

“Don’t be threatened by people smarter than you.” - Howard Schultz

Have you ever felt this way?

Whenever you have to attend a meeting with a bunch of brilliant people, agitation, fear and pressure will seem to get the best of you. Right before the session, your stomach will swirl like crazy. Your heart pumps so fast and so sonorous that you worry the person next to you can clearly hear the uproarious beats. Worse still, you can feel the shivering coldness in your body, and then every sound in this world goes silent.

Half-way through the meeting, you still cannot find the right time to sneak in your clever comment. You spend most of your time thinking, thinking and more thinking, trying to search for appropriate words because you don’t want to make a blooper. After summoning up your courage to speak up, your voice just doesn’t come out right due to the overwhelming tension. Instead of eloquent, well-versed speech, what comes out is nothing but a senseless mumbling.

If you show none of the symptom mentioned above, you must be a very confident—and lucky—individual. But there’re still many of us who cannot get rid of this annoying fear. What’s the problem? Probably, it comes from our own thought that we aren’t good enough since we often compare ourselves with others. Moreover, we keep repeating the daunting phrases that we are not smart, gifted or competent.

Someone tells me that language is also a formidable hurdle. If the meeting is conducted in one’s mother tongue, there will be no problem. But if it’s in English, the brain suddenly feels numb. Apart from stunning ideas that must be suggested in the meeting, one must also think of the way to phrase it in English. To make the situation worse and more tense, participants in the room seem to be using English like natives.

I am not kidding about it.

I have seen this syndrome wreaks havoc several times. But I also have seen many who won’t make a big deal out of this fear. They don’t let it affect their confidence or unwavering will. After all, it depends on our mind. If we tell ourselves that we are not competing against anyone, or engaging in heated debate competition, or demonstrating our intelligence to outwit other people, then we can’t feel the pressure.

The best method, I have to say, is not to compare oneself to others.

I believe that no one is perfect. Everybody has both strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, you, in any circumstances, shouldn’t put yourself down simply because someone else is talking more, looking smarter, and having better efficiency in language. Lots of people, who are not comfortable with English, can perfectly convey their messages and points with cogency, and they rightfully earn great respect from audience. Therefore, we must be confident and share our ideas without contrived mannerism. There’s no need to be shy or scared of saying something unintelligent, because no one knows everything and nothing is completely right or wrong. Answers to every issue depend on one’s experiences and how one chooses to look at them from various aspects.

One useful tip, I hope, is that the fear of smart people can be blotted out if we can look at them as teachers, not competitors.

If we respect them for having more knowledge in certain areas, we should take that opportunity to learn from them. How do they get to where they are now? Mingling with smart people should be viewed as a chance to improve oneself, not to discourage one from doing anything. During the meeting or working with smart people, we should learn their thinking process. If we are lost or don't understand anything, don't hesitate to ask. Sometimes simple question that sounds easy and uncomplicated, can give intense exercise to the brain of these experts.

I wish that my advice can comfort many of you and wake up those dormant confidences inside you for future meetings. Remember that you should never let your own imaginary fear destroys your self-respect.