

Dropping THE MASK

We all use an array of personas to function in the world. Performance coach **Dr Diana Theodores** looks at ways we can access our true, authentic self and reap a bounty of benefits in our relationships

PERFORMANCE IS NOT just in the domain of the arts. We are all performers and everyone wants to perform their best in life. As players on the 'stage of life' we perform many different roles in our personal and professional environments and relationships. Yet our performance in these roles can often be stuck in 'old stories', habits and our 'default' zone. Examples abound of how we revert to our childhood behaviours within the family constellation and how we don our corporate 'masks' when we step into our workplaces.

If Shakespeare is right and 'all the world's a stage', then the greatest role you ever get to perform is you. Bringing your fullest, authentic self through the door is about dropping the mask and breaking out of habitual stories that may no longer serve you.

It can be scary at first, but when you finally have the courage to perform as you, you connect first to yourself, deeply and truthfully, and then to the

world. And, like everything else, we become what we practise. When you are fully present, you become a better listener, you show up with far more empathy, you are responsive rather than reactive, you build deeper connections and you create more quality and fulfilment in your engagement with others. Here are some ways to break free of limiting stories and hiding behind masks, and also to practise being present in the moment:

1 Presence

During the Academy Awards season, news outlets are filled with images of stars on red carpets looking poised under a barrage of flashing cameras. These image-conscious stars seem to have unerring instincts about how to show their most flattering angles, profiles and smiles. However, presence isn't about masks of power or the red carpet and cameras. It's about being completely present in the moment. The actress Julianne Moore once said that: "Your presence can bring out their

presence; you elevate everything." I think she was talking about presence as the quality of engagement with others that you create. Your presence allows you to see and hear other people and allows them to feel seen and heard. When you are fully present, creating real engagement, you are giving and attracting attention. When you leave the room, your presence lingers and inspires confidence in those around you because they have had a positive and meaningful experience.

2 Deep breaths

Breathing is our great tour de force of being. Breathing makes us possible and fuels our presence, energy, voice, thinking and feeling. In the rush of day-to-day of life, our breathing can become superficial and thin. 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. When we breathe deeply, literally taking our breathing to heart, we value and



feel more compassion to both our self and others around us.

3 Self-centring

When we are truly centred, it means we are aligned and in balance. We are connected to the ground, to our roots – metaphorically and practically. Centring means getting balanced and feeling our equilibrium. When we are centred, we are open, upright and strong. We feel connected to those around us and we have more expansive ‘radar’ for reading others and situations. Centre is that place from which – feeling aligned and in balance, settled and alert, open and strong – you can ‘go forth’, feeling more comfortable in your own skin. Good posture, sitting up and standing tall, is a great aid to feeling more centred and ‘ready’ to show up at your best.

4 Setting intentions

When you have a clear intention regarding what you want to say and why you want to say it, the ‘how’ aligns

accordingly. Your body, voice, energy, breath, belief and expressiveness rally around you. Energy author Eileen McDargh says: “When you lose your ‘why’ you lose your ‘way’.” Before you go into that tricky conversation, scenario or any anxious-making ‘performance’ moment, remind yourself what really matters to you and what is truly at the heart of this story for you. This critical ‘pause and clarify’ moment of intention setting will give you a surge of alignment, confidence, ease and flow. From there, you’ll understand what emotional tone you want to project (the ‘how’) because you’ll be clearer about your objectives (the ‘what’). Clarifying your intention is your driver and your traction. By setting clear intentions regarding what you’re talking about and why you’re talking about it, you will discover the feeling and energy you need to invest. This will send a powerful message to your body and you will feel more intuitively aligned in yourself and in how others hear you and see you. PM



Dr Diana Theodores is an executive performance coach, speaker and Director of Theatre4Business. Her book, *Performing As You: How to have authentic impact in every role you play* (£12.99, Rethink Press) is out now. To find out more, go to theatre4business.com