

Woman coaches professionals in the art of public speaking

By Cindy Bellinger
For The New Mexican

It's one thing to understand what you do professionally or to know what you care deeply about, but it's quite another to put those beliefs into words and talk about your life in front of a group. By training with Gail Larsen, founder of Real Speaking, it's possible to put yourself or your company into the context of spoken words and to have those words really be heard.

"The capacity to tell your story is essential to great speaking," Larsen said. "We're in an age of information overload, and people are hungry for a real connection with a real person. A well-crafted story carries your message and is memorable."

Larsen got her start in business when she took over management of an employment agency in Nashville, Tenn. In 1979, she organized a women's career convention and 4,000 women, from 16 states, attended. The governor of Tennessee was the keynote speaker. Introducing him was Larsen's first attempt at public speaking.

"I was scared to death," she said. "I could barely say my own name."

Larsen went on to organize other large conventions. In 1981, she was the first

woman to be named the Tennessee Small Business Association's Small Business Person of the Year.

She began honing her own public speaking skills and later moved to Arizona to head the National Speakers Association, a not-for-profit organization for professional speakers.

Today, Larsen's clients travel to Santa Fe from all over the United States to work with her. She also offers workshops in the northwestern U.S. and Canada.

Her classes aren't filled with the usual skills found in Public Speaking 101 — making sure you look at the entire audience and not prefacing every sentence with "um" — and her workshops most often focus on getting to the real material that can bring a speaker, as well as his or her speech, to life.

Larsen first opened Real Speaking in 2001. Her modern-day lessons evolved from a class called Keynote Camp, started in 1991. Real Speaking is a three-day residential program and is limited to six students per session. The course costs \$2,500.

Last year, Larsen taught eight courses as well as several one-day workshops called "Spirited Speaking." Larsen said the shorter course costs \$250 and focuses primarily on "the magic of authentic expression."

Larsen's focus is on supporting people trying to bring about personal and planetary change. Hundreds of people, from lawyers to authors to entrepreneurs and directors of nonprofit organizations, have taken classes.

Deborah Nelson of Social Venture Network, which is based in San Francisco, Calif., is a graduate of Real Speaking.

"I loved Gail's workshop," Nelson said. "I got so much out of it in terms of improving my speaking skills and also getting more in touch with the message we wanted to convey. The class



is very interactive, and it's fun."

Marc Rosenthal of Rosenthal and Watson, an Austin, Texas law firm, has made it possible for several of his firm's attorneys to work with Larsen.

"Real Speaking gave me the inspiration and confidence to speak my heart without sacrificing intellectual content," he said.

Larsen talks about the dangers of PowerPoint and her belief in live presentations. Much of the nervousness of being in front of people vanishes when a person finally begins speaking from what she calls the "Home Zone."

"The 'Home Zone' is the place where we're authentic and your power as a speaker emerges. You speak from who you are and what you know," she said.

Another component of Larsen's workshops is video-taped coaching sessions.

"At first, when viewing their videotape, people see their wrinkles or weight," she said. "The second time, they begin to see what others experience: their essence and their gifts. To experience ourselves as originals in front of a group is a powerful moment and supports us in expressing more of what matters to us out in the world. That is what Real Speaking is all about."

Real Speaking

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