



Richard Byford

Fortune favours the...canny

Grant Pearson Brown
Consulting Ltd.

The Presentation &
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Advice *squeezed*
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In this edition:

Fortune favours the...canny
By Richard Byford
Our guest writer looks at
how cost saving can be
expensive

“Sing, sing a song”
By Ewan Pearson
Ewan summarises the key
findings of GPB’s latest voice
research.

Brevity, Clarity & Persuasion
By Alastair Grant
Do you say what you mean?
Alastair explains how.

**Seven seconds that will last
forever**
By Carl Schreiter
Carl looks at the value of
getting it right.

**The science of persuasion.
Part 1: Logic**
by Tim Farish
Tim looks at how what you
say and how you say it
impacts your audience.

BP makes an oily mess.
GPB studies the mistakes
made by BP.

This month we welcome this article from our associate, Richard Byford.

Not long ago I attended a meeting in a large military camp. Rather than have me lost amongst the buildings and corridors, my host asked a colleague to collect me from the car park. I was greeted by Andrew, a smartly turned-out naval officer.

As we walked across the acres of car park and between ranks of anonymous redbrick outhouses, we started chatting. He, apparently, had only been in the navy a couple of years, having previously worked for a brewery as a beer salesman. He joked that it seemed to him like a natural progression.

Andrew asked me about my work and I explained how I helped public sector organisations choose suppliers and solutions for complex projects. With a smile, he told me his own story about a project where the procurement had not gone exactly as planned.

A government department had set out to buy a fleet of cars. They were fully aware of the need to minimise costs and equally eager to prove that they were being frugal with public money. A carefully controlled set of meetings was held, where the exact needs of the users were explored and duly recorded. Eventually, they had a full specification for the cars and set about approaching industry to get competitive bids.

The cars were to be used for business only not for cruising down country lanes in the sunshine; so they wouldn’t need sunroofs. Civil servants were quite capable of winding down windows by hand, so electric windows would be an extravagance (this was a long time ago...). All driving would be done in work

time, cassette players were unnecessary simple radios could pick up the news and travel information. Other features considered to be expendable were ruthlessly eliminated from the specification. Civil servants would not be pampered at the expense of the public purse.

A short list of potential suppliers was identified and tender documents sent out,



complete with the detailed specification. “We want a standard, five seat car, with no sunroof, manual window winder and a plain radio with no cassette player or plugs for gizmos.” The list contained a further dozen or so additional economies that would drive the

price of the vehicles down. The procurement team sat back and happily awaited the bids. They wondered if they might get some sort of award from central government for all the hard work they had put in to driving the cost down.

The day arrived when all the bids were due back in. As is traditional in some of the older public authorities, the bids were blessed by a senior commercial officer, before being handed out to the Tender Assessment Board. There were visible signs of dismay on the

Continued on page 2

faces of the officials as it became clear that all the bids were priced well above normal retail prices for the equivalent cars.

The very first phone call to one of the bidders explained why this was the case. "We will have to produce new tooling for some of the body panels to eliminate the cut out for the sun roof" a sales manager explained. "Then, we will also need to redesign the door to take a manual winder, as the standard model comes with electric windows. So far, we have not been able to track down a radio player that meets your specification, but a supplier in Taiwan says he can produce a batch without CDs or other features - provided we pay for his set up costs." The explanation continued, with detailed explanations of redesign and retooling, line stoppages and changes to components.

I can't vouch for the truth of this story. In retelling it, I have probably added my own distortions. The important thing, though, is it demonstrates a dynamic that I have personally witnessed on dozens of real life public procurement projects. So was this down to the actions of lazy, careless and stupid civil servants? Well you might claim to have spotted some stupidity, but only with the benefit of



"It's going to require a great deal of money."

hindsight. But can you honestly say that you would have noticed it if you were part of the team developing the requirements? Many of our greatest opportunities for cost savings are lost *not* by incompetence or carelessness but

by people working too hard and trying to be clever.

Let's turn the tables now and look at this from the bidders' point of view: Industry loves solving problems. Most bidders are on a constant lookout for ways that they can use their resources, ingenuity and innovation to provide better, cheaper, solutions. It makes sense for them; it gives them the potential for differentiating their bid and making relatively greater profits, even from lower prices. Instead, their attempts to save the Taxpayers' money are stymied by 'clever' civil servants constraining them to their own perception of what a good solution would look like.

