

SPEAKER



Rewriting the Demon Script

Janet Lapp, PhD, evaluates the destructive forces—and sounds—that prevent speakers from making audiences feel great

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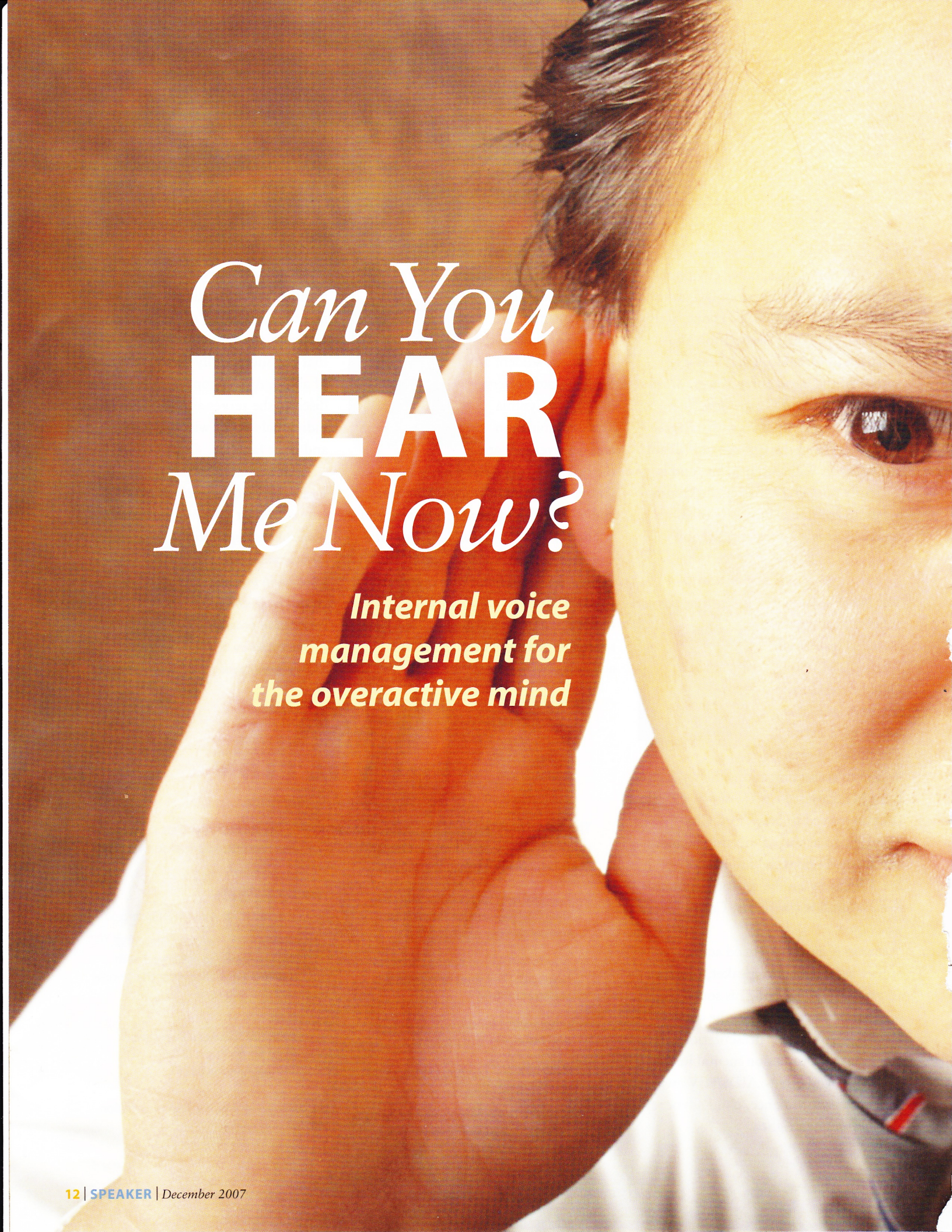
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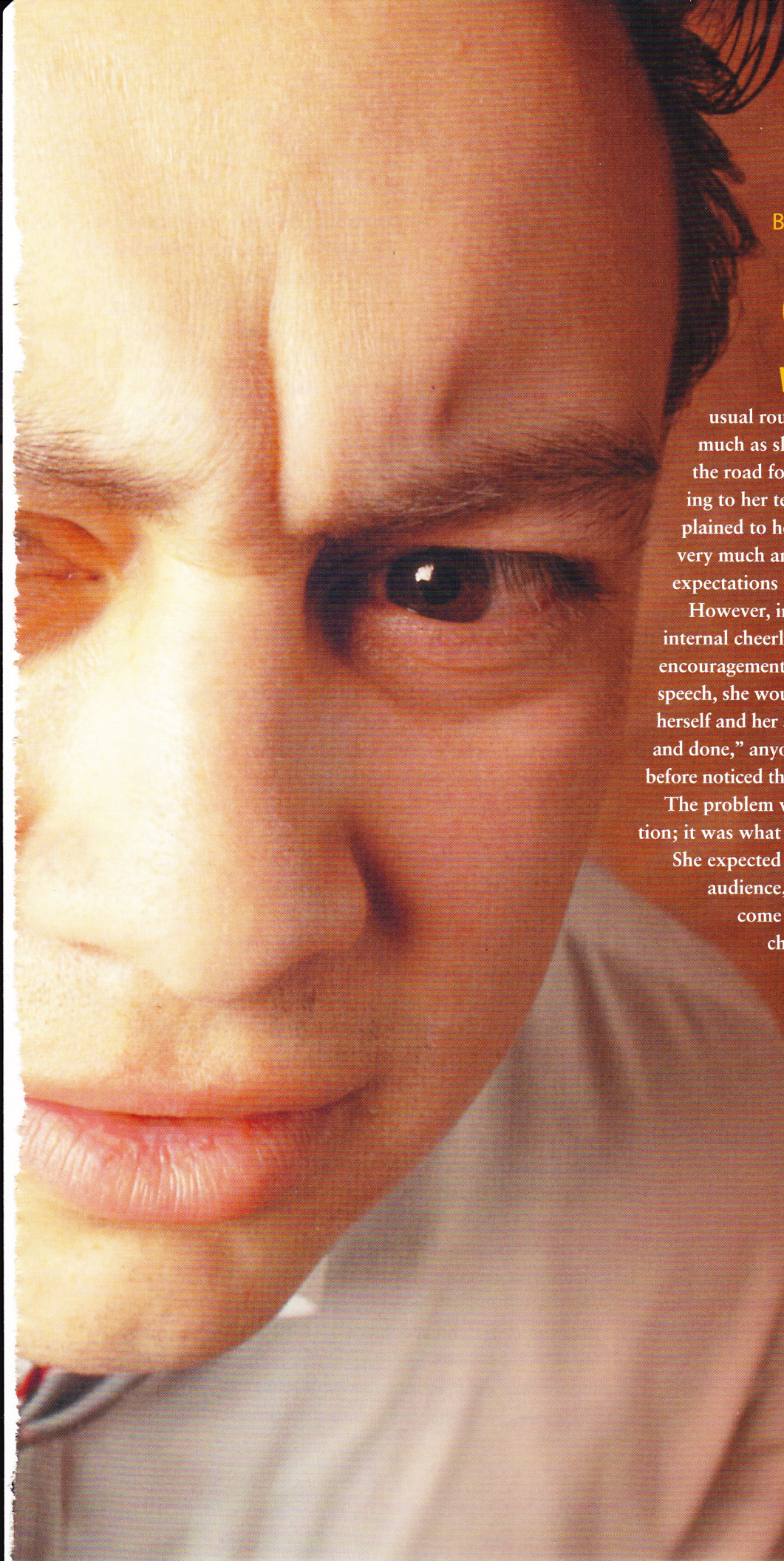
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Can You
HEAR
Me Now?

