

'How we deliver a message and the skills to gain engagement  
are as critical as the content.' **Penny Power OBE**

# unlock your business voice

how to **speak** as well as you **think**

Simon de Cintra  
foreword by Mike Still

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Simon de Cintra



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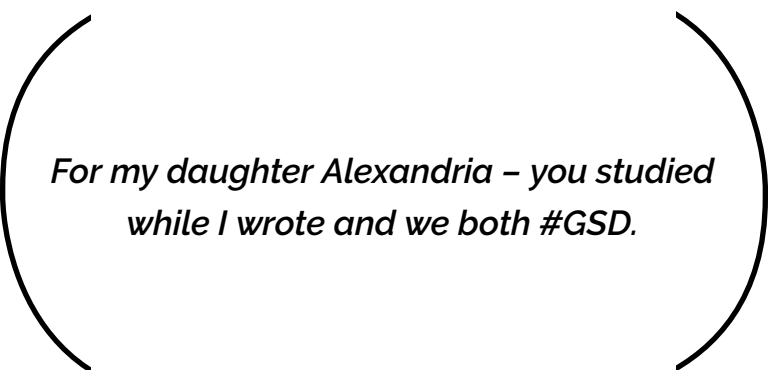
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Cartoons by Andrew Priestley



*For my daughter Alexandria – you studied  
while I wrote and we both #GSD.*

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## Preface

I cannot name a single profession, job or role in society that does not require us all to have the confidence and skills to be heard. We are in the Communication Age, online and offline. How we deliver a message and the skills to gain engagement are as critical as the content we deliver. In fact, I would like to be brave enough to say, how we deliver the message, our voice, is more important than the words we use.

Simon de Cintra's fascinating career has enabled him to share both his experience and the science behind his message to enable the reader to move forwards with such empathy and gentle teachings. His desire to help us all become 'the best version of ourselves' is clear in his generous study and sharing. In his words, we must have a 'credible voice'. Our skills to engage in all interactions we have, whether we are networking, public speaking, pitching for investment, in a meeting with one or more people, even online, will determine our success. How we enter a room, deliver our message and manage conflict all have an impact.

We say we are in a 'Knowledge Economy'. Our knowledge is only part of our success in a time when our skills to engage, build trust and communicate effectively will determine whether others truly listen and are influenced by our beliefs.

We have a choice in life, to fit in, to go with the crowd or, as Simon says, 'dare to be different'. We must be brave and have opinions and deliver them with credibility. Many brilliant people have not been heard, despite their relentless speaking, networking and writing, and this will



undoubtedly be because they are not delivering their thoughts with the skills required to influence the audience in an overwhelming world of communication and information.

I have loved reading Simon's book. As a writer, public speaker and entrepreneur, I have experienced resistance, fear, anxiety and failure. Simon's book will sit by my side; his metaphors, practical exercises, case studies and tips have had a powerful impact on me and I will refer to his book many times before important meetings and speaking engagements. This is not a book to read just once; I am sure, like me, readers will highlight and make notes and return again and again to its profound lessons.

Each of us have an opportunity to be 'the best version of ourselves', but this cannot be done without acknowledgement of our skills, weaknesses and a determination to keep working on certain aspects of our ability to achieve the results we need to achieve our life goals. Communication is without doubt a joy or a challenge for us all. I can categorically say that my ability to communicate has been one of my joys; it is quite possibly the key factor in my own progress, but I also know I can improve and it feels good to know how.

**Penny Power OBE**

Entrepreneur, Speaker and Writer  
CEO The Business Cafe

## Foreword

Communication is at the very core of human life. From the day we are born we are communicating, with smiles, frowns, laughter, crying and body language. As we grow and mature, the way we communicate evolves and adapts, but its fundamental role in shaping every aspect of our lives remains just as prominent.

The art of effective communication is so critical in this modern, ever inclusive world, with the need to connect and engage effectively across countries, languages, religion, ages, gender and more. In addition to this, empathy in modern business and society has increasingly taken centre stage in recent years, along with the understanding that to get the best from people, you need to treat them as they like to be treated.

As technology and innovation progress, more ways of communicating will emerge, with digital innovation supporting this evolutionary process and making cross-cultural communication even easier. Translation technology is already well established and people are becoming more aware of the need to acknowledge other views, cultures and experiences. If you think change is fast now, it is only going to get faster in the future!

