



## Set the Stage for Learning

By Richard Wilkes

Drama-based learning has a long track record in the world of Learning and Development. The biggest shift in attitude over the last 20 years has been an increased awareness of the merits of this approach, and an emergence of companies who specialise in the use of drama as a learning tool. These companies have married their skills in the use of drama with an in-depth understanding of organisational behaviour and its impact on individual and team performance.

The combination of drama and an organisational understanding produces a powerful learning product. When a learning 'audience' is presented with a situation played out by actor-facilitators with an understanding of current business issues they become engaged in a way that very few other learning techniques can achieve.

Dramatic techniques can be used in a variety of ways. Probably the most common usage is in Skills Practice. In the old days colleagues used to role-play with each other in order to try out their sales techniques, practise interview techniques, etc. Since professional actors can provide a much sterner behavioural challenge, can feedback objectively and obviously come from outside the organisation, the benefits far outweigh the costs involved. Critically, the learners only have to play themselves, which allows them to concentrate solely on building their skills and gaining the most from the training programme.

Another useful learning methodology is Forum Theatre. Forum Theatre gives delegates a chance to witness a scene being played out by experienced actor-facilitators. When the dialogue or situation gets particularly challenging, one of the actors will speak to the delegates, in role, and ask for their advice and guidance on how to move the conversation towards a successful resolution. By witnessing their suggestions played out within the scene, delegates can see the direct impact of behaviours within a safe environment.

Forum theatre relies on the input of delegates. However, it is also possible to produce scripts that reflect current issues, and encourage delegate engagement. Using this method, actors can remain in role once the drama is finished and can be coached or challenged further by the delegates. Critical learning outcomes can be explored and developed with expert facilitation.

Drama-based learning works because it engages, it is practical and it is delivered by highly skilled practitioners. It goes further than a 'chalk and talk' approach – providing real behavioural challenges and equipping delegates with tangible benefits to help them in the workplace. Finally, done well it is great fun – which is vital for the retention of any learning outcomes.

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*For more information or to learn more about the use of drama for learning and development, please contact Steps on 020 7403 9000 or by email: [mail@stepsdrama.com](mailto:mail@stepsdrama.com).*