

***Automated Transcript**

Cec Busby ([00:04](#)):

Hi everybody. I'm Cec Busby, editor of Flying Solo. Welcome to our weekly podcast where we step inside the minds and lives of soloists and small business owners. Today's guest is Natasha McNamara. Tash is a vocal coach and communication specialist who assists everyone from politicians to CEOs to business leaders and small business owners to communicate more effectively. Whether it's tackling a difficult conversation, learning how to present with more confidence or understanding the importance of active listening, Tash can teach you the communication skills that you need to succeed. She joins us today to share some of her top secrets. Hi, Tash, welcome to the show. So great to have you joining me today.

Natasha McNamara ([00:54](#)):

Oh, thanks, Cec. I'm happy to be here.

Cec Busby ([00:57](#)):

Excellent. It's always lovely to have you on the show. Last time we gave our listeners a lot of valuable advice around presenting with confidence, which is something that expert in. Today I'd like to talk perhaps a little more deeply on the art of communication, because I think since the pandemic, I guess we all feel a little bit rusty in our communication skills. I think something's been lost in translation along the way, and now everyone's kind of coming back to work and getting back into the swing of things. But their communication might not be exactly up to scratch, is it?

Natasha McNamara ([01:38](#)):

No, I think a lot of the workshops that I've been doing recently have been about refreshing those skills of communication particularly cause so many people have been on Zoom or in that even today I had a workshop and people hadn't been face-to-face for a really long time and actually had to present in front of a live audience. So to refresh those skills is really, really important. Things from body language, the way you stand. I noticed today people weren't used to being grounded or having stillness in the way that they spoke. And so, yeah, just simple things like when you're standing in front of an audience, have you gone to your casual egg syndrome or are you grounded? And still, it doesn't mean you stay there, you can move, but come back to that. Alignment is probably a good word.

Cec Busby ([02:33](#)):

Mm. I think there's also, from anecdotally what I've been hearing as well, there's like a whole generation that kind of finished school or might have finished their uni and then they've not gone out into the workplace as you would. In previous years they've started their jobs remotely, so they haven't had any of that kind of face-to-face connection. And it's like they need to be taught those skills completely from scratch. So what would be some tips you would have for someone that might be feeling kind of nervous about having those face-to-face interactions?

Natasha McNamara ([03:13](#)):

I think that's such a good thing. Well, I think firstly talking a little bit about body language, standing and neutral, which is feet hip width apart, feet parallel. Then I think being aware of dynamic gestures, particularly coming back face to face. And I think on Zoom, sometimes our gestures get a bit lost if you don't bring them up. But gestures really add that dynamic. They also come from the same part of the

brain as pitch. So when you add gestures, it really brings dynamic interest to your voice. The other thing I would say, probably the most important thing is, am I breathing <laugh>? Yes, I, I know that you're all breathing, but am I really deeply breathing? Most people are topping up using only one fifth of their lung capacity, and breath brings you into being present with people. When you breathe deeply into those lungs, it also relaxes the audience because if your shallow breathing, your audience will often start to mirror the way that you, and that's why deeper breathing calms you, brings you into the present moment or into presence. It also allows you to think about what you're going to say in front of a live audience where the nerves might come up. And it allows what you say to really be absorbed when you are breathing. So many other reasons as well. You know, there's so much. I think breath is the key.

Cec Busby ([04:41](#)):

So what about less on that bigger scale things, presentation scale things, and more on the intimate day-to-day? How can people make sure that they're more present and they show up in conversation with their workmates that they're supportive and, and listening, I guess?

Natasha McNamara ([05:02](#)):

Yeah, I think listening is, I mean, I spent a lot of the time in workshops looking at active listening or listening to learn, and that ability to really listen and not to be listening to respond, which when you really get to the bottom of what most people are doing, when they're having a conversation, they're thinking about what they're gonna say. And so much of the training, particularly of an actor is really listening to the very last word that someone says and really absorbing that. So I think listening to learn is really powerful and a skill that we need to practise. I think often we have forgotten how to listen because again, we're thinking about what we wanna say. We're thinking about you know, our next appointment or our next meeting, and we're not really present with someone.

([05:55](#)):

And when someone's not present with you, it really leaves a mark and we know how it made us feel. We all have been in a situation when we've been talking to someone about something that we really care about, and they look at their phone or they look distracted and how that makes them feel. And I think, you know, Maya Angelou says that great quote, "people don't remember what you do. People don't remember what you say, but people remember how you made them feel". And when you listen to someone, you are giving them your presence and it's really powerful.

