way more interesting to the audience than a long intro, is that if you launch right into a story, the audience is like, whoa, this is different, and then they're captivated by the story.

But starting off with a story is also for our sake as speakers. Imagine you're up there with your best friend, your biggest supporter, and they've got their arm around your shoulder. That's your story, that's what your story is doing for you. Because you've experienced it, you don't have to be thinking about, okay, what

were the points I wanted to make? You've experienced the story, and you can tell it easily because you lived it. And actually at the last minute I've changed opening stories because I was feeling nervous and I wanted to use a story that the audience laughs at, it puts me at ease, and I'm good to go.

In a recent blog post on my site, I've got a debrief on a presentation. It's about a talk that I was asked to do one hour before I would need to go on stage. Even though I've been speaking for years, again, I normally need some time to get my thoughts together. But, in this case, I told a funny story to start out because I needed to relax.

So, that being said, if you start out with a story, and if it's a funny self-deprecating story, then that's awesome. But don't start out with a joke. Unless you're a comedian, it probably won't go well and then that just creates more awkwardness.

Now—anything you want to say about that, Steve?

- Stephen Lahey: Yes. It probably would be particularly dangerous for me. My sense of humor may or may not relate well to any audience in particular. So, for example, when you were talking of taking up space, I was going to say, well, this is a good time of year to think about that because we've all put on some pounds for the holidays. We're all taking up more space.
- David Lee: There you go.
- Stephen Lahey: And I'm sure everybody in the audience is roaring with laughter right now.
- David Lee: Give us more. Give us more.
- Stephen Lahey: Note to self. Use that joke again. But please go on, David.
- David Lee: Here is an example. A classic example of a type of story to start off with and it's what I call a pain and promise story. So, for instance, with the group that I had kind of like an impromptu talk and it was on using storytelling, well, since I know most people who've done any public speaking have had that painful experience of uh-oh I'm bombing here, after I told the funny story to loosen me up, and then, I told my pain and promise story. This was about a world

famous expert in the mind/body medicine field who was absolutely dying on stage. And even though he was really passionate about the topic and an expert in the topic, he was just preaching at the audience. He was just speaking in terms of abstractions. He'd say obvious things like it's really important to listen to the patient, it's really important to understand their story.

So he's just delivering all these worn out sound bites, these takeaway messages, and as I'm saying this, as I'm sharing this story about him bombing on stage I want to hook my audience and get people thinking, oh, I know what it's like to feel like I'm bombing on stage too. And then I describe what happened. Fortunately, he shifted gears and he started to tell a story, and when he did that, I found myself suddenly coming to life because I was slipping into a coma with the way he had been talking for the last 20 minutes. So, I come to life, and I look around, and I notice the rest of the audience has come to life, and now he has us.

So, that's what I shared with this audience. A pain and promise story where here's the pain that everybody in the audience can relate to, bombing on stage, and then here's the promise. Here's the good stuff that'll happen to you if you continue to listen to what I have to say.

As an example, let's say you've got a consultant who's an expert on succession planning. They could share a pain story of a company that had a disaster because they didn't have succession planning in place, and then share a promise story of a client of theirs and the good things that happened because they did effective succession planning. So that would be two contrasting examples, sort of like a combo, two different case studies that illustrate the pain and the promise. So that's a great way to start off by having people tap into WIIFM, what's in it for me. A pain and promise story is a great way to connect people with that.

- Stephen Lahey: Oh, absolutely.
- David Lee: Before I do my last couple of examples, anything else you want to say about that, Steve?
- Stephen Lahey: Well, we're kind of running out of time, to be honest with you, David.

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- David Lee: Okay.
- Stephen Lahey: We're probably going to have to do a part two interview. But let's just say this – I think that you've done your job as a speaker because you've left the audience wanting more. So here's a question. How can they connect with you online, especially via your Stories That Change site? I guess that's StoriesThatChange.com, right?
- David Lee: You've got it.
- Stephen Lahey: Tell the listeners about that and tell them about the type of work you do with individuals to help them to become better speakers, and storytellers if they want to add that to their speaking repertoire.
- David Lee: Absolutely. So just real briefly if you visit StoriesThatChange.com you'll find lots of examples, video, audio, and written, of how to use stories whether it's one-to-many in public speaking situations or one-to-one in a sales or coaching conversation. So lots of resources are there. And there's actually a brand new one I put up last night, it's a 60 minute recording of the talk that I did yesterday on storytelling for entrepreneurs. And so if you're interested, whether it's using storytelling to communicate who you are to the marketplace, your origin story, what your value proposition is, how to tell it in a way that's interesting and doesn't just sound like business speak, or, if you just want to be a better speaker, get in touch. Just email me from the website and we can talk.
- Stephen Lahey: And StoriesThatChange.com also gives information on your coaching services, and I know you do coach via Skype and so on, so they do not have to live in snowy Maine where you are now to work with you.
- David Lee: That's true.
- Stephen Lahey: You're obviously very well qualified to help people and I highly recommend that my listeners consider what you offer. Thank you again for joining me on the podcast, David.
- David Lee: Fantastic. Thank you, Steve.
- Stephen Lahey: And to our listeners, thank you for spending some time with us today. If you like what you heard, I encourage you to visit

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