



PODCAST #70

Interview with Julie Friend (JF) by Carma Spence (CS)

This transcript has been edited for readability.

CS: Hello and welcome to *Public Speaking Super Powers*. Today I have on the line with me Julie Friend, who is a strategic business advisor with Gemstone Partners. Welcome Julie.

JF: Thank you and thank you very much for having me.

CS: Just so listeners can get a feel for your unique expertise, could you tell us a little bit about what you do and about your journey to success in public speaking?

JF: Absolutely. I work in a management consultancy capacity with Gemstone. Been with the organization for quite some time and in fact involved in strategic business advising since probably the mid 1980s. And one of my absolute favorite passions is getting out and public speaking regarding data privacy security and minimizing risk for identity theft in companies of all kinds.

So, public speaking has been something that has been very important to me from a personal perspective. It's a great practice for experts to be able to get out in front of people and hone skills. Something I love to do. I've done public speaking as far as guest presenting, as well as a lot of corporate training. So, they require many of the same skills.

I think one of my favorite things is to be in front of people. And I've been on the stage since around something like second grade. Various things from musical performing to instrumental to vocals. Did a lot of theater work, and things like that. So, in a professional capacity, I believe that really has aided me tremendously in being able to get up in front of a group of people and talk.

CS: Do you believe that public speaking is a learned skill? Or do you think it's something that people are born being able to do? And why do you choose the answer you choose?

JF: Unlike some skills, I think it's somewhat innate. But I definitely believe that it is a skill that anyone can learn to do. I think confidence, poise, some of those things might come a little more easily to others. I believe also that there may be the introvert/extrovert type of personality. And that's not a bad thing, introvert or extrovert. It's just a different type of personality. Think sometimes a lot of people that regenerate their energy by being in a more introverted, tend to probably not like to public speak as much. That's a possibility. I don't know. But I've worked with a number of different people on helping them prepare and

practice for presentations. Those who were absolutely deathly afraid to get up and speak. And I've seen them blossom with a lot of practice, tips and tricks. Things like that. So, I do believe that it is a skill that people can develop.

CS: OK. So, if you were a public speaking superhero, what do you believe would be your main superpower?

JF: First and foremost, having fun. Because that helps set the tone and if you're not enjoying it, it makes the process very difficult. But as far as a superpower, I think mine is that I'm very empathetic as a personality. And I believe that mirroring my audience, relating to my audience, at that level versus necessarily walking into the room stone cold expert like. And that can be anything from dress, to the actions used. Movement in a room, as well as speech. Lot of people speak with way too many big words or they're talking a very technical topic, and the room is maybe not technical. And I think that's a real superpower that I've been told that I have – being able to take very involved topics, deliver a well-rounded presentation, but having the audience, no matter where they are within that topic, get it.

CS: So, if someone wanted to develop that particular superpower, what would your advice be?

JF: Put myself in as many rooms, with as many people as you don't know on a regular basis and hone that skill on a one-to-one and a small group basis.

CS: Can you give us some tips on that? I mean, how do you know you're being empathic? And how do you know you're just making it up?

JF: A unique question. I just ask someone that the other day when they were using the term to describe. I think a lot of people spend a good deal of time, whether they're in front of a room of people – and I would differentiate between a keynote presentation and a presentation. Because a keynote presentation doesn't generally warrant interaction. But a presentation better darn well have some interaction or you very likely will lose the audience. So, I love humor. I don't like jokes. And humor can be very simple to lighten the crowd. I never recommend a joke at all.

The simplest way to understand empathy is to listen in a conversation – in a room like that if you're honing this skill – how much time you're talking versus how much time you're listening. What that does is help you develop your ear for your audience when you are giving a presentation. And that ear may not be verbal. It may be visual clues and things like that as well.

CS: So, this would be like having the audience ask you questions and then listening to what the questions are ... that would help? Or are you talking about watching and seeing, oh these people are falling asleep or something like that?

