

Think on Your Stilettos

IF YOU CAN SPEAK ABOUT
NOTHING, YOU CAN TALK
YOUR WAY OUT OF ANYTHING

"It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech."

MARK TWAIN

think on your stilettos. *figurative* to be able to speak coherently on a random topic while balancing on long, thin high heels for an audience of friends (*we were awestruck by her ability to think on her stilettos as she expounded on the ins and outs of envelopes*).

Can you talk for a full minute without interruption on the subject of rubber bands? Many people, especially introverts, don't consider themselves capable of speaking extemporaneously (the fancy word for thinking on your stilettos), because often in conversations the perfect line doesn't come to them until twenty minutes after the opportune moment has passed. But learning to Think on Your Stilettos is a skill like any other,

and has more to do with the confidence that comes from doing it well in a friendly environment surrounded by friends than with innate talent. Introverts, who prefer to ponder for several minutes or hours before they open their mouths, will particularly benefit from Think on Your Stilettoes because they will find it exquisitely painful. At least at first.

You may never have to regale an audience on the elastic subject of rubber bands, but chances are, at some point in your life, all eyes will turn to you, and you will be asked to share your thoughts. Will the thoughts tumble out like plastic monkeys from a barrel, leaving your audience dazed and confused by the tangled mess, or will your listeners be awed and enlightened by your oratorical gifts?

Comedian Jerry Seinfeld has joked that our fear of speaking is so severe that at a funeral, most of us would rather be the person in the casket than the one standing behind the podium delivering the eulogy. We hope that Think on Your Stilettoes will help you become so comfortable with ad-lib public speaking that you'll consider trying International Extemp, the bungee jump of public speaking, an event where speakers from around the world compete on their ability to prepare a seven-minute current-events speech in thirty minutes. When sociologist Andrew Zakeri asked which skills are most useful in the business world, oral communication was ranked number one by college graduates. Public speaking helps develop critical thinking as well as verbal and non-verbal communication, and the more you practice public speaking the less afraid you will be when asked to say a few words.

Think on Your Stilettoes starts with everyone writing a single word on a slip of paper and folding it up and putting it in a bowl. The more common the word, the better, like pineapple, toothpick, calendar, or soap. Mix up the papers in the bowl and choose someone to make the first pick. All they have to do is

speak for one minute about the word they draw. Sounds simple, doesn't it? The problem is that we are accustomed to setting our own verbal agendas, and the to-and-fro of conversation gives us a breather once we've run out of things to say.

To perform a monologue on a random topic is a skill rarely, if ever, used. But it's a great way to keep your brain nimble and ready for conversational surprises or encounters with (other) introverts, when you have a lot of empty conversational space to fill.

A variation of Think on Your Stilettos is to scan your surroundings for an object to talk about for a full minute. Try to convince your friends that the object is meant for some purpose other than what it's known for.

Let's use a clothespin as the object. It could be described as a "chip clip" to keep the bag of chips closed, but that's a fairly common use for clothespins. To dial up the creativity, one might hold up the clothespin and announce in a confident voice that the object is a "gloves pincher," a gadget used by women during the Victorian era to keep their gloves handy when they weren't wearing them. They would pinch their gloves together and then fasten the pincher to their handbag or the side of their boot. Another item that might be repurposed is a melon ball scoop. This could be described as an instrument used by ophthalmologists in the eighteenth century to examine their patients' eyes by looking through the hole in the center of the scoop. (You thought we were going to say scoop their eyeballs out, didn't you?)

These ideas should not be judged on feasibility but rather applauded for originality, humor, and the passion of the friend who is presenting. Be sure to applaud the fledgling efforts of the introverts in your group in proportion to the redness of their cheeks, and give your friend with the most unique explanation something ingenious as a prize. Deb made an impassioned

presentation in which she inflated a rubber kitchen glove and convinced us that it was used to cure people with a fear of hands, narrowly beating Julie whose CPA designation added credibility to her assertion that the gloves were used by accountants to handle dirty money, and Lynne who said they were used for clown burlesque. For her creative efforts, Deb won a bottle of Mamma Mia! Pizza Beer.

Think on Your Stiletto hones your ability to speak concisely and with clarity. It exercises your brain's creativity and imagination, too, which can in turn help with everyday problem-solving and decision-making. And, if you feel you would benefit from remedial Think On Your Stiletto training, choose a few words and do one-minute monologues alone in your car or join Toastmasters, where Think on Your Stiletto is called "Table Talk."