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gpb

"speak up journal"

Alastair Grant

Please don't confuse me. Get to the point. Don't waste my time.

"If you use words that the viewer has to process, then they will miss the next three to six words that you say." This is a quote from Scott Chisholm who, it appears, is the man who coached Alastair Darling's performance in the first televised debate against Alec Salmond on Scottish independence.

Alastair, 'as dry as a bone' Darling produced a performance in the first debate that was robust, witty and with flashes of emotion. Salmond's theatrical style by contrast was, in my opinion, wrong-footed. True, the second debate was a reversal of fortunes although Darling did score some hits. Scott Chisholm's advice goes on to say you have to pitch as though your audience are ten year olds. Is he right? Does this apply to business presentations? Well, Chisholm is referring to the rock and roll of a TV debate, and this is not quite the same as a business presentation. But he does point out that the Financial Times uses language that could be understood by a literate 12 year old. And we would agree with that approach.

Again and again we ask presenters to simplify what they are saying. The great majority over-complicate their story. Most will admit this but find it hard to get to the right place. Some say that the audience, who have knowledge of the subject, don't want to be patronised. We completely agree!

The start point then is to look at knowledge profiles of your audience. We call this the '***The Rule of Ten***.'

Audience Knowledge – A scale of 1-10:

Level 10. You, as the presenter are the expert and so you are at level 10. You know the subject well, in detail; when talking to close colleagues you may use common jargon laden language and various shortcuts. They are also experts so will understand. But brevity is still preferred.

Level 8-9. These are people in the know. They understand almost all of the jargon and business terms, and are used to seeing the sort of slides you may use. But you can still confuse them with too much detail and a lack of imagery. They may remember what you said afterwards. *Lots of information but no message.*

Level 6-7. These are people in the business but are not specifically in your area. They understand some but not all of the detail but will take longer to process ideas.

Level 4-5. These are people who are not experts in your area. Jargon and detail confuse. They take longer to process complexity. These people are often senior and often decision makers. These also make up most of the typical audience.

Level 1-3. These are people outside your business with low-level and varying knowledge.

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Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd.

The Presentation & Business Development Specialists

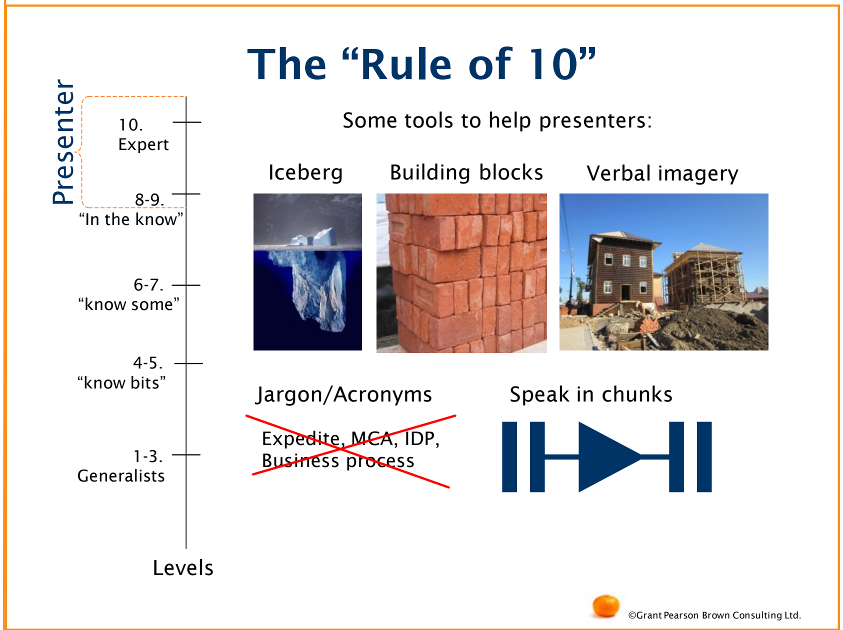
Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts

In this edition:

Please don’t confuse me…. continued

Most will be intelligent executives able to process complex and subtle ideas, if properly briefed. They may also be the most important as they may be the ones who have to be persuaded by your presentation. Here are a few of our tools that help presenters in such situations:

Iceberg. Use just the tip of it. This simple concept is about sticking to your key points with minimal elaboration. Stay above the waterline. A simple test is to imagine you only have 60 seconds to get key points across – what would they be? In turn this means cutting out unnecessary detail. Do they need a continuous flow of slides? *This applies to all levels 1-10.*



Basic Building Block. For levels 1-5 there is an absolute need to put in a basic building block that all can understand, pitched for that 12 year old. A great example is the YouTube series by Paddy Hirsch. He explains complex financial matters very well. For example the Yield Curve. I might have nodded wisely but on hearing the term I actually had little idea what it was until I watched 4 mins of Paddy Hirsch on YouTube. I am still not an expert but now I understand the concept well enough to take on more complex detail.

Use of verbal imagery. Key points are fine but they can be abstract; imagery helps the listener to create an image quickly in their brain that can be remembered long afterwards.

Paddy Hirsch, describing private equity, uses the analogy of a group of investors buying a house. He develops the process on a flip chart and towards the end of his entertaining 4 minute talk makes a number of quite complex points; the high level of imagery really helps to make it all stick. So use “Stickies”, as we call them.

Remove jargon and acronyms. All corporations use them. The military do it. The lawyers do it. Who doesn’t do it! (Ans: good journalists). Those of us not in the know feel undermined as we struggle to make sense of what we hear. We may puzzle it out from the overall context, but we fall way behind and fail to register the key points as we spend too much time translating. So err on the side of caution and assume that levels 1-7 will not understand your pet acronym or the local jargon.

Speak in chunks. This is about pace; it is an easy concept in theory but harder in practice. Ideas need to be delivered in chunks with distinct pauses at the end of each idea to enable the audience not just to listen but also to have time to process the ideas. How long is a chunk? Maybe a single phrase, or a few sentences – up to 30 words. Then pause. The key, with a longer section, is that you are clear about what the final words are. If not then you start to add umms and errs. Whenever I hear an idea ending with the word ‘AND’ I know they are not speaking in chunks. I recently heard a QC (Queen’s Counsel – a top level UK advocate) end a statement with this: “*At the heart of this case is a simple and serious injustice to a 96 year old victim.*” This is chunking .

To Sum Up. All presenters fall victim to over-complicating presentations, so it takes skill and effort to ensure that key points can be detected, understood, and made compelling… and that key points can easily be remembered afterwards.

Alastair Grant

Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts

Listening and [Mis]interpreting

Lynda Russell-Whitaker

"One often contradicts an opinion when what is uncongenial is really the tone in which it is conveyed." **Friedrich Nietzsche**

This article is not just about the tone we employ, but about interpreting or misinterpreting what has been said. Though our tone of voice can play a critical part in how what we mean to say is received by listeners.

Along with tone, another vital factor in spoken communication is our accompanying facial expressions; these can sometimes be misconstrued even more than what's being said, or at least add to any potential misunderstanding.

Friedrich Nietzsche, probably in a contradictory pose.

A personal example of this is a friend of mine who is a doctor; she tends to frown frequently when in conversation, particularly when listening. I only recently realised that I have often interpreted her frown as negative, when that's not at all what she means to convey. She simply tends to overuse the 'frown of concentration'. This mismatch is known as *Discongruence*, i.e. what is being said is not aligned with the facial expression we would generally expect. So my misinterpretation is not surprising or uncommon.

Next, how do we interpret the words that we hear? This is a veritable minefield! What happens between ear and brain (to oversimplify) can be quite a leap, and often a subconscious one. Even if, or when, we're giving our full attention to our conversational partner, a fair amount of distortion can take place.

