



*Merry Christmas & Happy New Year  
from everybody at  
Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd*



Ewan Pearson

## Evidence in support of cases...of wine

In this edition:

**Evidence in support of cases...of wine**  
By Ewan Pearson

**Do you buy wine to drink, or to sell?**

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Why consistency of communication is vital, and what sort of consistency this is.

**Push or Pull?**  
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Two different approaches to persuasion, and when a boss should use each to get the best effect.

At this time of year, lots of wine is bought and pretty much all of it consumed; little would be bought for investment. There have also been some elections in the USA and a whole raft of exercises in evidence-base persuasion, both in the public domain and in private.

I recently surprised myself by selling a case of wine that I had bought some years earlier. I had intended to drink it but instead made a nice cash profit, but had nothing to drink. So I thought I would take a look at the use of evidence in these cases. Is it strong? Will it last? Does it pass the 'smell test'? No, not the wine, but the strength of evidence-based arguments used in selling such cases. This paragraph just proves that puns are the second lowest form of wit... although still well above practical joke phone calls.

Evidence is fact; it can be checked and tested, verified or disputed by experimentation and observation. Just take the Higg's Boson. Well, if you could take one.... Opinion is nothing like evidence. It is one person's view. It usually predicts the future, which is notoriously hard to do accurately, and success mostly occurs by random chance rather than skill.

This is not investment advice! However as it is Christmas soon, I do want share some anecdotes about evidence given in support of an argument, and I will include one such argument given in favour of investing (instead of just drinking) wine.

You can make up your minds whether to invest, or to imbibe.

### Buy wine, they ain't making it any more

With my apologies to Mark Twain (this edition's featured quotee), who said something similar, the case for investing in wine is made by most sellers of wine using a mixture of evidence and opinion.

Consider the following evidence from the wine merchants, Berry Brothers, on their website: "Whilst it is difficult to find totally accurate records and therefore data, prices for the very best wines have risen by an average of 15% per annum over the past 25 years."

Yippee - if only I had bought some 25 years ago!

Deconstructing this gives you first a caveat condition ("it is difficult"), followed by a softener ("totally accurate") which suggests the records are good enough, then a qualifier condition ("the very best wines"), then some data that is neatly rounded (15% and 25 years).



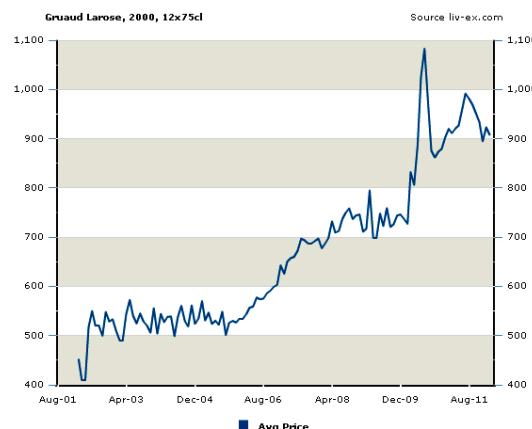
# Evidence in support of cases ...continued

So is this strong evidence? No, I don't think so, due to the conditions attached, but at least it can be checked. The trouble is that most of us won't or can't do that check.

Here's the next piece of the argument: "*It is undeniable that the best wines have proved to be sound long term investments over the past twenty years, though it is important to remember that one has to take the long term view.*"

Hmmm, this argument is getting weaker. Now we are asked to accept an opinion ("it is undeniable"), which would not be true in every case, and also the caveat condition ("long term view"), which suggests if you time it wrongly, you could lose money, or make very little after holding an asset for some time.

Berry Bros then show a price vs. year chart, supplied by Live-ex.com, of Chateau Gruaud Larose 2000, which shows (see below) an impressive line going from bottom left to top right, with a spike in 2010, and a price some 20% lower today. This is reinforced by notes that suggest you could have bought en primeur for £250 and sold for £900 now. Wow! Where do I sign?



