

What did the Romans ever do for us?



Sarah Cottam

All right, but apart from the sanitation, medicine, education, wine, public order, irrigation, roads, the fresh water system and public health..... (sorry couldn't resist the Monty Python quote!)..... the Romans gave us rhetorical delivery! They built on what the Greeks had done, in more ways than one. In fact, the Romans tended to take all the best ideas and practices from the territories they conquered, developing and claiming them for their own.

Delivery embodies everything from the way you stand to how you pronounce each and every word. Highly regarded Roman orators noted the importance of speaking and how it was affected by variations in speech and body language.

"Nature has assigned to each emotion a particular look and tone of voice and bearing of its own; and the whole of a person's frame and every look on his face and utterance of his voice are like strings of a harp, and sound according as they are struck by each successive emotion." Cicero (c.106-43BC)

Cicero studied the then-famous actors Roscius and Aesopus. He applied this study to the detailed understanding that he already had of public speaking technique and, over hours of practice, he learned to improve his own delivery and to educate others of the technique's principles. Cicero though never directly addressed the relationship between speaker and audience. All the same, we still recommend many of the principles today, but just as the Romans did we have taken the best ideas and practices and developed them to apply to speakers in the business world.

So what is it about delivery that we should apply today? Well.....

By varying the pitch, pace, and loudness of the voice, a speaker can emphasise emotion in a presentation.

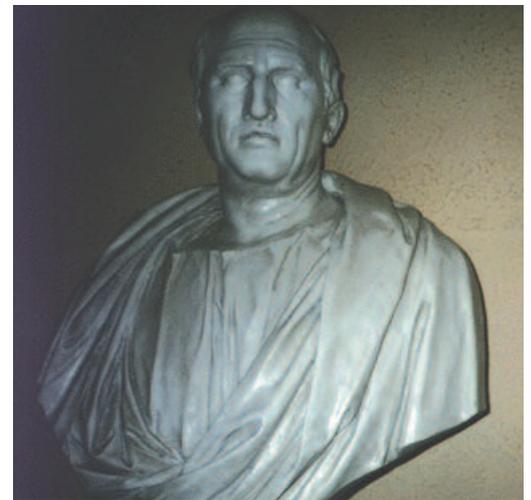
We have written about pace before. Here we'll focus on pitch. Use of a higher pitch can emphasise an excited state whilst a lower pitch can and should be used for more serious states. Using changes in intonation we can give weight to the most important

words. Often words that carry the most emphasis involve a sharp rise and gradual fall in pitch.

The final word or syllable at the end of a sentence should end on a lower pitch than average, as seen in this 'high-drop' pitch contour diagram. This conveys finality, certainty and confidence.

Anger or excitement can be expressed by increasing the loudness of your voice, along with other changes in pitch and pace. And adversely, if we decrease the loudness and pitch and slow down the pace, we express sadness and disappointment.

We also convey much expression in what we don't say. By using silence, we can create anticipation,



Marcus Tullius Cicero

expectation and gravitas. Sometimes this can be over engineered as keenly demonstrated by Tony Blair and Michael Howard during a Commons debate in May 2004. Ann Treneman of The Times reported "I listened as pauses stretched beyond comma length, or indeed dashes, and entered ellipsis territory before being saved by the uttering of a word. And then, in time, another one." "...having all the speed of an egg and spoon race between Galapagos tortoises". I am sure that Cicero would have expressed much the same opinion!

Our body language is another major area for

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Completes her series of three articles on oratory with passing references to Cicero and Monty Python.

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expressing emotion, encompassing eye contact, facial expressions, posture and body movements. Sustained eye contact with your audience at the end of a statement reaffirms its importance. The facial expressions should change to match the emotion that you are conveying; in conversation we tend to smile if we are talking about something happy or exciting; frown if we are confused, angry or upset – this shouldn't be any different in a presentation. A strong posture and appropriate hand gestures add impact to your presentation.

pointing out some of what that 'best' is. The key to effective delivery using these techniques is to adhere to the advice given by Eugene Talmadge, Governor of Georgia in the 1930s and 40s when he said "This effect is achieved by the speaker who is keenly aware of his own attitude toward his material, who deliberately sustains in his mind the proper tone, and who remains in full control of it as he speaks".

