

Grant Pearson Brown
Consulting Ltd.

The Communication
Skills Specialists

*Advice squeezed
straight from the
experts*



Welcome to our
37th Journal – Spring 2010

In this edition:

“I wish the meeting had been as good as the lunch.”

By Carl Schreiter

Tired of long ineffective meetings? Carl looks at ways to make them work better for you and your business.

So, what does that do for me?

By Tim Farish

Tim looks at how considering what the client really wants can improve revenue.

“You had me at hello.”

By Alastair Grant

Alastair looks at the importance of good rapport in two areas of business.

Evidence – fact or fiction?

By Ewan Pearson

Ewan considers the way that evidence is frequently not all it's cracked up to be.

GPB expands in Scandinavia

I am delighted to tell you all that Grant Pearson Brown is opening its first ever overseas office, in Oslo, Norway.

Tim Farish has been promoted to Director and will be in charge of this office, which will formally open on 1st April 2010. Tim will share his time equally between GPB's London and Oslo offices, so will be at the spearhead of this international expansion.

Norway is a perfectly natural addition to the strong UK business built up by GPB since establishment in 1993. GPB has many clients in the Scandinavian region, spanning Norway, Finland, Sweden and Denmark. This is a great opportunity for us to cement our position in the Scandinavian countries, and to provide an even better service to our clients throughout that important region.

We are currently developing a new website at www.gpbuk.no in support of this business. We would be happy to discuss working with any of you who have business interests in Scandinavia. If so, please contact Tim on t.farish@gpbuk.com and Ewan at e.pearson@gpbuk.com.

Ewan Pearson, Managing Director





“I wish the meeting had been as good as the lunch.”



Carl Schreiter

Coming out of a meeting late one afternoon, one of my colleagues turns to me and says: “Well, it’s back to the office for me to get some work done. Blimey, I’ve been in and out of meetings all day”.

Meetings come in two categories. They are either good or bad. Effective or ineffective. Energising or boring. The latter category seems to prevail.

A survey carried out in the mid noughties makes for alarming reading. Turgid meetings, it said, cost the UK £8bn a year. Mindboggling and shocking statistics, indeed, but far from surprising. Think of the last time you emerged from a meeting convinced that those ninety-something minutes could have been invested more wisely. A quick numerical exercise of daily wage divided by eight hours would suffice to argue the case.

Luckily, all is not lost as some meetings are rewarding, energising and produce tangible measurable results. Some even make history, think of the Churchill/Roosevelt/Stalin meeting at Yalta in 1945 or the Blair/Brown meeting at the Granita Restaurant in 1994. Good things will come to those who hold good meetings with a clear objective in mind, a firm agenda, and a real commitment to involving the delegates in the preparation and execution of the meeting.

So what are the key factors determining good meetings? Well, as with all good things they come in threes:

- Meeting agendas are driven by objectives
- Time is used wisely
- Participants feel that the meeting is conducted following a sensible and productive process

Objectives

To be effective, meetings have to serve a useful purpose and achieve a desired outcome. Calling people to a meeting to ‘discuss’ something without really knowing what the outcome will be is not good enough. Before you start planning your meeting, define your objective. Here is a sentence that you might remember from SMART actions plans and the like: By the end of the meeting, I want people to be able to....*think, know, feel, do*. Your objective serves as your mental guide and will keep you focused and determined to achieve a positive outcome.

Meeting time management

Time is a scarce commodity, so please don’t waste it. You owe it to yourself and the people attending to make the meeting as streamlined as possible.



The historic meeting at Yalta 1945

Remember your objective and that everything you do in the meeting should further that objective. This is where a strict agenda is needed, one that covers topics and activities that are relevant. Any miscellaneous chitchat devoid of purpose will need to go. Save that for the next gathering around the water cooler.

Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts



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“I wish the meeting had been as good as the lunch.” ...continued

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An agenda will allow you to run the meeting on target and on time. To prepare it, factor in:

- Sequence and timing – the order in which you will cover topics and the time needed to cover each of them
- Prioritise – what must be covered and what can be left out
- Results – decide what you intend to achieve, think in terms of measurable results.



