

All the workplace is a stage

How to communicate
with clarity and impact

RADA
BUSINESS

Royal Academy of Dramatic Art



Curtain raiser

Actors are the ultimate communicators. Their ability to grip an audience and, in the space of an hour or two, transport them to a different place and time, has always been at the **centre of our culture**.

While from the vantage point of the front row it may seem effortless, this art of communication is the product of practice, training and hard-won experience.

To boost their own performance, business professionals can look to the stage for inspiration.

At RADA Business, for example, we take the world-leading training offered by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and make it work in a business context.

Through our simple philosophy of mind, body, breath and voice, RADA Business has successfully offered thousands of professionals the same skills that help actors to communicate with clarity and impact.

The results, shared in this report, reveal how many of us lack confidence in our ability to communicate as well as we would like to.

Communication takes centre stage

To show how the art of communication plays a key role in professional success, we asked 1,000 business people for their views and experiences.

The results, shared in this report, reveal how many of us lack confidence in our ability to communicate as well as we would like to, and in the situations where we would seek to make our voices heard.

It also shows the value we place on the communication skills of others, for example when forming first impressions or looking for strong leadership.

The findings are accompanied by powerful insights from some of our leading tutors, highlighting ways in which acting skills hold the key to better story-telling, influencing audiences and **communicating with clarity and passion.**

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YOUR BIG PERFORMANCE

Every actor hopes for their big break - a role that gives them a chance to shine and show their talent.

Workplaces are no different. From time to time the spotlight falls on us and we feel under pressure to deliver a strong performance.

For many, this opportunity comes in the form of an important presentation or meeting. How we rise to meet this challenge can have significant implications on the ways others perceive us, as well as on future advancement in our careers.

Once again, communication skills give us a framework to tackle such opportunities, and can help to avoid freezing with stage fright to make presentations with confidence and impact.

Making your entrance

Every time the curtain rises on a new business relationship there is an opportunity to leave a lasting impression, and set the tone for all your future interactions.

Before you skip this section, confident in the knowledge that to meet you is to love you, it's a sobering thought that (according to the data) you're very likely to be mistaken.

Although seven out of every ten business people believe they make their desired impression on a first meeting, it's only a select few who are actually perceived in this way.

The overwhelming majority of us say that it isn't often we meet someone who makes a **strong first impression**, with over a quarter saying they "never" or "rarely" encounter these charismatic individuals.

So how do you turn the odds in your favour?

RADA Business' tutors use acting techniques to improve first impressions, teaching skills such as:

- Physical presence
- A strong and engaging voice
- Open body language
- Effective eye contact
- Positive ways to open conversation

The importance of this training is illustrated by our data. Almost everyone (97%) stated that first impressions depend significantly on factors linked to effective communication.



Our research shows that what you say is the factor most associated with making a first impression. However what you say is heavily influenced by how you say it.

Vocal and physical choices allow us to determine how a message is received.

Think back to a time where the content of a talk has been relevant to your work, or seemed interesting on paper, yet you've left feeling disengaged because the speaker didn't present well.

Small shifts in how you hold yourself can lead to dramatic changes in how successfully you make these impressions on others, as can gaining a better understanding of the impact and meaning of your body language. These techniques are used by actors on stage to communicate their character or their relationships with those around them non-verbally, before they even begin to speak.

Applying these insights to real-life situations helps you to convey gravitas and confidence simply and consciously, which in turn helps you deliver what you have to say with greater impact.

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Conquering stage fright

Everyone gets nervous, but how you channel that energy is crucial to a strong performance. Techniques used by actors to manage your body, breath and voice help you to work with these nerves and ensure they are under control, rather than controlling you.

