



Alastair Grant

Appreciate the Situation or Situate the Appreciation?

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Consulting Ltd.

The Presentation &
Business Development
Specialists

Advice *squeezed*
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A long time ago as young officers we were taught the dark arts of '**Appreciating the Situation**', a process to make the right, clear, decisions in the fog of war. It looked easy enough. Start with a situation paragraph and then establish an aim. After that look at facts regardless of their implied relevance. Then a key stage: Produce deductions from each set of facts. The importance here was to persistently apply the '*SO WHAT?*' test rigorously. There is almost an element of playing Sudoku where you test possibilities.

The next stage was to outline options and finally choose the best option and your reasons why. It wasn't easy and our teachers would liberally scribble in red ink over the folly of our slack thinking.

I have not seen such an approach in commercial life that applies the same degree of ruthless vigour yet there must be equivalents - not least computer modelling. I am also sure that industries such as oil and pharmaceuticals have their own equivalent.

obvious deduction from that is that the driver is likely to drive more safely. And so some car rental companies will only rent out AC equipped cars as there are less accidents.

For me the chickens came home to roost when Staff College exercises became reality. I sat - as a marine infantry officer - in the naval department in the Ministry of Defence and was invited to write an 'Appreciation' for the recapture of the Falkland Islands in 1982. Some of the



One obvious business model is to describe features of a product and then describe the benefits of those features. A further stage is to apply the '*SO WHAT?*' test. For example, the benefit of aircon in cars is to make the occupants more comfortable on a sticky hot day, but a less

deductions that flowed from my pen (no PCs in those days) were pretty obvious. The terrain was road-less with soft boggy ground, so land rovers and trucks would be of limited value. The obvious deductions were to take over our snow

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Appreciate the Situation or Situate the Appreciation?...continued

vehicles and of course lots of helicopters. And lots more. Of course greater minds than mine were applying themselves to the same problems so I am claiming no credit for my input!

But there is a glitch with this process, and it's called '**Situating the Appreciation**'. It goes like this: You start with a blank sheet of paper and full of good intentions apply logic objectively and without bias. Or that's what you think. But as an expert you already know a great deal and it is hard to prevent your knowledge from weakening your impartiality.

So what happens is that deep down you think you already know the solution to the problem and the outcome that you desire. And without realising this you magnify the arguments that support your predicted or desired outcome, and the objections that logic throws up are painted into a corner and have reduced importance and visibility. I suspect that this happens often in business life and can be found to be the reason behind many fiascos.

Situating the Appreciation certainly has direct relevance to helping our clients with their key pitches, presentations and negotiations. In its simplest form it could be that we apply the '*SO WHAT?*' test with

total objectivity and without a great deal of knowledge of the complexities involved. Also called '*playing the fool*' and being the '*Devil's Advocate*'. It can be incredibly valuable.

A more sophisticated form would be to map out the entire 'argument set', get each team member and adviser to privately identify the areas where intuition is having an effect, score the total relative size of that effect and then invert the scores to rebalance the weighting of these underweighted arguments.

I'll summarise with a simple point and a question:

When trying to make a key decision you need to get the balance right between intuition and logic. If the logic throws up absolute facts do not dismiss them on gut instinct, but give them the full weighting they merit.

And my question: I think that many business people do have a model as rigorous as that taught at Staff College, which was developed from military setbacks over the years. Many of you are MBA students or graduates. Many of you are successful businessmen and women. Am I right?

Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts



The Science of Persuasion

Part 2 – Music & Dance



Allan Pease is an Australian. He is also a body language specialist and has written eight best-selling books based on years of research into this area. Probably the most dramatic finding of his research is that he says 90% of people's judgements about you are made in the first 90 seconds.

His research goes on to show that people's initial judgements take a considerable amount of time to change from those first few moments. The main reason is that once judgements have been made we are constantly looking for data to back up our conclusions. Very similar to Alastair's point about bias in his article.

The bad news is that if you make a poor impression it could take some time to change it. The good news is that there are plenty of things that can help you make those first 90 seconds work in your favour. So, what can you do to ensure those first moments impress?