Cec Busby ([06:30](#)):

That active listening, it is a skill that a lot of actors have, as you say. I guess I should probably preface for our audience that your background originally is as an actor, you went to WAAPA.

Natasha McNamara ([06:44](#)):

Yes, that's right. Yes.

Cec Busby ([06:46](#)):

And after that NIDA where you studied voice. Do you find that a lot of your skills from your acting days are useful when it comes to teaching people how to communicate more effectively?

Natasha McNamara ([07:01](#)):

Definitely. I think, you know, the interpersonal soft skills, as people say, are incredibly important. I think as an actor, I think you are wanting to be present, you're wanting to listen, you are responding. You do have a script which you've learned and you're making that sound natural and discovered. And I think, yeah, I think the acting skills are really important. I think a lot of people are going to an acting based business training to really help them to be expressive, to be influential, to have clearer intentions and objectives to get what you want in business. I think so much of what I've learned as an actor is really incredibly useful to business people from body language to voice, to having a clear intention about what you wanna make someone do, think and feel, and then also having emotional tactics in your resource kit, which are transitive verbs, if you like, but you are thinking about how you wanna make people feel rather than focusing on yourself. Which I think in business, when I say to people, so, did you rehearse your presentation? They'll say, no. And I'll say, did you spend a lot of time on the slides and the content? And they'll say, yes. And there's nothing wrong with that, but people are forgetting that also a great tool that actors have is the notion of rehearsal and practise, as if you were really doing it. I think there's so much to be gained in that preparation.

Cec Busby ([08:41](#)):

I think you're right there. Like, it's great to have a fantastic looking PowerPoint, but <laugh>, but you know, people aren't gonna remember the slideshow above anything else. They're gonna remember what you said to them and how you made them feel in the room at the time.

Natasha McNamara ([08:59](#)):

Yeah, that's right. But I think there is a different focus in the business world, which whenever I ask that question, most people have spent their time on the content and have not thought about the channels of communication, which as we know from early research back in the 1960s, body language is the highest per cent of communication. The way you gesture your facial expression, your energy, your stance, your smile, all that really impacts an audience. Of course, voice is just under that with body language. 55%. They say Albert Moravian back in the 1960s and voice 38%. I mean, Albert in context said words were 7%, which is interesting. I do think your content is important. I do. But I think sometimes in business we forget the body language, the voice. And also I really think what's useful is structure and looking at starting with a hook. A lot of times in business, I'm hearing "Good afternoon everyone.

([10:11](#)):

Today I wanna talk to you." And it's stats and statistics quite dry, and we're forgetting that we need to start with a hook. Now, some of you might be asking, what is a hook? Well, number one, a hook is a story and storytelling is so powerful in business to find a story that is connected to your audience analysis, who your audience is, what you want is really powerful. It lights up the brain. It's memorable. Or a question. Today I was working with a group and there were some really great opening questions as hooks, that got us straight away actively listening and engaged with what that presenter was saying. So I think that's really powerful. Group activities shocking statements, all those things. There's lists of hooks, which are great to use. Group activity analogy.

Cec Busby ([11:07](#)):

<Laugh> <laugh>. Tell me more about the shocking statement, <laugh>.

Natasha McNamara ([11:12](#)):

Well, something that grabs. Like even today, did you know that? Well, what I would say, did you know that 55% of communication is non-verbal? It's your body language that counts. I mean, some of the ones that I heard today were, a lot of them used the word 'imagine', which I think is a great hook. Imagine for a moment. I mean, there were stories today and shocking statements around risk. I can't go into detail who the company was, but we're talking a bit about risk management. But there were some just really great ones that grabbed our attention and just completely changed the engagement of the listeners when you start with a hook.

Cec Busby ([11:55](#)):

And I guess we're, we're all wanting to hear a great story. We're all wanting to find the human in the story as well. And I think is that something as well, you encourage people to do, like be more aware of that human element?

Natasha McNamara ([12:10](#)):

Definitely. I think that's coming out a lot more. Even today, there was emotion that comes up and I mean, I think in the safe place that I believe I create as a facilitator, I really am encouraging people to let their whole personalities out of the box. And that we're not wanting a cookie-cutter perfect presenter, but yes, Cec, you're right, we're looking for human beings, vulnerability, realness, you know, and also that notion that the audience doesn't want perfect. They want to see people that are real. That's why real stories around your sometimes triumphs and tragedies and challenges are great. Case examples are great. Where maybe you've made a mistake and you've learned from that. I think those human elements make make a great connection to people.

