

THE POWER TO CONVINCE

HAVING STARTED HER CAREER AS AN OPERA SINGER, CAROL ANNE LOWE WENT ON TO ADVISE LEADERS ON INFLUENCING OTHERS. SHE TALKS TO **SORCHA CORCORAN**

Former opera singer and founder of Blue Moon Communications Carol Anne Lowe has been aware of the importance of convincer strategies from the aged of 10 when she walked into Independent Newspapers' head office on Abbey Street and asked to meet the managing director (MD).

"A new old folks' complex was built near where we lived and I thought it wasn't fair that there were no deliveries there of bread, papers and milk. Even at age 10 I understood that to get anyone to say 'yes' to anything, all you have to focus on is what's going on in their head. Most people think, 'What's in this for me?'" she says.

"I negotiated a better price for the old folks with Johnson Mooney & O'Brien and Premier Dairies and told the MD at Independent Newspapers that arranging the paper deliveries to the 18 old folks would make a good story for him. I didn't realise this was a PR strategy at the time."

Trained by Veronica Dunne, Lowe started singing professionally in her late teens and gained international critical acclaim, once invited to sing at the British premiere of Robert Stolz's *Blumenlieder* in a solo recital at Covent Garden.

While singing at Dublin Castle during a state visit in 1997, she was approached by a leading international politician, who asked if she could teach him to mesmerise an audience and speak with confidence, conviction and passion.

"I had seen this politician on television and it was apparent to me that he could create a greater import from a visual and vocal perspective so that he would appear more charismatic and likeable. He was a very assertive and forthright individual.

It is important to be confident but having charisma makes you more approachable," she says.

"Having worked with great leaders since from around the world, it has become clear to me that they have the same concerns and anxieties as any of us. They want to make sure what they're saying is something they can stand over. We all influence others whether we're in business or not as every idea has to be sold."

While waiting to take on a singing role on Broadway a number of years ago, Lowe started reading about neurolinguistic programming and she now uses it along with convincer strategies, voice techniques and body language when working with leaders.

PRESENTATION SKILLS

For any business owner faced with having to speak in front of a large group, whether of peers or employees, Lowe has a number of practical guidelines.

"If you think about the oratory skills of the Greeks and Romans, Cicero was the greatest in terms of voice production. He used to go down to the ocean every morning and proclaim over the sound of the waves. This gave his voice great power," she says.

"Onomatopoeia, or making the sound match the words, adds to a speech, for example, punching the letter 'p' when you say the word 'powerful'. Also give meter to the words, so you sound like somebody in control and that there isn't a problem."

She cites a technique used a lot by President Barack Obama – *anaphora* – which she believes is also effective. "It means saying the same thing three times in different ways when you begin a speech. Another wonderful one Obama uses is *captatio benevolentiae*, which means humbling yourself in order to appeal to others. This has to be used at the right time – don't start off a speech by underselling yourself. Once you've created the perception of expertise, then it can be a hugely powerful tool to humble yourself. It creates empathy with your audience.

"*Praeterito* is a brilliant sales tool, often used by Americans. This is where you may start a meeting with phrases such as 'Today, I'm not going to talk about...', or when you walk into a meeting saying things like, 'Before we start the meeting there was something I wanted to discuss' or when you're leaving and the meeting has closed, saying 'Just before I go, I wanted to ask you something'. With this technique people have relaxed their guard, while you reopen the pitch and compound your main message."

When making a speech to a room full of people, Lowe says there are three big things to remember.

"If you have the opportunity to use a radio mike then stand out on the stage and move around. This gives the impression you're brave and you command the stage. It gives the perception of someone in charge. Don't use a script. This is because the part of the brain that you use to write a script does not use your speech centre, so you will not write as you speak. Reading a script stops you making eye contact. If you want to use cards, make sure they're stapled together in order.

"Try to sell one idea in your speech, not lots of ideas. People should go away with something that has value for them that they can buy into. Make that point and everything else you say should back that up. Adopt the 'must have, should have, could have' approach when it comes to information you provide."

This means if it's a three to five-minute speech you should only provide 'must-have' information, and the 'should have' and 'could have' should only come afterwards, if at all.

Lowe also advises telling a story when you're making a speech or pitch.

"One of the most influential people in the world ever was Jesus Christ and he made a lot of his points through telling stories. If you put yourself at the centre of a really engaging story around whatever piece of information you're trying to get across, people will go home and tell it to their family or use it at dinner parties."

ONE-TO-ONE

When it comes to one-to-one scenarios, Lowe advises business owners not to focus on a laptop when pitching to potential clients or making a presentation.

"The biggest mistake individuals make when making a one-to-one presentation is focusing their subject's attention on their laptop. If you do this, the potential client sees the visual and written word, but is not engaging with you as a person.

"It's a terrible strategy. If you are constantly focusing their attention on a laptop screen they are not interacting with you so they won't buy into you."

The other problem with focusing on a laptop presentation is that in the mind of the potential client it becomes the centre of expertise, not you, she continues.

"If you're going to use a laptop, you should only use it to back up the points you're making. One way of doing this is to use quotes from influencers in your industry that support your ideas. For example, if you're trying to sell the concept of buying into a network, you could use the quote from Bill Gates: 'My network is my network'.

"Use someone who is a global expert in your field to back up what you're saying. In this way, you're 'up-branding' yourself by attaching to a brand that's greater than yours. Whatever you're selling you can be sure it's not the first time someone has sold something similar and proved it to be valuable and reliable."

The biggest challenge for all small business owners is the need to create an environment where you are seen as being an expert in what you do, according to Lowe.

"The two realities are that people will buy from somebody they like while also wanting to employ the best in that area. If you combine these two factors you will have a winning business."



Carol Anne Lowe