



Diana Theodores
Director, Theatre 4 Business Ltd.

Share this content



Tags: [Behavioural Skills](#), [Communication](#), [Skills](#)

Presentation skills: take a deep breath and drop the corporate mask

2nd Sep 2019



Connecting with an audience in a business setting isn't just about content – it's about being able to bring your authentic self to the room. To get better at giving presentations, we first need to look within ourselves.

In a corporate training room in London, an inspiring space with lots of natural light, creative décor, and room to move around in, 25 magnificent women came to the end of an off-site leadership programme and were about to re-enter their 'real' worlds again.

We'd done wild-card [icebreakers](#) to uproarious laughter, and high-energy warm-ups. We'd shared stories, challenges and action plans.

To wrap up the day, we stood in a circle for what I call a 'valuing ritual'. It consisted of taking some deep, slow breaths with our hands on our hearts and taking a moment to appreciate the day, one another and our selves.

As I looked at this room full of women standing in their full integrity and dignity, breathing in some self-acknowledgement, I saw many eyes welling up with tears and faces holding tight against the dam of emotion wanting to spring forth.

Breathing is our great tour de force of being. Breathing makes us possible and fuels our presence, energy, voice, thinking and feeling. It beckons our feelings, and that's why there wasn't a dry eye in the house.

In the rush, in the action-driven day-to-day of life, particularly corporate life, our breathing can become superficial and thin. This is what produces speech that is monotone and too fast.

Connecting with emotions

The deeper we breathe, the more we have to slow down. The more we slow down, the more present we are to sensation, to the moment and to feelings.

Our broken hearts, elations, loves, losses, fears, dreams, courage, failures, triumphs – our very life stories – are written on the way we breathe.

When we breathe deeply, literally taking our breathing to heart, we honour ourselves.

“Drop the corporate mask, allow yourself to express emotion rather than damping it down.

Touching that core of vulnerability for a moment through the power of breathing doesn't mean you'll have a meltdown at the office or be too emotional in your next presentation (genuine fears often expressed).

It just means that you have a powerful resource whenever you want it – a way to value yourself and give the gift of compassion to yourself and to others.

Connecting to your emotions, to how you feel about what you are saying and doing shares your humanity and creates trust.

Learning to speak from the heart

Recently, I was coaching a leader in the automotive sector on her keynote speech. 'Ava' wanted tips on sounding more confident.

After listening to her run through her content I felt unengaged. I had no idea who she was.

Why would anyone listening to Ava's keynote be inspired, moved or persuaded by her ideas or trust her if they didn't know who she was and if she didn't share her humanity with them?

We threw away the script and I asked Ava to tell me her life story. As she told me her story of loss and hard work and reinvention her eyes welled up and I encouraged her to keep going through her tears, to break all the rules of how she thought she should tell me her story, and just speak from the heart.

In this safe rehearsal space, Ava bravely explored her story, let the tears come to her eyes, and kept going. Her story found new life. Her story found new words. Ava was unstoppable.

“Share your vulnerability rather than blockading it, harness your animated, passionate, energised self and don't let it atrophy under conformity.

When she came to the end of her story, Ava looked and sounded very different. She had broken through her fear of expressing her emotions.

By following role models who believed vulnerability was off-limits in the boardroom, she had left her full self at the door.

There was nothing Ava needed to learn about vocal exercises or speaking techniques.

By facing the fear of an old story – 'if I start crying I won't stop' – and by honouring the wisdom and experience behind her tears, Ava found her voice.

Even if Ava chooses never to tell personal stories in her talks, she has experienced their power and can show up in her full humanity when she walks to the podium, takes a breath and begins.

She will inspire her audiences with the weight of her presence and her words.

Take courage

There are so many things you can do to move forward with courage and creativity, as your fullest and most authentic self.

Drop the corporate mask, allow yourself to express emotion rather than damping it down.

Share your vulnerability rather than blockading it, harness your animated, passionate, energised self and don't let it atrophy under conformity and conventions that may belong out of date.

Get the latest insights, advice and opinion on the world of learning from TrainingZone

Enter your email address to receive our twice-weekly newsletter.

In the words of the legendary choreographer, Martha Graham:

“There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening, that is translated through you into action and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. If you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost”.

Extract adapted from Performing As You: How to have authentic impact in every role you play – out now.

Interested in this topic? Read [From super manager to inspiring leader: how to drop your work mask and be your authentic self.](#)

Tags: [Behavioural Skills](#), [Communication](#), [Skills](#)

Share this content



leave a comment



Diana Theodores
Director, Theatre 4 Business Ltd.

[Read more from Diana Theodores](#)



CPD Accreditation UK

Join The Largest Community Of Accredited CPD Providers In The UK. Over 20 Years Experience

CPD Certification Service