



Ewan Pearson

# The best salesmen aren't salesmen

The best people in sales focus on buying, not selling, and (sorry folks) the best at it are women.

**W**hen I was a kid, my Dad was for a while Head of Sales for a diesel engine subsidiary of Hawker Siddeley, a B2B business. Recently this has struck me as odd because I've never thought he could 'sell' me or my siblings anything, in the sense that he was not very persuasive when it came to where we should go on holiday, what car we should buy (or its colour) or where we should live. Perhaps it's because we'd be F2C (father to child) not B2B. That, and re-reading Simon Sinek's 2009 book 'Start with why' got me thinking.

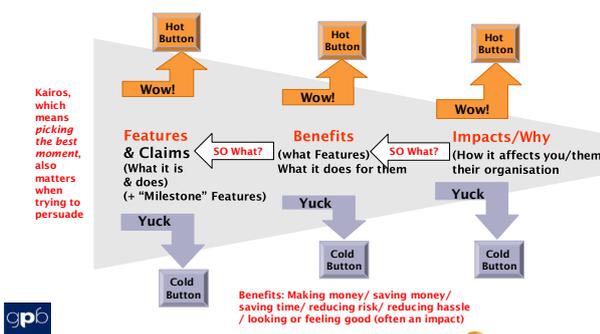
My Dad trained as an engineer, so he knew all about the mechanicals of an engine, and its performance details. He could explain engines to almost anyone, from the expert to the ignorant, including his own kids (F2C), and what he did **was to make** it easy for us to understand. There lies **Lesson 1** for salespeople: make it easy to understand. It also explains in part why I and two of my three brothers have been interested in cars to this day. I always felt though that my mother

was the more persuasive of the two (M2C).

**Lesson 2:** Buyers buy, so focus on what the buyers want. Duh! Part of our work at GPB is to help our clients to sell stuff. Often in my case it's an investment fund, but *inter alia* we also help clients to sell audits, advisory work, cars, planes, phones and drugs (the legal and good ones that they prefer to call pharmaceuticals). As we are 'pan-economy', in fact we help to sell everything, even people (not slave trade but getting hired). What we see all the time is that our clients seem to focus on what they are selling, and not on what the buyer wants. The good news is that - with a will - that is easy to fix, as all it requires is to hold back on the selling bit until the trust-building (see my article in #77) and the asking bits have been done. If you get the asking (and listening to responses) right, then proposing a product or service to match with good features and benefits should come fairly naturally.

*Buyers buy, so focus on what we the buyers want.*

GPB's F.B.I. concept (Image Source: © GPB)



**Lesson 3:** Why do buyers buy? Features, Benefits and Impacts (or F.B.I). It's a trope for us to say to clients 'Buyers don't buy the features of your service or product, they

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In this edition:

The best salesmen aren't salesmen

By Ewan Pearson

Ewan suggests that what is needed is not so much 'selling skills', and instead a deeper understanding of why buyers buy.

Optimising Persuasive Impact: Pull AND Push, but Pull first!

By Desmond Harney

Des looks at Push and Pull techniques of Persuasion and reminds us that it ain't just WHAT you do, but the way that you do it. That's what gets results.

Deliberate Practice

By the GPB Team

We postulate that it's not talent or genes that determine excellence but this weird concept called Deliberate Practice. Emma Raducanu is a great exponent of this.

## The best salesmen aren't salesmen (cont...)

*buy what those features do for them*'. We also share the trope 'WII-FM, aka everyone's favourite radio station - What's In It For Me'. We have to say this because our initial analysis of clients' attempts to persuade often focus on features, with the benefits implicit rather than explicit. The buyers thus have to work out the benefits for themselves and they often don't or can't. In some cases, the claimed 'benefits' could even be disbenefits as we don't need or want them (see Lesson 2).

But stating benefits is not enough, we need to understand *why* a buyer buys. This brings me to Sinek's provocative book, and his review, particularly of Apple Inc., of why a buyer buys. Yes, it's because of what the benefits are, but for enduring organisations (he cites Apple and United Airlines) it's much more. It's because in all their sales approaches they focus on the effect their products have on their buyers. We have for more than two decades called this the '*Impact*', which is the ultimate effect on the person buying, and/or the effect on their organisation. Sinek calls it the '*why*', and about 2,370 years ago good ol' Aristotle (bless him) called it *Telos* (today we'd call this Purpose, see my article in #76). It generates loyalty, not just purchases. So this is not new, and Sinek concedes that.