Well, that seems a strong enough case, even though it is based only on historical data from a small sample.

## Obama is bad for markets?

Here's another example of persuasion: debunking myths. The Financial Times (4th November) carried a Lex Column

article on the expected effect of a Democrat or Republican win in the US Elections on equity markets.

The article starts with a restatement of the 'myth' that might damage Obama's chances of re-election: "*Democratic Presidents are bad for US investors*".

The debunking is simple and quippish: "*History does not bear out that judgement*", then the citing of data since Obama's win in 2008 and generally since 1927, which supports this argument "*even excluding the 1929 and 2008 crashes*" (that happened it seems under the Republicans). All good stuff, but SO last century!

Like any good act of persuasion, the counterargument then kicks in: Roosevelt's (Democrat) 2nd term was bad for investors (during WW2!!), and under Eisenhower (Republican) big gains were made. The author, James Mackintosh, then develops 4 arguments why shares might do better under Romney from here on (using speculation of future actions), then he argues against that then finishes with a flourish to suggest that perhaps it doesn't matter who is in the White House, so preventing anyone from arguing against him. A neat trick, but thus largely useless in trying to tell what to do.

So you're left with 10 minutes less of your life and no wiser, but a well-balanced and safe article has been written, and read. Papers have been sold.

The least useful aspect is that markets react so quickly to such new information that when you do try to act on any view formed, you either have to speculate in advance or get left way behind those slinky computer-trading algorithms.

What can you learn from this? Opinion is not evidence, the past does not predict the future, and you can't predict it either. All persuasion is based on trust: Discuss.

Happy Christmas, and we do hope you enjoy all that time to speculate as you contemplate the contents of a fine wine. I know that I shall.

Ewan Pearson

**Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts**



# Think on Your Feet



Mark Twain has many quotable quotes. The one I want to use here is: "*It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech.*"

Most of the time when we talk we just get on with it with varying degrees of fluency. But if it's a presentation or a briefing then many head for PowerPoint. Some of us dread talking impromptu as we forget some detail or dry up.

We admire those who can speak impromptu without a note, PowerPoint slide or any other prop in sight. So can we do better?

I will identify two situations here. First, where you have time to prepare. Second, where you need to talk impromptu with little or no notice.

## When there's time to prepare

### Prepare - Step One

Brainstorm ideas on paper. This could be scribbling down ideas without thought to their order or relative importance or structure. Then as a second stage herd the ideas into order, or use the Mindmap idea. One good system is at [thinkbuzan.com/uk](http://thinkbuzan.com/uk), where ideas radiate like spokes of a wheel.

### Prepare - Step Two

You have some key headings so now you enlarge or expand on them.

### Prepare - Step Three

Start strong - use a key fact, anecdote, or something to arouse the curiosity of the audience. Add a few key points that are relevant to the audience backed up by examples.

### Prepare - Step Four

End: A summary, a point of inspiration, action or encouragement. But being impromptu also means you have to remember what to say. Here are five ideas:

- First rehearse out loud several times to get the flow and spot where you stumble
- Memorize key points which start each set of ideas
- Memorize where each point ends and how you transition from one idea to the next.

- Use memory pegs. For example visualize the rooms in your house and mentally place ideas on items of furniture that you know well. Let's say it is a talk on the Leveson enquiry. You might visualize the key people involved in your sitting room. Make the images quirky - perhaps the judge is lying down by the fireplace. A newspaper owner is sitting in a chair with a dunce's cap on with his back to the judge. Victims are sitting together on a sofa.

- Resist the temptation to extend ideas on the hoof. This has the potential to derail you as you dive down some rabbit hole and blow your timings and find it hard to get to your next point.

## When there's no time to prepare

This is of course much harder!