Millennials, in particular, are facilitating this rapid pace of change, transforming the 'traditional' world of work as we used to know it and causing organisations to re-evaluate the way they operate in order to remain productive, profitable and keep hold of their best talent. Millennial employees are highly communicative, agile and highly accountable. For them, purpose is more important than profitability.

The word 'purpose' has never been more important for either organisations or their respective business leaders. Purpose defines the reason why a firm, and indeed a person, exists; it directly affects the impact and legacy they will leave on others and on society. Everyone has their purpose – something Simon alludes to in this book through his discussion of knowing your 'casting'. Understanding the role and position you play in a business can only come from knowing your purpose.

This shift in mindset is proving a challenge to many organisations. In business it is all too easy to let short term greed rule over doing the right thing for the long term. But the latter is necessary for survival in the marketplace of the future. 'Business in the community' and the idea of being a force for good is gaining momentum, with honest and transparent communication playing a huge part in this new and exciting way of working. The work I'm personally involved in with Business in the Community, The Prince's Responsible Business Network, promotes and supports businesses to be responsible, resilient and sustainable. This includes how employees and supply chain behave, with transparency an essential deliverable. But transparency is rarely a given in business, often as a result of poor communication skills at various levels.

Too often in business we have to fix problems that have happened because of a breakdown in communication, either due to different views of the truth or because someone said everything was OK when it wasn't. When faced with different versions of the truth, it is critical that business leaders ensure that everyone understands and agrees to the same terms and intentions, whilst also understanding the differences in opinions, views and experiences. It's about being aware

of your own 'DNA' and background and being prepared to make allowances for differences in others to boost collaboration and ensure that any conflict is of a healthy nature. It's about being transparent, empowered and accountable.

In his popular TEDx talk, highly renowned public speaking expert Richard Greene spoke about the importance of not just giving a 'speech' but rather creating 'conversations' from the heart. This is at the core of authentic communication, but doesn't necessarily mean everything has to be 'nice'.

Fairness underpins my leadership position and approach. The ability to have a fair and transparent conversation about performance without being expected to be nice is critical. Fair conversations ensure that any issues are aired and addressed before it is too late and the all important trust is broken. Fairness is born out of trust and integrity, the desire to genuinely help a colleague to improve and not to avoid what some may describe as a difficult conversation. If your intentions are honourable and positive and you really want to help, you must be fair rather than nice.

The concept of fairness, learning and moving on, taking responsibility for our own communication and actions and most importantly adapting our style to the needs of the specific environment and situation, are absolutely key to succeeding in modern day working life. Through writing this book, Simon has skillfully put the 'workbook' element of this theory into context and, critically, into the real world of work.

*Unlock Your Business Voice* is there to support anyone who needs to communicate more effectively in business. Many people are experts in the art of communicating at work; for most it did not come naturally and

was not achieved without significant investment in self-development. Like all things in business, practice makes perfect!

I encourage you to read the book, learn, then practise. Then practise some more. The more you practise, the better you will get. Spend time with as many different people, ask good questions, tell good stories and observe others, to understand the things they do well and how they do it.

If you are a 'Driver' like me, you may want to skim the chapters, do a few exercises to get some results and then go to the repeat prescription at the end, picking the book back up for a booster from time to time. Others will enjoy the stories and the references to the research that backs up the techniques, as well as the practical hints and tips.

Whatever your motivation for picking up this book, by the end I have no doubt that you will have gained a greater understanding of how to interpret the business world around you, how to unlock your business voice and how to communicate fairly, authentically and with true purpose.

### **Mike Still**

Mike has over 30 years of experience in the insurance and risk management industry, including 12 years as a Managing Director at Marsh and prior to that Aon. As well his corporate career, Mike has always cared passionately about making a difference to people, businesses and communities. Mike is currently Chair of HRH The Prince of Wales' Business Emergency Resilience Group; and Trustee, Director and Scottish Chair of Business in the Community. [www.bitc.org.uk](http://www.bitc.org.uk)

# Introduction

Have you ever sat in a meeting with your inner voice in overdrive, burning to share that killer concept you've so ingeniously cooked up, only for the moment to be stolen by somebody else pipping you to the post? If and when you do get the chance to speak, do you get lost in the detail before you can dispatch the golden nugget? I wish I'd had this book to read twenty years ago when I was beginning to build my career as it contains the advice I'm still self-administering today.



