



**Helping individuals and companies
break out of their comfort zones
to become more successful**

Training | Coaching | Speaking
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Think on Your Feet – **and Watch out for the Wasp!**

Recently, I was scheduled to speak about "Thinking on Your Feet" to a group of 50 administrative professionals, in honor of Administrative Professionals Day. I was well- prepared; I had interviewed several people from the audience over the phone and I had my notes, timer and driving directions ready.

I arrived more than an hour early in order to have lunch with the participants. On the way to the room where the event was being held, I stopped in the restroom. A few seconds later, I felt a sharp pain in the back of my leg, as if I had been poked by a needle. In shock, I looked down at the floor and saw a black-winged insect - and realized that it was a wasp! I stared at it; it was fully grown and looked like it had been reared on steroids and protein shakes! Then I crushed it with my foot.

I had never been stung by a wasp or a bee in my life. Ever. So I had no idea whether I was allergic.

I considered the situation. There were 50 people in the room next door getting ready to have lunch and then listen to me speak. And I had planned an interactive session that included improvisational exercises. What if my leg swelled up, or the sting hurt too much to stand comfortably? How could I lead a session on "Thinking on Your Feet," when I was sitting down? Or worse, what if I had a severe allergic reaction and went into shock right in front of the audience?

I looked at my watch - I still had time to get the sting checked out before my time to speak. So I went out to the hallway, told one of the program organizers what had happened and asked if there were any medical personnel on duty. She looked shocked and then quickly made a phone call. In less than 3 minutes, the security guard who had let me into the building earlier arrived with his little black bag - he was a certified EMT.

I explained the situation and he decided it was best to take me to the first aid room. So off we went - Joe the EMT, the program organizer and me, limping along, to get the grand tour because of course, the first aid room was on the other side of the building.

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I kept saying, "This is going to make a great story! I am so going to use this story!" It's what a trainer calls a "teachable moment" - when something happens that you can't ignore and you use it to make a point. (It's what a speaker calls a "Murphy's Law moment" and an improv comedian calls a perfect opportunity!)

Joe gathered my medical history and checked to ensure that my breathing, blood pressure and heart rate were all normal. After administering cream and an ice pack, he concluded that I showed no signs of a severe allergic reaction and that I could go ahead with the program as scheduled.

So, at 1 PM, I went on as scheduled, with only some soreness and mild swelling. I led the participants through a series of improv exercises, including Half-Life, that helped them get comfortable thinking on their feet, which is a crucial part of their roles as administrative professionals. Of course, I shared the wasp story with them, showed off my ice pack and made the connection to "Thinking on Your Feet."

The next day, one of the organizers emailed me: "Your presentation was filled with interactive fun and useful information. The activities you planned encouraged us to go beyond our comfort zones and, as made obvious by the laughter that filled the room, your games were engaging and thoroughly enjoyed." Then she added, "My, what extent you go through to give examples of 'thinking on your feet'!"

What is the moral of the story? Despite your best plans and preparations for a presentation or anything else, sometimes things just happen that are outside your control. Then you have to think on your feet. Rely on your experience and your skills, and ask for help when needed. Be confident and trust that you will say and do the "right" thing - and the "right" thing is defined as the best that you can do in that moment, given those circumstances.

So the next time the unexpected happens and you have to think on your feet, be confident that you can handle it - just watch out for the wasp!

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