



THE POWER OF CATE

BARBARA ROBERTSON explains how practising the Alexander Technique can boost your confidence in court and with clients.

When watching a performance by Cate Blanchett it's hard not to be impressed by her presence, her clear, resonating voice and the simplicity in her work. She does so little and yet she is so specific in what she does. She is one of the masters of connecting with her audience and a lot of it has to do with her voice and her stance.

All instruments must be tuned in order to allow a clear resonating sound. For the human instrument, tuning means removing the tension to allow sound to resonate from all the voice resonating centres and for the breath to support the voice. A tuned body results in a visual as well as an auditory wonder.

The Alexander Technique is about clarity - clarity of intention and expression, of the facts and of the voice. Frederick Mathias Alexander, an Australian actor who created The Alexander Technique, described it as "the use of the self". He claimed that looking at the way we move allows us to delve into the sensitivities that lie below our habits and, in so doing, find our power.

The power of the Alexander Technique is that it is based on a set of principles that provide a process to achieve excellence. The muscular-skeletal system of all animals, including humans, is organised around the principle of primary control. For example, the head leads the body in order to allow the spine to lengthen and find its natural buoyancy.

Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the University of California (Los Angeles) Albert Mehrabian's communications research gives us the 93/7 per cent model: 93 per cent of all presentations come from the body and just seven per cent from the content.

This work is about being in your body rather than your head. None of us are merely talking heads. When you are "in your body" you have more voice, presence, energy and authenticity.

For solicitors and barristers, the ideas and arguments that you send to the judge, your colleagues or clients have to travel from your feet up through your body and come out as speech. Your connection to your body and therefore your reality, gives you your connection to your audience. When you are confident in your body you have self-confidence. Equally important is the concept of inhibition. It is about giving you time to feel and accept

what is going on. By stopping limiting habits of thought and movement you can redirect your thoughts and energy and return to your buoyancy and flexibility. Authentic behaviour comes from awareness.

As you repeat new ways of doing things, you re-educate your sensory mechanism into giving you reliable feedback in terms of what you feel. This allows the integration of body, voice and feelings, which results in a professional performance.

Actively maintaining the dynamic relationship of the head, neck and back (Alexander called this process "direction") allows an active relationship to the throat and respiratory system. Secondly, muscles are not unnecessarily switched on. Correct weight bearing gives you dynamic stability.

When you hold "the core", the diaphragm is unable to move down and complete the respiratory movement.

Likewise a shortened spine causes the ribs to shorten and tighten preventing the intercostal muscles from performing their part in the respiratory process. This pattern of misuse results from slouching.

Because the nervous system originates and radiates from the spine, poor use exacerbates nervous tendencies. When you use your body well, nervous symptoms are not part of your presentation. Your breath and your posture are your secret weapons to replacing nerves with audible, confident and credible presentations.

Another concept is "doing" and "non-doing" or the ability to find stillness in yourself and therefore your presentation in the same way that Cate, Judi Dench and a number of successful actors do.

Putting it into action

The Alexander Technique is a tool that will make a real difference in court, meetings or with clients. Ultimately the judge, the jury and your clients have to see, hear, feel, and understand the facts in order to make a decision.

When you can enter a room and command the space by not rushing, standing tall, allowing your shoulders to be wide to allow the breath to support your voice you will know the power you see in President Obama. It is in your body. It is a way of working that you can do for yourself. It doesn't take long. It is a discipline that you have to apply and then so much more comes through. **LSJ**

BARBARA ROBERTSON is a teacher of the Alexander Technique and will run a continuing professional development course at the Law Society of NSW on 10 February. Visit lawsociety.com.au for details.