

I've not been shy about talking about my issues with anxiety and depression over the years. They are a part of my life and something that I am not ashamed of these days.

However, not being ashamed of them does not make them go away!

Anxiety is the biggest problem on a daily basis. A large portion of my time is spent wanting to curl up into a ball and hide from the world, cutting any and all contact with other humans. That is part of the reason that I used to love online gaming. I didn't have to interact with "real" people, there was no expectation that I would have to make eye contact. I could be Dave Rage, cannon fodder grunt in Call of Duty.

So, what do you think one of the most unnatural things I could possibly do would be? Public speaking. Standing on a stage, with hundreds of eyes looking at me, expecting me to impart knowledge and wisdom in an interesting way. What do I spend a fair amount of time doing? Public speaking!

I have never been good at standing in front of people. I remember one school play where I was asked to step in for another child who was sick. I had one line, that was it. As soon as I got on stage, I froze and had to be dragged off. It is not my natural environment.

Over the years I got better, especially if I was doing something I felt I was ok at, such as singing or playing the guitar. But it never came naturally.

So now I find myself in the position of being seen as something of an expert in gamification. This comes with the expectation that I will speak to people at events. First off, I feel privileged and very grateful for this. And, perversely, I actually really enjoy it. But, I don't find it easy.

Introducing Dave Rage, the Man in the Hat

That's where a hat and Dave Rage come to the rescue.

If I am struggling with anxiety at an event, the hat goes on and I become Dave Rage. Dave Rage can walk on stage with rock music playing, arms raised and soaking up the applause. Dave Rage can confidently tell an audience of several hundred adults that they need to play more. On those days, Andrzej just wants to curl up into a ball and cry!

I recently had the honour of speaking at Gamification Europe. However, I was really struggling with anxiety at the time. Some noticed that on the first day when I wasn't

speaking, I didn't wear "The Hat". I kept to myself or with people that I consider friends in the industry. On the second day, where I was due to speak, "The Hat" was on my head all day and Dave Rage was mingling and networking like a pro.

The hat acts as a costume that allows me to become a character. What you see on stage is not usually just Andrzej, it is Andrzej and Dave Rage.

I don't have to do this every time and I am not suffering from multiple personality disorder, but sometimes it is what gets me through.

If you have any kind of mental health issue, you have to find mechanisms that allow you to function from day to day. In my case, this includes needing to function in front of large groups of people.

My advice to those who have to speak in public and don't want to create a character? Remember they are there to see you speak because you know something they don't and they want to hear it!

What are your coping mechanisms? Do you create a character, or do you just try and face it head on?



“The Hat”

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