Experienced speakers have a variety of ways to say something coherent. Much of it based on previous situations. So for example a sudden request to give a vote of thanks to a departing executive may follow a well-practiced format. It could be:

- Start - a quick and pleasant anecdote about something that is flattering or amusing about the subject
- A recall of when the person arrived and what they have done
- What they have contributed
- Thanking them for their services
- Wishing them good fortune.

All of this assumes that you know the person reasonably well.

Learn and practice using a standard template. For example the 4 Ps: Position, Problem, Possibility, Proposal (or Situation, Challenges, Options, Recommendations).

Let's say you are asked to talk about Scottish independence from a UK viewpoint:



**Alastair Grant**



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# Think on Your Feet ... continued

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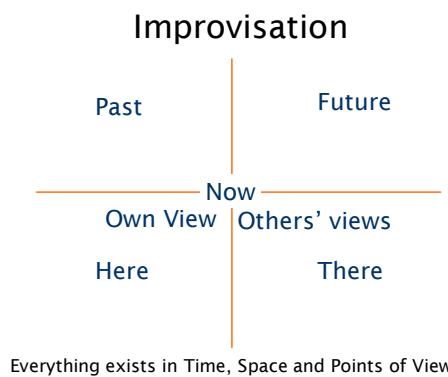
**Position:** Alex Salmond, a canny politician, has persuaded the British government to hold a referendum which will decide if the Scots should leave the UK.

**Problem:** Many – e.g. the UK without Scotland will become significantly smaller and weaker. Might lose its seats on the UN Permanent Council. Scotland might well find that going it alone is high risk. Etc.

**Possibilities/Options/Choices:** The UK plays it cool to avoid stirring up resentment. The UK communicates with clarity the disadvantages to Scottish voters why they are better off. The UK gives further local powers to Scotland.

**Proposal:** The UK should engage a wide band of activities to preserve the state of the Union but without being seen to bully the Scottish.

Another template for improvisation follows this 4-way box:



## Leveson to the test

Here's a worked example, Lord Leveson's Enquiry into the Press:

### Past

- In the past the Press have behaved very badly
- They paid money for information
- They hacked phones
- They damaged innocent people

**Now** Leveson enquiry has been published – recommending that the Press need

independent regulation enshrined in law.

**My View** Blah blah

**Others' Views** Blah blah

**Here** Here the UK the press have enormous freedom...

**There** But by contrast in France... and as for Russia press freedom looks quite different.

**Future** PM and Press do not want legal process to apply, but most of us do want binding laws. So the challenge is to have a system where freedom of the press is absolute yet the press behave well. Some sort of compromise is likely.

## Kipling's Six Friends

Then there is Rudyard Kipling's little Poem:

*"I keep six honest serving men  
(they taught me all I knew)*

*Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who"*

You could quickly construct a talk based on the six open questions:

- What ...is happening
- Why ...is it necessary
- How...will it be dealt with
- Who....is affected
- Where... is it taking place
- When....will it happen

The ability to talk 'off the cuff' is a skill that can be developed both through experience and practice.

You could do worse than listen to *Just A Minute* (BBC Radio 4) to see how they manage, at no notice, to cobble together a string of ideas with no hesitation, deviation or repetition.

In the real world, you are allowed some repetition and certainly should pause!

Alastair Grant

# Consistency = Reliability



*"There are those who would mislead us that to stick in a rut is consistency - and a virtue; and that to climb out of that rut is inconsistency - and a vice"*

Mark Twain, Consistency speech, 1887

In this article I argue the value of consistency. I'm certainly not advocating that you 'stick in a rut', rather that you ensure, in particular, that the messages you deliver to your audiences are consistent with what you are providing - or intending to provide - to your clients, whether products or services.

The kind of 'consistency' Mark Twain is referring to above is of not being willing or able to evolve or adapt. That is certainly something I would never advocate. On the contrary, I agree with marketing guru Seth Godin's view as stated in his blog "Inconsistency = Opportunity":

*"The nuances that define individual choices and allow us to rationalize our personal inconsistencies also define opportunities for product and service differentiation. Understanding the customer goals that drive these nuanced variations in customer posture can lead to the identification of new market segments."*

Furthermore, to be agile and adaptable allows you to "embrace and respond constructively to your clients' inconsistencies".