Cec Busby ([13:10](#)):

Sohow do we let our staff and team members know then that it's a safe space and that they can communicate honestly with us? Like, say there's a problem or a difficult conversation that needs to be had. I mean, everybody's had to face difficult conversations at some point, I think, in their career. How would you suggest tackling that from both sides? So the person having to give the difficult, challenging feedback and the one who maybe is on the receiving end?

Natasha McNamara ([13:45](#)):

Oh, that's such a good question. Recently I worked on a difficult conversation and the leader essentially had to give a team member some difficult feedback. And I noticed that the team leader went straight away to blaming and not really being willing to, he went straight away to, and there's no gender involved, but just to the emotion of the situation. And one thing, I tell you, a book that's really influenced me is *Crucial Conversations* which is just such a fantastic book, but starting with the facts is really important. Taking the emotion out, sticking to the facts - I really saw that work in great success. Rather than going to the emotions, you go to the facts. So rather than saying to someone, 'you are always late for work, and it annoys me', you would say, 'I've noticed on the last consecutive Mondays that you've been 20 minutes late.'

([15:00](#)):

So that's the first part of it. Then to tell your story, which is the consequences of that. So, 'when you are late 20 minutes late each Monday, it really throws out the timing of our team meeting'. Then I think the other important element, and it's what we've just talked about, is to really ask for the other's path or be willing to listen to the other person, what's going on for them. And that's sometimes a step that I see

missed. So that's some other tips. One that I'm using, which some of you might wanna write down, is HAQR and this is a great acronym, so I'll go through it. It's to hear first. I think sometimes that's missed - to hear what the other person's saying. I think sometimes we can go to blame or to defence, but if you can hear what the other person's saying, and that might mean paraphrasing or just feeding it back.

(15:59):

And then the H is to really acknowledge, and that's a step that often gets missed as well. So you've got hear and acknowledge that those two steps get missed. And then to question is to ask an open question. And I think sometimes I see people ask closed questions and they're not even aware of it. So that question is to ask an open question where you can get the other person talking rather than just a yes or no question. And then to respond.

(16:31):

So for example, if you were, if someone was wanting to give feedback about someone being late, you would first of all find out what's going on. And then hear. So Susan, I hear that you are finding it hard to get to work on time on the Mondays, and we have our team meetings. I understand, I'm acknowledging now that that's really hard. You've got to get the kids to school. Your husband's got an injury. Can you help me to understand, are there ways that we can help you with this difficult situation? That was actually a closed question and that was terrible.

Cec Busby (17:16):

<Laugh> <laugh>,

Natasha McNamara (17:17):

Can you share with me?

Cec Busby (17:21):

What would be, how could we help you?

Natasha McNamara (17:23):

That was a terrible example, but how can we help in that moment to think of an open question? I think HAQR is really useful. So if you wanna write it down, it's hear, acknowledge question and then respond.

Cec Busby (17:39):

But I think a 'how' is often, usually, an open question. So maybe that would be a tip. A tip would be ask a 'how' or a 'why' [question] rather than a ...

Natasha McNamara (17:55):

Than a closed question, yeah. So there you go.

(18:03):

I usually am so much better at modelling that. Anyway. <laughs> You know, sometimes I'll write out open questions on the whiteboard just to remind me and to remind the participants as well. So yeah. But I think that's a really good one. I think listening is such a great skill that is something to create an open space. I worked with a leader recently, and I remember she asked the question, she was talking about a difficult situation with her team, where she would use the phrase, 'tell me more'. And I just thought that was so, she was actually interested in what other people felt and what their experiences

were. So I think empathy, leading with empathy and kindness, compassion, vulnerability. I mean, I know that they're buzzwords, but they're, you see that in action when you see difficult conversations played out again and again and again.

Cec Busby ([19:01](#)):

So what if we happen to be just a shocking listener, we're someone that finds ourselves very easily distracted and jumps all over everybody else's conversation because we aren't listening. What are some things that we might be able to model to change our behaviour, to make us better at being active listeners and not conversations stompers. <Laugh>.