As the Civil Service shrinks, its ability to specify half engineered solutions will diminish and I predict that more and more bizarre tender documents will hit industry as the staffing cuts take hold.

So what can you do, if you are a bidder? You have to be canny, quick and versatile. Firstly, find some way of engaging with public sector customers before a procurement competition starts. Once a tender is advertised, it is almost impossible to affect the contract award criteria. Secondly, ask questions, using the formal channels of communication, to probe the rigidity of the specifications. Rather than challenge the specification, ask probing questions such as "Why is that of particular interest to the Authority?" or "what benefit does the Authority believe it will produce?" Both of these questions will allow you to suggest alternative ways of satisfying their needs: 'So if we could produce the same benefits using an alternative method, would that be acceptable?'

The future relationship between industry and the public sector will be critical to maintaining public services in the face of draconian budget cuts. It's time for government to recognise that real savings can only be realised when Industry is free to innovate when bidding for public contracts. Forget the specifications; let's talk about needs and solutions.

Please let us know if you would like to discuss this issue further with Richard.

Advice *squeezed*
straight from the
experts



“Sing, Sing a song”



With thanks to Joe Raposo, who composed the music and wrote the words for this famous song sung by the Carpenters. And no, I haven't completely lost the plot. Well, not quite.

Most singing involves the use of many notes, to form a sound that is pleasant to a listener. Speaking is much the same, and in addition pleasantness is a key contributor to persuasiveness. Although there are no notes, and it's not music, when we speak we do (sometimes make that 'should') go up and down in pitch at various points and for good reasons. That's very like music, so we can use music to help clients understand how to use their voices more effectively when speaking. One key similarity is pitch modulation, which is the use of rises and falls in pitch to denote elements of speech such as emphasis, energy and finality. Pace and volume have other similarities.

We have for the past 9 years been recording and scientifically analysing the voices of many of our key clients, comparing them with a reference of the 100 most relevant good speakers. This includes the measurement of pitch pace and volume. We have gathered these analyses together to bring you the first results into the characteristics of average voice.

The biggest sub-group of our voices are male and British, but there is a statistically significant level of women, and non Brits in our database. So we have set about finding some trends among the people we get to work with, as well as trying to work how big a difference we've made.

We measure up to 8 parameters. For this article, we will use a set of 175 analyses done, as these are the most detailed of those that we have in our archives.

The caveat here is to admit that there is a degree of self-selection. Not because these people have poor voices, they don't. Instead many are excellent, although they

have chosen to have their voices analysed. And that shows they are interested in how they sound, and are curious to know if they can improve. If so, how?

So, what does the average voice sound like on these 8 parameters?

Well, you won't be pleased. On average, the British speaker only achieves about 81% of the score they should get on Pitch Modulation (PM), which is the amount of up and down in pitch as we speak. So we're more than a bit monotonous. Pitch Range (PR) scores a little better at 86%, so we don't exactly do the Sound of Music when we speak.

Fluency (FL) is the measure of absence or presence of umms and errs and the like we score only 85%. This may seem OK, but when I tell you that we allow up to 6 disfluencies per minute within the 100% score, and that each 1-2 percent lost equates to one disfluency per minute, you get the, the, um, err, picture. We

don't seem very sure as a nation about what we're saying!



Ewan Pearson

Continued on page 4



“Sing, Sing a song”...continued

Our Articulation (AR), Speech Rate (SR) and Loudness Range (LR) are OK at 94-95%, and for Pitch Height (PH) we are bang on thereference level. Finally on volume (VO) we are if anything a bit LOUD, at 103% on average.

In summary, we’re rather boring, very uncertain and just a bit loud.

Now I know that may not come as a surprise to some of you, but it’s good to know it’s not just your opinion, but scientific measurement.

So what can you do if you are Mr/Ms “Voxus Medios” and want to become “Maximus Vocalis”? Are you born with or without a Stephen Fry / Moira Stewart voice, or is there anything can you do anything to improve? Well, there’s good news from the research here, because the answer is (and you’ll need a Barack Obama voice here), “Yes you can”

You see, our analysis also measures the improvement people can make in their

voices with coaching, practice and (James Bond female accomplice voice here please) a “positive mental attitude”. She also mentions “mutual bodily warmth”, but we’re British, so maybe we can skip that bit. Stiff Upper Lip anyone?

