

Alan Blumenfeld and Katherine James teach lawyers how to overcome "stage fright."

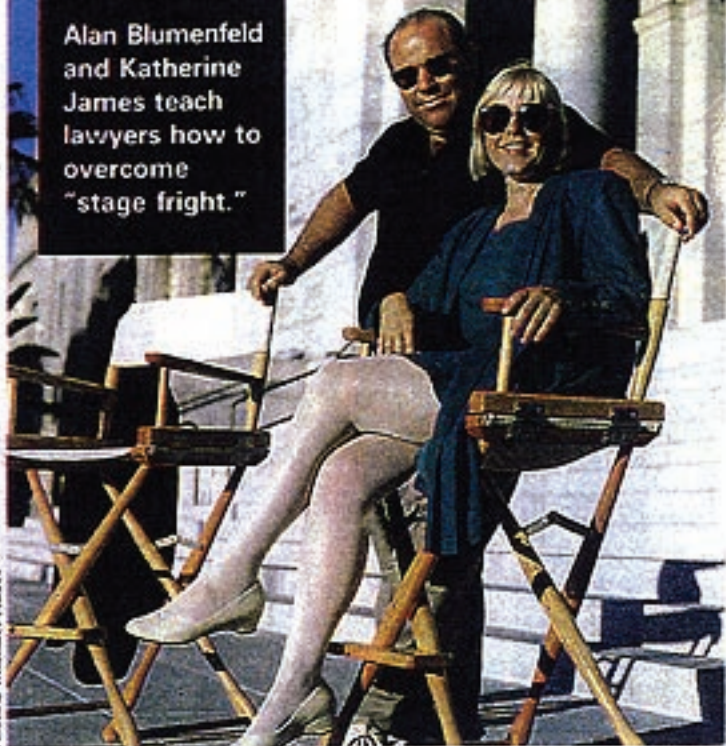


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The Firm

dazzled by actors like Tom Cruise and the gang at "L.A. Law," juries are often turned off by real-life lawyers, who are more likely to be fumbling, wordy or boring than glib and glamorous. "There is increased pressure on the legal system as a result of the slick theatrics in films and TV shows, in which very complicated problems resolve themselves in short periods of time," says entrepreneur Alan Blumenfeld.

For Blumenfeld, that pressure presented opportunity. In 1977, he and Katherine James founded Act of Communication, a Culver City, California, consulting firm that has helped more than 8,000 attorneys nationwide "find their own style" via techniques used by actors, writers and directors.

Act of Communication teaches attorneys to overcome "stage fright" through physical relaxation techniques, and teaches them how to use their voice and body naturally. Lawyers also learn the skill of storytelling, which involves finding the essence of a message, making that message sound new each time you say it, and "speaking in [plain] English."

Blumenfeld and James, themselves veteran actors and directors who have appeared on TV shows including, yes, "L.A. Law," are surprised this aspect of litigation is neglected by our nation's law schools. "Communication skills get lost in the complexity and intricacies of the law," says Blumenfeld. "The humanity is often put aside."