

Superior Force



Ewan Pearson

If two forces are equal and opposite, nothing moves; irresistible force meets immovable object. To develop skills, motivation must exceed inertia.

During lockdown, lots of people have binged on box sets. We're no exception: my family watched every Star Wars movie, even the ones we don't like! It got me thinking about that hackneyed line "*Use the Force, Luke*". Luke seemed to have a lot of trouble training himself to do so. The same it seems applies to us mortals, when it comes to learning to become better at using our voices, at doing the right things with our faces and gestures, and speaking the best set of words.

To understand this better we'll need a bit of school-level Physics, most of which I have long forgotten and had to look up. Newton's First Law says colloquially that something won't move (or change speed) unless you shove it. His Second Law famously says " $F=MA$ ", where Force (newtons) = Mass (kg) x Acceleration (m/s²). So, Force is described here as accelerating things, e.g. from stationary to a decent pace forwards. Thereafter, apparently, no Force is required to maintain speed, but that assumes we're in a vacuum, and we're not. There is the force of resistance, which can stop things from starting, and will slow things down after they have got going unless 'something' overcomes the resistance. So, we also need to mention Power (watts) = Energy (joules)/Time elapsed (seconds). In Physics, Power is a measure of strength, e.g. of an engine to pull or push an object through wind resistance or up a hill, or here of a person to overcome a psychological obstacle.



Force is required to start moving forwards and to overcome the inertia

How does this darned Physics apply to you and GPB?

Simples! We coach and advise people to develop their skills and knowledge and thus competence and persuasiveness. This requires them to have *Force* to start moving forwards and specifically to overcome the inertia to getting started, and then to have *Power* to keep things moving against the resistance to change, which can be large or small. I have had several conversations over the past six months with coachees about just this.

Here, the sources of *Inertia* include a lack of time and a personality type that is resistance to change, fear of being foolish and of failure, and simply not knowing what to do. The sources of *Force* that we see include a key event (e.g. an IPO, fundraising roadshow, pitch or a wedding), or your boss telling or asking you to do it.

Best of all is the *Force* of self-motivation, that comes from an internal drive to improve oneself, possibly with a pay rise and/or ego boost at the end of it. Anticipation of such change, and making the change, can induce high states of nervousness and stress, some of which will be motivational, others destructive.

Then we need *Power*, to keep going against the headwind. It seems to me that this comes from the same sources as the *Force*, but as it's later in time, it can be high or low, as can its opposing *Force*, and the latter will produce a reversion to the pre-condition (aka 'going backwards').

This *Force* can be huge, even clinically

Advice squeezed straight from the experts



Superior Force (cont...)

identified as 'glossophobia', the fear of public speaking, that can be triggered even months ahead of a known key event with serious mental health and sleep deprivation consequences.

We are often asked how to become a more confident speaker, and deal with nerves and stress when presenting, which is anecdotally known as one of the scariest work activities. Having to give a 'difficult' speech will cause a big increase in Cortisol levels, and more hesitation¹. Heart Rate and Speech Rate are known to rise significantly, Disfluencies such as 'umm' and 'err' and repetition too.

The superficial answer is that this *Confidence* comes from (a) knowing you've got a great *Story* to tell (which comes from good content creation), plus (b) *Practicing* until you know you can tell it well (aka rehearsals), (c) *Attitude* (a positive mental one) and (d) *Motivation* (see also *Force* and *Power* above) to do the hard graft to get all of that done.

Or, for the mathematicians, $C = S + P + A + M$. Yes, Confidence comes from SPAM! (other good tinned meats are also available).

I want to focus more on *Power* here. Put most simply, a presenter has to find "a power to push forwards that is felt to be much stronger than the power of the nerves pushing them back, and thus overcome the psychological obstacle". It's easy to say but where does this forwards power come from?

In our experience, it is unique to each person, and often is a power they need our help to uncover. Our key questions for this include 'why *you?*' and 'why are you *really* doing this presentation?' If there is a common theme in answers it is that there is a 'bigger cause' that has required them to speak on this topic to this audience at this

time. Here are two examples:

Firstly, a young woman who had already interviewed twice for a promotion as a radiologist and had been so nervous that she could not hold it together. For her third and final chance at promotion she came to us nearly a year before the key interview and presentation. We found her Power came from her desire to share more widely her expertise in spotting breast cancer diagnoses earlier, in order to save lives and reduce serious operations. We got to her have this front of mind when preparing and on the key days, and we were delighted to hear that she got the job. Many women with earlier breast cancer diagnoses can be grateful that she found the Power to defeat her nerves.



Story, practice, attitude and motivation

Secondly, a young man who had both his wedding speech and then a high probability of a major shareholder conference speech to give. We found the Power for his wedding to be in his love for his fiancée and therefore the desire to ensure he started married life in just the right way. For the conference it was the sharing of a business strategy that was both admired and profitable compared with peers, that others could benefit from. The result? He gave a knockout wedding speech and is now happily married. The conference? That was cancelled (for now) due to Covid-19, but he may be back on stage in 2021...

These examples, among many we have seen, show what's possible, but to put it most simply, the Power driving you to do these stressful things has to easily exceed the Forces pushing you back. Time to call Luke....

By Ewan Pearson

References

- Buchanan, T., Laures-Gore, J., & Duff, M. (2014). Acute stress reduces speech fluency *Biological Psychology*, 97, 60-66 DOI: 10.1016/j.biopsycho.2014.02.005

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