

“Boooooorriinnng!!!”

THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT **PHILIPPE GAULIER** TEACHES LEADERS NOT TO BE.
HE USES THEATRICAL TECHNIQUES IN ORDER TO HELP
WOULD-BE LEADERS FIND THEIR INNER CLOWNS.
BY HARRIET RUBIN PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANTON CORBIJN



There is a chair on the stage.

Two competitors circle it. When the music stops, only one of them sits.

That person gets to be Major—the power, the leader, *the force*. The loser becomes Minor and slinks away. It's a child's game—musical chairs—but this time, it's teaching a lesson in leadership.

In this game, when the music stops, the person who grabs the chair doesn't just sit in it—he *possesses* it. Major swells to fill the chair. He revels in his new seat, declaring himself born to that perch, destined for that role. He is not gracious, not for a moment. He is loving every minute of sitting in that chair. And watching him, so are we. There's something so right about his sitting there. It's perfect! We enjoy seeing him in that chair even more than we would enjoy sitting our own precious ass down in that winning seat. And Minor? What of Minor? Minor is off to the side—and cleverly drawing us to him. He's full of entrancing second-banana movements, from that droopy grin that he wears on his face like a wilting flower in his lapel to the abject crawling that has become his new way of getting around. His version of losing is actually quite winning: It's touching, charming—and just as perfect as Major's boastfulness. Minor, too, has touched us. He, too, could convince us of anything—even that crawling around on a dusty floor is fun. So completely have Major and Minor connected with an inner chord of emotion and energy that we would follow either of them.

Major and Minor are, in fact, learning to be leaders. But they're studying a type of leadership that goes beyond the traditional requirements of being clear, motivational, and inspirational: The leadership that they're learning teaches people to go for the jugular. Major and Minor are among the 26 students in this class who are learning to tap into the very core of leadership by drilling past their rational minds into the depths of their emotional responses. It's at this core level that people commit their deepest loyalties to strangers. Think of the way that music takes possession of you: truly, madly, and deeply. Now imagine leadership that touches you as powerfully, as primitively, and as completely. That is the essence of leadership.

The class is taught at L'école Philippe Gaulier—a nontraditional school in North London that rearranges everything that we thought we knew about the art of leadership. It is a school for leaders, though it is not a leadership school. The principal—the master—is a clown. Philippe Gaulier, 57, makes sure that his school focuses on one essential objective: how not to be boring. Without knowing it, most of us are deeply boring. *Deeply*. And leaders are the most boring of all. What they don't understand is that being boring limits their power and undermines their effectiveness. Whenever Gaulier catches even a hint of "boring" in his class, he looks the offender in the eye and growls, "You are boooooorriinnng! Adios immediately!"

Whether you are onstage in a theatrical production or onstage in the real world—the "theater with consequences"—when the spotlight shines on you, you must become larger than life.

Gaulier is pleased with the most recent Major and Minor, as they were anything but boring. They performed as leaders—an art learned best in reverse: First you master the performance; then you become a leader. Two other students begin a new game. When the music stops, a woman plops herself down in the chair as if her body were a bag of groceries and becomes Major. Her eyes fix on Minor as she engages the loser in the kind of dull conversation that strangers take part in: "Where do you come from?" she asks. "I come from New York," Minor answers. "And you?" This isn't leadership—it's chitchat. No one is listening; no one cares. Major may hold the seat of power—the office of leader—but she has zero command of us, her followers, her audience.

Gaulier withstands only a minute of this misery. He then abruptly turns on the music—*boooooorriinnng!*—and banishes this Major and Minor. *Adios immediately*.

"People are ready for Gaulier when they sense that there is more inside them than what they have allowed themselves to express," says Isabelle Anderson, 49, a former student of Gaulier's who uses some of his dramatic techniques to coach CEOs, authors, and business leaders in communications, public-speaking, and presentation skills. "They may feel that they've done pretty well, but significant power has eluded them."

When a promotion, a sense of ambition, or a need to perform forces people out of their safety zone, says Anderson, those people "step out of themselves and into a larger identity. That's when they start to feel that they are not good enough to shift to the next gear."

Ronald Reagan understood this—as an actor playing a leader playing a leader-playing-an-actor. There is an art to understanding posture, voice, and the dramatic moment. Great leaders instinctively know it; others learn it. Gaulier tells his students that they don't need to play a role—they need to play *themselves* comfortably. He teaches theater techniques that help people embrace their humanity.