**Lesson 4:** Be a woman. Yes, I know in most cases you can't do much about this, and even raising it is highly controversial. Despite his qualifications, my father may have started with a slight biological disadvantage, as he is a man not a woman. Why? Because clients and customers prefer, slightly, to buy from

women. In an echo of the infamous WII-FM question about the Romans in Monty Python's Life of Brian, I am compelled to ask '*what have women got that men don't have?*' Well, other than the more obvious gender differences, a Harvard report in May 2020<sup>2</sup>, quoting research by Xactly (a US-based SaaS company) showed that women outperform men in sales.

Xactly cited that 86% of sales women hit quota, versus 78% for men; that's significantly better. I can only hope the research was robust. The Harvard report also cited ZS (a consulting firm). Their research of over 500 salespeople in various B2B and B2C sectors concluded that there was gender

difference on some of their seven key sales capabilities: "*women were more likely to emphasize connecting, shaping solutions, and collaborating, while high-performing men relied more on improving and driving outcomes. For analyzing and influencing, there was no measurable difference between the genders*"<sup>2</sup>.

**86% of sales women hit quota, versus 78% for men; that's significantly better.**



A salesperson working in an office on a virtual call (image source: Unsplash, 2021)<sup>4</sup>.

The Harvard report also suggests that the Covid pandemic has and will continue to favour saleswomen: "*the shift to remote selling using video and digital channels will have lasting impact on sales. This will boost the power of women, as capabilities at*

*which women excel align perfectly with the morphing world of sales and the evolving needs of customers*"<sup>2</sup>.

The key skills differences appear to be in '*connecting, shaping solutions, and collaborating*'. I am sure we men could

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# The best salesmen aren't salesmen (cont...)

step up to the plate and get better at those aspects of selling.

I do wonder whether this observation favouring women in sales is a recent thing. Solutions selling as a sales concept was apparently developed by Frank Watts in 1975 at Wang Laboratories<sup>3</sup>, and Huthwaite came up with SPIN selling in 1983<sup>3</sup>. My Dad's generation of buyers and sellers were all men, and I *think* from the various bits of old video footage I've seen (but I don't *know*) that B2B buyers back then assumed they were buying most things from men. There were few skilled/trained women in the commercial workforce 100 years ago, although that improved quickly due to WW2, and you see more women in TV ads from the 1950s onwards, initially in B2C areas such as consumer goods and especially household appliances. It is a blessed relief that women now seem to have equality of opportunity in sales; women may even have a behavioural advantage over men in those situations.

Harvard's report also mentions the low % of women in B2B sales, "including wholesale and manufacturing (27%) and financial services (30%)<sup>2</sup>". Is there a difference between selling B2B and B2C? Candidly, I don't think the difference is material, not any more. The cliché that 'people buy people' is probably true across B2B and B2C sectors, whether what's sold is a cheaper product or the more costly consulting/legal/accounting services.

**Lesson 5:** Whether man or woman, you can do something about your appearance and your voice. Ah, this is where we come in. We have worked to improve the way people sound and look when presenting, pitching selling and negotiating. To be clear, we don't coach the same things in these spaces.

But we can and do profoundly improve the way people sound, for example in terms of Fluency, Pitch Modulation and Information Output Rate. In the visual space, we have always coached the areas of Facial Expression, Eye Contact and Gestures, but have enjoyed, during Covid, adding more advice on the areas of how you look and sound online. We've written about both areas extensively in other articles, so please go have a look via our website ([www.gpb.eu](http://www.gpb.eu)) if you

<b>Vocal aspects</b>	Pitch Height, Modulation and Range
	Volume and Volume Range
	Information Output Rate
	Fluency
<b>Visual aspects</b>	Facial Expression
	Eye Contact and Gaze Aversion
	Gestures and Tells
	Posture and Movement
<b>Both</b>	Online Communication

GPB's Table of key areas of vocal and visual communication (Image Source: © GPB)

would like to know more about those aspects. For more background on 'why', my colleague, Des Harney, wrote about that in his article in our Journal #73, Summer 2020.

