



## Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



**from Santa & Co**  
at Grant Pearson Brown Consulting

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## Jumping on the bandwagon



### Sarah Cottam

With the plethora of reporting on David Davis's presentation at the Conservative Party conference in October, I couldn't resist sticking my oar in too. Especially when the reporting has been so forceful with descriptors such as robotic, lacklustre and dull. So what went wrong?

We know that Davis isn't the most exuberant of presenters, although he's not that bad, so that shouldn't have been an issue. His supporters and indeed the press, having seen him present before, would know not to expect anything too brilliant. And of course Davis would have prepared extensively for this key presentation to ensure that he was performing at his best on the big day. Wouldn't he?

Shortly after the presentation and of course the subsequent reporting, Davis admitted that he had not prepared sufficiently. Excuse me for being cynical but this was of course only mentioned **after** the event. Surely you would prepare adequately for this most significant presentation in the race to leadership? But, if he genuinely didn't prepare, then he's probably

committed an equally atrocious crime of resting on his laurels. Assuming that as he was winning the race already, he may have felt that he didn't have to worry about preparing for a little presentation like this.

However, looking back at his past speeches, specifically the Conservative Party conference 2004, I would say he did prepare for this speech, in fact he seemed to have overcooked himself. His robotic style had the pattern of someone trying to be something they're not.

It didn't help that he was the third man to present. Both Cameron and Clarke presented before Davis and both performed at their best with powerful performances. Both very different but both engaging and rousing. This raised the bar of expectation. The next presenter, no matter who they were, had to perform equally well, if not better, to be considered in the same league. Davis was in poll position and was therefore expected to take the gauntlet thrown down by the competition and excel. But he didn't, and disappointment is very damaging.

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# Jumping on the bandwagon

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He started with an emotionally strong start, recalling 7/7 and continuing into the issues of immigration. All powerful and emotive stuff, no matter whether you agree with it or not. His delivery for this was as expected, emphatic with much pausing, a slow word speed to hammer his points home. And he used very strong hand gestures to match this style. On paper, that doesn't look like a bad start to me (if of course that's the tone you want to achieve). However, underneath all this was something less strong. His stance was one of nervousness, hiding behind the podium and shuffling, as one journalist put it, "like a naughty schoolboy". His voice was also

Davis is making headway and aims to continue to do so." This is all very well and we have to agree that substance is as important as style or as we term it message and personality. But the only way Davis will be able to persuade his followers of his substance is through his speeches and if he can't persuade them, then his substance won't win. And persuasion is mainly down to personality. Do I trust you, do I believe in you, can I see you as leading the country in the future?

So what can we learn from David Davis?

Well most importantly, in a race as important as this, you can't afford one bad performance. Just one poor

performance can dramatically threaten your chances of success. And it's hard to claw back from there. It takes many more positive performances to right the negative impact of a poor performance

Preparation, preparation, preparation. By spending some time preparing and rehearsing your speech you can greatly reduce the risk of a poor performance. And whatever you do, don't rest on your laurels, no matter how comfortable they are!

Make sure that the presentational tools you use fit you, don't try to be someone else



Substance or Style?

not at it's best with a monotony to it caused by a repetitive pattern in his modulation of pace, pitch and volume. So we got this impression of one wearing a suit that doesn't quite fit.

So, the start could have been better. What about the rest of the presentation? Well, unfortunately this tone and style carried on for the 20 minutes that he was speaking. Think of a speech like a piece of classical music. You have a mixture of tone and style throughout so as to carry the listener along. Unfortunately for Davis he decided he wanted to keep his piece of music at a slow crashing climax without the calm and crescendo to compliment. Everything was a call to action, rallying the troops in slow-motion. Eventually the troops needed a rest!

In reaction to the journalistic reporting of this speech, a member of the Davis team said "The Conservative Party is in danger of choosing a new leader on the basis of one speech. Politics is about substance as well as style. On the substance front

by using their techniques, it won't work. You need to find a style that suits you and shows you off at your best.

Have a strong start that captures your audience and makes them want to listen to you. It is that last part of that sentence that is important – makes them want to listen to you. What do they want to hear and how do they want to hear it. When presenting, make sure this start comes over with confidence. This will also help you to feel confident and relax into the speech.

Vary the tone of your presentation. Think of it as a piece of classical music with slow points, quiet points, rapid and energetic points. Then build up the crescendos to your key points.

Remember that the only way we are able to persuade people is through speech, be that presentation or conversation. Either way, it's your personality that is the most important factor, make sure it's the best of you.

# "Kippers or Kippered?"

We're delighted to produce here a guest article by our good friend Andy Berry of Fishburn Hedges, the PR firm. His background in Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A) makes him well placed to talk about breakfast, er... I mean the communications issues in that field.

## Andy Berry

Picture the scene; just as the butler brings the ironed copy of the Financial Times and a plate of kippers to the chairman's breakfast table, the peaceful morning in leafy Surrey is disturbed by the shrill ringing of the telephone.

"Sir Rupert, it's Larry J Raider here and I wanted to let you know that in 10 minutes' time we will be launching a dawn raid as the first stage in a takeover offer for your company. We expect to secure full control within the month."

It's the call every chairman dreads, but such calls might be becoming more of a regular event if the recent spate of mergers and acquisitions activity in the UK stockmarket continues for any length of time. Recently, in what has become known as Merger Monday, bids with a value of over £23 billion were announced in London in just one day and commentators are predicting more to come as corporate confidence and cashflows peak and the cost of debt remains low. A recent report by JP Morgan forecasts M&A activity with a value of over £530 billion this year. Whilst some of these deals will be agreed by the incumbent management teams, many will result in rudely interrupted breakfasts.