The VOICE Methodology has practical steps and exercises that will help bridge the knowing and doing gap that may be holding you back right now. The good news is that it's not a long-winded or time-consuming process. I'm sure you're already busy enough; I will

help you to be more effective in your communications so that you can focus on business rather than 'busy-ness'. The 'how you say it' isn't just in the performance; it's as much about the structure and order you design into your message. Everyone's looking for the hook.

My first piece of advice would be: beware of your cognitive biases. There are a few that can get in the way of you speaking as well as you think, for instance the idea that only actors, singers and performers have great voices. Everyone has a great voice; the insight comes from accepting the relationship between thought, breath and action. Dialling the inner voice down will help you to dial your business voice up.

That's my headline concept. This book isn't about flicking a switch as that would risk you becoming inauthentic, which goes against the key to credible business voices. It's a question of small adjustments that will help you flex your communication style to suit your audience.

The simple five-step process – VOICE – can easily be carried in your head. It's like a portable drive that's always with you, plugged in ready to go. From now on, you'll never be without your VOICE:

- 💬 **V**ocation – being understood by others is more important than being the expert in your own head
- 💬 **O**bservation – people learn most easily from watching others at work
- 💬 **I**ntention – making deliberate choices about the effect you want to have on others will dramatically increase the chances of getting what you want

- **Casting** – add skills and techniques to make the authentic you more compelling to others, adapting your style, not your personality
- **Experiment** – have the courage to get things wrong, reflect, improve and move on to discover your most effective communication style

By following my VOICE Methodology, you will learn a practical and simple approach to increasing your competence and confidence in business communication, whether it's a one to one conversation or speaking to hundreds at an industry conference. The principles are the same irrespective of the situation. I've had plenty of experience in helping people so I know that my methodology works.

There are people in business whom others listen to intently, buying into their ideas and acting upon them. Have you ever noticed that the ones who do command the attention of an audience sometimes have little to say, or that their thoughts are not always the most original or insightful? Nevertheless, there's something about the way their message is ordered and delivered that makes it compelling to the audience. It's tempting to think it's purely instinctive; that these people are born with the gift of the gab and it's everyone else's fate to work much harder to be heard, understood and persuasive.

It doesn't have to be this way. Now it's your time to unlock the potent business voice in your head and be listened to. It's your turn to be the one people will want to hear. Please allow me to help you.



In business, the days of all sizzle and no substance are definitely on the ropes. The fastest growing businesses are high tech, either directly through their product ecosystems or indirectly by what is driving exponential growth. Whichever way you look at it, the age of the Expert Introvert is now truly upon us.

The demands placed on the technical expert are significant. The challenge is to get your ideas out of your head and into the arena, speaking as well as you think during project team, senior leadership and board level briefings. An empowered business voice will help you move your business forward and ensure your expertise and creativity (introverts have creativity in bucket loads) are used for everyone's benefit and reward. You just need to have belief in yourself and know how to use it.

During our working lives, we strive to assimilate the knowledge, expertise and experience that will make us credible in our chosen field. This process is often challenging and will involve sacrifices, commitment and plain old putting the hours in. Quite rightly, we feel a sense of achievement when we get the recognition our efforts deserve, from graduation day to entry into professional bodies; from getting that big break job offer to being promoted. It's not surprising, therefore, that the opposite is also true. When we can't leverage what we've worked so hard to attain, we're naturally going to feel frustrated and deflated.

Today's world of business spins so fast. If we don't hook the other brains in the room quickly into our way of thinking, then what sounded so clear and compelling in our own head won't get airtime. Our business

voice will remain unheard. The transfer of ideas doesn't happen by telepathy, so we need the rest of our business machine, i.e. our body and voice, to join in.



During twenty-five years in business, I have coached and mentored subject matter experts who've needed to make more of an impact. My corporate career started in sales, latterly leading the Corporate Card team at American Express. This was where I realised I was more interested in helping introverts become confident in their communication than increasing the amount of plastic in people's wallets.

Over the last ten years, I have led nearly 1,000 workshops all over the world for major organisations as well as at leading business schools. Consequently, I have had the pleasure of working with thousands of highly intelligent people.

Two questions I'm frequently asked are 'Can you really learn this stuff?' and 'How long does it take?' Happily, the answer to the first is a resounding yes, and it doesn't take as long as you may think. Making a few small changes and actually talking less will quickly result in better outcomes and increase the potency of your communication.

Before we explore the VOICE Methodology in more detail, I want to reassure you on a couple of points, particularly, 'Does it actually work in practice?'

