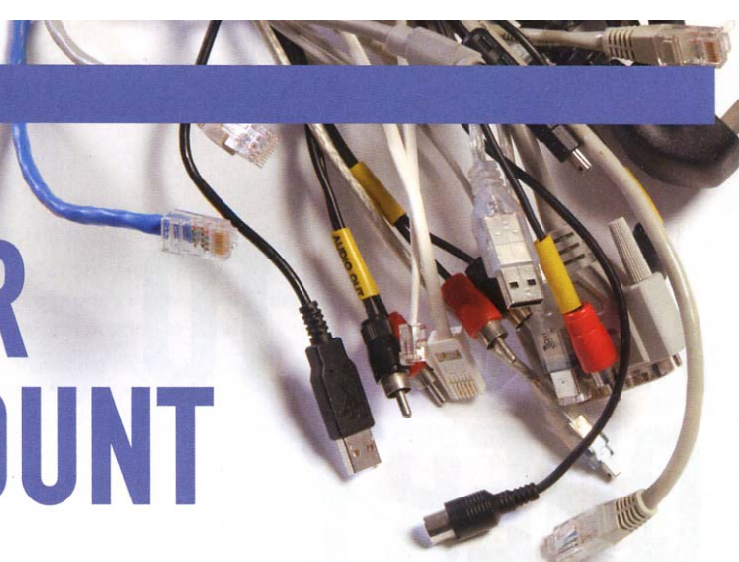


# MAKING YOUR PRESENCE COUNT



Perhaps it's just as well they were only taking photos at the conference, and not giving us the full sound and video treatment. At one point the photographer walked into the seminar billed as "Communicating effectively in court", just as presenter Sheena Wheatley had her audience on its feet, all reciting "Mary had a little lamb" as she coached on intonation. This was just part of Wheatley's strategy to get us to understand that the manner in which we deliver a statement affects our hearers' response to it. Everyone goes in and out of bad states all the time, she said, and our state in turn affects

what we pass on to others. Thus a bad experience just before you leave the office for court will make it harder for you to present a convincing case than something that puts you in a confident, energised mood.

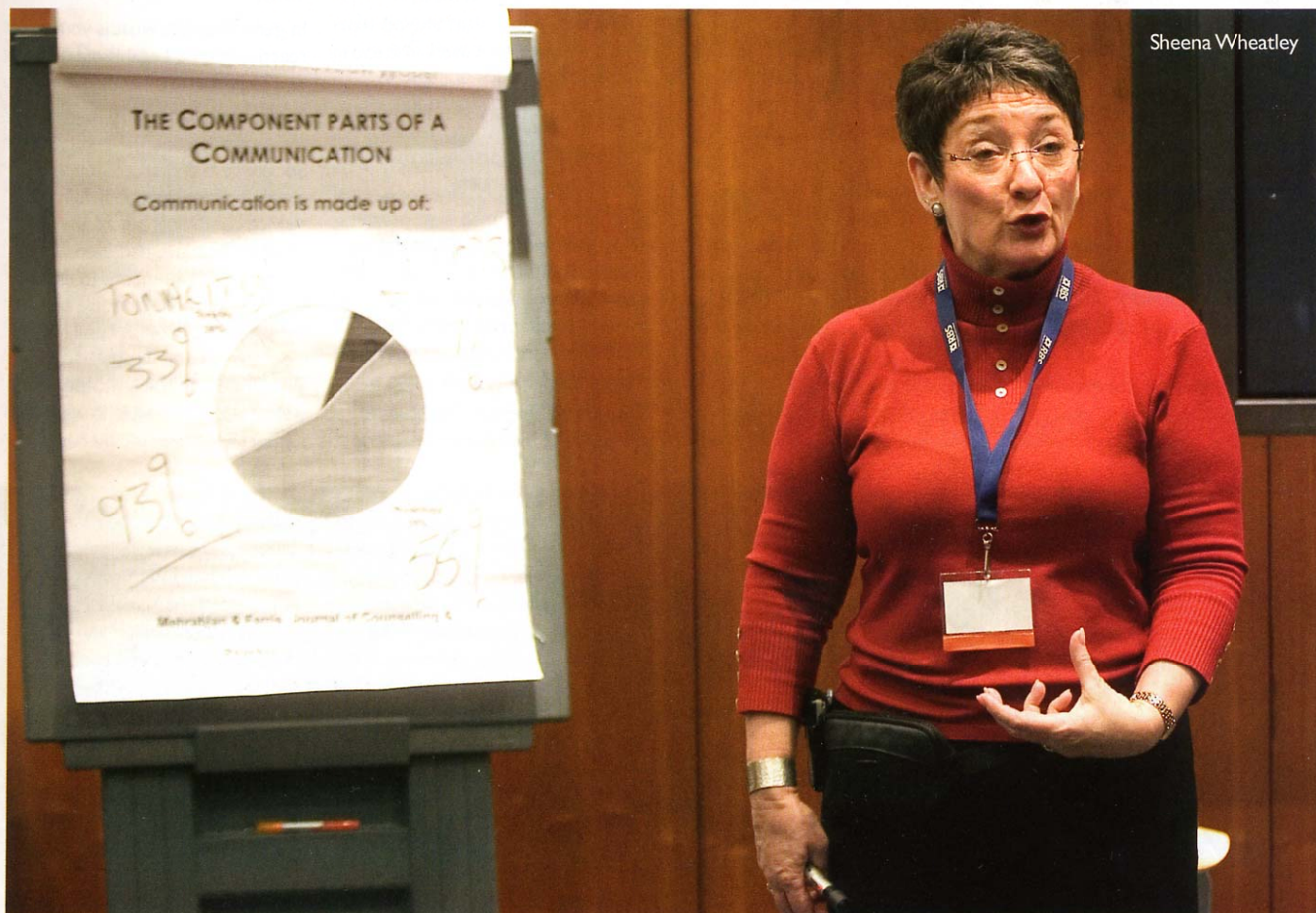
That may not come as news, but in Wheatley's analysis "there are two sides to communication – the way I communicate with you, and the way I communicate with myself". If, she added, you can take control of how you communicate with yourself, "you can do anything". In other words, the key is what you hold in your mind: it affects your state, your senses, even your physiology.

To alter a state of mind, however, she put the process into reverse: "If you adopt a vital, dynamic physiology, you automatically adopt the same kind of state. The biggest leverage we have in any situation is physiology because it works fast and it works without fail."

As has been said by others (for example John McKinlay in the November Journal at page 32), physiology is much the most important element in communication, followed by tonality, with the actual words used coming a poor third – despite the obvious need in legal argument for these to have substance.

The aim is to achieve a rapport with your audience – defined by Wheatley as "responsiveness and the ability to see each other's point of view (not necessarily to agree with it), to be on the same wavelength, and to appreciate each other's feelings". So if you don't start off with rapport, "mirroring and matching" behaviour can put a listener at ease – not mimicking them but "the behavioural equivalent to agreeing with someone verbally".

Then there were the tips on choice of language and tone of voice – but you really had to be there.



Sheena Wheatley