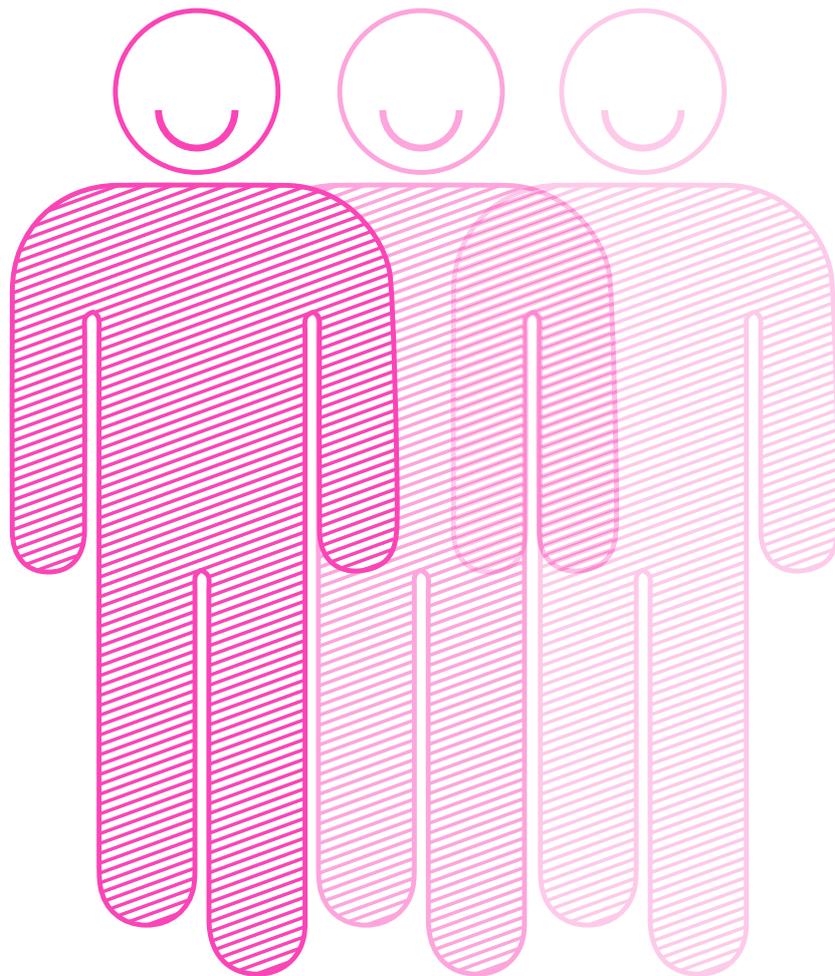
Top tip: making an entrance

Using your peripheral vision is crucial when making an entrance so that you can see the space you're walking into, and everyone in it. This will also help you to gauge the physical environment and emotional climate.

This means that your audience (whether it's an interview panel or a TED Talk) can see that you're engaged and available to them.

It can help to think about the image of throwing French windows wide open as you enter the space to enjoy the view.

Charlie Walker-Wise, Client Director and Tutor at RADA Business



The factors deemed to make a good first impression



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Finding your voice

Applying acting techniques to work situations doesn't mean pretending to be someone you're not, quite the opposite. It enables you to set aside stresses and strains, allowing you to clearly **articulate and engage** with your audience. It allows you to be at your best whatever the challenge.

In responding to our survey, the majority of people (63%) underlined the importance of the skills needed to be heard, saying they were best able to make their opinions heard in the workplace when they could act naturally and be themselves.

The data also revealed the situations in which people said finding their true voice was most challenging. Top of the list was being in large group meetings where many competing voices are fighting to be heard.

The nature of our audience is also a major factor hampering effective communication, especially when our nerves affect how we perform in the presence of people in more senior positions to us, or presenting to people outside our company.

Voice and physicality

Commanding attention is key to an actor's craft and learning the basic techniques can equip people with the tools they need to communicate more effectively, whatever the situation.

At the heart of this is appreciating that body, breath and voice are all linked. By paying close attention to each, impact is greatly increased.

THINK



Every communication begins with a thought that you wish to share. Who are you speaking to and what message do you need to convey? The thought then triggers the breath.

BREATHE



The way you breathe affects both your physical and vocal presence and provides the energy behind your speech.

SPEAK



When your body is centred and you are using your voice to full effect, you are able to inspire and influence your audience.

