

SPEAKING TO INSPIRE:

AUTHENTIC VOICE AND PRESENCE

by Diana Theodore

On a recent visit to Vancouver I had the gift of a couple of free hours between meetings. It was a rainy day so I decided to visit the nearby planetarium.

After immersing myself in the 3D galaxy experience I opted to cap off my visit by attending a presentation on the future of space research. I was ushered into a beautiful, state-of-the-art auditorium designed for an audience of about 300.

By the time the house lights dimmed there were two people in the audience: me and a gentleman who was a dead ringer for Albert Einstein. The presenter strode onto the stage, briefly acknowledged us and launched into his presentation – in ‘full house’ auditorium, podium-style performance! It certainly was memorable – not for its content, ideas or messages - but because it was so uncomfortable that it was comical.

The presenter, clearly a knowledgeable, committed researcher, was completely disconnected from himself, his environment, his audience, and from the purpose of what the presentation was for.

Clinging to his script ‘no matter what’ in order to get his presentation ‘over with’ he was not **present in the moment**.



“The aim is to know your story so well that you embody it. That is the life force of authentic voice and presence.”

How different that experience could have been if he had had the agility to make a truthful and creative decision in that environment, to turn the lights up, sit on the edge of the stage and simply have a compelling conversation with us and to be real!

Speaking without connecting to self, audience or purpose is at best, energy draining and at worst, terrifying.

Somewhere in the middle of that spectrum is what most clients describe as their ‘habitual’ or ‘default’ zone, the place from where they ‘manage the task’ of presenting.

Think about it: Most executives spend 80% of their time engaging in critical communication such as building relationships with clients, building trust and motivation with their teams in meetings, selling an idea

or a product or going forward for a promotion, among many other challenges.

CAN PERFORMING FROM YOUR HABITUAL, DEFAULT ZONE YIELD TRULY GREAT RESULTS IN THESE SCENARIOS?

Whenever I attend live performances of theatre, dance or music, my favourite place to be is right up close and personal.

I love to see the effort, the sweat, the physicality, the decision-making, the thinking and the contact being made between performer and audience.

While not every performance can be virtuoso, lifting me out of my seat into a standing ovation, live >>>

**Transforming
knowledge
into action**

performance always brings me to a more enlivened and thoughtful place.

The job of the performer is to communicate powerfully and memorably with an audience, and not just in the theatre.

In the business world the best and most engaging presenters are those who give you the 'up close and personal' experience of live performance.

They are the ones who come out from behind the power point, who take time to breathe, to look, to pause, and to think. They are the ones who dare to do things a little differently and break some rules. They are with themselves and with their audience. They are in the moment and they look like they want to be there.

SHIFTING MINDSET

Communication that influences and inspires is achieved largely through the powerful instrument of authentic voice and presence, rather than through a slide deck or impeccably researched content and data. And like all instruments it needs to be tuned up and fit for purpose.

The *Beyond Presentations: Speaking to Inspire* programme invites you into a safe rehearsal space where you will discover and practice a process that takes you from your default zone to your high performance, from a state of managing to enjoying, and from knowing your facts to knowing what you need to perform at your best.



WHAT IS AUTHENTIC VOICE AND PRESENCE?

Authentic voice and presence is the skill of being able to “get out from behind the desk” and step into the spot-light with ease and impact.

At a deeper level it is about knowing yourself: valuing who you are and what you do and connecting to yourself with clarity and belief.

When you harness your authentic voice and presence you are seen and heard in a way that makes people take notice and want to listen. You ignite confidence and commitment in those around you. You embody and model your messages and therefore you INSPIRE.

WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT TO BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE WITH AUTHENTIC VOICE AND PRESENCE?

Because in the world of business - as in all of life - everyone works with a clearer sense of purpose and feels more motivated when they feel inspired. This leads to

growth and health in people and organisations.