By Ewan Pearson

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# Optimising Persuasive Impact: Pull AND Push - but Pull first!



Desmond Harney

Develop and Combine the power of your persuasive 'muscles' - in the right order.

**A**s Ewan's article above suggests, becoming the most persuasive communicators we can be is a multi-faceted process. When trying to achieve change in the actions or thoughts of others *we must flex several different persuasion 'muscles' at the same time* if we hope to optimise our effectiveness and success rate. But it's also important to be aware there's an optimal order in which to flex them.

Anybody who has unexpectedly spent time at home recently may well have found themselves on the receiving end of some very unpersuasive "cold" approaches from people trying to sell them something. Whether via phone, email, LinkedIn or some other medium — and whether they needed that something or not. Since such approaches forgo some basic principles of Effective Persuasion, most of us (not unreasonably) remain resistant to them.

Worse still has been the 'surge' in financial and other scams during coronavirus lockdown. Research published in August 2020 by Barclays Bank showed a 66 per cent increase in reported scams in the first six months of last year<sup>1</sup>. While Which? claims that, of the £355.3m lost to UK bank transfer scams in the first half of 2021 (a +71% YoY increase) 'just £121.7m was reimbursed to victims – only 42.4% of the overall losses. Not only is more money being lost, but less money is being repaid to fraud victims'<sup>2</sup>. Such stats might well negatively impact our perception and reception of all cold contact, making us more suspicious.

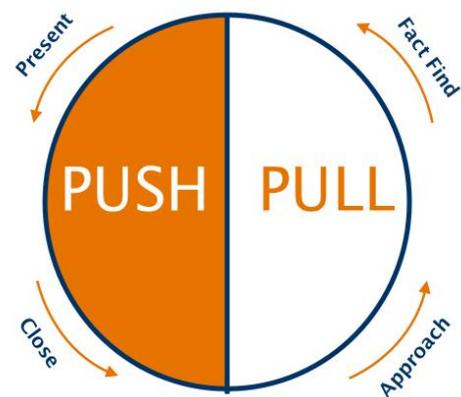
But what makes even non-scam "cold" calls feel so... errrm, cold? And what can we learn from them which might help us develop more successful and persuasive approaches to our communication more generally?

One reason why so much cold contact is unpersuasive is that insufficient time is invested in developing **Rapport** and **Understanding**. Cold-callers instead play a numbers game and often use the scare tactics too. Approaching a large quantity of unqualified leads, they hope that at least a small proportion (perhaps just one!?) might miraculously convert or progress. They're prepared to waste a lot of our time - and theirs.

**One reason much cold contact is unpersuasive is that insufficient time is invested developing Rapport and Understanding**

Without gaining enough relevant, valuable information and developing rapport, cold calls tend to start in what can be called the Push phase,

by prematurely presenting or proposing their product or service. Often there is a self-fulfilling question at the end. And while some Push is an important element of the persuasive process (c. 30% of it) it's rarely successful if an audience has not been made receptive already, or warmed up.



Data source: Sheppard Moscow<sup>3</sup>  
(Image Source: © GPB)

It's always worth remembering that people do things for their own reasons, not for ours. So we should try to identify those reasons, incorporating and highlighting them in our discourse.

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# Optimising Persuasive Impact: Pull AND Push - but Pull first! (cont...)

This audience-centric model for Effective Persuasion applies well to sales and business development. Because getting influencing wrong results in an expensive waste of resources: time, energy, money, and valuable opportunities. But it's also relevant to other scenarios that involve "selling" an idea, presenting, or persuading.

One of the most popular articles in our Speak Up Journal archive explores how this Pull-Push approach can usefully inform important communication and influencing done by business leaders. See: <https://www.gpb.eu/2012/12/push-or-pull-what-influencing-technique-should-we-use.html>

Using the Push technique first is rarely successful in the longer-term, so it's positioned in the second half of the diagram above. Starting from the bottom of the circle (at "6 o'clock"), moving anti-clockwise, we advise that you use a Pull approach first.

