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Speak up



MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

from all at
Grant Pearson Brown Consulting



Our core team celebrates our 10th Birthday at Goodwood in November

Contents

TEN YEARS ON: DEATH OR ETERNITY FOR THE PRESENTATION COACH?

Ten years older and ten years wiser, Alastair Grant and Ewan Pearson look back at the way people present, what has changed and what hasn't over the last ten years. And what the future holds for GPB and other presentation coaches.

WHEN WILL THEY LEARN?

It's not just what you can learn from us, but what we can learn from you. Every piece of work gives us new challenges and new lessons are learnt. Here are a few war stories from 2003.

CULTURE VULTURES KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

We are delighted to include a guest article from Richard D Lewis, eminent author of 'Where Cultures Collide'. Here Richard shares with you a short vignette from his knowledge of different cultures and their expectations as an audience.





TEN YEARS ON: Death or Eternity for the presentation coach?

We started GPB ten years ago in the place where all good firms start – a spare room. Since then the way people present may have changed a lot, or not. If it has, what has changed? And has there been a change in the importance of speaking well? Has GPB changed what it coaches? Are people presenting better? Have we coached ourselves out of a living or is there a future (and is it Orange!)?

Some trends are easy to spot. The most obvious is the almost ubiquitous use of email, voicemail and PowerPoint.

What has changed most?

Today people use email extensively in place of written letters, faxes and even personal contact. Many admit to sending an email to someone 5 yards away. Many phone calls end up as voicemails. So we are talking less face to face. Offices are quieter as people stare at their PCs.

Ten years ago, presentations were supported by OHPs or 35mm slide projectors that used to jam spectacularly on occasions. A new device called the “slab” came in – a sort of see-through laptop screen that was placed on top of an OHP to project PowerPoint or Harvard Graphics slides. Remember? A gloomy greenish picture could just be seen in a darkened room. So easy to take a zizz.

But now most presentations are dominated by PowerPoint. It's the easy way to ensure the speaker doesn't lose his way. About 5 years ago a movement started against “Death by PowerPoint” – a realisation that too many complex slides, far from bringing clarity, did the opposite. Things are better now, but we still see top management talking to too many busy slides rather than engaging with their audience.

And the importance of speaking well?

We have no doubt that the requirements to inspire, lead and persuade are as vital as they ever were. Technological change makes our response time much shorter. Consider the effect of Michael Howard taking on the Conservative leadership from Ian Duncan Smith. Howard's better presentational performance has immediately been noted without exception, and he's got a shot at PM at the next General Election. In commerce we know that our clients

win business for the same sort of differences. Products and services are now so competitively equalled and quickly commoditised that it is hard to tell whose is best. This

gives added importance to the need to speak well. We may all talk less but when we do it is more important!

Has GPB changed what we coach?

The teaching of good presentation skills was and always will be the ‘head of our arrow’. And the very tip has been our ‘two goals’ approach to raising performance. We got some valuable lessons from a magnificent 90 year old, John Casson, who achieved fame back in the 60s by teaching an old fashioned idea called “Oratory”. He was right to use the Ancient Greek's techniques – and we still coach essentially the same way. Perhaps not in Greek though. What has changed is our increasing use of computerised Voice Analysis. We've covered this in recent articles but what's fascinating is that we have combined ideas from 3,000 years ago with the latest software! We know that in the last three years we have advanced our skill in this and several other areas quite significantly, so yes we have added to what we can coach.

Are people presenting better?

Sadly, not much, yet. It's like walking up a descending escalator. We know we've made progress, but the technology changes mentioned above, political spin, the multimedia craze, and a whole new raft of untrained people on the business scene pushes down on the general standard, which stays pretty much where it was. Education has helped and hindered; helped by getting more children to present, and hindered by not giving them the basic tools to do it well. The need to present well in commerce is a constant, and organisations vary mostly in their appetite for good speaking skills only when economies shift. But we know that our clients are getting better, and one of the great benefits of ten years in the game is the joy we and they get from seeing and hearing them do so well.

Have we coached ourselves out of a living, or is there a future?

Not by a long shot. There is always going to be a need to communicate better, although we don't want to mimic the PM and his ‘lots done, lots to do’ cliché. There is now a better attitude to the use of visuals, to interacting with audiences, to time keeping and trying to present in a more interesting way. We are hoping to help the 2005 London bid for the 2012 Olympics, and this will be a fascinating chance to coach a highly dedicated team with a clear case for winning. The future is not Orange, or Green ‘n Gold, but Red, White and Blue!