*Internal voice
management for
the overactive mind*



BY MONICA WOFFORD

Sarah walked into the hotel after an already challenging morning. She had changed her outfit a couple of times, noticed a few new wrinkles and—as had become the usual routine—failed to prepare her presentation as much as she thought she needed to. She had been on the road for two weeks and was having trouble relating to her teenage children. Sarah's husband complained to her the night before that he doesn't see her very much anymore, and there was guilt and a few expectations attached to his words.

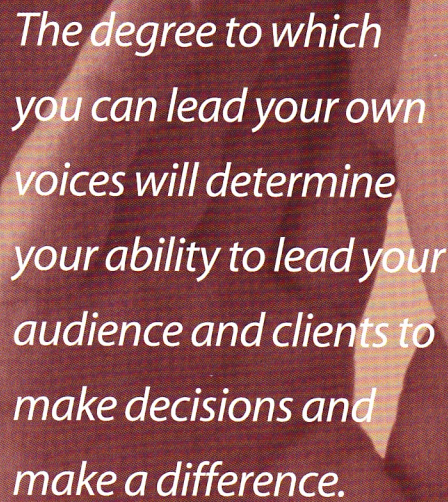
However, in spite of all this, she had a job to do. Her internal cheerleader was trying to pump her up, give her encouragement and convince her that when she gave her speech, she would create a meeting of the minds between herself and her audience. Yet when it was literally "all said and done," anyone in her audience who had seen her speak before noticed there was something different this time.

The problem was not what Sarah said in her presentation; it was what she said to herself before and during it.

She expected to have a "meeting of the minds" with her audience, yet the meeting in her own mind failed to come to agreement first. Her internal optimistic cheerleader failed to convince her (and those other nagging voices) that she was ready to deliver a powerful program.

We've all had those days. Intellectually we know we can't change or control the circumstances of the day, but shouldn't we be able to control those voices in our head, manage what they say and do, both to and for us? Especially on stage?

You can. But it takes more than a simple affirmation. It takes work. Not back-breaking work...just a little mind-bending effort and practice.



*The degree to which
you can lead your own
voices will determine
your ability to lead your
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Monitor the value you place on the opinions of others and the power of authority you “give” them over the voices in your head. Of course, you are always in control of what you say to yourself, but if you are not careful, you may inadvertently give another person permission to hold a higher priority in your head than you even give yourself. Your opinion should count for something, for most things.

Just the Facts, Ma’am

If only Joe Friday, the no-nonsense officer from television’s *Dragnet* series, could be the voice inside our heads, reminding us to focus on the facts, our meeting of the minds would be much more efficient. Unfortunately, much of what is said in our head is based on assumption, supposition or down right false information.

Consider some typical internal dialogue:

“That guy in the fifth row. Look at him. He’s bored. He hates what I just said.” That may be true. Then again, maybe he has jet lag, or was the last one to leave last night’s Welcome Reception.

“Michelle walked right by me at convention, didn’t even say ‘Hello.’ She must be mad at me. What did I do? Doesn’t she like me anymore?” Or, maybe Michelle had an urgent need to be first in line at the ladies room. It might be just that simple and have nothing at all to do with you. Imagine that!

“Bob hasn’t replied to my e-mail, so he must not want to talk to me.” Come on. Bob is probably just as busy as you are and hasn’t been able to see the virtual bottom of his overflowing inbox in weeks.

But our internal voices tell us otherwise, don’t they? Next time your internal voice jumps to an emotional conclusion, ask yourself, “What else could it mean?” And listen for Joe Friday’s voice focusing on the facts.

Monitor Value

What if, just by chance, it does mean what you thought at first? Michelle didn’t say hi because she was bothered by you. Bob didn’t reply because your e-mail did not get his attention or you’re just not a priority with him. The key question is, do you care?

No mean-spirited, cold-hearted intent here. It’s merely a question most of us forget to ask. If someone doesn’t like you, maybe that is okay. We tell others that we can’t make everyone happy and that we won’t please all the people all the time, yet why is it that when it comes down to the business of managing our own internal voices, we conveniently delete that message?

