

LESSON-31

THE BURDEN OF SHYNESS

What is shyness?

Shyness means discomfort, inhibition, awkwardness, bashfulness, retiring, reserved, reticent, backward, diffident, coy, modest, self-conscious, timid, nervous, wary, chary, cautious, distrustful, suspicious etc. Similar to all forms of stage fright, shyness is brought about by apprehension of unpleasant events or outcomes and the fear of negative evaluation.

Difference between Shyness and Stage fright

Stage fright and shyness are closely related. Social and clinical psychologists find both the problems under the general area of social anxiety or social phobia. Shyness differs from stage fright in the sense that it occurs only in groups where there is a proper give-and-take policy, or interaction. In the case of stage fright there is generally a performer and an audience. There is very limited interaction in the form of a question and answer session and that too at the end of a presentation. Evaluation, however, plays a smaller role in shyness than it does in stage fright.

Stage fright is much more common than shyness. Furthermore, almost all shy people experience stage fright. When you fear something and can avoid it, there is not much of a problem. Many people are able to avoid situations in which they have to perform in front of an audience.

Symptoms of Shyness

Behaviour: Shy people are known more by what they do not do than by specific things that they usually do. They are withdrawn and inhibited people who refrain from interacting with others. They occasionally respond to others in the most minimal ways. When someone asks them a question, they speak so softly even to the extent of mumble. When shyness is extreme, there are visible signs of anxiety, such as trembling hands.

Emotion: Shy people often express two main emotional reactions: fear and self-consciousness. When fear predominates, the sympathetic nervous system reacts with quickened heartbeat, increasing blood pressure and sweating. When self-consciousness predominates, the parasympathetic nervous system causes instant and involuntary blushing of face.

Perception: When fear predominates, the shy person becomes experience panic-stricken in the immediate present and worry about future social interactions. When self-consciousness predominates, he or she may feel personally threatened and vulnerable.

Reasons of Shyness

The greatest cause of shyness is novelty. Strangeness emerges from the presence of new people or new situations. As you start approaching new neighborhoods, new schools, new jobs or meeting new people, you probably tend to show more shyness. As you assume new social roles, novelty greatly increases.

A Fear of People

Shyness often presents itself as a fear of unknown people. Many persons express shyness around strangers, members of the opposite sex, authorities by virtue of their knowledge and others shy around authorities by virtue of their roles.

Situations that Invoke a Fear of Negative Evaluation

Generally, as the formality of a situation increases, shyness increases with it. Graduations, funerals, weddings and public events are examples of situations in which shyness becomes more intense. When there are many rules, and the enforcing authority insists on them being followed there is a greater likelihood of making mistakes. For example, saying the wrong thing to the widow in India, or giving the wrong kind of gifts, can lead to exposure and embarrassment.

Situations in which there is a great deal of social attention cause shyness. Being ignored at a party is just as difficult and embarrassing as suddenly having the spotlight placed on you. A breach of privacy also is another cause of shyness. Many persons feel shy about delivering a speech or being part of large groups of people or being in social situations or being in situations requiring assertiveness and being in situations in which they are being evaluated.

Low Self-Esteem and Feelings of Unworthiness

The poorer your evaluation of yourself the less willing you will be to interact with others. Your apprehension about the outcomes of social interactions will tend to be negative. For example, if you consider yourself boring, you will refrain from attending intimate dinner parties.

Consequences of Shyness

If shyness is allowed to have its sway, it will lead to loneliness and depression. Shy persons often tend to have fewer friends and less frequent romantic association with the fair sex. In relationships, shy persons will generally choose to keep themselves in their own confines. They are not so free to divulge their feelings, their wants and even their complaints. They prefer the security of not asking and not telling to avoid the risk of taking a chance and getting hurt in turn.

Isolation-Shy persons often think their reactions to be inappropriate, so they prefer loneliness to be a safe haven for them rather than associating them in groups or in public in which they may feel embarrassed. They choose protective *isolation*. Unfortunately, shyness lowers attention in both social and work situations. Shyness also leads to poorer performance at work, and worse functioning in relationships in different spheres.

Boredom-Shyness often leads to *boredom*. As shy people try to avoid interaction, they often develop a repetitive and outmoded lifestyle that is based more on safety needs than on pleasure seeking and pleasure giving. Since shyness and fearfulness are inter-linked,

shy persons tend not to experiment with new events, activities or new social circles, which offer newer and better experiences.

Vanity-Interestingly, shy persons are inclined to nourish self-aggrandizement and conceit. They are preoccupied with themselves. They have many thoughts and fantasies that they never get to act on.

How to defeat shyness

The basic formula for stage fright also applies to shyness as well. You can predict how much shyness you will experience by looking at two factors: your prediction of how successfully you will perform and how important you think the consequences of your performance is for your self-evaluation.

- Identifying fear provoking thoughts leading to shyness
- Setting of goal
- Social skills training
- Learning new conversational skills
- Entering into a conversation group
- Question – asking
- Giving and receiving compliments
- Learning assertion skills-How to say “No”
- Practicing skills you already have
- Selecting appropriate practice opportunities
- Preparing a dialogue in advance Learning to build self-confidence
- Maintaining positive attitude
- Seeing failures as milestones to success
- Believing that any situation is an ongoing learning process irrespective of success or failure.

Now here is an account of a real life event about shyness in public speaking.

He Had an Audience of 20000000 people A day During 1920 to 1936

For sixteen years, O.O. McIntyre had been writing a column titled “New York Day by Day”. Four hundred and ninety eight newspapers carried it, and about 20 million people read it daily .

He was the most celebrated commentator on New York life that the old town had ever known; and yet he was born in Missouri and never saw New York until he was 34.

To millions of people Oscar Odd McIntyre – or “odd” as his friends call him – was the most famous person in New York.

Even if you paste one of Odd McIntyre’s pictures on an envelope and drop it in a letterbox without any name or address on it, it would have been delivered to his Park Avenue apartment, he was receiving at least one such letter each week.

There were lot of odd things about Odd McIntyre. For example he was paid \$2150 per week for writing his daily column; yet he never talked face to face, more than three times in his life with the man who paid him that salary.

He mad more than \$100000 a year by writing yet he was not having stenographer. He was packing it all out himself on portable typewriter.

His salary was more than that of the president of the United States; yet he never knew how his office looks like. He was having one office, but he had never been near, it he did all his work at home.

Odd McIntyre was not having the slightest desire to go on the air, though he was offered thirty one radio contracts in one year. One concern agreed to put a microphone right in his New York apartment and pay him five hundred dollars a minute for talking in front of it; but he did not do it. He said that he got goose pimples at the very thought of it. He never wanted to appear in the movies, in spite of the fact that Hollywood had been hot on his track for years. Warner Brothers were determined to have him act as master of ceremonies in one of their films. They tried to tempter him with one offer after another, but he kept saying, "No. No" finally, they sent him a blank contract saying, "write your own figure - anything you want and sign it and send it back.

He sent it back all right, but it didn't have his signature.

He was asked why he turned down these fabulous offers, and he said, "well, because I don't know how to talk." He replied that he tried to make a speech once at a dinner given for Jack Dempsey in Los Angeles; and when he stood up, he was so scared that he felt swallowing and stammering and as a result could not say a word.