### "Pull" techniques

By this term, we mean drawing individuals into participating and sharing. Research (see Sheppard-Moscow et al, 1983<sup>3</sup>) specifically analysed influencing strategies over several hundred interviews, role-plays and test situations, with fascinating and contrasting results:

- 70% of attempts to influence consisted mostly - if not entirely - of Push efforts
- Over 60% of those Push efforts failed - even when possessing positional advantages
- Of the other 30% (predominantly Pull attempts) less than 25% failed completely. The majority achieved most of their objectives.

**Cold calling might sometimes achieve a sale, but it will rarely lead to a long-term client relationship.**

Observations also showed that commitment to (or compliance with)

Push demands tended not to last long, once pressure is removed. Developing some inner conviction, a typical result of Pull strategy, is far more effective. What people tend to do most instinctively (i.e. Push) produces very sub-optimal results.

Cold calling might sometimes achieve a sale, but it will rarely lead to a long-term client relationship. Whilst failure (the more common result) can drain a sales person's confidence, sap morale, and create uncertainty - and rapidly permeate an entire organisation. It is widely reported that staff turnover in the call centre industry is around 26% annually, considerably above the national average of 15%, impacting training costs, recruitment fees, loss in output and the concern that other staff may follow suit<sup>1,4</sup>.



Further detail - the Pull-Push model, Data source: Sheppard Moscow<sup>3</sup> (Image Source: © GPB)

A 'Pull' technique starts with the "Approach" phase. This has 2 sub-elements, as you see in the diagram. The key is to engage the other party by being genuinely curious about their opinions, needs, goals, preferences and behaviours.

As this more detailed version of the model shows, we suggest that Pull efforts should take up the majority of effort and time when selling (c.70%).

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## Optimising Persuasive Impact: Pull AND Push - but Pull first! (cont...)

As they allow the counter-party to do most of the talking, “Pull” techniques give sales people less control of situations. It can also seem less efficient than simply Presenting and trying to Close. But by Pulling first, you establish a valuable dialogue, generally providing useful and important information - as well as longer-lasting engagement. It reaps benefits for both parties, covering the vital *Ethos* (trust) aspect, which develops credibility.

The Fact Finding phases involves active, deep listening, along with skilful questioning, using probing and prompting skills. These should build naturally and progressively, optimising the information gathering and further developing the relationship. The table below has further details:

going to cut through a lot of this potential background noise, and instead be as relevant, compelling and memorable as possible for your audience of potential clients. And that’s something best done using Pull techniques first. This is true whether pitching for business or when communicating in other settings.

The Pull phases help to refine your key messages, as with a relationship successfully built, and valuable information gained, you can then more confidently present tailored ideas. Audiences will listen more readily and receptively to your messages, rather than resisting.

In his Dr. Doolittle stories, children’s author Hugh Lofting describes the *Pushmi-Pullyu*. A fabulous, two-headed

PULL Behaviours (from 6 o’clock, anti-clockwise)	PUSH Behaviours (from 12 o’clock, anti clockwise)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking about values and principles</li> <li>• Questions about needs and objectives</li> <li>• Probing for feelings and perceptions</li> <li>• Asking for explanations and examples</li> <li>• Listening and following up</li> <li>• Inviting ideas, helping to enlarge them</li> <li>• Encouraging new perspectives</li> <li>• Respecting the other party’s integrity and/or ideas</li> <li>• Inviting logical reasoning and the expression of preferences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statements of fact, making speeches</li> <li>• Statements about objectives</li> <li>• Demands for agreement on specifics</li> <li>• Demands for commitment</li> <li>• Expressions of opinion</li> <li>• Defining priorities and options</li> <li>• Insisting on your own particular perspective</li> <li>• Contradicting/denying the other’s views</li> <li>• Ridiculing or “putting down” opposition or disagreement.</li> </ul>

*Some typical Pull and Push behaviours*

With many businesses specifically set up to manage cold calling, either for themselves or as a service for clients, the post-Lockdown (post-Furlough) return to work may well again prompt increased levels of such contact. If your aim is to persuade, however, you’ll probably want to know that your own organisation’s key messages are

creature perfectly adapted to thrive in its natural habitat. Despite appearing to possess two competing halves, it’s made clear that these apparently opposing parts are in fact entirely complementary and symbiotic.