The Dance

Your face and eyes are all part of the dance. Your eyes are one of the key zones for

conversation partners, so you need to ensure that your eye contact is working well. We think 60-80% eye contact with your audience is optimum as it matches the amount of eye contact that most people have during conversation. The reference to conversation is important as a person's eye contact can be very different when presenting to when in conversation. This is mainly due to the fact that we are typically more relaxed when talking 1-1 than when presenting.

The type of gaze is important too. We typically have more impact when we are able to hold our gaze firmly and for a few seconds, especially on key points or at the end of sentences.

The next thing to focus on is facial expression. Here a natural smile is essential.

The key feature of a fake smile is a lack of congruence between the upper and lower

sections of the face. Professor Paul Ekman (latterly from Univ. California San Francisco) researched many things about the face, and found for example that many people are surprisingly good at spotting a fake smile, which is typically where the eyes show little emotion while the mouth smiles to a much greater extent, as in the picture on the left.



People who produce fake smiles typically do not hold eye contact well. Instead, aim to smile naturally. It helps if you are genuinely pleased to see the person too!

Moving on to gestures and posture, there's a lot of work published here, some clear, some controversial. One peculiar piece of research has shown that when a presenter has their palms open and facing upward the audience's information

retention rate is 40% higher. We're not sure we've seen much evidence for that, so we've started a search for these presenters and hope to report back soon. Whatever you think of that, we think that there's a lot you can do with active natural use of the hands, for gestures and emphasis.

Your sitting posture is another area to think about. It's been researched that it's probably better to sit up or slightly forwards than to lean back, although again, if it's natural and varied, movement of the upper body within a sensible 'zone' is probably the best of all.

Listeners can show active listening using a number of body language cues: sitting slightly back with arms relaxed and crossed, and/or head tilted to one side usually gives the speaker the signals that the listener is interested (head slightly to the side) and will not interrupt (arms

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Tim Farish

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The Science of Persuasion

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folded and leaning back), which increases the chances of success.

But it's important to note that the research also highlights sexual differences in the optimum communication style as measured by approval ratings. Apparently, to signal agreement with male listeners, it's best to nod while giving a verbal cue ('mmm' or 'uh huh') gently to acknowledge what's being said. This leads to the approval ratings with those listeners to rise dramatically.

When speaking with female listeners, we should not be surprised that things are apparently a bit different. For them, approval ratings are higher when the speaker's facial expression and the emotions displayed are matched by those same listeners.

One final point on gestures and posture is that whilst it's ok to scratch an itch the once, it's best not to touch your face much when speaking.

Research into telling lies has shown that regular facial self-touching is the biggest giveaway for those who are telling those little porky pies.



The Music

What does science tell us about the persuasive voice? A new term is 'Anxious Presence'; it describes an individual who is giving out signs of nervousness. One clear vocal signal of nerves is disfluency. Disfluencies fall into 4 categories: umms and errs, repetition, filler phrases e.g. 'you know', and perhaps most of all for nerves, hesitations of over 2 seconds. They all signal that we are nervous, so seriously undermine our credibility. We do not normally notice less than 6 disfluencies per minute but over that our doubts about the speaker begin.

A good way of reducing disfluencies is to play our version of 'Just a Minute'. This is our game of speaking for 1 minute to a partner who has permission to interrupt as soon as they hear one of these disfluencies. If a speaker can manage one

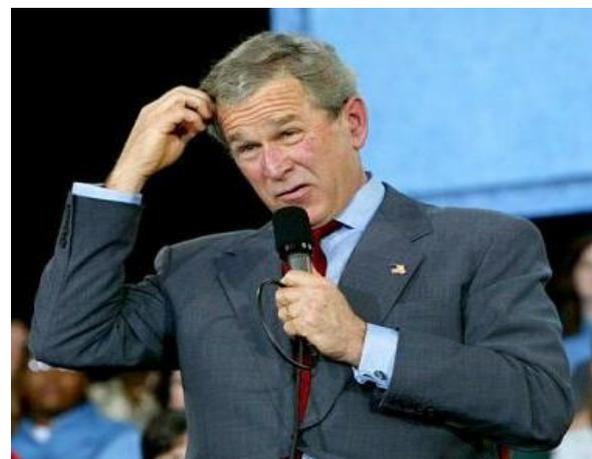
minute without being disfluent, then they will increase their credibility when meeting others. Credibility, with other siblings, begets persuasion.