Think Straight

Some days in our business, it’s as if a tornado is happening in our head. There are thoughts flying around everywhere, clients to please, speeches to write, products to create, Web sites to update, and on and on and on. Few people put “take care of me” on their list of “to-dos” and thus it is usually placed on the proverbial back burner of life.

Whether you have taken care of you, things happen. We age, we grow, we gain and we lose, and the reality is that we notice it far more so than anyone else does. Thinking straight includes a clear analysis of whether you really are what you think and you really do what you thought. It also includes considering how much someone else’s opinion of you is a result of his or her own “stuff.”

Maybe that one participant evaluated you poorly because you reminded him of an ex-girlfriend. Certainly that is his stuff, or issue, not yours. But you have to be thinking straight and clearly, and exercising effective internal voice management to come to that conclusion.

Check Yourself

Are you tired or fatigued right now? Are you stressed out about projects you may be working on? Is your personal life experiencing challenges? All of these circumstances can lead to a warped perception of reality. They can also lead to more severe reactions and a higher sensitivity.

Have you ever overreacted only to realize later that what you reacted to really wasn’t so bad after all, which then left you with considerable damage control? It happens. But if you are able to pay attention to what else is going on in your life and manage the emotions that your mind will tell you are warranted, you can avoid a dangerous situation.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Managing the voices in your head is not easy. Getting them to agree and work with you instead of against you can be downright frustrating. Most of us know what to do, but struggle with doing it consistently. (Otherwise we'd all be trim, completely healthy and free of any bad habits.) Yet, just as the bad habits take practice to get rid of, the good habits take time to form and take hold, and remember that those voices in your head have been talking to you habitually for years.

Spend time paying attention to how you react to things and determine how you want to react and how you'd like to respond differently. Get good at looking for the facts in situations that have an emotional attachment or history for you; these are the ones most likely attached to habitual, but not necessarily accurate thinking. Monitor how much you care about what other people think, pay attention to what is getting in the way of what you are thinking and give yourself a break when you fall into comfortable conversations with yourself that may have no basis in truth or accuracy. Then do it again and again and again.

Be a Mind-Leader

The meeting of the minds and agreement between the voices inside your head are where we find happiness and contentment. Don't snicker; it not as trite as it sounds. If you are not leading the voices in your head well, conducting effective internal voice management, then, frankly, you have no business leading other people. And in this business, despite your title, it's what we all do—lead others to be better. The degree to which you can lead your own voices will determine your ability to lead your audience and clients to make decisions and make a difference.

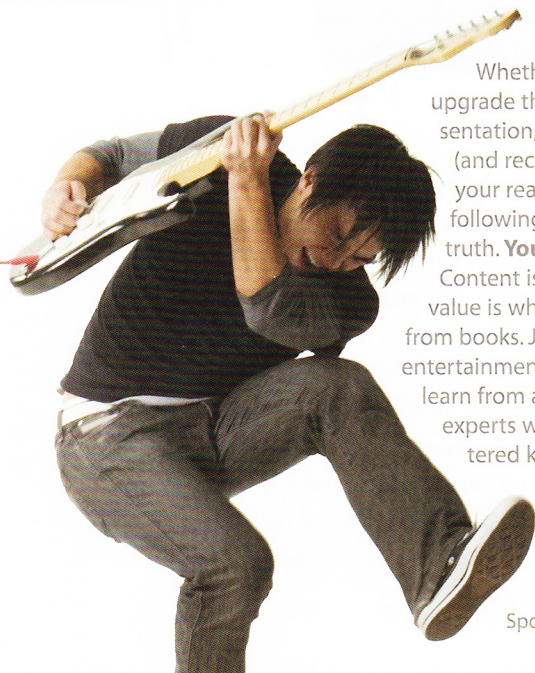
Monica Wofford brings more than 18 years of experience as a business consultant, trainer, speaker and coach to Monica Wofford International, Inc. She is the author of numerous learning tools, including "Contagious Leadership," "Contagious Confidence" and "Contagious Customer Service." She can be reached at www.monicawofford.com or (866) 382-0121.



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