Once you know what needs to be covered and for how long, you can now look at the information that should be prepared in advance. Ask yourself: To make the best use of the time, what do the attendees need to know and what do you want them to do to come properly prepared?

If you have called for a meeting to solve a problem or address a critical issue, ask participants to come prepared with solutions and suggestions.

Getting people to talk is sometimes a bit of a challenge. Assigning specific topics of discussion to different participants is one way of dealing with this as people feel more involved and find it easier to engage. For instance, if you're meeting to discuss an ongoing project why not have someone put together a short summary of their progress to date and give a short presentation.

Remember that your agenda is your keeper and friend. Refer to it when needed. When running out of time, ask people to hurry up, call time out and ask for decision or defer the discussion until another time.

Once you have an agenda in place, you need to circulate it to the delegates. This is where their participation starts, with feedback and input. Perhaps there is something important that a delegate would like to add. Or you might have allotted too much, or too little time for a certain item. Whatever the reason, let everybody have his or her say.

Once in the meeting, there are several things you should keep in mind:

- If certain people are dominating the conversation, make a point of asking others for their ideas
- At the end of each agenda item, quickly summarise what was said, and ask people to confirm that it is a fair summary. Then make notes regarding the follow-up
- Note items that require further discussion
- Watch body language and make adjustments as necessary. Maybe you need a break, or you need to stop someone from speaking too much
- Ensure the meeting stays on topic
- List all tasks that are generated at the meeting. Make a note of who is assigned to do what, and by when.

At the close of the meeting, quickly summarise next steps and inform everyone that you will be sending out a meeting summary.

After the meeting is over, take some time to debrief, and determine what went well and what could have been done better. Evaluate the meeting's effectiveness based on how well you met the objective. This will help you continue to improve your process of running effective meetings. That way there is a decent chance that, as Charles Warren Minor suggested, your meeting will be better than lunch.



So, what does that do for me?



Tim Farish

As hard as it might be to admit, most of us are unaware of what people really want to hear. Of course we have moments when we get it right but most of the time we are transmitting information that is not crucially important or interesting to our audience.

There is a simple reason for this: we don't spend enough time thinking about the most important things that people **need**. There has been plenty of research, including that done by GPB, in this area and the same things keep coming up. In fact, what people need in business is pretty simple and can be achieved using a few key words. The common denominator for all these words is that they offer a clear and simple **benefit** to people. This article will introduce the most important ones that you can use to give you the edge.

Time – Almost everyone is interested in saving time. It has become such a precious commodity because we are all getting busier. This is mainly because of the increasing demands that are being put upon us by the immediacy of our business culture. We are now able and expected to respond and complete tasks far quicker than previous generations and this has created a real issue with time. Being aware of this is crucially important when you are persuading people. Just how much time can your product, service or idea save your client?

Money – It is a rare individual who is not interested in the bottom line, and the financial crisis has made the species even more rarefied. There are two ways you can approach money: increasing revenue or saving cost. Both are powerful although in the current climate cost-saving is more prominent. As ever with money, figures are important so it is critical to have some specifics to hand when you are communicating. Exactly how much can you help with the bottom line?

Hassle – People can spend a lot of time anxiously running around trying to sort various issues out. You have to say how your service can help them. But how exactly? I recently negotiated a great price with my builder for a new kitchen and bathroom, as I said that I would take the hassle out of him running around buying all the little things needed to finish a job while he was on-site. Put simply, I took the hassle out of the job by offering to spend ALL my time running around Homebase & B&Q! I'm not sure I'd do it again but it meant that he could work to my budget and deliver on time. How can your business help with reducing the hassle, stress & anxiety spent sourcing, solving and running around?

Risk – With every endeavour there is a risk of failure. Generally speaking, the business culture is not known for its tolerance of failure and this has led to more fear and a risk-averse attitude creeping into the boardrooms of UK plc. However, this does create a lot of opportunities for anyone who can communicate how their business can reduce the risk of failure or damage. So, how does your offering do it?

Looking Good – Everyone likes to look good even though they might not admit it. Here we are not talking about outward appearance although that is important too. No, we are referring to your perceptions and how your clients are regarded by those around them. I recently worked with a client who admitted that looking good to the board through the innovative ideas that he was



introducing was the single most important thing in his world. To varying degrees, everyone wants to be seen to be doing a great job, so how can your offering help?