AUTHENTIC VOICE AND PRESENCE BEGINS IN THE BODY

In our increasingly technology-driven environments where we present via power point, where we are invested in virtual connectivity and where the pace in the workplace prioritises action over reflection, we urgently need to reacquaint ourselves with our first and most fundamental environment – our body.

Our power, beliefs, instincts and style – this extraordinary palette of expression of self – is all located in our body.

In the BPSI programme we teach mindful practices around effective breathing, posture, body language, centering, alignment and awareness; to take you from tentative, apologetic, defensive, or anxious states to confident, energised and grounded states. These practices demonstrate the power of body-mind integration.

In the words of social scientist, Amy Cuddy (Ted Talk: Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are) “Our body shapes our mind, our mind shapes our behaviour and our behaviour shapes our outcomes.”

We work in the body first because it opens us up and brings a more animated self forward. Something more moving and truthful is revealed. It releases us physically, vocally, emotionally and energetically. >>

This means action-based learning: moving, warming up our bodies, our voices and our imaginations and entering into a state of what we call playing with a purpose.

THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

"Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with deeper meaning."

Maya Angelou

We use our voice all the time in communication that really matters and yet many people report surprise, unfamiliarity or even disappointment in hearing their own voice. It's that default zone again.

Even though we are all capable of a huge range of expression in our voices and use that range in everyday life without struggle, those animated voices seem to get left outside the door of the workplace.

After sitting through a cluster of presentations or pitches most of us feel engulfed in one great monotone bandwidth, like hearing Phil Neville broadcasting the World Cup!

Investing in your voice does not require singing scales (although singing is a great exercise in itself!).

It requires being interested in what you are saying. That means making meaningful, personal connection to the words you are speaking and the ideas you are speaking about.

In BPSI we explore the power of language through inspirational texts - language

that is outside the everyday, extraordinary, that expresses not just the fact of things but the meaning and outcome of the words spoken.

With those animated, dynamic voices we step into the workplace stories about sales and finance reports and productivity and benchmarks. Together we banish *monotone voices and monotone beliefs about your material and your messages ("numbers are boring" and other myths.)*

AUTHENTIC VOICE AND PRESENCE LIVES IN STORIES

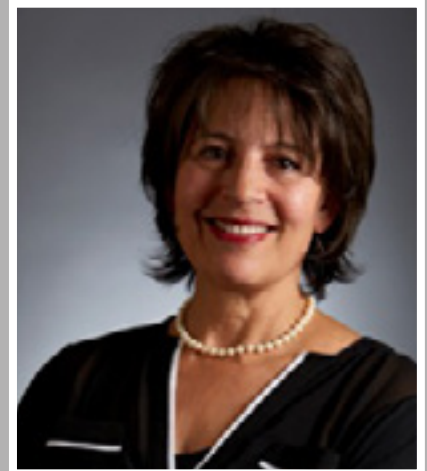
When you think of any compelling speaker, you think of someone who can really tell a story to engage an audience and relate that to solid content.

One of the best ways to bring people with you is through storytelling. When we are told a story, we engage much more of ourselves than we do when presented with mere facts.

Even more critically, the practice of storytelling is a key preparation tool for inspirational speaking.

Storytelling helps to connect us to ourselves before we connect to the world of our audience. Stories help us to see more clearly, identify with our beliefs and experience ownership of our "ground."

In BPSI the practice of story telling and structuring for impact and inspiration is a continuous thread throughout the programme.



WHY CRANFIELD SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT?

Dr Diana Theodores is Joint Programme Director for the [Beyond Presentations: Speaking to Inspire](#) programme with [Josie Sutcliffe](#).

[Diana](#) is a performance coach, executive educator and facilitator in leadership development.

Her diverse board level clientele include the oil industry, banking, insurance, media, engineering, legal, sports and automotive.

She promotes the principles of 'great performance' on the world stage for business leaders, teams and individuals.

[The Praxis Centre](#) at Cranfield has been offering highly innovative and groundbreaking management and leadership programmes for over two decades.