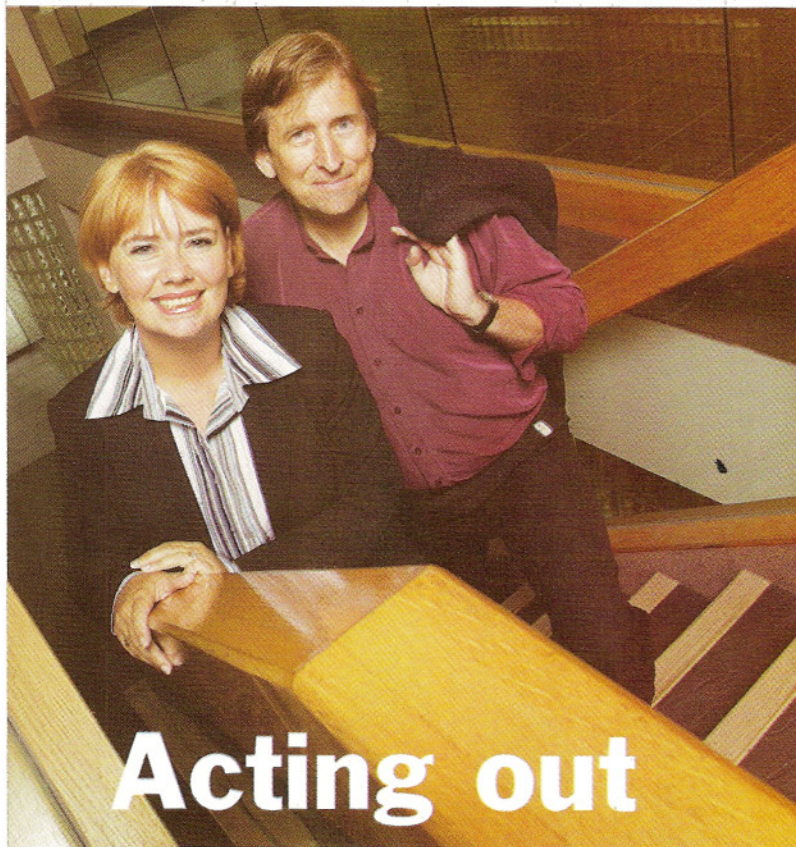




ANNE COUGHLAN AND MIKE WILMOT



Acting out

IMAGINE YOUR ORGANIZATION as a theatrical stage with an elaborate cast of characters. Some take on minor roles in the organization while others take the lead in areas such as sales, customer service, negotiation and even appraisals and disciplinary procedures.

When performing a piece for live theatre, the desired result for any actor is a believable character—something achieved through practice and rehearsal. So why should we expect anything different from those working on the corporate stage?

Anne Coughlan and Mike Wilmot believe we shouldn't. And their corporate role-playing business, Supporting Roles, with offices in London and Toronto, offers to remedy the situation by supplying a pool of highly-trained, professional actors with extensive experience performing business simulation and training scenarios.

"People often have no chance to try out different approaches to situations that they find difficult to deal with on the job—it is always 'for real' for them," says Wilmot, himself a 20-year veteran of radio, stage, movie and commercial work. "They remain trapped within patterns of behavior that are not effective. In the end, this affects their confidence and productivity on the job and doesn't make the most of their abilities."

According to Coughlan, also a veteran television and stage actor, corporate role playing provides training programs with an injection of reality that only years of experience in the workplace can replicate. "Using professional actors to create the scenes specific to our clients provides an effective learning tool," she says. "Through role play, people can become aware of strengths they never realized they had, as well as define and improve upon their weaknesses.

"(It) brings to life situations from the workplace. The actor is a trained professional and therefore can sustain a character throughout the entire simulation providing the subtle and not so subtle physical and verbal signals that make the role play a stimulating and realistic method of learning."

Wilmot says employing actors (instead of having employees role play workplace situations alone) makes the situation real for both participants and observers by maintaining a believable character and reacting truthfully. "When we role play ourselves, there are too many distractions, including the fact that we only fulfill roles based on our reality alone," he says. "For the participant, the learning does not reach true potential. An actor has the chops to navigate a particular improv scenerio, (but) Supporting Roles recognizes that it is only the organization that can decide how they want their staff to navigate the difficult, emotional and even volatile issues in the workplace."

Clients, which include the Royal Bank, Richard Ivey School of Business, Bank of Montreal, Maple Leaf Foods and the Ontario Police College, will often have Supporting Roles write and perform sketches or mini-plays on subjects relevant to the training required.

"Supporting Roles took the time to tour our facilities and understand our culture and business," says Jane Washburn, director, leadership development, at New Brunswick-based J.D. Irving, Limited. "They were very quick to pick up on the unique nature of our culture as well as portray a variety of employees accurately...from sales to technical to operational. Our participants were amazed at how realistic the role plays were. Having actors in our coaching program was very high impact to a group of professionals with very high expectations"

Adds Coughlan, "We're here to help develop the training and skills to professionally navigate the challenges on the job in a rehearsed, professional manner."

by Carolyn Gibson

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BUSINESS	Corporate role play training
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