

An Actor's viewpoint: Role Play

The characters I play in role plays come in all forms and styles. For my first ever role play for the UK's Ministry of Defence, my brief was to deliver a 'robust challenge' to the candidate. To explain this further, I had to create a person that was difficult, experienced, stubborn, resistant to change, and above all probing. I had to give the participant playing my manager a hard time over a number of set issues, and I wasn't to give them much breathing space unless they came up with some strong, persuasive arguments to convince me otherwise.

This role play was set up as a meeting between a manager and his subordinate. It would last approximately 20-30 minutes and be observed by a sit-in assessor who would examine how the participant dealt with my character's challenge and what possible communication tactics they used to solve this confrontation.

To bring this character to life, I used a direct and blunt manner of vocal delivery, whilst creating a physically defensive position, i.e. leaning back in my chair, arms folded, with my upper body facing slightly away on a diagonal to communicate that, at first, I was not willing to engage directly with the participant. Utilising this negative body language and vocal quality every time starts the role play off on a difficult note for the participant, and encourages them to choose an approach that can be clearly assessed. For instance, if they were belligerent and tried to bully me into their way of thinking they would receive a similar reaction in return. On the other hand, if they took a different tack by building rapport with me, by trying to see the situation from my viewpoint and gently encouraging me to work towards changing my ways for the benefit of the company, then I would be much more obliging towards them.

After having done more and more role play work over the past few years, there are number of reasons why I think actors are essential for this particular training and assessment. Firstly, it is critical to give all the participants a consistent level of challenge. Actors are very strong in this area because they are trained implicitly to recreate indistinguishable performances on stage or on film every day. An actor may make some minor changes to their performance based on their director's notes, but these are minor in comparison to the main thrust of their character's journey. Furthermore, actors have much more experience in how to sustain and shape performances to a consistently high level. They are deeply focused on making their characters as believable as possible and will maintain consistencies with participants by playing the character with the same level of emotion every time.

In a great combination with the above, actors are also keen experts on physicality and body language. In a role play an actor will instantly adjust their mannerisms, posture and gestures in relation to what positive or negative stimuli they are supplied by the participant. In comparison however, a trainer who has to manage the role play and assess the participant at the same time, simply cannot relate to the participant as effectively. Even the most experienced trainers cannot pick up on all

the participant's body language signals whilst carefully assessing their technical knowledge at the same time. This is why in performances actors have directors. It's integral to have an outside eye to observe the interaction in the entertainment industry so why not in a role play? Even in self-directed work you will find that there is usually another director or another actor in the company stepping in as a surrogate to give notes on the actor/director's performances.

If you really think about it then using trainers and employees as participants does not yield great results. It can only weaken the impact role play can give your participants as a unique training method. You wouldn't use anyone but a doctor for medical expertise, so why not use an expert in your role plays? The only way to get the maximum benefit from your training is to use actors because they are the only qualified resource that can deliver consistent and credible interpretations of the roles you seek to develop or assess.

Professional actors are now available in Dubai to participate in Role Plays for more information please go to <http://www.itsallaboutpeople.ae/services/impact-role-play> or contact Tom Raftery on 00971504875119

Justin Palmer

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