



BP makes an oily mess

There are many columns inches already written about the communication and PR errors that the 2 bosses at BP made: Carl-Henric Svanberg went from invisible to inexplicable, and Tony Hayward went from inactive through introspective to indolent. And we've only seen one BP man who spoke with an American accent, Robert Dudley, who it seems will be taking the flack from here on. We won't re-hash the sad story here. Instead we want to share with you what we as a team at GPB think these 2 men at BP should have done differently, and what the rest of us can do differently now that we've had this severe wake-up call.

It's important to acknowledge that the context here was that BP was on a hiding to nothing. The US government wants blood in return for their spilt oil, it has just been a question of how much blood. The BP pair had thorough preparation, but the result of this in the case of both Svanberg and Hayward was very unsatisfactory.

Carl Svanberg, BP's Chairman, has only landed on the media recently, and his lack of exposure shows.

his toes talked about the 'small people'. No, this was not an accidental, innocent and forgivable slip (or slick) of the tongue; he said this phrase THREE times.

Lesson 2: Ensure brain is switched on before putting mouth in gear.

Once you have done that, actually think what you're going to say before you say it. Then don't. Instead, be your own best adviser, and realise that modesty, contrition, humility and



Picture Source: <https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/british-petroleum-chief-executive-tony-hayward-listens-news-photo/102147216>

Lesson 1: If you are going to represent one of the World's largest companies, get some ongoing media training, some presentation and voice coaching and some public speaking training.

On 16th June he came out on the White House lawn, and with an unchanging enigmatic smile and neutral tone shared with us the key moments of his long meeting with Barack Obama. Then in answer to his last question, he put foot squarely into his mouth, and through

sympathy for the plight of your public will provide the least worst outcome. Overall score: Obama: 1, Svanberg: 0. Own goal. Many thought this would draw a line under 2 months of awful PR. No such luck.

Tony Hayward, BP's CEO, is a totally different specimen. He had spent weeks in the USA, mostly in Florida, trying to sort out the mess. Good, but where were the emergency board meetings?

Lesson 3: Look busy by being busy, engaging the whole Board.

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All the while the US public and politicians have attacked him. He has made a string of gaffes:

"There's no one who wants this over more than I do. I would like my life back" (after a week) and "it's only a relatively tiny bit of oil in a very big ocean". Oops!

Lesson 4: Nobody cares if you're tired, frustrated, angry or depressed. They just want the problem fixed, and not for you to belittle the size of that problem.

Hayward's piece de resistance was saved for his appearance in front of the House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee on 17th June. He was in there for 7 hours. For the first 80 minutes he listened to speeches filled with vitriol, disdain and political points scoring hurled by a succession of US Senators. Then he got to make a short speech. This is where we'll kick off.



Media Interview

Source: Adobe Stock

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Hayward delivered his scripted speech in an unemotional monotone. Dead pan, flat, dull, impassive, and disinterested are words you could use (and have been used) to describe this vocal style. His facial expressions were very limited and neutral, his eye contact high, forwards and sustained, and his blinking rate shot up at one point from 20 to 60/minute

(the meaning of this is disputed). His body language was highly controlled and minimalist, with one hand on top of the other, occasionally clasped, sipping coffee or fiddling, his posture forwards but almost static.

The key thing is that nothing in his voice or his face supported the authenticity of his content, and this totally undermined his position. He was doubtless advised to take this approach by his legal advisers, and certainly we'd support the generality of this – that he should not say anything that would create a mountain of legal action from individual and corporate America.

We're mostly happy with what he said, but not the way he said any of it. No conviction, sincerity, determination, or sorrow. Consequently any goodwill he had at the start was removed and replaced with frustration, anger and resentment. We would not support the style used in his answers, but would instead advise much more communication on an emotional level, both vocally and visually. It did not surprise us then that the senators attacked him for this lack of interest or involvement, for example: "We hope you would have had more candour in your responses", and "You're kicking the can down the road".

Most of the focus in preparation was placed on making sure the content did not implicate BP any further. Unfortunately, this has been at the expense of how the content sounded and looked which has meant Svanberg and Hayward are not believed anyway!

In a further twist General Stanley McChrystal has taken a leaf out of Hayward's book by making offensive comments in the Rolling Stone Magazine about Obama and his deputies. For example he described James Jones, National Security adviser as a "clown". McChrystal was called to The White House for a dressing down, where he was fired.

We can all learn from their mistakes, let's make sure we do.

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