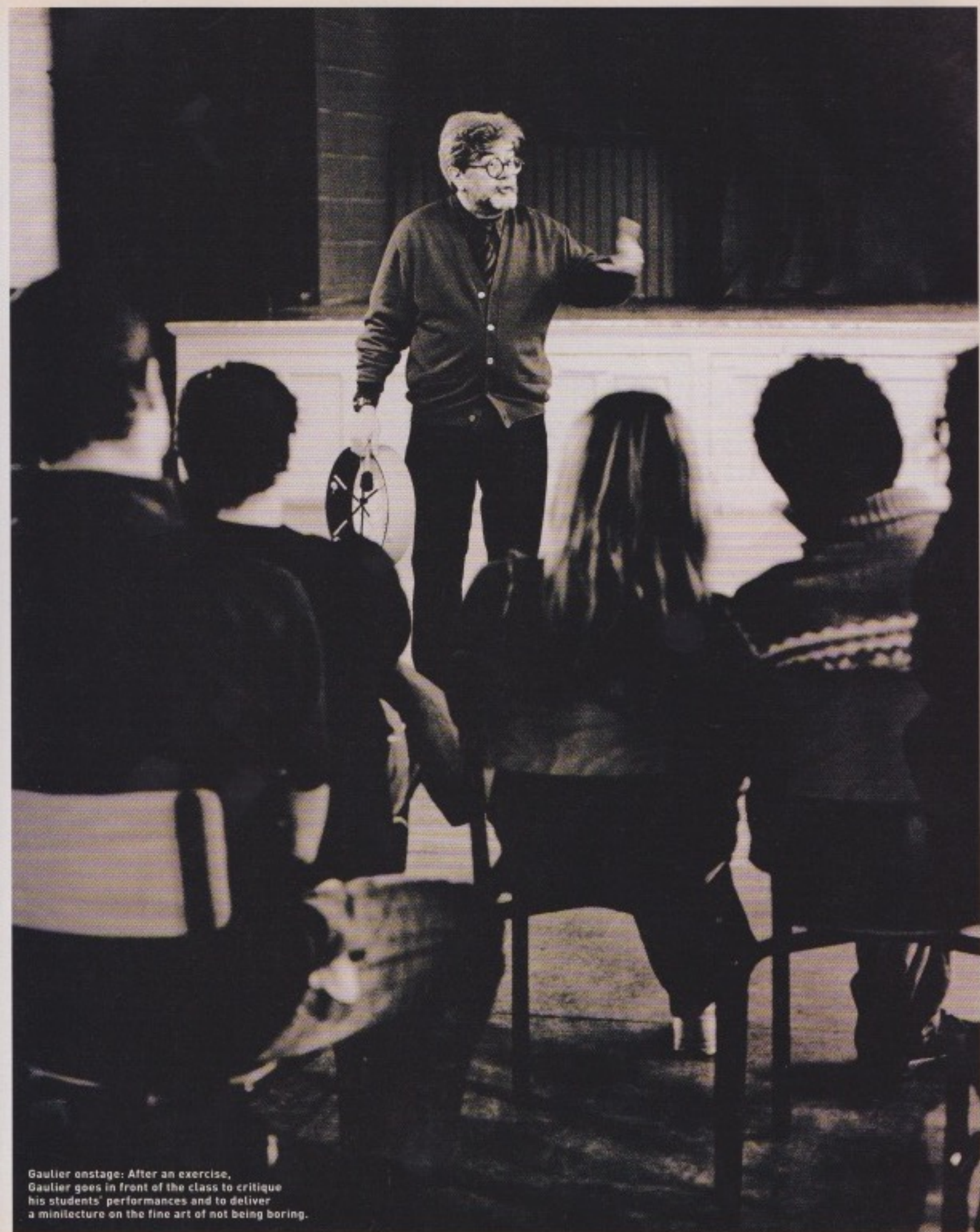
A TOO-NICE WOMAN

Once upon a time, there was a woman who was much too nice. Just how nice was this too-nice woman? This woman was so incredibly nice—that nobody liked her.

The too-nice woman runs around the room, per Gaulier's instructions. When you're running, he says, your body reveals the role that's



Gaulier on Gaulier:
At his London-based
L'école Philippe Gaulier,
master teacher Philippe Gaulier
offers lessons in the
essence of leadership.