As many of us know, whether it's us or the person we're in conversation with, we are often not giving full attention. The one *not* doing the talking is often giving more thought to what they want to say next, rather than exclusively listening before formulating their response! Furthermore, human beings have a tendency to hear what's being said through their own filters, colouring the information with their opinions and views of the world.

Sometimes the scenario can be fairly innocuous, albeit irritating, and any misinterpretations that arise are dismissed or forgiven. During more stressful times, however, emotions can escalate and make for an explosive atmosphere, creating huge gulfs between family members, colleagues, communities or entire nations! For example, a typical American pilot euphemism such as *"drop the wheels"* can cause real problems for the more literal listeners such as the Japanese, and their aeroplane pilots!

In stressful conflict situations, it would be prudent to heed the advice of someone expertly trained in conflict resolution such as Gabrielle Rifkind, co-author of '*The Fog of Peace: The Human Face of Conflict Resolution*'. Writing in The Guardian newspaper earlier this year, she says: "*Institutions do not decide to go to war or to make peace or decide who to destroy or kill; those actions are the responsibility of individuals. So to try to understand the root causes of conflict only in terms of power politics and resources, without also understanding human behaviour, undermines our effectiveness in preventing war and making peace."*

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Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts

Listening and [Mis]interpreting ...continued

Gabrielle Rifkind's context is war-torn regions that have often been traumatised by conflict for many years; nevertheless, she accurately points out that "*actions are the responsibility of individuals*".

I have used an extreme example to illustrate my point; thankfully, here in the UK we no longer live in war-torn communities. That being said, if we each focus on being responsible for what we say on a day-to-day basis, misunderstandings and conflicts can be substantially reduced.

3. If there is something you think you may have misinterpreted, ask the speaker to clarify, explain or elucidate. You can even explain what you thought they meant if that helps.

4. As the speaker, pay attention not only to what you are saying but also *how* you are saying it, i.e. through your tone of voice and facial expressions, even body posture.

5. Again, as the speaker, your mood or state can influence how your communication is delivered to the receiver.

GPB's simple illustration of ***congruence****, which runs (like correlation coefficients) from −1 to +1.*

Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts

With regard to our day-to-day spoken communication, if listeners bring all their attention to what the speaker is saying, they are far more likely to have successful, productive and even inspiring communications between colleagues and other counterparties.

The same can be said if we are aware, considerate and as unambiguous as possible with our verbal and non-verbal communication when we are speaking, as well as aware of the filters that listeners are most likely to be using.

In summary, here are some tips to start practising in your daily conversations:

1. Listen actively when on the receiving end of any communication. Importantly, this means not composing what you want to say before your interlocutor has finished speaking.

2. Also as the listener, be aware of your own mood or 'state' and the filters that are likely to result. The more conscious you are of this, the more you will realise that you could be misinterpreting what is being said.

Bring attention to your mood; focus on your breathing and take time to think before saying what you want to say.

6. Ensure the listener has correctly Interpreted what you said by getting feedback from them, clarifying that what they heard was what you intended.

The more we bring this level of awareness and attention to our spoken communications, the higher quality they will be; the ensuing results are very likely to be positive and, dare I say, even life-enhancing!

Lynda Russell-Whitaker

"You will be my most important client"

Anyone in a business development role will be familiar with the phrase above. There is a feeling that it should be said, especially to a big client that you are very keen (and probably incentivised) to win, and is often said at that peak in effort—the pitch. But is it the best thing to say?

One of the key documents we have created and developed over our many years of advising on business development and pitches is something we simple call "The Clients Rights Act".

It is now in the 2014 edition, and still fits on one page (without a microscopic font) but of course is not likely to become anything the UK Govt legislates for. There have - to be candid - been very few word changes to this Act of ours over the last few years; it has finally settled down after robust testing with our colleagues and clients in workshops around the UK and wherever we work overseas.