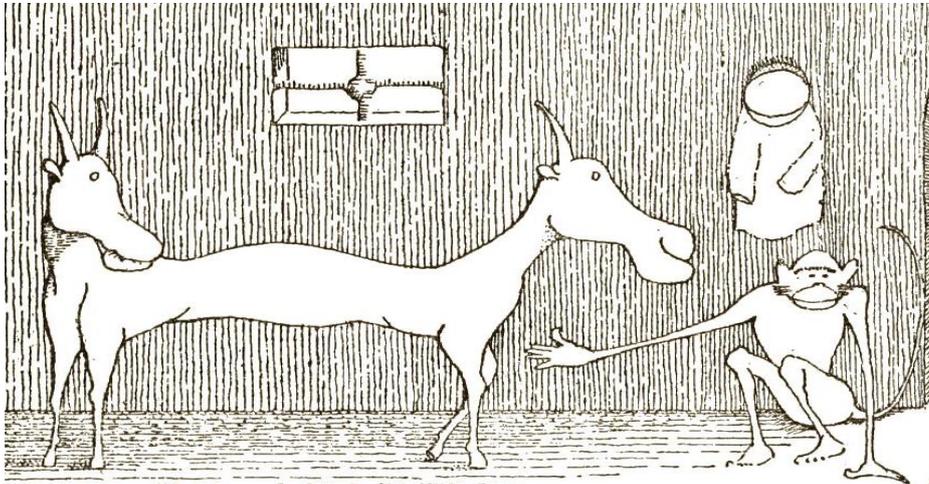
The Pull and Push elements of GPB’s Persuasion model are similarly complementary parts. The main tweak we suggest is that you Pull first before

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# Optimising Persuasive Impact: Pull AND Push - but Pull first! (cont...)

Pushing, weighting more of your effort and time on the former. A *Pullme-Pushme*, perhaps?



Meet Hugh Lofting's *Pushmi-Pullyu* (Image Source: Wikipedia, 2021)<sup>7</sup>

Adopting the best order of their use is all-important. We advise that you start with Approach and Fact-Find phases. And only then Present a relevant case and move to the Close. That should save you a lot of audience resistance and wasted effort. Cold Callers would learn a lot from reading this article.

The *Pushmi-Pullyu* claimed that its great-grandfather had been the very last unicorn. Selling organisations and their sales teams can reduce their own existential risks (and wasted effort) by deploying more persuasive approaches to communication. Let's, ahem, push for that.

By Desmond Harney

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## Deliberate Practice

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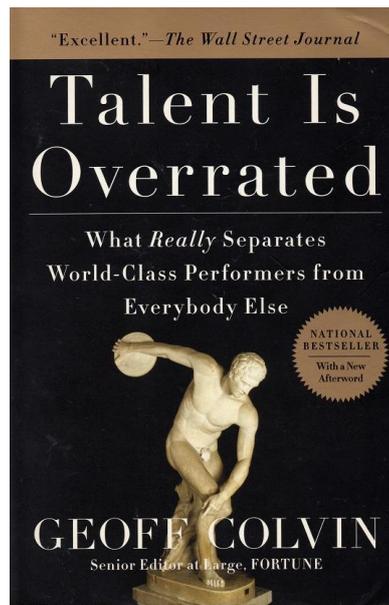
GPB Team

It's deliberate practice, not talent or genes, that really determines who becomes a great communicator

We often swap book recommendations with our clients. One recent example of this was the CEO of a US-based consulting firm, who recommended 'Talent Is Overrated' by Geoff Colvin, first published in 2008.

Mr. Colvin's main job has been as a senior editor at large for Fortune magazine, in the USA. He has also done a stint as a daily business commentator for the CBS radio network.

It is a book about our subtitle above, but was recommended by this CEO to us with the comment "*that's what you do!*", meaning the approach we take to coaching our clients to become more effective and persuasive communicators using Deliberate Practice.



*Talent is Overrated by Geoff Colvin*

We hope Mr. Colvin will forgive us for not knowing the term 'Deliberate Practice' before hearing about the book. Reading through, it's clear that he does indeed describe our approach, and cites many examples of how individuals have practiced in a particular way in order to become world-class performers, distinct and separate from everybody else. He's sure it's not genes or culture or money.