Gaultier onstage: After an exercise, Gaultier goes in front of the class to critique his students' performances and to deliver a minilecture on the fine art of not being boring.

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captured you, the role that limits you: stiff and subdued, light and childish, aggressive and energized. When you're moving, you can't hide. Generals know that—and so does Gaulier. This woman's step is light; she positively prances. There is an angelic smile on her face.

“You are too nice,” Gaulier says. The woman even enjoys the reproach. For her, “too nice” is just right. But then Gaulier lets the air out of her tires: “You are so nice that you are not convincing. You are *booooooring!*” It's true. She is so nice, she is not even very convincing at being nice.

Gaulier quickly performs surgery on her soul. He makes her aware of how trapped she is in the role of helper. Indeed, he makes her aware of how everything that she does—the way that she walks, breathes, talks, glances at another person—limits her effectiveness. Leadership is communicated through more than just ideas, vision, or values. Gestures can also communicate leadership—swiftly and surely. The too-nice woman doesn't have what it takes to command attention. And Gaulier won't let her off the hook until she does.

Booooooring? Gaulier is eminently qualified to make this judgment: He is a Zen master in Dilbert suspenders. Everything about him contradicts everything else about him. Since he's French, you expect a high degree of formality. You expect to be reprimanded for anything less than perfection. But Gaulier loves risk and foolishness. He wears the beard and the patches of Jean-Paul Sartre and the round glasses of the Nutty Professor. You expect him to expound on theory. Instead, you get demonstrations on how to love what you do—how to love it so much that pleasure becomes the center of your power and authority. Take total pleasure in everything you do, insists Gaulier, even the lonely job of leadership.

But our young Mother Teresa can't break out of her too-nice shell. Having been told that she is boring, she becomes even duller. Gaulier asks her to act like any animal she wants. She opts for a swan—not an inspired choice! In fact, it is an insipid choice: She is already a lot like a swan, so in mimicking a swan's behavior, she is still stuck in her old routine.

“Choose your punishment,” Gaulier demands. “A kiss or a whack.” Since this woman is boring, Gaulier makes her choose between two punishments that afford her no safety: She must either convince another student to kiss her—not an easy thing to do in a room full of strangers—or accept a whack.

Our Sister of the Loving Heart again plays it safe: She decides to take the whack. Gaulier bends her at the waist, her arms pinioned behind her, and karate-chops her back. His whacks are no more uncomfortable than a typical Swedish massage. Still, you feel them. Your butt in the air and your head down at your ankles, you feel broken in two. Afterward, you sit with the others who have been condemned for being boring. And then later, you get up and try the exercise again.

THE SIN OF BEING BOOOORRRING!

One thing that Gaulier insists on is that his students become bigger human beings. “People make themselves smaller in every encounter,” he says. “If you're in the light, either onstage or in someone's attention, you can't afford to be small. You're not just the space around your shoes. If you don't take pleasure in even the smallest things that you do, then you don't have an aura.

“You have to be so charming,” Gaulier tells his students, “that

The Gaulier Method In the early days of the presidency, to be a leader, you had to play a role. Writes Richard Brookhiser in *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington* (Free Press, 1996), “Character . . . was a role one played until one became it. Every man had a character to maintain; every man was a character actor.” Playing a role does not undermine authenticity or honesty. It can mean acting as yourself with heightened energy and skill. To achieve that, follow these techniques that Gaulier recommends.

1. **Become a fixed point.** Don't move around a lot when delivering your message. Effective movement may mean using only the gestures of complicity, such as bending toward your listeners conspiratorially. Or it may be as simple as adding a pause between lines: “You have beautiful eyes.” *Pause.* “Kiss me.” Or, “Fourscore and seven years ago,” *pause,* “our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation.”
2. **Be modest in relationship to your audience.** Share your moments of suffering.
3. **Show pride in what you are saying and doing.** As a warm-up exercise, Gaulier asks students to stand up and say, “My sister sold her body to buy me this chair.” Say that to yourself before you speak, and you will engender waves of sympathy.
4. **Take pleasure in the game.** Don't overact, says Gaulier: “If you act too much and don't show your pleasure, you won't succeed.”
5. **Action is important.** Bring your body into it. Don't expect words alone to carry your message.
6. **Face your listeners.** Don't turn away from them or give them a profile: That will make you appear too remote, too snooty.
7. **Have fun with your voice.** Vary its tone.
8. **Be subtle and light.** Don't let your actions weigh you down.