By using delivery techniques consistent with the material being delivered, the tone of a successful speech will be inseparable from and add to the content. This will assist the speaker in keeping the audience's attention and interest in the speech, and to persuade their audience. The audience will as a result form a positive impression of the speaker and be more receptive to the subject.

Highly regarded orators such as Marcus Tullius Cicero and Quintilian both addressed delivery and stressed its importance in speeches. Neither man directly addressed the relationship between the speaker and the audience, however, each orator noted the importance of speaking and how the speaking may be affected by variations in speech and body movements. Quintilian stressed the idea that a "true orator must be . . . the good man speaking well." (Covino et al, 77)

The 'High Drop'

"... we will remain solvent."

----- Speaker's average pitch level
 _____ Modulation of pitch for a 'high-drop'

There may be concern that these delivery techniques are being used consciously and so unethically; that the speaker is acting so not being genuine. Such presenters are usually betrayed by subconscious 'tells', as we highlighted in our article 'Can you spot a fake smile?' in the 16th Edition, and was also demonstrated clearly in the programme 'Body Talk' on Channel 4 in May 2004. For more on this see <http://www.channel4.com/culture/microsites/B/bodytalk/>.

We'd share the concern. Our advice has always been to be 'yourselves at your best'. Here we are only

So you are being interviewed. Don't panic!

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I've told you that once, you won't want to hear it again.

Of course, 'doing a Paxman' is usually designed to goad an interviewee into responding with feeling, which can be very persuasive. But, recently, a company CEO, advised to be passionate about, and try 'selling', his company's system, grandly declared he had salesmen to do that.

I contrast that with a doctor I met in southern India last month. Despite little more than an hour's sleep a night since the Tsunami battered the coastline on Boxing Day, he glowed with a passion about the work his team had been doing to keep disease at bay in the wake of the great waves. No-one could fail to be amazed by what they'd achieved, or by the energy they'd summoned up to keep going.

Then there are those interviewees who can't resist the opportunity to go on at length about their

subject, to the dismay of the journalist who just wants a representative soundbite and a quick getaway. What's called vanity publishing may be an outlet for one's detailed exposition. But how many readers will it get? Give a hack a decent quote, and it could be seen by a few hundred thousand. Or you can follow the lead of a company chairman I met recently who said, "I just throw the stuff out, and leave the journalist to choose." Brave words!

To summarise Jane's Advice:

- Do help the journalist. They have a job to do
- Be aware of how you look and your surroundings
- Don't hide that good soundbite
- Don't bang on at length
- Keep your cool when being goaded
- Remain aware throughout - before, during and after the event
- Speak with passion and energy.

Divided by a common language

Alastair Grant

I have never felt at ease with the insight in the title above by George Bernard Shaw, perhaps we and the Americans are *separated* by a common language. Divided suggests that the different use of language is a source of friction. I don't think it is most of the time. We quickly learn the social faux pas about erasers, faggots, pants and you probably know the rest. Of course what does happen is that usage gets altered. An Englishman was pouring wine into the glass of his American guest. *Good* she said. He suitably encouraged poured more. *Stop* she said her voice rising a note. Good for her meant that's enough - stop pouring. He took the opposite view.

Americans tend when being formal to take a more Latinate slant at things. The America General said: *"The directive was mandated and subsequently failed to be executed"* but the British counterpart said: *"The order was given but not much was done about it"* (with acknowledgement to the late Alistair Cook).

But Americans are different to us. Many years ago on starting a job in Norfolk, Virginia my amiable Texas boss warned me on day one not to assume that it would be like working in the UK. He was right. His second insight was to tell me that



the customary two weeks vacation entitlement could be ignored by me without penalty. Take your six weeks a year and see our country. I was grateful for his reasonable and rather British approach.

