

## How WFWP Participation Taught Me to Be a Skillful Public Speaker

Kiyomi Schmidt  
May 30, 2019



I have always taken school very seriously, but as I grow older I realize that there are so many life skills that you don't learn in the classroom, like confidence, determining your value system, facing your fears, or trailblazing something new. And through working with WFWP over the past four and a half years, I have gained new experiences that have challenged me to develop life skills outside of what I needed before.

While I have many strengths, I acknowledge my innate weaknesses in certain social settings. I have always been a bit shy or timid, which makes public speaking, voicing my opinions, and making conversation with new people feel overwhelming. (Not to mention the added challenge for a self-proclaimed planner to do these things off the cuff of my sleeve.)

I have heard the idea many times that you should just focus on what you are good at, and someone else will fill in the gaps. And for a long time, I believed that. While it is true that teamwork and utilizing each other's strengths can be a really important tool, I think with only that mindset we end up selling ourselves short.

Why? Because when we tell ourselves time and time again that we are not good at something, we start to define what we can and can't do. When I told myself I am not good at public speaking, I created my own self-imposed wall of what I can't do. Instead of working on that weakness, I avoided it at all costs, leaving myself to approach the idea with paralyzing fear.

When I started working with WFWP, I had zero interest in public speaking, to the point where I brought it up in my interview. Well, the joke was on me because just three months into the job I was asked to speak during a United Nations Commission on the Status of Women event in front of hundreds of people. And even though I strongly did not want to, I felt like I can't let my fear allow me to pass up this opportunity. So I did it, felt accomplished, and took a sigh of relief thinking that was the end of it...

Spoiler alert - that was just the beginning. Since then, I have emceed events featuring high end speakers, given trainings and presentations, spoken on conference calls, videos, board meetings, and much more. And each time it is still a major challenge for me to get over the nerves and the fears. But every time I do, that self-imposed wall gets a little bit shorter and seems a little less insurmountable.

Through working with WFWP, I found I had so many ideas I wanted to make happen, like video ideas or social media posts, and the only way for me to do it was to face my fears and stop worrying about what other people might think. I had something I wanted to accomplish and it was literally only me and my fears standing in my way!



2015 CSW

I decided, in that case, I might as well take a step forward and try, accept the fact that I will definitely fumble along the way, and know that is okay.

This has empowered me in my own life, giving me confidence to speak out on things that matter to me, and to do things I normally would never do.

Two recent examples:

- A few days ago a man commented on my body after I had passed him and was already a few steps ahead. Instead of pretending I didn't hear and just letting his comment bother me, I confidently turned around and walked toward him. You could tell he wasn't expecting it, as he shriveled back into the wall and meekly said "it was just a compliment." I looked at him straight in the eyes and said "Your creepiness is not a compliment. Get it straight." And I walked away with confidence instead of feeling defeated, as I had experienced the power in speaking up.

- The second example was when I noticed one of my favorite YouTube stars in the coffee shop I frequent. The thought of asking him for a photo was making me hyperventilate. I knew if I waited until I was ready, the moment would certainly pass. So instead I took the first step by just standing out of my seat. Then I committed to taking one step forward, then two, and somehow made it to where he was sitting, where I spewed a few jumbled, unplanned words out of my mouth asking for a photo. I accepted that my delivery was less than perfect and that I may have embarrassed myself, but the reward was much greater as I did something I would have otherwise only daydreamed about.

I have been noticing more of my friends and people in my life that are too afraid to go after what they want, full of self-doubt in their own capabilities or shyness.

So I want to say to you that when you are the only one standing in your way, know that you are the only one who can change that!! Take the first step and see what happens!