Alastair Grant and Ewan Pearson



WHEN WILL *they learn?*

We thought as a little Christmas present we would give you some tips that we learnt this year as a result of consultancy work on some of the many specific presentations and pitches we've helped clients with. First, a big 'thanks!' to those clients (whose blushes we will spare) that have hired us to do this work, and so given rise to these insights.

1. Can't get the team right

A summer pitch by one of our clients suffered from team leader problems. A person was chosen who knew the client well, but was not so sure about the service area and did not have the full support of his bosses in a new role. We all persevered for several weeks trying to improve the situation and his skills. Meanwhile the competition was getting ahead in Prospect Relationship Management (PRM©) terms. We went all the way to the end of the final rehearsal before management gripped the problem and replaced the team leader, moving him into the body of the team. The actual pitch went well despite being a modified team with virtually no rehearsals. Latest news is that they won the pitch; the former team leaders' future role is still unresolved. Moral of the tale? Take the tough decisions early on.

2. Twice the price, not enough difference

A recent pitch involved professional advisers selling their services to a UK Government business about to start a major property project. The pitchers knew they were overqualified, but went for it for good commercial reasons. The competition was 'plain vanilla' in quality, smaller and much cheaper – about half the fee rate. We were called in very later, but worked hard in rehearsals to help our client team to show their higher fee rate was worth paying for, for example using the perfectly valid concept that experts can get the job done in half the time; so the total bill would match the competition AND their client would be able to start a very profitable project sooner. Our client's pitchers were under-prepared; they had not done enough target meetings and calls to know all the Hot & Cold buttons, so had to guess. We did get them to rehearse, and found they hadn't met before, so didn't feel like a 'team'. We did what we could and they pitched well. They were told they lost the pitch, as they hadn't enough value differentiation; their client did admit they nearly won it, but sensed the lack of 'team'. Morals of the tale? Keep your price competitive, make the case for higher prices, spend more time speaking to clients and ensure your team members know each other. That's all!

3. Get the picture?

We worked on fund-raising presentations for two very unusual ventures this year (they are still active, thus confidential). They shared one particular issue, that of needing clear and supportive visual aids for complex topics. Their initial efforts were worthy but ultimately unsuccessful. We gently sat them down and asked what they were really trying to explain, and after listening, discussing (in one case, at some length) and doodling with them we devised new visuals that showed what they were getting at. There was an 'aha' moment in each case. You know, it's when someone has explained something in a way you can't understand, you then question them, and eventually between you, you figure it out. The main shared issue is that they had started with many complex word slides, which failed as communication aids for the presenters AND the audience. We ended up with only a couple of simple picture visuals instead. Morale of the tale? Brainstorm before you commit pen to paper, and try to illustrate your point, not write notes about it.

4. Too many cooks?

Earlier this year we worked with a leading IT firm on their internal presentations to a global audience. Having put in the 'spade work' in terms of sharpening up delivery skills, we then needed to firm up both the content and visual material. This took much longer than planned for a number of reasons. First there was not a consistent view on the fundamental purpose of the presentation. Was it to motivate? Educate? Update? Lead? or a combination of all four? Where should the focus go? Valuable time was taken up discussing the purpose with the result that not enough time was spent on actually firming up the content. Opinions and views in the USA differed quite widely from the UK and Europe. Time was taken up discussing and weighing up the merits of quite different points of view. Input was gathered from all the global locations via conference calls and precious time was used up updating people joining the calls at different times

Essentially, too many people were involved resulting in the whole process taking much longer than anticipated. This meant that time originally allocated for rehearsals was used up finalising the content and slides. Moral of the tale? Seek input early on and then nominate a small core team.

5. Tale of Two Presentations

We coached two people for keynote presentations, both overseas. The outcomes were different!

The first was to a major medical seminar sponsored by two pharmaceutical companies. Our client, a leading professor (not British) had the keynote speech. Immensely able, dedicated to the treatment of a distressing condition but timid and shy when faced with a large audience. We were given five hours to transform him to lofty heights. He disliked "performance" We advised him to use a script. We rewrote the lines in easy to read phrases, cut out some complex detail but without dumming down to an audience who were knowledgeable. A mixed report came back. He followed his lines but found the start difficult, as the audience had not settled down. This somewhat unnerved him. Moral of the tale? All of us are at our most vulnerable and nervous at the outset. If you think you are going to have a rocky start then commit the first few lines to memory. Practise if you can in a large auditorium. Better still have some artificial disruption at the outset so that you get used projecting through noise and clutter.