Our most challenging work environments

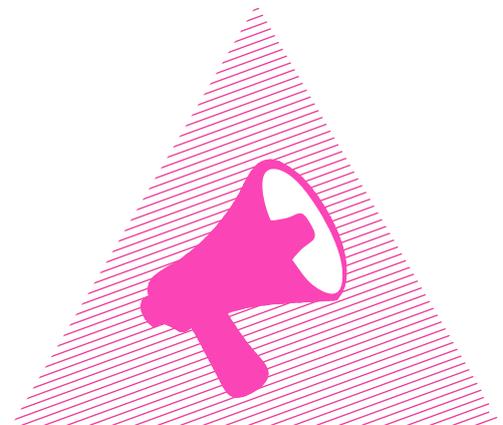


Top tip: find your voice

We need strong foundations for a building to survive and the body needs exactly the same care and attention.

If you are centred and grounded when sitting or standing, you are balanced both physically and mentally. Keep your feet planted firmly on the floor to help anchor the breath and in turn enhance vocal delivery.

Sue Meadows,
Tutor at RADA Business



Making a strong and commanding entrance

Setting the stage is an important part of your overall performance. Thinking through how you will appear, the first impression you make and how you will open the presentation, all build firm foundations for a successful outcome.

Unlocking creativity



Top tip: unlock creativity

When it comes to generating ideas, trying your hardest is often the worst option as your brain finds it incredibly difficult to be creative and critical at the same time.

When working in teams, adopt an attitude of enthusiastic curiosity towards every idea that you come up with, throwing them around playfully as if they were the best possible ideas you could have. Play now, edit later.

Matt Bannister, Tutor at RADA Business

"The thing about improvisation is it's not about what you say. It's about listening to what other people say."

Paul Merton
Comic

Another acting skill often absent from the workplace is the freedom to experiment and improvise, a key element to unlocking greater creativity within teams.

Our survey found that 81% of workplaces haven't created a culture that allows for play and experimentation. Yet, just under a quarter of employees (24%) felt that their workplace would benefit from the fresh thinking and the new ideas this can generate.

In the same way that many directors will work with their cast of actors to experiment with different ways to tell a story, business teams can also benefit from learning skills of improvisation.

Rather than promoting individualism and ‘showing off’, improvisation is a surprisingly effective technique at promoting better team bonds and understanding.

By applying the listening skills, fast pace and high energy used in actors’ workshops, teams learn how to quickly and collectively get into a creative mode, generating ideas and learning how to take risks.

It also teaches them how to be inclusive and give everyone in the team a voice. One of the frequent complaints about workplace creativity (just over 1 in every 5 workplaces) is that people who talk most or loudest are more likely to have their ideas heard.

Relatively few companies (19.5%) have an environment where employees feel everyone is assured of an equal right to bring new ideas forward. There are even some workplaces where creativity can feel actively discouraged.

According to our research, 1 in 6 people feel that any new ideas would be met by co-workers with criticism or suspicion.

Attitudes to workplace creativity



Dynamic communication

The tools used by dramatists to hold an audience are also part of an actor’s art. Concentrating on your voice as well as the rhetoric and structure of what you say is a powerful combination, enabling you to control the emotions and reactions of an audience to great effect.

Playing the lead

Drama is full of wonderful role models for leaders, from Shakespeare's Henry V to *The Hunger Games*' Katniss Everdeen, with famous speeches that inspire and motivate.

Comparing oneself to such iconic performances can be intimidating, but it provides a route to understanding what gives some leaders the charisma that inspires those around them.

Excellent communication skills are clearly high on the list of requirements for a strong leader, but so are other related skills.

Our survey found that being a good listener is almost as important as strong communication, as is the ability to inspire and exude confidence, while also appearing authentic and to genuinely mean what you say.

Rehearsing for the role

Acting skills show how leadership capabilities can be both learned and improved to great effect.

For example, RADA Business' tutors teach the importance of grounding and stillness and the ability to hold your space, much like an actor learns to command a stage. It also highlights the need to set the stage and consciously consider how others will see you in this role.

Take the classic image of a leader, Shakespeare's *Henry V*, and how he is portrayed on stage. You'll notice how flexibility is key to his quality as a leader.