Here in Britain most of us believe that we have little difficulty communicating successfully with Americans. We are used to their language from films and TV. Americans in this country adapt to our words and methods, but working with Americans elsewhere is a bigger challenge. They find the nuances and phrases that we use difficult to understand. *"How interesting"* says the Brit; meaning: *"I disagree"* But if he said: *"That's a really good idea"*. Then he has agreed.

"We will have to do our homework" says the Brit meaning:

"I can walk away from this deal". The Americans are more straightforward. They say it as it is whereas we

couch our language in modesty and understatement.

A place for ambiguity can be at meetings where it is not apparent if a decision has been made. An American friend of mine found this confusing at first. She would say to herself after a meeting: What have we agreed? Later she found that a decision had not been made but nobody had registered this to be the case!

They use different technical language. In accounting 'disclosure' becomes 'discovery'. At this stage a lexicon become useful.

When selling they are not into soft sell, but will push hard to extol the virtues of their product. Decisions seem to be made more quickly than in Europe but their contract needs to be read in detail. They are more inclined to take a legal route and sue. That said we in Britain can also misunderstand Americans. If an American describes a woman as 'homely' then he is not referring to her splendid cooking but that she is decidedly unattractive.

Americans use the word 'clever' in a different way to 'intelligent'.

Some of us in Britain feel uneasy in political terms with both America and Europe yet most of us have business to do in both spheres. Understanding of

American culture and their use of language is always worthwhile (understatement!). As important, is to be aware of how Americans see us. Raymond Seitz, former US Ambassador here in the UK wrote a superb book "Over Here" which, apart from being amusing, gives a deep insight into what makes us different and why.

Most Americans feel warm towards the British, particularly so at the moment.

So:

- Reciprocate that warmth
- Be prepared to get down to business quickly (Although Southerners are higher on courtesy and elongated charm)
- Listen carefully to what they say. If you are not sure seek clarification
- Define what decisions have been made and not made.



So you are being interviewed. Don't panic!



Jane Bennett Powell

Jane Bennett Powell, a Freelance TV news reporter with 25 years experience at the BBC and Channel 4 News, is our guest contributor to this edition. She has worked with us for a number of years and now advises our clients on interview technique. Here she gives some insights into how to be a good interviewee.

If I'm feeling kind, I'll ask an interviewee if he or she really thinks their child's artwork is a suitable background, pinned on the wall at shoulder level behind the office desk. However, I was quite happy for a member of Poland's 1980s political hierarchy to talk to me in front of a shelf-full of the collected works of Lenin, and I said nothing. Then again, perhaps he was very proud of the collection.



People sometimes become so concerned about what they're going to say on-camera, they forget that how it looks is, sadly perhaps, as influential. The comfortable swivel chair seems appropriate in the office, but somehow conveys unease on tv; ditto

swivelly eyes. I've watched interviewees try to catch what's going on off-camera - the floor manager coiling cable, say - and they appear untrustworthy. And forgetting that you can still be on TV even after the interview has ended is easily done, unless you saw the exchange with a dedicated woman who'd been running a weekend conference for sick teenagers, poignantly describing their highs and lows. The interview (from a remote studio in the Midlands) ended. She wasn't too confident about her performance, and, still visible in the plasma screen beside the presenter, grimaced to her friend beyond the camera. Impact spoiled.

I'm reconciled to the belief that politeness is a mixed blessing in media terms. Let me explain. A lot of interviewers now 'do a Paxman', or try, at least, to sound sceptical and incisive. Out of the mouths of those less skilled than the Newsnight presenter, such questioning can sound downright rude. The natural instinct is to feel under attack, which makes one sound defensive, ergo, in the mind of the questioner, guilty. The interviewees who refuse to take it personally, looking on every question as an opportunity, sound a lot more professional.

On occasions when I've chatted politely in the green room before an interview, mentally ticking off examples of the guest's eloquence for re-use on air, that courtesy has backfired. I've listened in vain for those great soundbites in the studio. Human nature seems to say,

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