No, I'm interested in the 'consistency' as defined in the dictionary as: '*agreement or logical coherence among things or parts*'.

I'm particularly interested in consistency with regard to the messages we put out into the world and what we deliver to our clients or customers.

However, consistency is also important in the quality of products and services that you deliver over time. It clearly shows reliability; clients can count on you to provide the same level of quality time and time again.

That quality has to be consistently high to maintain the integrity of your brand.

Marks & Spencer (M&S) were a great example of this kind of brand; well-known for their consistency of quality in the 80s, it set them apart from their competition. You could walk into a branch of M&S in Manchester and get exactly the same quality of food products as you would in Brighton. They were the market leader for decades.

Following defined processes can be valuable and helps audiences, clients and customers. This doesn't mean that evolution and flexibility aren't also valuable. Rather that you employ rigour not only with the messages you express to the world but also in the development and delivery of your products and services, to a consistent high quality. Proving in turn your reliability.

A brilliant and now famous example of the consistency of message and product backfiring in the extreme is that of Gerald Ratner's speech to the IoD (Institute of Directors) Annual Convention, April 1991.

In the body of his speech he made a joke about how a prawn sandwich lasted longer than the popular earrings that they sold. This got a good laugh.



An old classic, the prawn sandwich sketch



**Lynda Russell-Whitaker**

**Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts**





# Consistency = Reliability ...continued

He then added a second joke about a time when he had been asked how he could sell a cut-glass sherry decanters and glasses set along with a silver-plated tray so cheaply, at £4.95, Gerald Ratner had retorted "because it's total crap".

In that message he committed commercial suicide.



*Gerald Ratner...pre his speech in 1991*

Although supposed to have been in jest, and at a private (albeit very large) function, journalists had been invited, and they were delighted with what he said.

The following day his words were splashed across the front page of The Daily Mirror and Ratners' customers rapidly voted with their feet.

Equally rapidly, the company wiped £500 million of its value and Ratner was forced to resign as CEO the following year. Subsequent business gaffes in the same vein are labelled '*Doing a Ratner!*'

Your audience, whether influencers or your clients and customers, are paying attention to your messaging and will expect this to be consistent with your offering.

This is more important than ever, given the ubiquity of websites and the social media channels used to promote your online and offline presence.

In a recent conversation with Brighton-based Twitter expert and strategist Wendy Kier, she asserted that consistency is the single most important factor in using this tool effectively for your business. In this context, she's really talking about frequency and regularity.

It is really not much use to tweet in an ad hoc fashion if you want to increase business from your followers and win new clients. There has to be a regularity and consistency, although the content must be ever-changing to stay fresh.

They need to see consistency over a period of time in your tweeting habits. That doesn't mean saying the same thing over and over again, but being clear in your messages and delivering on the promises of these with high quality products and services.

Rather than implying being stuck in a rut, consistency can convey a reliability that is reassuring and refreshing in times of uncertainty.

This sort of consistency of messaging, as opposed to the 'stuck in a rut' kind, can be as strong as a heart beat, keeping on going not just for months, but not 'missing a beat' for years and even decades.



*Heartbeats, consistent but ever-changing*

Gerald Ratner has recovered from the shocks created by his speech in 1991, and has not only started two successful businesses since then, but has also written a book about it all.

As if to prove the point about consistency he has called his book "*Rise and Fall... and Rise Again*". I expect it would be a good read, and a good Christmas present too.

Lynda Russell-Whitaker

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# Push or Pull – what influencing technique should we use?

gpb

The days of the authoritarian boss are fading fast and instead contemporary leaders and business people are increasingly recognising that they cannot simply tell others what to do.