Henry is different things to different people at different times in the play. To his men he is the rousing leader who leads by example, but he also passes amongst them incognito to hear what they have to say about him; to the French Court he is a resolute equal, who even in the face of insult and humiliation (in the tennis balls scene), remains a steely and steadfast adversary; and to Katherine he is a humble and sensitive wooer. While we might not face the same challenges as a king, from a leadership perspective we can see that flexibility allows Henry to respond appropriately in every context.

Mastering a performance

Finally, these skills are crucial at major leadership moments, when you are placed firmly in the spotlight and expected to perform.

Adopting the right physical and vocal characteristics, suitable to the situation and circumstances, is key

to ensuring audiences feel that you understand what they need from you at that point in time, as well as demonstrating your passion and resilience for the task ahead.

Storytelling

Learning basic rules of storytelling gives communicators a powerful tool to entertain, to inspire, to excite and to unite. Knowing that you are able to 'hook' an audience from the outset and then sustain their interest empowers you with greater confidence to relax and enjoy your moment in the spotlight.

Top qualities inspiring confidence in leaders



Top tip: playing the lead

A lead actor requires versatility to meet the needs of their audience. So does a leader.

- ▶ A leader whose voice comes from the heart communicates compassion.
- ▶ A leader who demonstrates passion and excitement inspires others.
- ▶ A leader whose voice comes from the head sounds analytical but may lack empathy.

We all have these qualities, yet we must access the weaker areas and not overplay our strengths to meet the needs of everyone in our business.

Claire Dale,
Tutor at RADA Business



Women in the Spotlight

While the gender balance in senior management positions is improving, women can still face specific challenges to make their presence felt in business environments traditionally dominated by men or suited to typically male characteristics.

This situation is evidenced by our research findings.

Women responding to our survey were 60% more likely to say that they never felt comfortable when expressing themselves in a work environment (3.7% of women compared to 2.2% of men).

And 8% of women said they find it easy to make their voice heard at work, compared to 15% of men. This gap was widest in specific sectors, most notably IT, professional services (such as law and accountancy), retail and education.

Typically, women said that they feel more comfortable when communication is a two-way process.

For example, women are more likely to communicate effectively when the other person is good at listening.

Situations where women said they felt significantly less comfortable than their male counterparts were when meeting with their manager (33% more likely to feel uncomfortable than men) or an organisation's board members or senior management (12% more likely).

Building confident communication

RADA Business runs courses designed specifically for women in the workplace.

For women in management positions, training emphasises techniques for **impact and influence**. Two key challenges often identified by women in the workplace are sustaining a belief in their own ability and potential, and having the confidence to put themselves forward for senior positions.

Impact skills, as well as an awareness of the perceptions that people may have about women's communication styles, can help women to succeed in the workplace by examining the power of physicality, voice and language and learning strategies to flex these attributes in order to affect the attitude and behaviours of those around them.

The aim is to create greater personal understanding of the impact of these skills and how they may be applied to build resilience, step into the spotlight and perform more effectively in the workplace.

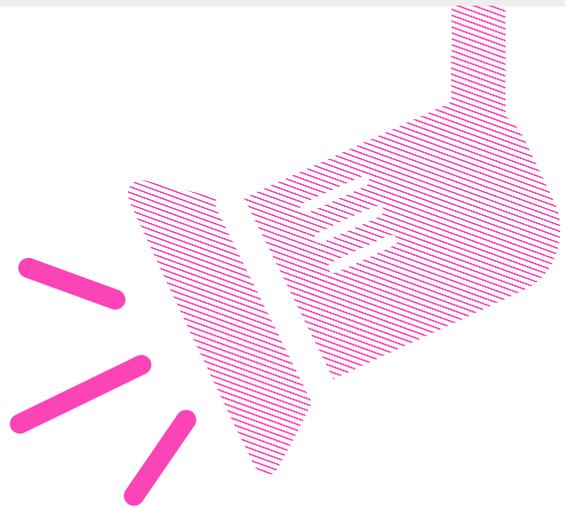
RADA Business also runs courses for women entering into the workplace for the first time, ensuring that from day one they have the tools to overcome common challenges. Using communication techniques (working with body, breath and voice) to tackle these situations increases confidence and presence, helping young women make a successful transition from university to work.