While I was at school, my passion was for Chemistry, and I went on to read it at university. I remember being struck by the revelation that in science, all you can do is observe behaviours and characteristics, mould a predictive model around them, and then wait for someone else to spot an anomaly and disprove your hypothesis. That's as good as being an eminent scientist gets!

Later, after a brief brush with the military and my time in financial services, I had a career change (or an early mid-life crisis as some of my friends called it) and went to drama school to retrain as an actor. I was taken by the head of the school's opening address.

'If you think you've come here to learn to act, you're wrong. People won't pay to see you act.'

Thankfully, he didn't add, 'Fame costs, and right here's where you start paying.' Instead, he went on to clarify that what the audience is expecting is a truthful representation of someone else's character and their communication style. That's why there needs to be a process and work involved.

So even though my background has been a mixture of the sciences and arts, both disciplines have taught me to search for the methodology and process behind the result. Consequently, I've spent the last ten years absorbing what others have had to say on the subject, from Albert Mehrabian's often misinterpreted studies on feelings and attitude in the 1960s, to the present day research of Amy Cuddy on stereotyping and discrimination, emotions, power and nonverbal behaviour. I've combined this with keen observation and note-taking while working with talented individuals who wanted to be heard and understood. I'm looking forward to sharing my favourite pieces of research and observation throughout the book. However, I'd like to start our work together with a personal story.

## **How the VOICE Methodology saved me from bravado**

A few years ago, I was hired to deliver a keynote speech at a conference for 800 employees of a global retail brand. The subject was leadership communication, and it needed to link to the new company values and behaviours that were to be launched earlier in the day.

During the preconference briefings, I'd been warned that there may be some cynicism under the banner of 'we've heard this all before' around the new model, so I decided to deliver the first five minutes of my session in an equally cynical tone, Jack Dee style. In the weeks leading up to the conference, which was being held at a beach resort not far from Barcelona, all went well and the outline of my speech, my slides and sample videos were approved by the organisers. I was offered the opportunity to rehearse at the venue the day before the

conference, and although that meant missing out on a day's work and finding a stand-in for another workshop I had been due to deliver, I readily accepted.

Thank goodness I did, because at the rehearsal, not all of what had felt and sounded so right in the detachment of my head worked. Even though there could only have been twenty or so watching the rehearsal, I could tell from their reaction that I needed to make changes to fit the audience that would subsequently fill the auditorium.

The preparation I had done up to that point was certainly not wasted; the overall premise, structure and the majority of the content of the speech were all still intact after the rehearsal. What needed work was how my delivery would get the assembled management team to embrace and champion the values and behaviours the company wanted them to adopt. After all, that was the whole point of my session. I gave more thought to the dynamics of the space and how 800 people needed to be guided through the message, and I could only reach this insight by getting it a bit 'wrong'. Working out in advance that my business voice wouldn't have been as effective as I had imagined gave me the opportunity to do something about it.

Walking out of the rehearsal, I resolved to put into practice what I'd been preaching to others over the years and not to let my training as a performer deceive me into thinking that all would 'be alright on the night'. It was the reflective geek inside me that encouraged me to rework the process and be thankful for the opportunity to do so, rather than be wounded by what hadn't worked. This was the '*Eureka*' moment for me, when I first discovered My Business Voice Methodology® by asking myself the following questions during a long walk along the beach.

<b>VOCATION</b>	<b>Why had I been hired as an external speaker?</b>
	<i>To add credibility to the new values and behaviours and deal with any cynicism</i>
<b>OBSERVATION</b>	<b>What tips could I take from other speakers that would match the brief?</b>
	<i>Set up the story (Hans Rosling), be clear on the message (Sheryl Sandberg) and add a bit of healthy cynicism (Jack Dee)</i>
<b>INTENTION</b>	<b>What did I need to achieve?</b>
	<i>Bring the new values to life for 800 people in a simple, engaging and 'grown up' way</i>
<b>CASTING</b>	<b>How did I want to come across and where would my credibility sit with the audience?</b>
	<i>The '3 Cs': Certain, Clear and Confident! My authority would come from making the connection early by getting the audience to join me in some simple exercises. Most of all, not be too 'needy'.</i>
<b>EXPERIMENT</b>	<b>How would I know if my ideas would work in practice?</b>
	<i>Get them out of my head and into the space by practising out loud and trusting my judgement as to how they'd sound to the audience. I easily found private spaces around the hotel to do this.</i>

At this stage, it didn't really matter if I came up with the perfect answers. Most important was that I believed and was prepared to commit to them. This gave me the scaffolding to frame and build the content.

