



Guest author  
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## The total opposite or total opposition?

Grant Pearson Brown  
Consulting Ltd.

The Presentation &  
Business Development  
Specialists

Advice *squeezed*  
straight from the  
experts



In this edition:

**The total opposite**  
By Andrew Richards  
Andrew explains what people really mean when they use double meanings.

**The devil is in the detour**  
By Ewan Pearson  
Ewan reviews Oprah's interview with Armstrong.

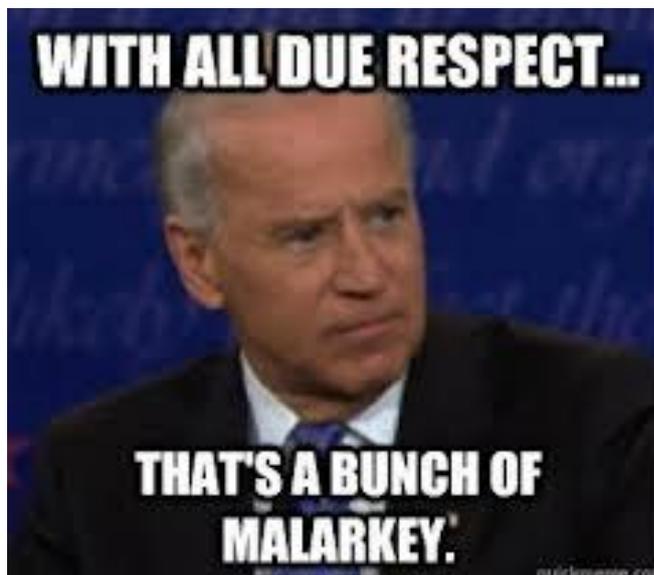
**Telling stories**  
By Lynda Russell-Whitaker  
Linda explains why telling stories is so effective.

**A great coming together**  
By Alastair Grant  
Alastair connects four great communication principles

Why don't people mean what they say? Why do they so often speak ironically, in riddles, or with double meanings? Is this wasted communication, simply using up words that fill an imaginary void? I can't really say why people use these disingenuous phrases but it really helps if you can recognise and interpret them, especially when precision is a key factor of the discussion.

With maximum cynicism and sarcasm, here's my quick guide on how I would interpret them:

**'With all due respect....'** Really means without any respect, I disagree with you completely and I'm about to contradict



Joe Biden paying his respects

what you just said, and do it in front of your peers.

**'Without meaning to sound rude....'** Really means I'm about to say something really rude and hope that by warning you first, it will reduce the insult to an acceptable level. Of course it won't, it will just make the other party feel better for a split second.

**'It's not really important or relevant but....'** Really means you obviously

haven't considered what I'm about to tell you so you'd better listen up. Why else would you bother to say it??

**'As soon as possible....'** Really means right now, and in common use this is a huge source of confusion. Your 'as soon as possible' may be by today and mine may be by the end of the year. This deliberate imprecision is best avoided at all costs, unless of course you are the one who wants to delay the idea.

**'We really must get together for a meal some time...'** Really means what the hell are you doing here, I'm embarrassed to see you, I didn't expect to see you and definitely means we'll never get together for a meal as long as I have breath in my body.

It's often said by married men when an old flame gets divorced and appears on the single scene unexpectedly!!

**'If I could just interrupt for a second...'** Actually you already have. Why not barge in and start talking? We were not doing anything as important as listening to you.

**'As you would be aware....'** Really means I've already told you this and for some inexplicable reason you've chosen to ignore it or forget it. If your colleagues say this, then best to reconsider; if your boss says this, then definitely reconsider.

*(Continued on page 2)*

# The total opposite or total opposition? ... continued

If your wife or husband says this, then just do it.

**'If truth be told...'** You'd really say that? Does this mean there is some alternative conversations we've had where the truth was not told? Do you need to signpost the truthful discussion from the other kind??

**'I'll obviously do my best with that...'** Really means I obviously won't because I doubt it has any chance of success and I'm unlikely to put effort into a doomed project.

**'Let's see what happens next with this...'** Really means I know what will happen next. Someone else outside this discussion will not deliver, not participate or kill off your idea.

**'Let's do lunch...'** See also page above. Really means let's not. But at least I got my invite in first, so you will have to work out if I meant it or not. It's really more of a polite 'goodbye'.