Our average client went from the low figures shown above to about 100% on all the measures. The good news is they still sounded the same person, just a better version of that person: Modulation improved to the point where they sounded interesting to listen to, the disfluency had all but disappeared, and the other measures moved to or stayed around the reference level. Even volume moderated a little towards the better levels.

In summary, interesting, confident and agreeably loud.

Get that right, and persuasiveness will shoot right up.

Brevity, Clarity & Persuasion



Alastair Grant

In business presentations it is normal to use PowerPoint to assist. Indeed PowerPoint also provides the crib sheet we need to keep us on track and at the end it can be taken away as a souvenir of the occasion. This default standard has drawbacks. The presenter can end up as a secondary source of information as listeners use their eyes to scan the slides. Of course good graphics, pictures and charts show information that the presenter would find hard to describe verbally. But slides filled with dense words really don't help except when it comes to a handout. But this article is not another rant about PowerPoint; it's simply about the importance of words.

Churchill was reputed to spend an hour for every minute of his speeches. Every word had to add value. A memorable quote was that “**He mobilised the English language and sent it into battle**”.

It is true that Churchill's most inspiring words were at a time of great crisis but his ability to talk with clarity and persuasion are relevant to business presentations. Words matter.

Brevity

Most of us simply have too much to say. We might work on the principle that covering the

subject in a detailed and comprehensive way shows we have command of the subject and the more we say the more will stick. This is simply not true! Some believe that if they leave stuff out then they have not been thorough. But the listener did not come along wishing to be told as much as possible!

We all face a challenge with too much information, be it email, meetings, phone calls and yes presentations. 50 years ago things were quieter. No PCs, no mobiles no photocopiers of the sort we have today. Not

Continued on page 5

Brevity, Clarity & Persuasion...continued



even an overhead projector. (There must be a large shed somewhere filled with thousands of overhead projectors.) So words faced less competition. Listeners were accustomed to using their ears as a conduit of information.

An idea I use when helping someone with a presentation is to remove the slides and summarise their ideas on one page. If I can do that then it is a sign that the message is coherent. At Staff College we used to burden our students with writing briefs on complex subjects. They had to pick out what was relevant and ruthlessly discard padding and unnecessary detail. We gave them copious amounts of information but they then had to reduce to a two page brief. This is not the same as preparing bullet points which do not tell a story and can be interpreted in varying ways. So my first idea to use words well is to

word at 77 is the word 'number'. A simple trick is to use the short simple words. Stop/Start/Go/Get cut through the air better than Terminate/Initiate/Commence and Obtain. Directive = Order. Mandate = Allow. With regard to = About. As a result = So.

But we also need to speak using verbal imagery to avoid the confusion of abstraction. The amount of rubbish fly-tipped every month in London would fill Hyde Park to a height of five feet. That's ten football stadiums if you don't know Hyde Park! Such imagery works better than quoting tonnages or cubic metres. People also remember the detail longer as they ponder the image they had to create in their brain.

Persuasion

Words need to persuade. Of course delivery and speech writing flourishes appeal to emotions. There is not enough space to expand on that here. More simply the audience need to be persuaded of the relevance and benefits to your ideas. Facts need to be turned into benefits or the reverse, penalties, of the point that you are making.

Words Matter because we tend to use PowerPoint as the start point of preparing a presentation. The words that you speak are incidental to theme.



summarise in succinct prose your story on one page. Of course it may stray onto a second page but as an exercise in decluttering your mind and being focused on what you hope your audience will be taking away it has merit and may even save you time later.

Clarity

We know that we use the Anglo-Saxon route of our language in every day conversation. If you are not sure what has a Latin or Saxon route don't worry too much, The first 76 most used words in the English language came courtesy of the Anglo Saxons. The first Latin

I am certainly not suggesting Churchill's expenditure of an hour of preparation for every minute that you speak but I am certain that if you can summarise your presentation in a page of prose that could pass muster in The FT or some other august publication, then you have given yourself an advantage. Now you just have to win the game.

Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts



Seven seconds that will last for ever



Carl Schreiter

“You never get a second chance to make a good first impression”. This isn’t news to you, nor is it just colloquial wisdom but backed up by years of accumulated and rigorous research. And you better be quick because you only have seven seconds before a stranger has formed an opinion of you. That’s according to Roger Ailes, a world renowned media strategist, from whom both Ronald Reagan and Rudy Giuliani sought career defining advice. (Gordon, too late now I’m afraid.) But hey, who am I to pass judgment as I am now under considerable pressure to make my own case. So here it is: Seven top tips on how to make your first impression highly positive.

Put the other person, not yourself in the centre: “I”, “me” and “myself” driven individuals are turn-offs. Unless you’re an astronaut, polar explorer or have made it on to the rich list, chances are your life story doesn’t lend itself to oral transmission. Show others that you are others-centred. Get them to open up by asking unintrusive open questions, allowing them to position themselves and feel important. “What’s it like working in such a great location?” “I understand you guys just opened a branch office in Oslo, what are your plans?” “Why is this project important to you?” Remember, a first impression is less about you, and more about making the person you meet feel important.

Humour is a serious matter: and shouldn’t be taken lightly. Though a witty remark, prompted by the occasion may help break the ice, you should avoid jokes as you have no idea about the other person’s sensitivities. Save your favourite knee-slappers for later, once you have forged a solid rapport with the other person.

Clothes make the man (and the woman): Arguably the very first factor in first impressions is the way you dress. You have to look the part. Some may argue that you should dress for the job you want not the job you’ve got. Whilst it’s commonly a subconscious appraisal, it is the single most noticeable thing about a person. Standards for appropriate attire keep changing all the time and vogues occur with the same speed with which they disappear. The good news is that style is never out of fashion.

Avoid the need to be right: By challenging the views of someone you’ve just met you run the risk of destroying your chances of building rapport. You are only really in a position to challenge someone’s statement or

viewpoint once you have established your own credibility.

Manage and monitor your speaking style: Listeners judge us by the words we use and how we say them. Don’t mumble, speak clearly, articulate and avoid jargon and expressions that are abstract or elitist. Modulate your voice to avoid dullness and monotony. Display animation in facial expressions and refrain from using contrived body language. Natural gestures will do, provided that whatever you’re saying is conveyed with true conviction and authenticity.



Demonstrate good listening skills: Give affirmative verbal cues like “Interesting”, “I see” “Hmm” and so on. Non-verbally, you need to maintain steady eye contact and avoid letting your gaze wander as this is a tell-tell sign that, despite your physical presence, suggests that you have now abandoned the conversation in favour of your own thoughts or other, more interesting sights.

Smile: and try not to look bored or tired, even if you are. This gives the impression that you’re not enthusiastic. Making a good impression even when fatigued is a true sign of seasoned professionalism.

Advice *squeezed* straight from the experts



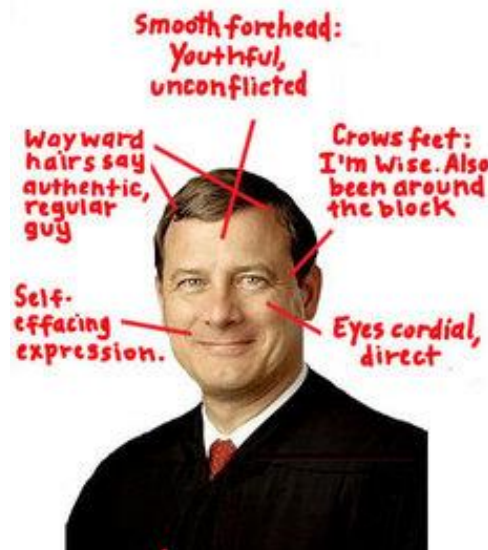
Continued on page 7

Seven seconds that will last for ever ...continued



In short, first impressions are important because they last. Whilst a first bad impression is very difficult to reverse or undo, a first good impression will give you leverage to prove the content of your character and articulate the value you bring to the table.

Remember that making a good impression isn't synonymous with impressing people. In fact, people will get annoyed if you try too hard and the phoniness will inevitably shine through. You don't have to go out of your way to please your new acquaintances. Just be yourself at your best.



The science of persuasion. Part 1: Logic

A lot of people have heard about the art of persuasion but few are familiar with the science behind it. As I was asked recently to put together a summary how our research-based approach can give people the edge when it comes to communicating, I thought I would share my findings with you. To give some context to what you are about to read, I intend to break the area of communication into 3 distinct areas of spoken communication: words, music and dance. By words, I mean the content of what's said, while "music" refers to sound of the voice and 'dance' relates to the face and body language of the communicator.