I went back to the hotel, found an empty meeting room and tried a few things out.

The following day, I built rapport with the crowd and my message hit home. The breakout sessions that followed ran smoothly because everyone was onside. Most importantly, I avoided that awful feeling that any speaker dreads when we know the audience isn't with us, the whole thing can't end soon enough and the opportunity is missed.

The time I'd spent implementing the VOICE Methodology paid off.

Feel free to dip in and out of this book. It's written in a non-preachy and logical order that will give you time to think, reflect, breathe and practise. Keep it within easy reach – it's an invaluable First Aid kit for all your communication ailments.

A black-outlined speech bubble with a tail pointing towards the bottom-left. Inside the bubble, the text is centered and reads: "PART 1" in a small, grey, sans-serif font, followed by "Get Your Voice Out In The Space" in a larger, bold, black, sans-serif font, split across three lines.

PART 1

**Get Your Voice  
Out In  
The Space**





## CHAPTER 1

# Taking Control Of Your Inner Monologue

*"Whether you think you can, or  
you think you can't – you're right."*

**HENRY FORD**

This wisdom is simplistic and yet irritatingly true.

Before we start looking at the practicalities of unlocking our business voice, let's examine the self-sabotaging mind games people often play on themselves.

Do you ever find yourself ruminating on these thoughts?

- 💬 It can be difficult to break into discussions during meetings
- 💬 The message is clear in my head, but I lose confidence when I hear myself speak

- 💬 Sometimes I sense people wanting me to hurry up
- 💬 Self-belief and confidence can nosedive when I sense conflict
- 💬 Others' higher status can get in the way of what I'm trying to say

If you responded yes to all five, don't panic. The vast majority of people would say the same. Likewise, if your answer to all five statements was 'It depends', that's perfectly valid, too.

These beliefs are voiced by our inner monologue and fuelled by the reptilian part of our brain – the oldest, most primeval portion of our hard drive. It's responsible for the out-of-body experience we feel when we lose our train of thought and the fight or flight response is triggered during a speech, presentation or high stakes meeting.

If this happens to you, how long do you feel the experience goes on? In my classes, most people tell me it feels like an uncomfortably long time. Yet, very often if we ask the same question of a colleague who was present, their experience will have been different. They'll say the moment passed in an instant, and they're not just being nice about it. There's a physiological reason for this.

You may well recognise the triggers: your heart rate soars through the roof; you feel flushed or go red; and most significantly, your breathing goes haywire and it can feel like you're hyperventilating. If you feel this happening, don't be defeated by it – it's a natural part of being human. Instead, do something about it. Place the palm of your hand on your diaphragm (the part of your chest that moves up and down when you

laugh) and take a deep, indulgent breath. Exhale as slowly as possible without straining, and then crucially allow the next breath to arrive naturally. Don't even think about it, just let it happen. This ten-second 'time out' will slow down your heart rate, refuel your voice and switch your consciousness back on.

Remember, you alone are in control of your breathing, not the situation nor anyone else in the room at the time. Think of it in these terms: if you ring your IT helpline, what's often the first thing they tell you to do? Usually, it's 'Turn your computer off and then back on again.' Try the simple things first; they can often solve the problem.

Taking control of our breathing is actually the reverse of what most of us do during moments of stress. Instead, we panic breathe, which triggers the thumping-heart-in-mouth feeling, thereby feeding the flames rather than fighting them.

We also need some internal reprogramming in our level of self-belief. We need to convince ourselves, first and foremost, that we're worth listening to. Even if everything else is working, such as the quality of our insight, the evidence to back up our idea and the structure of our narrative, if the delivery of the message isn't congruent in terms of voice and body, then the recipient won't buy into it and we'll end up working much harder to convince them.

The world of work today has never been so demanding. The American military gave us the acronym VUCA, which stands for 'volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous', and this has been adopted by many companies

to describe the challenges of doing business in modern times. Yet this can be a highly stimulating and rewarding environment in which to plough our careers. The consequence of this rate of change in business is that there's no shortage of ideas, but there's a very real shortage of time to make strategic decisions. It's somewhat ironic that amongst all the noise around 'big data', more and more key decisions need to be made instinctively.

Like never before, if we've got something worth saying, the right time to say it is right now.