Optimal pitch modulation (natural, often and significant ups and downs in pitch) is also critical in making a positive impression, especially when you start a presentation; there's that first 90 seconds again. If you can raise your pitch height on key points and lower it at the end of a phrase, then your dynamism will improve in proportion. Dynamism is a sibling to credibility.

And for those who want to boost their gravitas when meeting others, we suggest lowering average pitch height (for both male and female speakers).

Some may say that this is all style, and that substance is what really matters. We'd agree up to a point; we think they all matter. But another piece of research points to the relative importance of style and substance, and suggests that in any competition between them, style tends to win.

You can, for fairly little self analysis and coaching, using what the scientific world has to tell us, gain an edge as a communicator and persuader. *"It's life Jim, and now we know it a little better"*. Thanks Mr Spock....



Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts



Smiley face or Poker face?



I have just had an interesting, challenging and occasionally terse dialogue with the boss of one of the leading private equity firms. Had I got it wrong, we might not have had this client for much longer.

He had done one of our bespoke scientific voice and visual analyses. Whilst overall the report identified him as a pretty good communicator, it picked out as an observation that he had what I'll describe here as a *'Poker face'*. In other words, he moved his facial muscles and jaw only just enough to produce the words; his facial muscles moved very little in total during the dialogue. He also had a relatively immobile body. He sat quite still.

Now, he thought this aspect of his report was excellent news: *"Great, no-one can tell what I'm thinking!"*



He has a point. When it comes to the antagonistic type of negotiation, his poker face is an asset, as the other party has no *'tells'* to read and make deductions from.

The only trouble with his moment of joy was that the recordings for the analyses were of him enacting the discussions he might have with a potential investor in a major fund-raising, and in that scenario I would have expected him to show some positive emotion.

Thankfully he's not doing a road show for a while yet, so the pressure is off, but doubtless his firm and many others will soon be out there competing for investors' Pounds, Dollars, Euros and even Swiss Francs, and he will then need to *'put his best foot forward'*, and perhaps even smile a bit!

My counter point to him was that whilst a poker face is absolutely the right way to

play poker, it is not the best way to conduct a date with – in this case – a business partner. His face and body would need to be expressive, but more than that: the set of expressions would need to match the content of his discourse and the sound of his voice.

When on a happy subject, he needs to look and sound happy, and when on a serious topic, to look and sound serious.

The word for this match between the three elements of communication (words, music and dance) is **congruence**.



There was no congruence at all in this client's recordings. For example, his words said that he was happy about his colleagues' investment performance over the last 2-3 very challenging years, yet his voice was only vaguely happy and sometimes frowning or apologetic, his face was stony still and he hardly moved his body. We measure vocal and visual congruence on a scale from 1.0 (fully congruent) to -1.0 (fully incongruent - where voice or vision contradicts the content). His visual communication scored - 0.9!

If this were Apollo 13, I'd probably say: To use the misquoted quote, *"Houston, we've had a problem!"* But what problem? In short, it's this: If the content is incongruent with the vocal or visual communication, it is well established that we believe voice over content, and visual over both the others. The former is useful

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Ewan Pearson

Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts



Smiley face or Poker face?...continued

to know if you're on a phone call, the latter relates to face-to-face meetings.

So, back to my client. An audience would hear positive words covering the point he made, but would hear little emotion, and see something else, or nothing at all. They will more than likely think *"Oh no he's not really positive at all, he's just saying that because he knows he's suppose to say that. This guy's a phoney!!"*

It's not so much that there's a mismatch, although for sure that's not great. It's more that the reaction will be disbelief and/or distrust. And if you as a Limited Partner (LP) and don't trust your Private Equity General Partner (GP), you won't be investing through them. As I said to my client, using time-honoured management speak: *"That's where your tyres are supposed to hit their road"*.

Thankfully this rather abrupt business focussed argument won over my client. He is now well on the way to becoming congruent, even sometimes adding a genuine smile, and is thus a much more persuasive communicator, whether it be to potential investors, peer group partners, his employees, or counterparties. But we both agreed he can continue to play power games in negotiations, as that is also important.

So how can you the reader check for your congruence, and improve it if deficient?

First, do the analysis. Yes you can do it with us, but a quick check would be to have someone video you, unobtrusively.