The other presentation took place in the US and was about insurance. The client decided to use the idea of the Perfect Storm to act as an analogy. It was an excellent idea (his!) but as sometimes happens doesn't fit like a glove. We advised him to make a virtue of it by stating clearly why the analogy didn't completely work. He also had some amusing asides that would appeal to an American audience – verging on the politically incorrect. Our reaction was to let him run with it. He received a standing ovation, was asked to speak again. He helped promote UK insurance. Moral of the tale? Don't worry if the analogy/example doesn't quite match the point, Be happy to explain the difference. We do think you can be risqué but don't use set piece jokes - certainly not the Gerald Ratner model!



GPB Consulting: 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 word, improving the performance of individuals and teams. Over the longer 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 and Telephone calls.

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 Analysis, Prospect Relationship Management (PRM) and the GPB Virtual Classroom.

Open Course

This course is a good opportunity for individuals who need coaching and would benefit from being in a group with people outside their organisation.

Advanced Presentation Skills

(through Capita Learning & Development)

This senior level workshop is designed to help participants improve their style and method of presentation. This is a two-day course followed by an on-line 'Virtual Refresher'.

2004: Feb 10-11, Apr 29-30,
June 7-8, July 8-9, Oct 28-29

Please call us on 020 7831 1000 for further information or to book someone on a course.

CULTURE VULTURES know the differences...

Most speakers are experienced in addressing their own countrymen; speaking to foreign audiences adds another dimension to the skill required. Each culture has its own preferences as far as audience expectations are concerned. These are quite complex, depending on the history of the cultural group. In this short article I can only refer to one or two basic differences.

The Approach

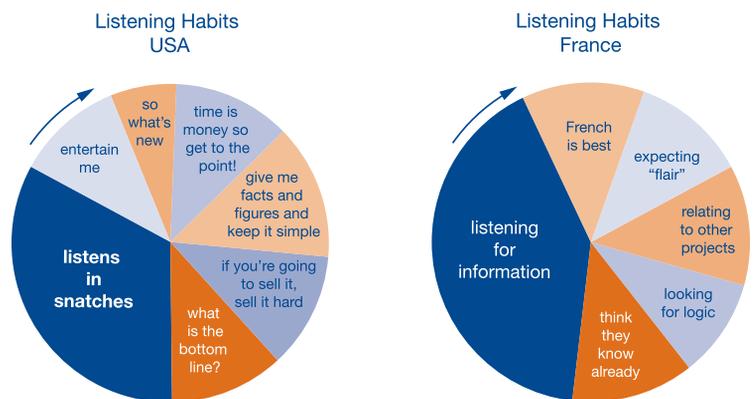
In the first place, there is the question of succinctness v. explicitness. People from Sweden, Norway, New Zealand and especially Finland will want you to be as succinct as possible, saying not more than is necessary and summarizing when appropriate. Individuals from Britain, Denmark, Switzerland, Canada and the USA have the same expectation to a lesser extent. In the United States, one may speak more, but must get to the point before long. At the other end of the scale you have those who require a full explanation of the idea or situation and who are not phased by lengthy analysis. These are headed by the Germans, who must be given all the context, as well as the French, Italians and all Mediterranean people. Hispanics, including South Americans also fall into this category. Russians, too, are fond of lengthy analysis.

Some other nationalities pose a different challenge. With the Japanese, Koreans, Chinese and other Asians clarity must be one's chief goal. It is necessary to simplify one's argument, articulate well and not go too fast. This does not apply to Malaysians and Singaporeans, who can follow with ease.

Another consideration is how much one should confine oneself to facts. Facts and figures are very important for Americans, Germans, Finns, Dutch, Czechs and Swiss. French and other Latins as well as Arabs react better to charisma than to dry, factual information. A certain amount of embellishment is permitted in the case of these nationalities. Brits, Russians and Australians are somewhere in between. With the last named, an element of mateyness is required.

Some speakers may find it hard to adapt to a variety of nationalities. Off the cuff advice for them might be to adopt one of two basic styles – **RESERVED** or **EXTROVERT**. The former is suitable for Britain, Canada, Germany, the Nordic countries and the Confucian Asians (Japan, China and Korea). The extrovert style is more appropriate for convincing Americans, Latins, Arabs, Slavs and Africans.

The following diagrams illustrate two well known listening styles – American and French



Richard D Lewis



consulting®

Grant Pearson Brown Consulting
37 Great Queen Street
London WC2B 5AA
Tel: +44 (0)20 7831 1000
Fax: +44 (0)20 7831 1010
Email: gpb@gpbuk.com
Website: www.gpbuk.com