This is where our inner voice can sometimes be behind the times. It wants us to wait until our ideas are fully formed and utterly bulletproof, so that when others hear them, we'll get an immediate green light and off we'll go. Life doesn't work like that. Other people's inner voices aren't necessarily following the same script as ours, and the truth is that decision makers make decisions with other decision makers. The first decision we need to make is to fully back ourselves and accept that the commercial world can't afford to wait for perfection.

That can be an uncomfortable concept for deep thinkers, who like to reflect and refine before demanding airtime. The antidote for this unease is to commit to becoming as clear and confident about what we don't know as what we do.

Have you noticed that senior leaders don't burden themselves with having to know everything? They are confident saying, 'I don't know about that in detail. What I do know is this...' That's an assertive way of communicating. Notice the use of the word 'assertive' rather than 'aggressive'. They are in

fact mutually exclusive, and this is an extremely important point of clarification.

Over the years of working with talented people, I've noticed that they often have an issue with their internal settings not matching their external output. Put more practically, they can sound to themselves like they're almost shouting, when the audience think they're only just audible. The same is true regarding the pace of people's speech. Intellectuals have a tendency to race through what they're saying, because it's the natural speed at which they think. The issue to remember is that the recipient of information needs time to process it.



This necessity to reset our inner dials can also be evident in respect of the effect we're trying to have on others when we speak. The impact we have, or don't have, on them and the way we leave them feeling is driven by the decisions we make. Our mind, breathing, voice and body work as an integrated system; we're designed that way, and under normal conditions, it looks after itself without us even thinking about it. This is evident during relaxed conversations, socially or at work. When the trust level is high, we rarely get the response, 'What do you mean by that?' This response only seems to happen when subconsciously we're unclear about our intention, often because we expect the content to do the work alone.

When we don't make conscious decisions about the effect we want our communication to have, the recipient fills in the gap and may well misinterpret how we want them to feel. That's why making choices around intention is so central to unlocking our business voice. Do we want to educate, challenge or inspire our public? Think about doing all three.

People aren't nearly as interested in us as we think. There's a misconception that others are continually judging us and scrutinising what we have to say. In reality, they don't have enough time or energy for this. We get noticed when we merit other people's attention, hopefully for the right reasons. Our focus needs to be on creating the hooks by which we will earn people's attention (rather than attempting to demand it), and then being easy to follow once we've achieved this.

Be generous in sharing your thoughts and hard-won insights. Never forget to switch from broadcast to receive mode during what must always be a two-way process, even when you're delivering a speech.

In conclusion, your inner voice is helpful. It can save you from appearing foolish, so take notice of it. However, just like your external voice, it needs managing. Always be mindful that what you're saying to yourself is transmitted into what you're saying to others.

- 💬 Acknowledge your inner monologue, don't be ruled by it
- 💬 Expect to get 'spooked' occasionally and take action to reset your breathing
- 💬 Get your ideas into the arena early – nobody is expecting perfection
- 💬 Tune your internal dials, e.g. volume, pace and body language, to the external world
- 💬 Focus on the dialogue in the room, not the monologue in your head

A clear and supportive inner monologue is the first step towards unlocking your business voice. Make sure your receptors are turned on and tuned in before you hit the play button.





## The Author

During nearly thirty years in business, Simon de Cintra has coached and mentored subject matter experts who've needed to make more of an impact. Although Simon started his career in sales, the defining moment came when he left the corporate world behind and, in his late thirties, joined the Actors Company to train professionally as an actor. On his arrival at drama school, the early criticism of *'stop acting'* and *'beautifully said, didn't believe a word'*, inspired him to seek the formula behind truthful and authentic communication.

On graduating from drama school, he set up MyFirstTrainers® and for over ten years, has delivered workshops and coaching sessions all over the world for leading business schools and in private and public sector businesses.

What Simon discovered from working with thousands of technical experts is that everybody's best version of themselves is good enough; it's not about having to be an actor, it's about being comfortable in your own voice and making it work for you. He has combined his understanding of the corporate world with his experience as a jobbing actor to design a book

for people looking to improve their influence at work. In *Unlock Your Business Voice*, Simon describes a simple framework for finding your most impactful business voice in the fast-growing world of high tech business.

Simon's simple mantra is '*Make what you say count to the people that matter*'.

To find out more about Simon's work, visit  
[www.myfirsttrainers.com](http://www.myfirsttrainers.com)

You can connect with Simon on LinkedIn and on Twitter  
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