Different and Better – People still respond positively when they hear that a product or service is genuinely different and better than that currently available. The problem here is that most people don't realise how they differ from their competitors, so they have a problem explaining this difference. The key benefit words in this article will help you with this but here is a tip: start thinking about your service as different from rather than

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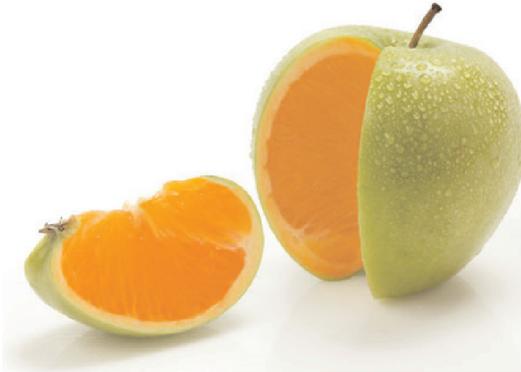
So, what does that do for me? ...continued

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similar to when you think about your competition. This will help you communicate the difference more clearly and powerfully.

New – Admittedly, this word has gained a bad reputation from TV detergent ads, but people are always interested in innovation and what is new in their sector. Once again, if you are able to communicate how the novelty of your service is a key benefit then you will have more success.

Now that I've saved you the hassle of finding out these new and different ideas for yourself, expect the 'edge' it gives to save you 30% of your preparation time and make you more profitable. Oh, and if used skilfully they will also make you look fabulous too.



“You had me at hello.”

We all know that some are adept at creating a rapport. They have the happy knack of putting others at their ease creating an atmosphere of warmth, a good mood and maybe even a convivial lifting of spirits. Others less gifted go through the motions but there is an awkwardness or lack of sincerity. So what is going on and is it important in a business setting?

At this stage it is helpful to identify two different types of rapport at work: Social Rapport and Business Rapport. Social Rapport occurs when there is a perceived need by both parties to make an effort. This could be at the start of a counterparty, or colleague meeting, a networking event and, more obviously, at social occasions. By contrast Business Rapport has a different, more formal feel. It may be in an email, a telephone call, a client meeting or a negotiation.

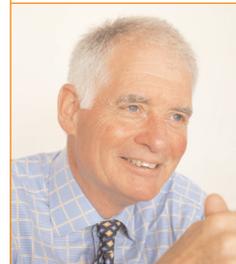
Social rapport

The basics are well known. We greet the other party, say a new colleague, by shaking hands, firmly but not crushingly so. We smile with genuine pleasure and engage in friendly chat which might even migrate to banter. The expression in our voice is enthusiastic, modulated and articulate. Our body language is also positive. But we match our behaviour to fit that of the other person. If they are quiet, shy and retiring then we normally adjust by being less spirited and lively.

At that stage we may try to promote conversation by encouraging the other party to talk about something that they enjoy. We may not know much about their subject, but by carefully listening to what they say we can expand our base from which to ask more questions.

It is a matter of asking open questions, with steady eye contact, nodding and perhaps reflecting on what they are saying. They need to feel that what they say is of great value to you. You may tap into how they feel about the topic: *“That must be a concern to you.”* or *“You must be delighted about that.”* Importantly you do not hijack their transmission and use it as a base to launch your grand ideas on the topic – at least until the moment is right.

Patience is needed, but building rapport or creating warmth does not mean we have to listen to someone becoming a bore. Indeed there are



Alastair Grant

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“You had me at hello.” ...continued

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strategies for politely breaking in: *“That’s a really interesting point you have just made but I wonder if I might comment...”* At this stage you may be able to establish an area of common ground, that you share their view on something or a common interest.

Business rapport, with say a client, has a different feel. Some people will be irritated by what looks like chit chat when they want efficient dialogue. *“How are you today”* may not hit the rapport button. Being efficient is a mixture of courtesy, clarity and charm. It may be – if you are speaking to a stranger, that you start – *“I am Fred Jones – We have not spoken before – but I have been referred to you by Jane Smith. Is this a good time to talk?”*

It may not be right but your courtesy will ensure you have gained a few points on the rapport scale. Once given permission to talk clarity is vital in order to make the dialogue efficient for the other party. And of course charm, properly applied, can earn further points. But beware of appearing smarmy. We are all different and some might be happy to socialise – especially at the end of the

business segment. Others although perfectly friendly have a habit of being crisp and focused only on business. You have to adapt.