**'Off the top of my head...'** Really means I'm making this up as I go along and you shouldn't take any notice of what comes off the top of my head, or out of my mouth.

**'What I suppose I mean is...'** Really means I'm about to say something rude, I was just trying to be polite with my previous version.

**'I'll get right on to that...'** Really means I'll do it once I have done everything else I can think of doing, but meanwhile you can think that I think what you say is actually

important. See also "As soon as possible" above.

**'That's a great idea...'** Is really an example of litotes (a type of irony), where someone says the opposite of what they mean. So really what they mean is 'that's a terrible idea'.

There is also an interesting cultural aspect to this as well. I live in Copenhagen, Denmark: When a Dane asks that very common question, **'How are you?'**, they are genuinely enquiring about your wellbeing.

Danes assume when non-Danes ask this, they are also equally interested. English speaking non-Danes tend to run the words together into a mumbled, 'hi-howareyou' without ever expecting someone to answer. It's no more than a verbal filler.

Danes then pick up on the enquiry and politely answer, wondering why their enquirer has already walked away.

Off the top of my head, and not wanting to sound rude, we are very rude and disingenuous, if truth be told. But let's get together for a meal some time, as soon as possible.



*A typical Dane arriving for lunch. Don't ask him how he is unless you actually want to know.*

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# The devil is in the detour



“Risible schmaltz”; “syrupy soft-focus philosophising”; “cod-psychoanalysis”; “it will make me sick”; “pure Busby Berkeley”; “an epic of strategic contrition”; “an apology opera”; “confession as TV drama”; “a stage-managed confessional”; “famous for soft-handling celebrities”. What could all these quotes possibly be referring to?

It was those words, all published on the same day in the same newspaper by just three journalists, which has inspired this article. But what on earth are they writing about, and why the huge level of criticism? And who was Busby Berkeley?

They were all writing in The Daily Telegraph on 10<sup>th</sup> January, the day after it was announced that the TV interview of the disgraced cyclist, Lance Armstrong, would be conducted by Oprah Winfrey on US television on 17<sup>th</sup> January. It was thought that Mr Armstrong often deviated from the truth when asked about drug-taking. The founder of *Change Cycling Now*, Jamie Fuller, was quoted as saying



*Lance Armstrong interviewed by Oprah Winfrey, courtesy of oprah.com.*

“We will hear the convenient truth; the parts that will work best for his image manipulation.” It would seem we don’t like bad people being let off lightly, and we don’t like the media to be complicit when we (the public) think someone has done something they should answer for. We want the naughty ones grilled by a tough interviewer, acting as the people’s interrogator.

We want confession and contrition much more than redaction and redemption. It seems we don’t fully respect Oprah Winfrey in this regard, although there are few who would dispute for contrast the

UK’s own Jeremy Paxman’s stinging ability to give interviewees the Brown Trousers Treatment. The Armstrong interview, in bits, is still on the internet along with significantly more than enough analysis by body language and voice experts. The interview is worth a look, was indeed heavily choreographed, and included Armstrong being asked a series of closed questions with yes/no answers. After an appropriate pause in each case, he duly confessed his sins in plain English.

Other parts of the interview allowed him to be contrite, and to explain and justify himself. It’s at these points you get the sense he is trying to gain our support, understanding, forgiveness and even for us to admire him.

Why does it matter that the interviewer is tough on their interviewees? Because we want to know the whole truth, even if it is painful, humiliating and self-damaging to tell, and not just selected easy extracts.

We can easily spot and don’t like someone getting away with an evasive or equivocal answer, and we don’t like being treated as gullible fools who will swallow any old yarn. We don’t mind if it is put in context, as that adds to accuracy.

Getting this right in the business world can be as hard as walking the sharp edge of a knife.

**So what?** Why might this matter to you?

First, just to be clear, I am not accusing any of you of being the bad ones, but I would like you to appreciate that in any pivotal Q&A situation, be it in the media or in a business setting, we expect those who ask questions to be tough.

*(Continued on page 4)*



**Ewan Pearson**

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



# The devil is in the detour ...continued

Also we expect that respondents who have to answer such questions should be put under some pressure, in order to distinguish between those who should be given the business and those who should not.

Over the last 20 years or so that we have been advising in this space, most people have become more effective presenters. So the questioning phase has become all the more important as a selection tool.

Yet still we find firms do not devote adequate time to the prepping for the likely tough questions, and thus often fluff their way through their answers in an unconvincing manner.