Firstly, most research conducted in the field of communication agrees on one thing: that what is said is often NOT as important as how it sounds or how it looks when it's spoken. Or that the words are often not as important as the music and dance. Now there are exceptions to the rule but, the strongest evidence shows that if there is a disconnect between how the words, music and dance work together then we are more likely to believe how the person looks and sounds when communicating the content of what they say. In fact, research has proven that when this is the case, the music and dance is twelve times as important than the words! Just think of all the times that someone has begun a presentation with "It's a real pleasure to be here with you today", but looked and sounded unhappy to be there and you get the general idea.

However, don't be fooled into thinking that

words are not important.

Petty & Cacioppo (1980 onwards) suggested that there were 2 routes to persuasion. They identified a central and peripheral route which, depending on the audience, could both be put to effective but different use when communicating. The central route is characterised by the logical core to the argument which makes it practical and verifiable e.g. "Using our services you will cut your costs by 15%." The peripheral route was characterised by a more emotional appeal e.g. By using our services you will beat your competition. What Petty & Cacioppo discovered is that people respond differently to each route but that it is imperative to be able to use both routes to be persuasive. So, how does this relate to words? Well, it implies that your content should have a strong, logical spine but



Tim Farish

Continued on page 8

The science of persuasion.

Part 1: Logic...continued



that it should be emotionally compelling too. President Obama is a master at delivering key messages that have a logical core but are wrapped up in powerful emotion to give them more impact. Try these examples from one of his Presidential TV campaign commercials “Plan for Change” back in 2008:

“Fast-track a plan for energy made in America that will free us from our dependence on middle east oil in 10 years and put millions of Americans to work.

Reform our tax system to give \$1000 tax break to the middle-class instead of showering more on oil companies and corporations that outsource our jobs.”

Obama makes his key messages work. And then some. He skilfully gets people involved by remembering that an emotional context is going to get them angry enough to want to change things. He also cleverly plays on the fact that it helps to have a focus of anger to motivate people and he produces just enough pain in his referencing to get them into action.

And this reference to “pain” is something else that comes out in research when it was discovered that pain is much more motivating to people as opposed to pleasure. It’s why dentists keep 25% of their diary flexible for last minute patients. It’s also why businesses are invariably more scared of losing money than being excited by making it.

But be careful when planning your strategy using pain. Goldstein, Martin and Cialdini (2009) discovered that a fear based approach only works when you give people specific steps to follow. This was exemplified by 2 types of health information regarding tetanus. One leaflet merely showed the dangers of tetanus and little else while the other gave a plan of what to do to avoid tetanus. In the latter group the sign-up rate for vaccinations was significantly higher. So scaring people is not enough – you need to have a believable plan to help them through their fear.

Goldstein et al also discovered some interesting facts when it comes to decision making. They discovered that having too many unnecessary options caused frustration and a lack of decision making. Their research

was based on 800,000 pension fund investors and discovered overwhelmingly that 1 simple decision i.e. 2 options works better than 3 or more which involve multiple decisions. They also discovered that people were more inclined to change their decision if circumstances were presented as changing. They discovered that people will avoid being seen as inconsistent, so changing the circumstances gives them permission to change their decision without losing face.

So, how does this affect your content when it comes to winning new business in an evolving market for example? Well, it implies that you need not only to update your offering but also present the market conditions as having changed significantly since your last meeting if you’re going to have more success.

The next article will explore the science of persuasion in more detail and looks at further research which will help you build more trust, leave better voicemails and design more profitable incentive programmes.

Until then, good luck with putting these tips into practice!



Source: <https://unsplash.com/s/photos/barack-obama>

Advice *squeezed*
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experts





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.

Continued on page 10

BP makes an oily mess ...continued



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
https://as2.ftcdn.net/v2/jpg/01/81/54/35/1000_F_181543583_6UIQXgve1ANBLXkzvEiLyzF69vW9EmbA.jpg

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.

Our Services

Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd is a respected adviser based in London and Oslo. 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 and visual analysis reports, then provide 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 Voice, Visual and Content Analysis, Prospect Relationship Management (PRM) and the Information Iceberg.

