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Ninja of boardrooms

Successful corporate speaking relies as much on good acting as it does on good speaking technique, writes **Alison Aprhys**

NOT many corporate speakers get to brandish a samurai sword, or can claim to have played a zombie in a horror movie.

But Ron Lee is an exception. Known as the "corporate ninja", Lee is a popular keynote speaker whose career has taken him all over the globe, and he's a far cry from the boring and mumbling speaker your firm may have brought in at your last sales conference.

"I absolutely love what I do," says Lee. "It's very fulfilling and satisfying work". But Lee didn't just wake up one morning and decide to be a top speaker without any form of preparation.

"When I decided to finally switch from financial planning to be a corporate speaker, I decided to be the best I could be," he says.

This meant achieving his CSP (Certified Speaking Professional) certification, an international accreditation established by the National Speakers Association of America and globally recognised. That hard work has paid off for Lee.

His past careers include performing arts as an actor, director and theatre critic, and he says that public speaking isn't much different from his childhood work at the Tivoli.

After graduating from NIDA and spending a few years acting (including appearing in eight feature films, in one of which he played the aforementioned zombie in the cult classic *Zombie Brigade*), Lee became disillusioned and turned to the more mundane pursuit of sales. When his boss asked him to run sales meetings, Lee didn't have any knowledge of selling techniques, so he taught his colleagues how to act instead. After sales, Lee fell into financial planning, thinking his performing days were over. But in 1986 he uttered the fateful words "I could do that" while watching the talent show *Star Search*.

"I thought the comedians were dreadful and reckoned that I could do better than that. And a friend said 'why don't you?' By the following Tuesday I had auditioned two routines and the next week I was on TV," he says.

"My main character is the 'corporate ninja' and I utilise acting, humour and deeper martial arts philosophies," says Lee, who has studied many forms of martial arts over the past 22 years.

"Nokia took me to Helsinki to train senior managers and my clients have taken me to Denmark, London, the US, Canada and all through Asia," he says.

His clients include IBM, Mobil Oil, Panasonic, Olivetti, Qantas,

Nissan, Pepsico and Hewlett Packard. "Part of the skill is to make it look effortless. People often fail to realise that while I may be speaking for only an hour, I'm drawing on 25 years of experience and expertise."

Lee talks about incorporating Eastern philosophies and martial arts practices into the culture of Western organisations in order to improve sales, leadership and teamwork. There's more to Lee's repertoire than simply speaking to CEOs and motivating staff.

In October he takes on the role of a Chinese miner and a martial arts master in the forthcoming musical, *Eureka!*

"I started out doing the Tivoli Circuit in the *King and I* as one of the king's kids in 1963," he says. "So it's wonderful to be going back to the theatre for *Eureka!*, which is part of the Melbourne Arts Festival, and working with Gail Edwards, who created *The Boy From Oz*. I can't wait."

Lee recently published his first book — *What Shintaro Taught Me: Zen And The Art Of Success*. "This book was designed to appeal to the baby boomers who can remember the TV series *The Samurai*," says Lee. "While it looks like a business book, the content is really about empowering the individual".

Katrina Webb, who has successfully moved from athletics to the corporate speaking arena, "had no idea that I would enjoy public speaking so much".

After a high-flying career as a state and all-Australian netballer, Webb later won two gold and a silver in Atlanta and four years later two silver and a bronze in Sydney at the Paralympic Games.

Now the chief executive officer of Kwik Kat Enterprises, Webb's job is to motivate and inspire people to achieve their own goals.

"Before going out to do a presentation, there's a lot of research undertaken to ensure I tailor the speaking to the audience," she says.

Webb undertook a great deal of work to develop her speaking skill.

"I worked with a trainer to improve my presentation skills," she says.

"I found it very useful to get my speaking to the desired level where I felt happy with my performance."

Yvonne Collier is NSW president of the National Speakers Association of Australia, and runs her own business, Maddison Training.

"Many of us go beyond keynote speakers and offer the training and coaching as part of our services," says Collier, one of 200 members across the state who attend monthly meetings and have access to the organisation's speaking academy.

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Jobs poll

Welcome to the careerone.com.au online jobs poll. Each week we will publish a work-related question. You can give us your opinion by going to careerone.com.au and clicking on the "Jobs Poll" button. Results will be published the following week

This week's question

What's the biggest turn-off during an interview?

Go to careerone.com.au and register your answer

Last week's question

The 'skills shortage' is growing. What does it mean to you?

- 33.77% Frustration. I'm still looking for the right job.
- 31.55% What is the skills shortage?
- 27.11% More power to the jobseeker.
- 7.55% More choice

"The NSAA exists to develop, promote and uphold the highest possible standards of the profession for the benefit of both its members and the public they serve," she says.

Organisations such as Toastmasters are often the first step to professional speaking.

"We have 4000 members in the ACT and NSW alone," says Toastmasters NSW PR manager Margaret Hawrylcw. "We encourage adults of all ages and professionals to join".

LINKS

<http://www.corporate-ninja.com>
<http://www.nationalspeakers.asn.au/>
<http://www.d70toastmasters.org>