Record yourself giving your most regular business presentation. Play the recording back pausing after each phrase, and check that when the content is emotive, the voice and especially the face fully match that emotion.

Second, do another recording, filming something you are really, really passionate about. This should give you a reference point for *'you at your best'*. It's important this is not acted up or artificial.

Third, compare the two recordings to see what the difference is. It's OK to have something of a difference, but the axes of emotion should still be congruent: when talking about an emotive subject, the visual and vocal communications should match the discourse.

Then, with the comparison and differences noted, work on improving the congruence across the three parts, of your presentation paying particular attention to the visual elements. Often this can be just to *'allow yourself permission'* to be emotive and expressive on a graded scale with the voice, face and gestures rather than restraining or suppressing these emotions. I'd also look at increasing the quantity of emotion, its affect (positive vs. negative), and where this is distributed over the words, music and dance.

If you find it a bit hard to do and a touch artificial at first, please persevere as you should find it easier and more natural each step you take. All I am really asking you to do is, to steal our own catchphrase, to be *'yourself at your best'*.

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Meet the cynics



Recently I found myself in a boardroom together with a group of high-flying, self-made, successful entrepreneurs. I was there to give a talk on how to give great talks. I was nervous. Despite the fact that I have been giving talks on the topic of great talks since the early nineties and presented hundreds of times at conferences, companies and organisations, I felt especially anxious about this presentation.

Why? Because I had been told by the organiser *“that these people had seen it all, done it all, despised PowerPoint, hated lecturing and took great pride in questioning anyone courageous enough to challenge their views”*. Of course, high-performing individuals have high expectations, value their time and have precious little tolerance for vagueness. In my preparatory sessions for this speaking engagement in particular, the word *“cynical”* was frequently used to describe the group.

Ultimately, the presentation went well because the group kept me on my toes and I kept them on theirs. This is high risk, high reward territory with failure always a grasp away. So why take the chance? Why not politely decline the invitation? What might be the underlying factors that force a human being in front a potentially hostile audience?

Well, I know what motivated me: Money and Madness. I was in need of the first and in possession of the latter.

On a more serious note, some of our clients are particularly concerned about what they would describe as *“difficult”* or *“tough”* audiences. As with any beast, no two audiences are alike. However, there are a few techniques that apply across the whole beastly board when delivering your presentation. There are a whole set of

others that relate to preparation. But that is a different article!

Here are some top techniques for you:

1. Be clear about your intentions and state a measurable and achievable goal straight away.

For me, I stated that my goal was to share the secrets of the world’s best communicators and to demystify those secrets by proving that great communication can be achieved through the use of a set of tools. I added that they would be able to use the tools straight away; the very moment they emerged from the seminar they would be firmly on the road to continuous success. That’s right, successful people want more success and that’s exactly what I was about to give them. I got them excited and I got them listening.

2. Acknowledge their time.

If your audience consists of high-performing individuals or stressed and busy people – you should acknowledge this up front. Where time is a scarce commodity attention spans tend to be short. You will gain respect by acknowledging the sacrifices that the audience has made to attend. And then of course you have to make it worth their while and prove that it’s time well spent.

3. Let them know what you know about them, or what you have been told.

I told my audience, in no uncertain terms, what I had been told: *“I have been told that you have seen it all, done it all, that you hate PowerPoint, that you are easily bored and that you hate being lectured at”*. Judging by their facial expressions – a combination of smiles, raised eye brows and the

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Carl Schreiter

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Meet the cynics.....continued

odd giggle – they seemed to appreciate my honesty and candour. But to be on the safe side I followed up with a closed question. “Is that true?” I asked. Not surprisingly, my questions got mixed answers ranging from the unequivocal “Yes” to “Well sort of...but I’m always keen to learn more”.

4. Check-in with the audience throughout the presentation.

“Checking in” means asking questions like “How does this relate to your sector?” and “Does anything strike you about this particular point?” With a combination of open and closed questions, you can keep the audience engaged and interested. This

questions upfront to get your head around the problems, needs and issues that your audience is facing and then try to address them with your presentation.

6. When concluding, summarise and provide perspective.

Great presentations all have a futuristic element. They take you beyond the here and now and compel you to consider things yet to come. Talk about how your points and how they relate to opportunities on the horizon. When your presentation comes to an end, ask for questions. In the absence of any answers, ask for reactions.