Such a meeting style is common in a new business pitch setting, in a negotiation on costs, and as already noted, in a media interview. We've coached extensively in all these areas, and have some good general advice below to share around.

There is a profound difference between open (infinite) and closed (4 option) questions. Oprah Winfrey had a mix of the two for her interview with the wriggly Lance Armstrong.

Closed questions seek a commitment, although I admit we'd all struggle with any answer to 'Did you lie to the Senate?'. The 4 options of: *yes, no, maybe* and *I don't know* are deliberately limiting.

Armstrong knew that to stand any chance of winning people round he would have to confess, and the one word 'yes' answers he gave really did that, even if they shocked with their simplicity and gall.

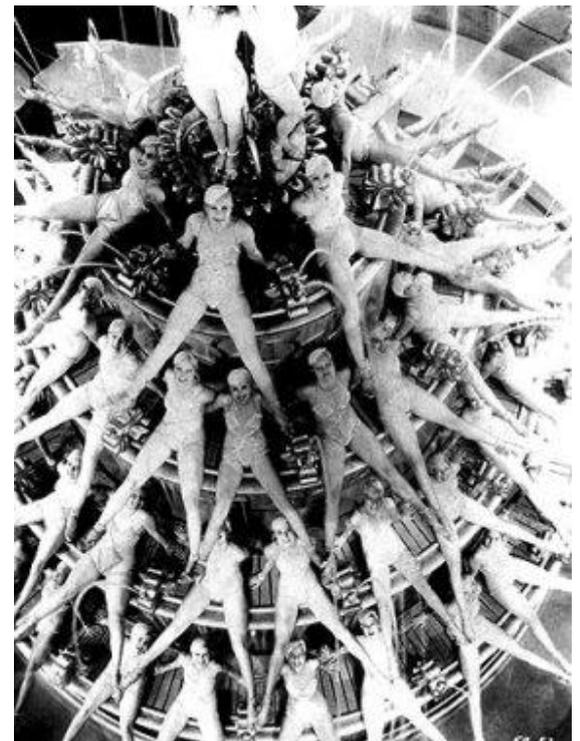
Open questions allow for elaboration, which can be very helpful, but can result in saying too much. They also allow for obfuscation and deviation; they give wriggle room for squirming off the hook. Journalists know this, I hope you do too.

So where can you take these goodies? Well, it sounds obvious, but first work out which type of question you have been asked. You will often have multiples, possibly some open questions, some closed. Second, decide if you want to answer the closed questions. If you don't want to answer,

don't; but if you don't, try to say why, and pass our 'Reasonableness Test' with what you say. If you do want to answer, then please get on with it. Start with the answer! This will set you apart from politicians and time wasters.

For the open questions, go for the short version of the answer first, then elaborate if necessary. Try to find a place to stop, as the next question will be waiting like a plane trying to land at Heathrow. Keep it waiting too long, and it will just divert.

By the way, *Busby Berkeley* was a Hollywood movie director. He created those elaborate productions that often involved complex set-stage dances by a crowd of showgirls, heavily choreographed and exquisitely performed.



*The Busby girls putting on an elaborate production. No comparison with Lance Armstrong here then....*

No, I confess I didn't know who he was either. He died in 1976, having been one of the saviours of the Great Depression of 1920s USA. Many people there 'escaped' by going to see his wonderfully elaborate films. I sense we're not that desperate now, so perhaps things are not so bad after all...

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# Telling stories



*'We are lonesome animals. We spend all of our life trying to be less lonesome. One of our ancient methods is to tell a story begging the listener to say - and to feel - "Yes, that is the way it is, or at least that is the way I feel it." You're not as alone as you thought.'* **John Steinbeck**

Storytelling has been in our blood for thousands of years; it can even be argued that a cave painting created over 30,000 years ago tells a story.

Culture can therefore be influenced and transformed as well as preserved, as it is in many indigenous tribes throughout the world.

In more recent, though still ancient times, Sheherazade is said to have saved her own life by telling more than a thousand stories (known to us as *The Arabian Knights*) and Homer's epic storytelling through *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are still

The indigenous tribes of North America, for example, have kept their great oral tradition of storytelling alive, preserving their culture as well as entertaining, educating and informing each other. Other examples include the Aborigines, Inuits,



**Lynda Russell-Whitaker**



*The power of a storytelling style*

widely studied and quoted to this day.