Natasha McNamara ([19:29](#)):

Yeah. Well, I think awareness is probably the beginning. It's that if you've got that feedback or you know it within yourself, that's the great start. Awareness is the beginning of change. And then I think you need to just stop talking, maybe focus on your breathing. Also really noticing the other person using the senses. What are you seeing? What are you seeing that's not being said? To observe their body language, how are they holding themselves, their alignment. To notice if they're feeling confident, or unconfident. To notice their gestures, their eye contact. I think those skills, those micro skills of noticing another person's communication, non-verbal and verbal, is really gonna bring you into focusing on the other person, rather than on yourself and what you want to say. I think that's a good skill is using the senses to really see, hear, feel what's going on, what's not being said with this person, to really focus on that person.

([20:45](#)):

I think also listening, to the key words that that person is saying, listening to their pitch and intonation, are they going up at the end of sentences? Are they dying at the ends of thoughts? What is their, what is about their voice that is revealing of what they're saying? Because often it's not what they're saying, but what they're not saying, which I think is interesting. I think those skills are really important, and I think practising your listening in nature is something that's really worthwhile, is just to spend time in nature listening to the sounds in nature. I think we've become de desensitised living in the city, in the urban concrete jungle, where our listening skills are taken away from us. But deep listening I think can really start with nature. Going for nice bush walk, listening to the sounds of birds, the wind, just resensitising our skills of listening.

Cec Busby ([21:49](#)):

That's an interesting point because if you can't look after yourself, then how can you really look after other people? So kind of, I guess in a way, good leaders need to practise good self care to begin with.

Natasha McNamara ([22:08](#)):

I think that it's such a huge discussion at the moment, self-care and mindset and the notion of taking time out for ourselves as leaders so that we are capable of giving to other people. I think is really, really important. And I think the skills to not be disheartened, anyone listening, that you can develop these skills, you can work on your listening skills. Again, awareness is the beginning of that. You can work on not interrupting someone, you can work on really listening to the end of their sentence, to listen to the cue that they're finished. I think being curious about other people is really powerful as well. Building rapport, you know, it's those things that really count. Never underestimate small talk in terms of

leadership as well, because you wanna build rapport and trust with people to lead people. And so I think that notion of rapport is really powerful as well.

Cec Busby ([23:10](#)):

Does that start with those small, meaningless kind of conversations? The ones that are just say, you know, hi, how you doing that, kind of develop a bit of a relationship.

Natasha McNamara ([23:22](#)):

Yes. I think that's big. I think in terms of the analysis of an audience, which is something I look at, it's we wanna understand who that person is, what are their needs and their wants, and then to really think about some simple questions. What is rapport to that person? Because some people might not like small talk, some people may be more analytical and wanna just get straight to the point. And I think as leaders, we wanna have our flexible communication skills. But some people love it. Like, I know at a couple of the places that I work at often talk about our cavoodles, <laugh>, you know, or I know kids are a good conversation starter. I think those things do build connection and I know some people have to come to me to learn how to build rapport, and I think that small talk, being interested in the other person asking open questions, the who and the why, those sorts of things are great just to find out about that person so you can engage them.

Cec Busby ([24:25](#)):

So focus more on the other person rather than yourself is probably a key thing I'm hearing from you.

Natasha McNamara ([24:34](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. I think in terms of audience analysis, which is the starting of structure, we look at, well, what does reward look like to this person? What does resistance look like to this person? What does reach look like to this person? Like, how am I gonna reach this person? I think you ask yourself simple questions about this other person, because when we stay focused on ourselves, I think we're losing connection and it is really important to be focused on the other person. What do you wanna make that person do, think and feel?

Cec Busby ([25:11](#)):

Mm-Hmm. Good advice. Thank you so much, Tash. It's been a lovely time this afternoon chatting with you.

Natasha McNamara ([25:20](#)):

It's been lovely to chat with you again as well.

Cec Busby ([25:24](#)):

Yeah. Any final tips for our listeners on developing rapport and being better communicators?

Natasha McNamara ([25:33](#)):

You know, we've covered, I think listening's been a big part of this conversation. I think that all of us can go away tonight and then to start practising with our partners, our children, our dogs, <laugh>, you know, the the Uber driver. I mean, I think it's just practising listening to learn rather than listening to respond. I think the notion of it that communication is not about you, it's about the other person. What

do you wanna make them do, think and feel - feeling is important. If you want to make someone remember something, you wanna make them feel something - excited, inspired or shocked or seduced; whatever. You wanna make someone feel something.

Cec Busby ([26:26](#)):

Thank you. Well, plenty for us to think on there. Think and feel. <Laugh>, thanks for joining me Tash.

Natasha McNamara ([26:37](#)):

Thank you, byebye.

Cec Busby ([26:39](#)):

Bye. Bye.