What is going on here? Well, a business relationship is getting started (or not!), and that is driven by the need to determine if we can trust this supplier, client, or business associate. We decide on other things too – Likeability, respect, confidence and arrogance levels, knowledge, experience and expertise to name few. We are also exchanging information – data on what and who we know. Things go wrong if this exchange is two-sided. Bottom line: we are deciding if we can do business together.

Is rapport important in business? Yes: good rapport is the pathway to trust, of avoiding and repairing misunderstandings and an increased desire to cooperate. But rapport has to be genuine and consistent. In my military days we had a saying: *“Sir is a right bastard but at least we know where we stand with him.”* By contrast false friendliness was coined *“smiling death”* and that was the worst label of all. Or to coin the slightly cheesy line from ‘Jerry Maguire’, which beautifully illustrates great rapport built quickly, *“You had me at hello.”*

Advice squeezed straight from the experts



Evidence – fact or fiction?

I often think “*rubbish*” when reading or hearing evidence in support of a case. It’s just not as strong as it first appears to be. The recent UK government’s enquiry into the Iraq war is one of many examples of ‘evidence’, or rather the lack of it. What’s interesting to me about many arguments used by presenters and persuaders, such as Tony Blair’s initial arguments for invading Iraq in July 2003, is that they appear to use the central or evidence-based route to persuasion, but in reality use the peripheral or emotional route. The central route is the commonly favoured one, but it requires audiences to both want and be able to consider the evidence: to have the desire to chew over the merits of the case and compare what is said with other things they already know about the subject. Most audiences lack one or both of these preconditions.

Here’s another, this time the peripheral route. If an eminent historian were to say on TV that King Egbert was a great king of England, you’d probably believe them. If a young student were to say exactly the same thing, you might not. So what’s the difference? Authority. However, if the historian made the claim with considerable hesitancy, and the young student were to make the same claim but with great confidence, I doubt you’d react the same way. In both cases, you would have little or no evidence to chew on, so we would be taking the statement on trust, heavily affected by both authority and confidence of delivery. I have tried this several times in our client workshops and elsewhere. The effect of a strong confident delivery and from a position of supposed authority wins even the greatest sceptic over, despite the information being sometimes untrue!

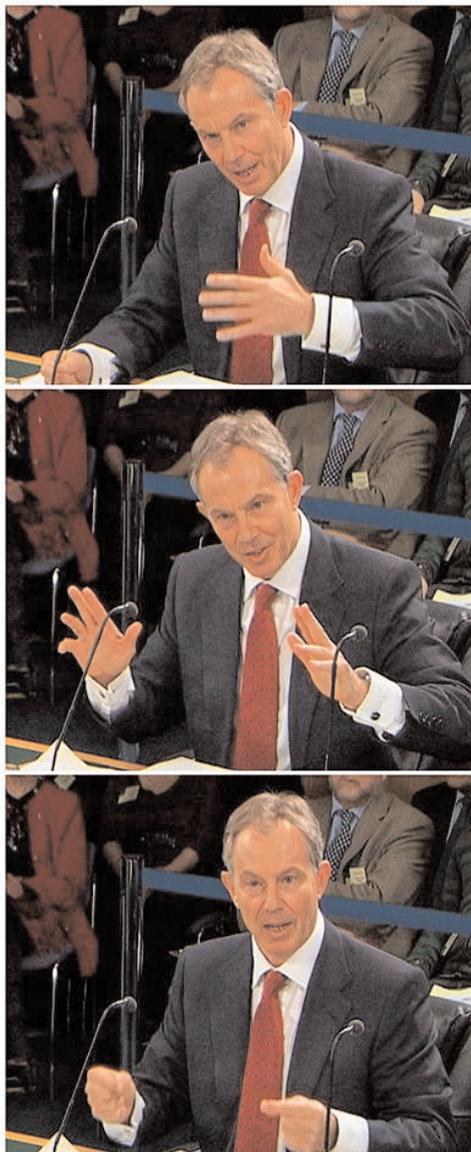
This example does not use the central route as there is no evidence given in support: you are likely to know very little about King Egbert, so you can’t elaborate. You have to take what’s said on *trust*. If you had doubts, you might go online and check what was claimed. But how do you know that what you read there is true? Wikipedia tries very hard to ensure its ‘facts’ are peer group tested, but there are so many facts there, many incorrect ones go uncorrected for some time. Try slightly mistyping a name on Google, and see how many hits you get – masses! There are 1,000s of people out there who have typed errors that you will then read and take on trust.

