

Conscious Performing

Conscious Performing

...from fear to freedom!

By Sally Bonkrude

*Overcome performance anxiety
and reclaim the gifts of childhood
for peak performance.*



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I would like to dedicate this book to my husband, Steve Bonkrude, who has stood beside me, at times held me up and who, without which, this book would never have been written. I owe him my very life and no words could ever express how much his love and support has meant to me.

There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening, that is translated through you into action. And because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique.

And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and it will be lost. The world will not have it.

It is not your business to determine how good it is, nor how valuable, nor how it compares to other expressions.

It is your business to keep it yours clearly and directly.

To keep the channel open.

—Martha Graham



I will not die an unlived life.

I will not live in fear of falling or catching fire.

I choose to inhabit my days, to allow my living to open me, to make me less afraid, more accessible, to loosen my heart until it becomes a wing, a torch, a promise.

I choose to risk my significance; to live so that which came to me as seed goes to the next as blossom and that which came to me as blossom goes on as fruit.

—Dawna Markova

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Introduction

The Performer...the Performance

Everyone is a performer in life! I think of the act of performing as being in relationship with another human being through words, music, art or writing. Whether you're a public speaker, musician, actor, actress, talk show host, politician, artist, writer, teacher, or a sales person, you express and connect with others in life. Your audience then becomes anyone with whom you make contact. Performance is about relationship, connection, expression and an exchange of energy. A great performance is when you can show up as "you", without the need to shut down any part of yourself and are free to express yourself fully, while at the same time being totally present.

Performance Anxiety

Performance anxiety is when you move away from connecting with authentic openness and instead close up and stop the energetic flow of connection between you and your audience. Often times we think of performance anxiety in relation to the symptoms that sometimes occur such as: racing pounding heart, panic, a frozen in-place feeling, shaky hands, voice and body, dry mouth, that out of body feeling, mind going blank or sweating. These symptoms do quickly disconnect us and set us up for an unrelenting cycle of mounting anxiety. We can get so caught up in our own symptoms that we are not even aware of the audience in front of us. Performance anxiety is an inability to be embodied, and present with your audience. This can come across as a rigid looking body, a neck stretching and reaching to connect, a clenched jaw, talking to fast, to loud, to quiet, or just not sensing into what your audience is feeling. You may have no typical performance symptoms, yet wonder why your performance falls flat or you're unable to get your point across. It's because, once again, you are closed down, without connection, unable to have an open energetic flow. An emotion or thought has hijacked you, disconnected you, this is performance anxiety too. Performance anxiety then, is anything that stops you from making an authentic, openhearted connection with your audience.

Conscious Performing (Definition)

Conscious Performing is reclaiming the gifts of childhood, as a way to open your channels of energy, to embrace your free flowing spirit, and to be free to connect with your audience without fear.

Freedom to fear...Our Journey Through Childhood

In each chapter of *Conscious Performing* we begin by looking at you as a child, free spirited, open and trusting. You come into the world breathing deeply and rhythmically. You have no inhibitions or worries about how people will perceive you or if you're perfect. Tensions and blocks haven't been developed in your body. You are one with all there is in the world. Sound/music shifts and touches you. Life is about play and within the play you grow and learn without overbearing stress and fear. You are present, expressive, improvisational and eager for self-discovery. Finally, you know when to release, to let go, relax and sleep.

Slowly, through time, you begin to close down, armor up and your body becomes blocked with tension. You have no idea of how you feel inside. Your mind takes over to mask the fear building within. Your breath becomes shallow and your energy becomes stuck and frozen in your body creating a state of anxiety or hyper alert. This compromises your health and your ability to be a Conscious Performer. You have journeyed from **Freedom to Fear.**

Importance of the Gifts of Childhood for Performance

The Gifts of Childhood: breath, movement, sound, improvisation, play, connection, presence and release/relaxation create a fearless Performer. A great performer knows how to connect authentically with others and how to take the time to rejuvenate through release and rest. To make a connection you must be open with free flowing energy. It's that simple. All the gifts of childhood are about becoming unstuck, connecting to self, others and the Universe. It's about getting out of your mind and letting the energy flow through your body accessing the intelligence of your whole being. It's like a rebirth to a natural state, a state that is still wired for fear, but doesn't live in fear and anxiety.

Reclaiming the Gifts for Performance

This book guides, supports and encourages you on your journey to reclaim the gifts of childhood and become a Conscious Performer. This section of each chapter gives you the “how to” of reclaiming these gifts. As you read this section of each chapter imagine it’s your birthday, complete with cake, candles and beautiful packages for you to unwrap and embrace.

In each chapter, take your time to unwrap each gift, experiment and play. This book is unlike any other book on overcoming performance anxiety because it’s not a cookie cutter approach but an organic unwrapping of your true self. You will reclaim these gifts by weaving them into your life on a daily basis, and in the process, discover the Conscious Performer within you. Then you will be able to step onto your “stage” in life, as an embodied, authentic and fearless performer.

Conscious Performance Stories

The stories within each chapter will help you to see how others have integrated the information and exercises you will learn. You will read about my personal journey with public performance anxiety and how I continue to follow the path to freedom. You will read and be inspired by the stories of other people that have been on the path from fear to freedom. Please note that these stories and names have been altered to protect their identity, but contain the essence of their struggles and successes.

Conscious Performance Plan

Each chapter has a smorgasbord of exercises for you to experiment and play with. This book is meant to be underlined, highlighted, scribbled in, and read again and again. You will want to not just read this book, but also live it. It’s an action book, not a quick read. It’s fine to get it dirty. Bring it to the bathtub, hiking, or read it out under a tree. Toss it up in the air and play catch with it.

Try every exercise that you are drawn to and notice how it feels in your body. Some of the exercises you will love and they will become a part of your life to stay on the path of “freedom.” Other exercises will create an inner dissonance and you will discard them. From these ideas you may

create your own “performance plan” to assist you in moving from fear to freedom. Select your favorite exercises to create plans for pre-performance, performance, and post-performance. Become a conscious, fearless performer by integrating these practices and ways of living into your life. Conscious Performing is your organic path to reclaiming what is already yours—the gifts of childhood.

Note

If you are currently working with a psychotherapist or have a medical condition, I recommend consulting with your therapist or doctor before beginning to implement this book into your life. If you find yourself becoming overwhelmed with emotions, or have trouble sleeping, eating, or functioning, talk to a medical professional. Be gentle and let your body, mind and spirit guide you.