



focalvocal

Welcome, Bienvenue and Herzlich Willkommen to
VocalPoint

FocalVocal's Monthly Newsletter

VocalPoint: **Issue 1**: September 2006

The FocalVocal team and I are delighted that you are interested in receiving up to date news about FocalVocal and reading articles written by us about current issues within training today.

We hope that our team of highly qualified, seasoned experts with a wealth of commercial experience within the fields of public speaking, presentation coaching, media training, personal effectiveness training and management development will give you information that you will find personally and professionally helpful. If there are specific questions you have regarding your training needs or areas that you think are worthy of investigation, we would be happy to hear from you and see if we can oblige.

Over the next few months each of FocalVocal's trainers will be writing an article concerned with their particular area of expertise and this month's issue kicks off with an article by myself on the role of theatre in training. However, before I present to you the reasons why all the world's a stage, even the business arena, I am pleased to let you know

What's New:

Five new members to the existing FocalVocal team full details of which can be found in our downloadable pdf brochure under publications on www.focalvocal.co.uk, all of whom can be hired, as well as the existing FocalVocal team, for role-play work, assessment days and 'pilot' role-play days.

Karen Bartholomew actor and scriptwriter who brings to FocalVocal a wealth of experience that she has gained by working for the BBC as a comedy researcher and working as a role-player for public and private sector clients doing role-plays, forum theatre and assessment work for training purposes.

Verity Bell actor who alongside her corporate and TV acting work is an experienced drama and dance teacher. Verity holds certificates by the International Sivananda Organization and British School of Yoga to teach yoga and shares her breadth of knowledge regarding many different breathing, meditation and relaxation techniques with clients within the corporate and public sectors.

Geoff Cotton actor/presenter/presentation coach, a former marketing manager in the financial services, audio and video sectors, a versatile linguist and exceptional corporate role-player. Over the last 12 years Geoff has as a role-player worked for a wide range of companies including the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Freshfields, Atos/KPMG, The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, The Treasury, Liverpool Victoria, British American Tobacco and Toyota, often asked to 'pilot' role-play scenarios and contribute to their improvement. As a professional keynote speaker, Geoff gives a talk on presentation skills **Traps and Tricks™** that deals with the common pitfalls in making presentations and tricks of the trade to avoid

them.

Lizzy Hughes actor who after flirting with journalism for a number of years working for Channel 4 as a freelance presenter and Live TV Birmingham as a News Reporter, Researcher, Assistant Producer, and finally Producer chose to branch out into acting. Lizzy has numerous corporate acting credits to her name which include; The Inland Revenue, the Metropolitan Police, Leicester General Hospital, British Telecom, Vinney Green and Clayfields Secure Units and Bolton NHS Trust.

And finally, but not least **Gareth Rubin media trainer and actor**. Prior to his acting training, Gareth spent five years as a journalist, a field he still works in. He has reported live from the scene of the London bombings, interviewed Tony Blair and been entirely unsuccessfully sued by Mohamed al Fayed. He now works in news for the Observer and writes about architecture for the Guardian and large-scale mergers and acquisitions for Financier Worldwide. He also trains journalists on an NCTJ course. As a role player Gareth has worked on the senior management training course for one of the Big Four accountancy firms; he has also trained people from the worlds of business and acting in press and media skills.

What's on?

In-house taster sessions

FocalVocal is currently offering free of charge in-house taster sessions, a perfect opportunity for you to test drive FocalVocal's method of training and our skills. If interested please e-mail monica@focalvocal.co.uk

A recent two hour taster session conducted at PKF (UK) LLP proved hugely successful and thought provoking dialogues regarding combatting nerves by 'thinking in pictures' when presenting ensued.

'PKF invited FocalVocal to deliver a taster session on Beginners Public Speaking. The attendees found it to be informative, developmental and fun. The presenter and actors struck the right tone from the very start and allowed the participants to contribute which helped maintain their focus. It was a thoroughly worthwhile session.'

John Watkins Director of Training and Development PKF (UK) LLP
Accountants & business advisers

FocalVocal Taster Sessions 2006 -2007

1. Beginners Public Speaking with Monica Lowenberg
2. Assertiveness with Helen McNeill
3. Managing Change with Chris Robinson
4. Giving and Receiving Feedback with Chris Robinson as from Nov '06
5. Work/Life Balance Helen McNeill as from Nov '06
6. Media Training with Gareth Rubin and Monica Lowenberg as from Spring 2007

FocalVocal taster sessions are two hours and fifteen minutes in length, conducted at your premises by one trainer and two actors, one session can train up to 18 persons.