The very first of the clauses in this one page Act is this:
"1. Important. Treat me as if I'm important, because I am. In fact treat me like a God: I'm the most important person to you".

Yes, that seems to sum it up well. But the practical problem with doing this is that you have other clients already (unless you just landed from another firm), lots of them probably, and they all want this. Plus you have probably told them at the time of your pitch that this is their status to you.

That makes some 50-100 "most important clients status" clients. Or better known as a contradiction. They can't all be, and the likelihood is that they know this, so when you said it, they didn't believe you. It is so common a phrase, it's an unverifiable claim about the future, it's not very specific, and everyone says it without meaning it.

Even if you haven't any clients yet, it's not a phrase that is likely to hold true beyond the first win you make.

Clients are not stupid. They know that when you say such a phrase, that even if you do mean it, as soon as a bigger and more important client comes along, you will say the phrase to that new one, and all of a sudden we perceive we are slipping down a greasy pole to insignificance.

Despite clinging on tight, this client is about to slide down the well-greased pole of significance...

So what should you do instead of making this statement, good though the intentions were behind it?

Well, we could start with the truth and the reality. They will be your most important client, for some possibly even most of the time, and if you are a good professional adviser, the times you do that will be the times that matter, and especially the ones that matter the most. It will also include being available pretty darned quickly if there is an important and urgent need.

Clients are also realistic (well, OK, nearly all of them are, and certainly the best ones are). They know and expect that you will have other clients you work for.

Our clients will go further—they see this other work as a clear advantage, for how else could you have gathered together your expertise, and in the same sector that they operate in. Our clients even demand this and its absence would be a commercial disadvantage.

So, what do you say and not say? Well, don't say something that's not true.

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Ewan Pearson

Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts

"You will be my most important Client" ....continued

Our Services

Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd (GPB) is a respected adviser based in London. 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, Visual and Content Analysis reports, then provide content, 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 Prospect Relationship Management (PRM), Just a Minute, the Fire Bell Test and the Information Iceberg.

You have to be available, committed and exclusive when you are working for the client in front of you. One of the most irritating traits they could see is you working for another (absent) client when you are actually with the one in front of you.

This is most commonly exhibited with the latest generation of smart phones. When mobiles first came out it was a brag to show them off and have them ring in meetings. *Wow, you must be so important!* The same thing happened with the first smart phones, but now we are on the iPhone6, it is all a bit passé. Even the iWatch, Gear2, and the other latest gismos seem to be having as limited impressive effect. It's what medics call 'attenuation', or the reduced effect of further and further doses.

Not so smart phones

It is a house rule at GPB that these devices are on silent and out of touch and sight whilst we are advising our clients. We (and they) pick them up in the regular breaks in our workload. We have yet to have a client have a wobbly because we did not get back to them soon enough.

Yet you see bankers, lawyers and accountants pick smart phones up in meetings, take and make calls, and read and type emails. Even going out of the room sometimes to do so. It seems to be getting worse not better in the last year or two, as economies come out of recession, business picks up and spare capacity falls to zero.

This is the clearest signal that someone else is more important than the client in front of you.

Our clients know that when we are with them, we are not available for other clients. These others leave messages or emails for us to get in touch and we follow through just as soon as we can.

So, here's how we think we should deal with this one:

First, tell the truth: *"All our clients are important. We will be available, exclusive and committed whenever you need us"* is a distinct improvement.

Second, whenever you are with your client, show them that you meant what you said by devoting yourself to them and them alone. Step away from your smart phones!

Ewan Pearson

GPB News - Consultant appointment

We are delighted to announce the recent appointment of Richard Keith as a Consultant at GPB. He joins us from a business development role with a London law firm, and has a degree in English from Cambridge University (which we admit puts the rest of us to shame!). Welcome Richard. We will be introducing him to our clients as and when the opportunity permits.

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