

# Isn't that acting?

by Cathy C. Bonczek

When we work with clients on their Executive Presence, we focus on the physical aspects of delivery: eye contact, gestures, movement, voice modulation and pausing. This is often revelatory because the focus in most businesses is on the content of the presentation, not the actual delivery of the information.

It can be discomfoting to suddenly have to think about how you are going to walk on a stage, hold your hands and/or a clicker, modulate your voice, look audience members in the eye and stop center stage to pause and let your important information sink in.

## That's when people will ask, Isn't that acting?

I always reply, "No, it isn't acting, but it does require some of the same techniques and skills of acting. My beloved former acting teacher, and second mother, Janet Sarno, used to tell me, you can't act an emotion, you have to feel something first. If you really feel something, then the audience will, too.

As business communicators, we should attempt to become expert orators as much as we strive to be subject matter experts in our lines of business. So, how do we use the skills of acting to show up as authentically great presenters? To that end, **think about your entrance**: don't just shuffle into a meeting room, walk in boldly as if this is the only place in the world you want to be right now.

**Greet everyone with eye contact and words** – connect visually with the people around the table, before you grab your seat.

**Open your presentation** with a practiced, calm and dynamic voice. Enjoy the fact that all eyes will turn to you. In reality, if you are selling or fundraising, you are the most important element of the sale – not the product. Your prospects will want to trust you before they open their wallets.

When you say something, **honor the punctuation**. Pause when you come to the end of a sentence or thought and let your audience hear what you just said, maybe even react to it.

**Use your arms and hands** to emphasize a point or illustrate a concept – like charades. It will help you use energy positively; it will create interest for your listener and move your voice, as well.

**Use structure**, or talking points to deliver your lines – the powerful and succinct key messages you most want your audience to remember.

**Feel something**: passion or optimism, pride or concern, and let that underpin your words.

**Listen carefully**, to what is being said, and observe what is not being said. Great actors and gifted improvisation artists, really listen to each other and react accordingly, they don't just march through a script. That's good advice for any meeting or presentation.

In short, don't think of acting as an exercise of fakery – think of it as a set of skills that brings a story and emotions to life. Do think of your presentations as something that can be enlivening, entertaining and impactful.

**In Shakespeare's words: All the world's a stage.**