So, what is 'Deliberate Practice (DB)'? The definitions in the book are brief and a little vague, but Colvin starts by explaining that it is not one activity, but a *large concept* that few people or businesses deploy, and which

applies over a wide range of areas of excellence, from ballet dancing to medical diagnosis, to insurance sales.

By implication it applies to presenting well and to tennis too, which neatly reminds me to mention Emma

Raducanu, the UK's latest tennis sensation. Virtually unheard of before Wimbledon 2021, she is now world famous for winning 12 matches in a row, going from the qualifying rounds to the final without losing a single set, to claim the US Open on 11<sup>th</sup> Sept. No-one has ever done that before, at any age. Amazing.

Much has been written about Emma Raducanu, but we've been paying attention to articles and broadcasts covering her highly focused training regime over the past 10 years (she's only 18 now).

It's very clear from this that she has an extra eye for detail, breaks down the components of playing shots, understands her equipment well, and developing skills at the molecular level. She then practices those skills with

perfection as the goal. She has also sought the advice of experts and listened to, then explored, what they said. That is Deliberate Practice. It very much reminds us of Sir David Brailsford's Marginal Gains in cycling.



*Emma Raducanu during the third round at The Championships Wimbledon 2021 (image source: Alamy Stock Photo).*

The book's definitions continues to explain that DB is important, hard, and constrained not physically but mentally. One clear description is '*required concentration so intense that it is exhausting*'... and '*not inherently enjoyable*'<sup>2</sup>.

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## Deliberate Practice (cont...)

We often have 1-1 client sessions where the client says something like ‘wow that was so tiring, I had no idea that speaking could involve so much work!’ Maybe Colvin’s term is so obvious that it needs no explanation. We differ. And enough of a recital from a book! How do we at GPB think this concept applies to becoming so good a presenter that you are excellent at it?

To us, Deliberate Practice starts by breaking down the act of communicating, presenting, giving a speech, media interview or doing a pitch, into its main components, then breaking those down again, and working on deliberate skill development in each sub-component. And yes, it turns out that it is hard, and so it requires a high level of motivation. Motivation is built on Purpose, and although Colvin thinks it’s not inherently enjoyable, we differ here as there are ways to practice that make it enjoyable whilst doing the hard graft work. Or maybe we’re just masochists.

To us, the main components of spoken communication are:

1. The content, meaning the narrative supported by any visual aids shown
2. The voice used to deliver that content, and
3. The visual, or non-verbal, aspects.

We further break these three down into their sub-components:

The **content** category includes key messages, evidence and arguments, differentiation, structure and sequence, language style and word selection, visuals (not just PPT but including mental imagery and physical objects), the level of complexity. This category is the only one for written communication, an area where we also coach using Deliberate Practice

The **voice** category includes: various aspects of pitch, pacing and pausing, fluency, volume, and articulation. We have at least 9 main elements here.

The **visual** category includes facial expression and its variety and congruence, eye contact patterns and gaze aversion, posture, movement, and gestures (6 types of these).

We have built coaching practicals in all sub-categories, and we tailor them to each client’s needs so that we get the most skills development in the shortest time. Our unique set of Scientific Analyses of each of the three component parts helps greatly to measure and thus identify what someone’s speaking and writing assets are, and what the main areas for development are.

Here are some examples of GPB’s Deliberate Practice exercises:

- The ‘Fire Bell Test’ for deriving key messages
- ‘F.B.I.’ to uncover more powerful differences and arguments in support of a case
- ‘Just a Minute’ to develop fluency
- Pitch pattern exercise to develop modulation and range
- Gesture practicals where we apply congruent gestures to set scripts.

We are sure that you’ll have seen Deliberate Practice in your various fields of work. The remaining factor is the degree of willingness or motivation to develop. For our clients, this is generally good, as they are driven to become excellent. Wherever it starts, the good news is that motivation is not hard-coded, it can develop, and we’re pleased to say that this is the case for many of our clients, who have become lifelong ‘students of communication’.

By the GPB Team

### References:

1. Colvin, G. (2010). *Talent is Overrated*. Page 7.
2. Colvin, G. (2010). *Talent is Overrated*. Page 8.

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