The central route is a much abused one. Let’s come back to Blair and the recent Iraq enquiry. He stood in the UK parliament in 2003 and claimed that WMDs were ready to be launched with 45 minutes notice. He did not say ‘*I think*’, or ‘*it is rumoured*’, but said it as the gospel truth. Neither he nor we had any other evidence to verify this. Indeed we had just the opposite: Hans Blicks, the UK weapons inspector, had continually come out of holes in the

ground and rusty old buildings shaking his head – nope, no WMDs there. But with the exception of a few MPs who found the arguments untenable, the UK Parliament decided to invade Iraq. We then get Blair back in to give ‘evidence’ in February 2010, and he sticks to his opinions even after the



Ewan Pearson



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Evidence – fact or fiction?...continued

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evidence against him was proven to be true. It turns out he would have invaded anyway, in support of Bush and the USA, even if no WMDs existed.

Were there ever any WMDs? Well there are threads of real evidence in the shape of Iraqi army documents discovered after the invasion, which suggest they did exist. This is real proper evidence, but not proof. So if they are not fictional, where did they go, and more worryingly where are they now?

Turning from Iraq to you and your communications, whether written or spoken, it's important to know and state whether you have proof, evidence, or opinion. The vast bulk of what is said and heard is the latter. 'Proof' is very hard to provide, even in

7. Unverified opinion – "I think/believe", so does my friend, but you can't check

8. Unverifiable opinion – "I think/believe", but you can't go check on it.

Which of the above was Blair's evidence? At best, level 4, as he claimed the dossier from MI6 backed him up. However the dossier was later shown to be 'sexed up', despite denials by Blair's colleague, Peter Mandelson, and in reality was at best level 7 evidence.

Here's another way you can look at providing your own evidence, our 2x2 matrix. This shows some categories that are useful to consider when making your own case in support of an argument, again in order of persuasiveness:

Evidence type	Factual	Non-factual or 'artificial'
Knowledge / Authority	1 Facts, Data, Statistics	3 Quotes
Tangible / Comprehension	2 Examples	4 Metaphor, simile, or comparison

maths, but there are many types of 'evidence', of rising persuasiveness. Here's a quick list, in order of persuasiveness:

1. Mathematical proof: $a=2, b=3, \text{ so } a \times b = 6$
2. Verifiable fact – written, seen or heard by you
3. Unverifiable fact – written, seen or heard by others, but not you
4. Verifiable statement – one person says so, you can go and check it out, or one person says so, another person backs them up
5. Unverifiable statement – one person says so, no-one can back them up
6. Verifiable Opinion – "I think/believe", and you can go check for yourself

So how can you make use of these pearls of wisdom? I think in two ways:

First when it comes to writing or presenting evidence, go for the highest level that you can. Check against the list or box and see if you can move up the list.

Second, when hearing someone else make a case, you can run the evidence through this hierarchy and come to a conclusion about how good or poor the evidence is. And if you are not happy with it, challenge it with some tough questions!

Finally, try out these adverts in London at the moment: *'The UK's best loved home show.'* and *'Britain's top chef. Our best loved cook. Coming soon to the UK's favourite supermarket.'* So! Fact or fiction?

Our Services

Grant Pearson Brown Consulting is a respected adviser. 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 face 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. Through our own innovative culture we selectively pursue new ideas and approaches, continually hone our advice and create tools such as Voice & Visual Analysis, Prospect Relationship Management (PRM) and the Information Iceberg.