Richard Rorty, 20<sup>th</sup> Century American philosopher, considered one of the great thinkers of his time, advocated influencing people's feelings rather than their minds, and asserts that one of the best ways to do so is to tell sentimental stories.

He maintained that great stories 'reduce cruelty' and 'expand sympathy'; creating solidarity and enabling us to move towards a just and equitable culture.

Bedouins and the Bushmen of the Kalahari.

As Robert Moss says in his book 'Dreamgates':

*'Australian Aborigines say that the big stories - the stories worth telling and retelling, the ones in which you may find the meaning of your life - are forever stalking the right teller, sniffing and tracking like predators hunting their prey in the bush.'*

*(Continued on page 6)*

**Advice squeezed straight from the experts**



Storytelling appears in many guises. Many stories are told through dance and movement as well as the spoken word; others through the words and music of a song; still others through opera and of course also through film and theatre.

The performer is every bit as important as the writer in conveying the story, so that the audience can sympathise with the characters. If we can't get a feeling for what they are going through, then the story really has very little meaning for us.

We tell stories through poetry, music, theatre, film, still images, paintings – even nursery rhymes (see my previous article!). Our enduring fascination with the genius of Shakespeare's retelling of often well-known stories illustrates how important storytelling is still to adults as much as to children.

So, what of the relevance of stories in our business lives? As Michael Margolis states in his widely distributed e-book '*Believe Me*', the best stories create continuity (from past to present to future). In doing so, the audience is drawn



in rather than alienated. From this standpoint, the author can influence and persuade.

There are also many more of us writing and publishing our own stories, for example on websites, blogs, Facebook and Twitter. Of course, some do so better than others whilst blogging sites proliferate across the internet.

Perhaps more interesting for those of us in the business of coaching people in

speaking persuasively, more and more people are taking to platforms and stages across the commercial world to sell and market our ideas, and ultimately our products and services.

Every day I receive a dozen more emails inviting me to hear this or that speaker on how to make millions through internet marketing, for example, or sell my book, video, etc. Storytelling can be a compelling part of these presentation forms.

We often hear of the 'gift' of the performer or storyteller, but really this is about mastery of your craft.

Developing well-balanced content, perhaps using some images, or even only images, and then using the power of your voice to illustrate the words used is a craft, as much as genetics.

Whether you do this frequently or just occasionally, in a meeting of 5, a pitch to a client with only 10 people in the room, or from a stage to an audience of hundreds, there's something thrilling about an orator who has mastered all the devices at their disposal.

They set the scene for us, and use not only logical facts and figures, but also an appeal to our emotions and our sense of fairness (Aristotle's three appeals) to bring us to their point of view.

Those speakers who can truly entrance and engage an audience do so through these and other tools of our trade, whether it be the pitch of their voice, their modulation or intonation; eye contact with many audience members, as well as a good vocabulary of gestures and facial expressions that align with the words spoken.

Who knows... perhaps our stories can prove Richard Rorty right and make us more humane and sympathetic, through being inspired and transformed by stories in all their many forms.

# A great coming together

At various stages of our progression as presentation advisers, we latch onto ideas that make sense and can be applied to client presentations. After two decades of this two things are apparent: First, there is lots more to learn; and second, there are recurring themes.

I have a theory that there is a distinct connection between four of those recurring separate themes. Are they all saying the same thing, are they variations on a theme, or are they independent?

These themes are:

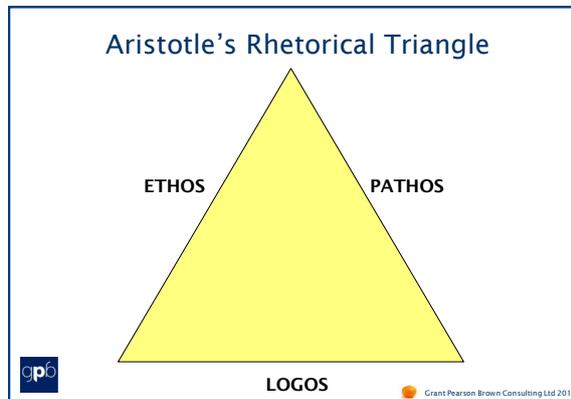
- Message and Personality - Key Goals
- The Central and Peripheral paths to persuasion – by Petty & Cacioppo
- The Rhetorical Triangle – Logos, Ethos and Pathos - by Aristotle
- Behaviour Styles – Measuring assertion and responsiveness.