October VocalPoint Helen McNeill, a member of the General Social Care Council, seasoned trainer for local government and FocalVocal's trainer in communication and assertiveness skills will be giving some useful tips on how to behave more assertively, but until then I would like you to question the following

What if all the world's a stage?

The Role of Theatre in Training Today

If you are anything like me you probably have a million and one things to juggle all at the same time and in most situations you don't have a lot of time to think through in the greatest of detail every thing you would like to say. In a lot of cases this is not the end of the world, but sometimes it really is and the misuse of simply one word, the tilt of a head or the raising of an eyebrow, suddenly causes your words to be misinterpreted, misunderstood or worse still just not heard. At such moments most of us wish we could turn back time and start all over again. In a parallel universe this is of course possible, but not in our day to day work environments where second chances are rare. A nagging question remains, 'What would have happened if I had given myself the time to think through what I had truly wanted to say?'

If as Shakespeare observes all the world's a stage and all men and women are merely players acting out many parts, then surely to script a few is probably a wise idea. Role-play is one such resource that allows just that.

The 1990's was the era that saw role -play enter the commercial sector and take centre stage. It has proven hugely popular because when it works well, it enables the following skills to be developed within a safe, non-judgemental environment:

- Trust
- Spontaneity
- Accepting Offers
- Listening and Awareness
- Storytelling
- Non-verbal communication

As various researchers have noted since even the 1980's, role -play gives students the opportunity to fully experience the frustration and rewards of a very demanding process, this is achieved by the role -play being so structured that it almost mirrors the social reality the student will have to later tackle in their professional work. (Jones and Rogers, 1981, p142).

Examples where role-play has been successful are countless, but those often cited are:

Trinkaus and Brooke (1982) where gender issues were the focus of a management roleplay;

Davis and Baten (1990) simulated performance appraisal feedback interviews where students practiced holding employee interviews in uncomfortable settings;

Totten and Overby (1991) role-play to help students safely experience and react to sexual harassment as a sales professional

And most recently McAfee and Boscia (2002) who used student-generated cases to enable students to have insight into the techniques their company uses to enhance employee motivation.

'In live role-play situations, all of the participants (including role-players, observers, and the instructor) not only perceive (e.g., see and hear) events as they unfold around them, but they also have an opportunity to actually react to and participate in the events as they occur. In this way , the participants experience the process, rather than just learning about theory related to the process.' (Greene, 1990, pg 73)

Since the days when the business community tentatively embraced the idea of role-play as an effective tool in the areas of skill development, assessment and selection/recruitment, the market has twenty years on become saturated with a plethora of companies who offer professional actors for role-play work. The question now for many HR professionals is, 'Which one should I use?', not an easy question to answer. However, as there are enough cases to show how effective role-play can be, there are in equal measure enough cases to show what a waste of time it can be, if not thought through properly. When hiring any company who use actors for role-play it is prudent to consider the following:

1. Do the actors have commercial experience?
2. Do they understand or have an ability and willingness to understand the issues my company is currently encountering?
3. Are the actors mature and experienced enough to give feedback at the end of a role-play that will enable greater insight, empathy and skills to be developed?
4. Are the actors credible as actors, do they have good memories to learn my brief, are they consistent, objective and good observers?
5. What kind of outcomes do I wish to achieve with a role-play?
6. What is the most effective way of using actors to achieve these outcomes?

Popular methods of using actors in training are Forum theatre, briefed role-play and sketches. FocalVocal's Think Tank Theatre uses a combination of all three, all are valid in their own right.

Forum is particularly helpful in demonstrating 'best practice' where a scenario specific to a company's project and needs is acted out, rewound and replayed according to the feedback the audience gives.

Briefed role-play enables students to test and develop their skills on the actor and later receive feedback.

Sketches very often humorous, sometimes outrageous are used to demonstrate a particular point and get the message across.

To work out what is best for your training needs, be clear regarding what you wish to achieve, work closely with the actors, ensure they fully understand your brief and if possible even pilot your ideas with them before any training occurs.

Until next time enjoy treading the boards!

Monica Lowenberg is the founder of FocalVocal, a professionally trained actress and singer, a qualified teacher of languages and theatre studies who in her spare time still makes occasional forays into local radio and academia.

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FocalVocal works with businesses in the private and public sector who wish to improve their communication and management skills. Businesses who

- *know that a dynamic, interactive learning environment is the most successful in helping you to retain newly acquired skills and be confident to apply them*
- *are bored with courses where you get to sit, but don't actually get to do*
- *have found it to be a bonus to have trainers and actors who are native English speakers but are also bi-lingual in German and French*
- *like the challenge of working with professional actors to test out new skills in a fun, non-judgmental environment*

*If you think the same, then get in touch with FocalVocal today!
Please feel free to forward VocalPoint to anybody you feel would find it of interest.*

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