8% of women said they find it easy to make their voice heard at work, compared to 15% of men.

Top tip: women in business

Powerful communication begins with non-verbal signals. When leading meetings or presentations, take up and hold your space. Don't look down or physically minimise your size as this indicates a lower status in a business environment. Instead, make eye contact and keep your body language open.

State your intentions with confidence. Avoid raising your voice at the end of a sentence when you're not asking a question, as this can signal that you are seeking approval.



Abi Eniola, Tutor at RADA Business

"If I hadn't learnt
to hold my space,
I'd just be another
overlooked woman."

Maxine Peake
RADA Graduate 1998

Connecting with an audience

Good communication not only focuses on what you want to say, but also takes your audience into account. Truly understanding who you are talking to and asking yourself what drives them and what their concerns or objections might be, enables you to be empathetic and create a genuine connection.

Be credible, Be incredible

So why does learning aspects of an actor's craft have such an impact?

At the heart of this approach is building awareness of the skills we all use every day as social animals, and then being able to adapt these in each and every situation.

While many of us do this instinctively, actors learn to apply these changes consciously, making it possible for them to be more in control of how they appear and the impression they give to an audience.

In a business setting, many factors can interfere with our natural abilities to communicate – **stress, formality, different hierarchies**, the range of audiences we may face and the unexpected.

It may be that we also feel some behaviour doesn't belong in a business environment. While as children we were more comfortable playing and telling stories, we might tell ourselves these have no place in the grown-up world.

This is rarely the case, and retaining the ability to tell stories and respond in the moment is at the heart of an actor's training.

Adopting the tools of an actor, we can better judge how we come across to our workplace audience and select a performance style that best helps us meet our objectives.

You have to understand
how to turn your
expertise into impact
and unlock the emotions
in what you're doing.

We may be technically excellent at our job, but if we fail to communicate with others effectively it will always be harder to fulfil our potential or convince others that we can help them.

To achieve this, you have to understand how to turn your expertise into impact and unlock the emotions in what you're doing, making sure that you can land the messages you need to impart.

The transformative effect of improving communication skills shouldn't be underestimated. Gaining the skill to truly reach other people is enormously liberating.

It also often tackles underlying feelings of frustration or low confidence that have held people back throughout their professional lives.

It's also an ongoing process. People instinctively pick up good communication skills from those around them, which makes developing excellent communication skills hugely beneficial not just for an individual but for everyone they work with.

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Opportunity comes in many forms

Our research tells us that it's not just big presentations where we want to be able to harness these skills. We want to be able to bring out our best performance in a range of situations, from meetings with our boss or colleagues to training sessions and one-to-one meetings.

We also need to learn how to apply these techniques in a way that is relevant to telephone calls and video conferencing, as well as face-to-face meetings and presentations.

About RADA Business

At RADA Business we take the world-leading training offered by the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and make it work for you in a business context. Established in 2001, RADA Business makes available the unique skills, assets and experience of the Academy to train, inspire and entertain individual, institutional and corporate clients.

We offer a wide variety of personal development courses, one-to-one performance coaching and team development experiences working with exceptional tutors with professional backgrounds in the performing arts.

A training course with us is entirely practical. We give you the skills you need to be the best version of yourself when it really matters.

RADA Business' training enables people to make effective use of the **body, breath and voice** to make fundamental shifts in their own personal impact, how they see themselves, and how they approach others.

We train everyone from CEOs to retail assistants, from lawyers to lecturers, delivering our work internationally in person from Singapore to Bahrain and from China to Canada.

We give you the skills you need to be the best version of yourself when it really matters.

The profits from RADA Business are gifted to support the activities of the Academy and the next generation of actors and technicians.

Please get in touch if you would like to discuss which is the best course for you at ask@radainbusiness.com or +44 (0)20 7908 4810.

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