



## Overcoming Shyness

### Did you know that . . .<sup>1</sup>

- nearly fifty percent of adults in the U.S. consider themselves shy?
- on average, shy people date less and may marry later in life?
- shyness is on the increase—almost 10% over the last twenty years or so?
- shyness causes shy people to miss out on opportunities that others would embrace?

Are you shy? Don't worry! You are not alone. In fact, some of the world's most successful people—including Robert Frost, Eleanor Roosevelt, Tom Hanks, Halle Berry, Barbara Walters, and David Letterman—are shy. Although shyness is not easily overcome, with practice you can start to feel more comfortable in those situations that used to make you feel painfully shy. Here's how:

### **Step 1: Learn Some Shyness Skills**

These skills might include:

- *Planning Ahead:* When you're ready to try something you've been avoiding—like a phone call or a conversation—write down what you want to say beforehand. Rehearse out loud, maybe even in front of the mirror. Then just do it.
- *Thinking Positive:* Spend some time thinking of good things about yourself. What are your strengths? Next time you are in a situation that makes you feel uncomfortable or awkward, remind yourself of your strengths—and stand tall!
- *Asking Questions:* One difficulty many shy people face is the belief that they have to talk a lot in order to be a good conversationalist. Actually, a good way to engage others is to ask them questions about themselves. Don't ask simple yes or no questions, but instead, ask open-ended questions. For example, instead of asking a classmate if he likes the class (which will produce a yes or no answer), ask what he thinks about the class.
- *Making Eye Contact:* Show your interest in someone with direct eye contact. Nodding and smiling also helps you to demonstrate that you are both friendly and a good listener.
- *Remembering Shyness Statistics:* Remember that anytime you are in a room with a group of people, as many as half of them may be shy as well. They just may be waiting for you to say something to reduce *their* anxiety!

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<sup>1</sup> Henderson, L. & Zimbardo, P. (2005) *Shyness*. Encyclopedia of Mental Health. Retrieved July 28, 2005, from <http://www.shyness.com/encyclopedia.html#I>

**Step 2: Make a List of Situations that Make You Feel Shy**

- Your list might include things like starting a conversation with a person behind the counter at the drugstore, or introducing yourself to a classmate. Make the list as long as you like, and be sure to leave yourself room to add situations as you think of them.
- Sort your list from most to least difficult.

**Step 3: Systematically Challenge Yourself on Your Shy Situations**

- Starting with the least difficult situation on your list, give yourself two weeks in which you will deliberately put yourself into that situation a few times and will practice some of the skills you learned in Step 1.
- When you've practiced your skills in one of the situations for two weeks, move on to the next situation and slowly work through them all.

**Step 4: Keep Your Skills Sharp**

- Even after you've worked through all of the challenging situations on your shyness list, you'll still want to keep your skills sharp. Be conscious about practicing them at every available opportunity. Ask friends or family to help you and to give you feedback. Enlist them as your cheerleaders!