JF: I would say all of the above. That's a great summary. And even in a small group of people, it's the same way. Speaking in a group, it's communication skills and understanding the reaction of what it is that a presenter is communicating and how they're communicating. So, there's lots of those verbal and nonverbal cues that can be seen.

- CS:** So, I guess in a way you have to really know your material well enough so that you are not paying 100 percent attention to it, so that you can at least give some of your attention to your audience and read those cues.
- JF:** Absolutely and those are two of my biggest tips: Practice, practice and practice. And I would say, for about one hour of presentation material, there's I'd say a 5 to 1 ratio between research, development, practice, etc. So, for every hour that I'm going to give one, or every hour that I put in, there's lots and lots of time behind the scenes. And that's two things I highly recommend in that situation, is to either have access to your presentation so that you can see it as well as your audience. I prefer either a monitor or a laptop. I don't recommend holding papers in your hand. And yes, as much of it as absolutely possible. And facing the audience instead of looking at the presentation. So being comfortable with content is really important.
- CS:** Oh yeah. I've seen many presentations where the speaker did not look at the audience. In fact, when I was competing in high school on the speech team, in one of the competition rooms I was in one of the competitors actually gave his entire presentation with his back to the room.
- JF:** Wow.
- CS:** He was very nervous.
- JF:** Yes. And that's embarrassing, because you feel for them.
- CS:** I did. I did feel for him. I mean, it's one thing to be nervous, and yes sometimes facing your audience can make you feel more nervous, but I can't imagine that turning your back on your audience would make it any better.
- JF:** I can't believe that either. All I can think is to look at the content. It's very common though, in a lot of public speaking, to turn that head over the shoulder.
- CS:** Yeah. I mean, I think once in a while, like if you're making a gesture to it, I think that might work. Because then it directs the audience's eye to where you want to. But if you spend the whole time with that gesture almost frozen in place, then it's as the audience looks at the presentation slide and then it you, you've just lost that connection.
- JF:** Absolutely. Absolutely. Eye contact, completely important. There's a lot of other little tips and tricks and things that can help ease a presenter's stress. And those are things that I absolutely focus on: arriving early and being prepared, calling ahead of time and knowing what kind of AV equipment you'll have.
- CS:** Oh yeah.
- JF:** And all of those tiny little details. I often try to take a walk before I speak. So that, this sounds silly, but the oxygen level in your body is good.

CS: It also helps drain some of the anxiety and energy that you build up.

JF: Absolutely.

CS: It uses up some of that. Now, you mentioned eye contact. And there's probably a million tips on how to establish eye contact with an audience, because you're basically establishing eye contact with a large group of people, which sounds almost like it's impossible. I was just wondering, what is your advice on creating that eye contact sensation for the audience?

JF: Well, I have to say it's venue based. If I was on a stage with a lot of people and it was impossible to really be among them, it would be a little different. But in many of my gatherings, if it's a 100 or 200 and there are aisles, be at tables, chairs, I really try to walk into the audience. And as you can imagine talking about identity theft and privacy security that isn't exactly the happiest of topics with a lot of people. So, I try to show them that there is a warmth there. That's also a personal thing for me that's kind of my personality. Still maintaining that sort of control over the presentation with a sense of expertise, without bombarding them.

The superpower of public speaking is marvelous. I encourage people to work toward using that as a business development tool. A lot of people don't think about it. They don't realize that it is a way to develop a professional persona out there in the world, looking for other engagements. And it's a great tool to add to a business person's arsenal, if they have the ability to get out there and start to seek speaking engagements. It is a way to develop income for a business professional, as well, if they can put together a program that's actually a very marketable tool. So, I encourage it.

CS: Yeah, it basically gets you in front of leads and starts developing that know, like, trust factor very quickly.

JF: Absolutely. Absolutely.

CS: Well thank you, Julie, for sharing your tips with us. This is Carma Spence from *Public Speaking Super Powers* signing off.

If you would like to learn more about Julie Friend, visit his profile page at:

<http://publicspeakingpowers.com/featuredspeakers/julie-friend/>