The first theme is the simple idea that just two outcomes should be achieved in any presentation. First that your message is understood, is persuasive and can be remembered afterwards – at least the key points; and second that your personality has also to make an impact in terms of credibility, competence and inspiration. They are not always equal partners as situations vary. Listening to the weather forecast is surely much more about message than personality.

A second idea is the concept of Central and Peripheral paths to the brain. Developed by Petty & Cacioppo. They believe that there are 'Two Routes' to persuasion: The Central route is about the logic of the message, and the Peripheral route relies on less objective measures such as the attractiveness of the speaker, their voice and other cues.

My theory becomes more complex at this stage, but I can see a connection between the 'Two Routes' and the mantra of *message* and *personality* listed above.

Then we have the influence of Aristotle. Logos Ethos and Pathos march around demanding our attention and understanding. We describe these three in the form of a 'Rhetorical Triangle':



For example, Waitrose has the strap-line: 'Quality Food honestly priced'. This appeals to **Logos** and **Ethos**:



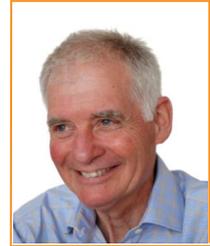
Sainsbury's strap line 'try something new today' is using **Pathos** as a driver. It says: 'Be daring, eat what you have not eaten before!':

Sainsbury's  
Try something new today

Asda's 'Always low prices' is simply in the **Logos** category:



(Continued on page 8)



Alastair Grant

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# A great coming together ....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.

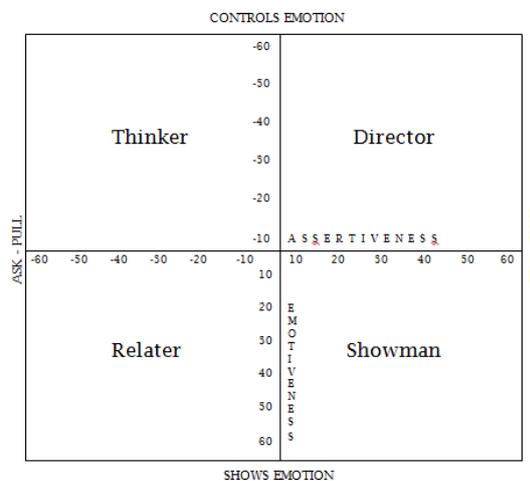
We coach and advise individuals to perform at their best in the toughest situations including: Presentations, New Business Pitches, Business Development, Negotiating, Media Interviews, Telephone Calls and Document Writing.

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.

Analysis of these suggest that Message/Central Route and Logos are related, but do Personality/Peripheral fit alongside Ethos and Pathos? I suspect both Ethos and Pathos affect the quality of the message and the personality of the presenter.

My fourth theme is 'Behaviour Styles'. We all have different behaviours based on how assertive and responsive we are. There are many versions of this but all are similar to the model below:



The 'Director' style is assertive, controlled and results driven: Don't waste their time.

The 'Showman' style is sociable and uninhibited: They get bored easily with detail.

The 'Relater' style is warm and friendly: Trust and rapport is important to them.

The 'Thinker' style is more precise and pay attention to detail. Message logic is important to them.

Behaviour Styles shows us that we must adapt our presentation to meet the style of the listener. '*Different strokes for different folks*' neatly sums it up.

So in conclusion: I believe these four themes do not conflict but complement each other. Here's what I mean:

Of course we should aim to hit the ball out of the stadium with a logical, clear and memorable message. But we, as speakers should also be credible and trusted.

Petty & Cacioppo's work shows us that if we fail in the Central or logical route, then the decision will be based on Peripheral cues instead.

And Aristotle shows that the message may not rely on Logos alone but that Pathos and Ethos are equally powerful drivers.

Finally we typically take account of our counterparties' Behaviour Styles and adapt all the above according to how they tick.

Now for a bit of shopping, but who should I choose to shop with???

## Stop Press: Draft Vox/GPB academic research paper produced

The first draft of our research paper on the voice has been produced and forwarded for academic peer group review. It asked the following question: "To what extent do the listener's own vocal features influence his/her judgments of the speaker on the dimensions of: pleasantness, dynamisms, competence, and clarity?"

Thanks to the many clients that helped with this project, you will be the first to get the results when we publish!



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