As tempting as it may seem to use good, old-fashioned authority as the main tool of influencing, other skills are now required by the modern leader. They understand that in order to gain commitment to their plans and ideas they must use an increasing array of other influencing skills.

Influencing\* here is defined as *the ability to affect others' attitudes, beliefs and behaviours without using force or formal authority.*

Influencing is essentially an interpersonal and communication skill that largely depends on your ability to interact with

others in a way that appeals to them, to gain their attention and commitment.

This might sound as though assertiveness in our leaders has had its day but this would be misleading. It is the ability to be able to know when to PUSH (assert), and when to PULL (appeal) which is valuable. In other words, when to PUSH as well as how to PULL is still important.

So, what specifically is meant by PUSH and PULL? According to Professor Fiona Dent of Ashridge Business School, both PUSH and PULL consists of 2 core influencing styles, as shown in the chart below:

<b>Directive (PUSH)</b>	<b>Collaborative (PULL)</b>
<p>This is an 'I'-driven style where the influencer asserts their own views and ideas and expects others to follow. This style is most appropriate when:</p> <p>You are an expert. You require very speedy action. You are working with new or inexperienced staff. It is a safety, security or time deadline issue.</p> <p>When used ineffectively, your colleagues may judge you to be a bit of a 'bull in a china shop'.</p>	<p>This is a team-oriented style where the influencer aims to involve others who will offer views and ideas about the issue. This style is most appropriate when:</p> <p>You require commitment from others. You want innovative ideas from others. Your issue has no clear answer.</p> <p>If this style is overused or used ineffectively you may be regarded as 'w wishy-washy'.</p>
<b>Persuasive reasoning (PUSH)</b>	<b>Visionary (PULL)</b>
<p>This is an issue-driven style where the influencer wants others to buy into their ideas by presenting them in an even-handed, logical, rational and objective way. This is most appropriate when:</p> <p>Your credibility with others and knowledge about the topic is high. You need to get buy-in to an unpopular decision. There is a 'best' answer and you've done the research to prove it.</p> <p>Overuse or inappropriate use and you may be regarded as a 'tough guy'.</p>	<p>This is a style where you have to tap into others' emotions, engage their imagination and help them visualise what could be. This style is most effective when:</p> <p>You are at the beginning of a complex change process. You wish to gain people's attention and whet their appetite for future debate. Innovative thinking is required.</p> <p>Used ineffectively or overused, so other people may regard you as egocentric or idealistic.</p>



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# Push or Pull?....continued

To understand when to use each style we need to understand the relationship context of influencing in business.

According to Professor Dent, there are four categories of important stakeholders we all influence on a day-to-day basis: Clients, Colleagues, Bosses and Suppliers. And, of course, each needs to be dealt with slightly differently depending on the nature of your relationship.

In addition to this, Ashridge have also identified two additional issues which increasingly impact our ability to influence: cross-cultural factors and matrix organisational structures.

Again, this should be no surprise to those who work for large organisations as employees are becoming more international and the teams they work for more globally dispersed.

A significant number of leaders within multi-national organisations are now having to manage remote teams across different time-zones, which provides its

So, with this in mind – what is the best approach?

Well, there is some research that suggests that a combination of PUSH and PULL is needed but there are clear preferences.

Further, a recent survey showed the Collaborative style as being the most popular in organisations and the Directive style the least.

One could argue that this is a backlash to the authoritarian boss and I think that is a fair point. But I also believe that the Collaborative style is most suited to the cultural, geographical and structural challenges that organisations now face. One thing is clear though, with the world becoming more global and complex – the modern leader needs more versatile than ever.

Tim Farish

\* Source: *The Influencing Style Preference Inventory*<sup>1</sup> by Dent & Brent, Ashridge Business School, 2009.



own additional influencing challenges.  
*Dr. Dolittle's Pushmepullyou seems the right way to go. But which way IS that?*



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