

Unlocking a firm's magic

JUNIOR BESTER

JOHN French is a communication strategist, which means that he is responsible for the communication methods used by various businesses and ensuring that these are used strategically. He is also a trainer for other communication strategists, as well as the founder of Corporate Intelligence Training, a company that trains various industries throughout South Africa.

What does your job entail?

I am fortunate enough to have a career that is both thrilling and incredibly rewarding. I empower individuals and organisations by helping to improve their communication skills. My business teaches all communication skills, from voice training, customer service, public speaking, sales and negotiation skills, right through to written communication and personal branding and strategy. It is almost impossible to succeed if you cannot communicate effectively, and if your communication does not reach the necessary target market, the business will surely fail.

What is your background?

I majored in law and English, and then studied drama at Wits. I am also a licentiate and teacher of the SA Guild of Speech & Drama Teachers, and have a public relations diploma. I have been part of the communication training industry for 15 years, training in major



SKILLS TRAINER: John French

centres in South Africa, the US and the UK. I have a very strong strategic brain, as well as a powerful creative flair, which helps me to gel with business people and create winning communication strategies for them.

Describe a typical day:

I am fortunate that no day is typical or the same. I love running my own business and being involved in all aspects of its growth. On the training side, I could be writing up

new training material, or training individuals or groups. I may be with a group of truck drivers teaching them basic customer service and communication skills one day, and then be with the premier or a billionaire the next day working on their top level speeches, or personal branding and personal communication strategy. My days are all so varied. I am very lucky to be with so many different types of people as I get to learn all about their differences, and I am able to embrace them all to deliver a solution for each.

What are the biggest challenges that face you at work?

My company's logo is "Take your communication to the next level", which leads to the greatest challenge of running such a company. I have to find the magic in each individual or organisation in order to improve their communication skills and methods. No matter how talented anyone or any organisation is, I strive to make them even better.

What are your major rewards?

Teaching people how to communicate properly is extremely rewarding, as I get to see how their confidence increases when they are able to communicate better. That is why I often hear the words: "Thank you, John. You have changed my life." Another reward is the fact that I am able to see these people,

who I have helped become successful, soar above their own expectations.

What do you need to succeed as a communication skills trainer?

First, you need to lead by example. You need to be an excellent communicator who understands and applies all the principles of excellent communication. You also need to have a passion for people and people development. Having great emotional intelligence, insight, discipline, a tremendous intuition and a penchant for excellence are all key requirements for anybody willing to become a communications skills trainer.

What are the minimum educational requirements for the job?

A degree or diploma in speech and drama is essential to become a voice coach, while English, psychology and public relations experience also helps.

What is the basic starting salary?

The joy of working for yourself is that you determine your own salary by how hard you work, and by how successful you become. I remember that at the end of my first month in this industry I earned only R80... but that was freelancing and a long time ago. Currently, you can work as a trainer and receive a daily rate in the region of R1 400.