Having been so rudely separated from his breakfast what should Sir Rupert do next? Maybe it's time to read through some of those papers on shareholder communications that the PR Johnnies sent through but which have been gathering dust? Sadly not; by this stage his major shareholders will most likely have met the offeror's management team and may well have decided that Sir Rupert's company (as he still tends to think of it) might well fare rather better under the guidance of Larry Raider's more aggressive management style.

Of course it didn't have to end this way. Sir Rupert's first mistake was one of poor timing; the conversations with the PR Johnnies or, more usefully, the shareholders, should have been taking place many months, if not years, previously. The opportunity to build relationships with shareholders during good times is often forgotten but it is these long term relationships which will stand a company in good stead when the corporate raiders come knocking at the door. Companies that develop a meaningful relationship with their shareholders are far more likely to be given a sympathetic hearing when things get tough and a fund manager is required to defend his

holding in your company at the next pension fund trustees' meeting.

So what else can a company do if it fears it may become the target of unwanted suitors? First, - and be honest with yourselves - have you been giving clear voice to the company's strategy? Review all of your communications efforts and ensure that all materials state *exactly* what your corporate strategy is. Equally important, are the messages in simple English? A fair measure here is whether they could be understood by an intelligent 14 year old. The temptation is often to use a form of words which sound like the latest missive from a firm of management consultants - something which is likely only to irritate.

You should also make every effort to visit as many shareholders as possible to let them know how the business is faring. Every quoted company should have an investor relations plan - kept constantly under review - to visit as many of their institutional shareholders as possible at least twice a year.

When you have the opportunity - or the need - to put your case to your shareholders make sure you prepare well. One of the biggest challenges in communicating can be to say a little on a subject about which you know a lot! Remember also that there is no substitute for time spent on rehearsal. The old adage 'if you fail to prepare you should prepare to fail' was never more relevant.

With an extension of the M&A boom into the mid-market it would appear that there is no such thing as a company which is genuinely safe from takeover. You will serve your shareholders well if you remember to communicate early, often and openly; the very best bid defence is the one you start years before the event. You might still receive an approach but, if you do, you are far more likely to be negotiating from a position of strength, with all that that means for the price you achieve - and the effect on your reputation and your breakfast!



"Kippers or Kippered?"



# Mind your body language



## Alastair Grant

Body language is a subject of much discussion. Plenty of books give advice on what to do and what not to do. We have in the past rather ducked the subject on two grounds:

Firstly, prescriptive advice such as *'Don't fold your arms'* falls at the first hurdle, as it is quite reasonable to fold your arms to keep warm or to make yourself comfortable. But according to the textbooks, you are being defensive!

Secondly, we have always felt that if you are being your own positive self, engaged in a conversational style, then good body language happens naturally. Our only task would be to point out any distracting mannerisms.

We still avoid a prescriptive list of what to do, but we now advise more actively on body language. The first key point is that body language is part of a bigger package – *Words, Music and Dance*. *Words* – the words you speak to convey the idea. *Music* – the way you sound, your vocal expression. *Dance* – the way you look, body language. It's no good getting wonderful body language if the words are lightweight or the vocal expression deadly dull. Some would argue that David Davis's performance at the Conservative Party conference was lacking in the body language department. David Cameron, by contrast, did well on Music and Dance but it could be argued he lacked substance.

It is also true that we leak emotions subconsciously, more than we might realise. In some research done last year, a memorable clip showed Gordon Brown, during a speech by the Prime Minister, giving distress tells over 180 times! We saw him pressing his tongue against his cheek, playing with his cuffs, stroking his hair and so on. By contrast Blair was using good vocal emphasis and hand gestures.

## Our advice?

First, find out what your emotional 'tells' are. When distracted or nervous do you fidget, look down, fiddle with your cuffs, stroke your hair? These are useful things to know. We know that when you are making a presentation, most of your effort is going towards remembering what to say, handling PowerPoint and

other distractions and so your body language could be revealing some tells.

We also successfully apply the *'Three Bears'* concept to hand gestures. This helps you understand what body language suits you! It works like this: Film yourself presenting in a low key way, with no hand gestures or animation – that's *'baby bear'*! Then do it again, but this time use moderate hand gestures and more expression in your voice – *'mummy bear'* and then go wild! Use exaggerated hand gestures and bundles of expression – this is *'daddy bear'*! On playback you will quickly get an idea of what works best. In some cases to the surprise of the presenter, the daddy bear – the 'over the top style' - worked the best, much more like the effective style we use in normal conversation. They needed to see it to believe it...

Another essential 'tell' is posture. You can feel better and impress people with good posture; standing tall, not slouched.

Know how to smile naturally. A conscious smile is artificial. This is when only the mouth creases into a smile but the muscles around the eyes remain static. It's quite hard to give a genuine smile when you don't feel like it, as you do not have voluntary control over all the muscle groups in the face.

Be aware of mirroring and matching – this covers all three parameters: *Words, Music and Dance*. So be aware of not using words, expressions or gestures that are too out of sync with the other party.

In a media interview sit with your bottom well back on the seat and lean forward slightly.

Do hold friendly eye contact as key points are made.

Above all get the right balance between remembering what to say and showing your passion and commitment with expression, hand gestures and warm and friendly eye contact!



Daddy Bear

## 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 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 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.