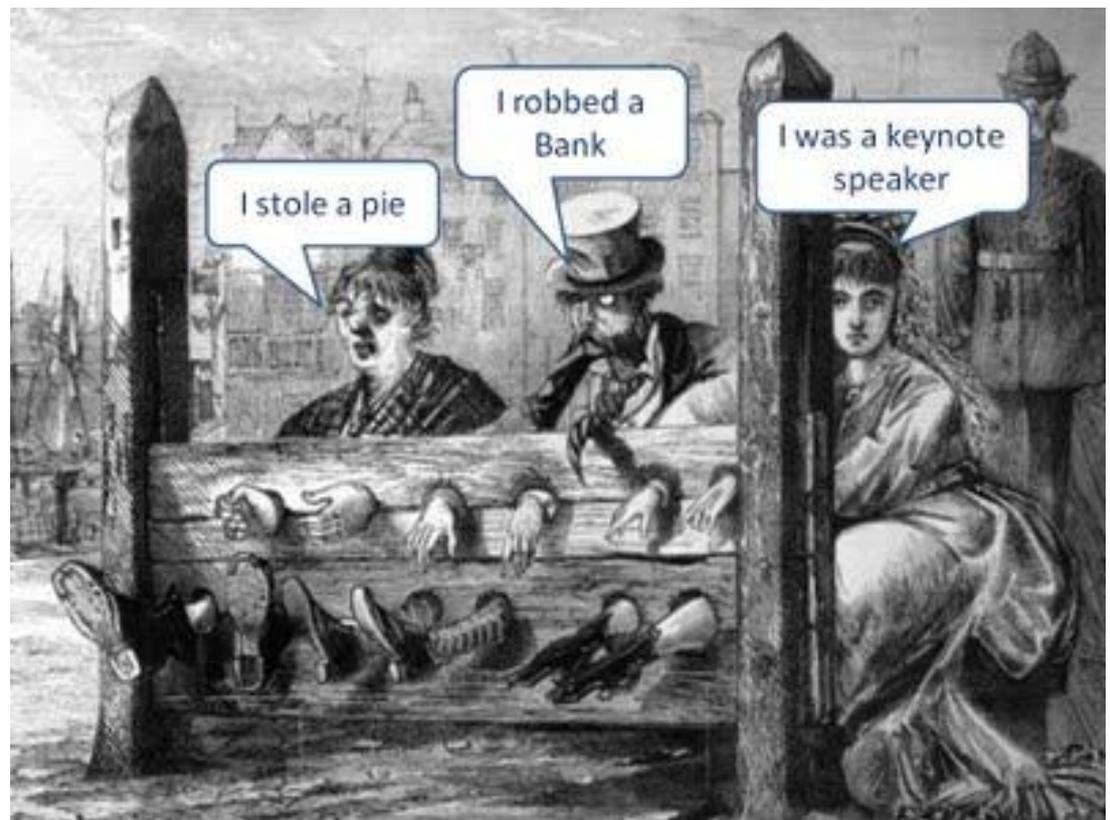
Our Services

Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd is a respected adviser based in London and Oslo. We enhance the performance of businesses, helping clients to excel in the use of the spoken and written word, improving the performance of individuals and teams. Over the long term our work improves the way a firm does business.

We coach and advise individuals to perform at their best in the toughest situations including: Presentations, New Business Pitches, Business Development, Negotiating, Media Interviews, Telephone Calls and Document Writing.

We also produce scientific voice and visual analysis reports, then provide voice coaching and non-verbal communications advice.

Our clients’ needs are the only focus of our work; we listen to them and closely tailor our response to deliver first class coaching and advice. In support of this we selectively pursue new ideas and approaches, continually hone our advice and create tools such as Voice, Visual and Content Analysis, Prospect Relationship Management (PRM) and the Information Iceberg.



technique works with most tough audiences and is easy to apply.

5. Use sector-specific and wherever possible, company specific examples.

Before going in, you should have some case studies or examples to cite. Ask

I like to think that cynicism is a symptom of an unmet need, as in “tell me something I don’t know”. As a presenter you need to find that “something” somehow and with a bit of luck that cynical someone will hear you out.



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