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*Happy Christmas, Hogmanay and
New Year from everyone at
Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd*



Desmond Harney

Are you **DONNE** with Christmas yet?

Des shares a favourite source of impactful quotes – and leads us to a seasonal poem

Regular readers may recall I'm a big fan of well-chosen quotations – as are my GPB colleagues. They improve almost any "story" you might care to tell, making it (even) more engaging and persuasive. I collect the best ones as a nerdy hobby. A good sprinkling of these come from one poet, born 450 years ago. You may recognise his more frequently quoted lines, whilst being less familiar with his name, and/or his story (ardent Catholic, then Protestant convert; adventurer, soldier, philanderer, criminal, man of God, royal advisor)^{1, 2}.

John Donne (1572-1631) penned many famous "soundbites", as we might now call them. Some are so familiar, we could be forgiven for misattributing them to Shakespeare, his more famous and prolific contemporary quotee - born just 8 years earlier.

I was lucky enough to "discover" Donne via English A-level, far too long ago now. As a result, I also made the lucky teenage discovery that his poetry could be surprisingly sensual, for its time – indeed, for any time. I've carefully curated for you here a few of Donne's more familiar phrases. You'll surely have heard several quoted before. How well and persuasively

used, I'll leave you to judge. You might try quoting one yourself, at a suitable moment, some are more (ahem!) work-appropriate than others³: Here is a sample of Donne quotes:

No man is an Island

Though Truth and Falsehood be / Near twins, yet Truth a little elder is

Reason is our soul's left hand

Go and catch a falling star (used as the title of Perry Como's 1957 hit song)

Busy old fool, unruly Sun

Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime

*Who are a little wise, the best fools be
... dear, I die / As often as from thee I go*

Love built on beauty, soon as beauty, dies

No spring, nor summer beauty hath such grace / As I have seen in one autumnal face

*Come live with me, and be my love
(used as the title of Heaven 17's 1983 hit song)*

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I / Did, till we loved?

In this edition:

Are you **DONNE** with Christmas yet?

By Desmond Harney

Des shares some of John Donne's poetry, much of which has been reused.

An ancient preliminary exercise for Christmas time

By Lynda Russell-Whitaker

Lynda exercises on one of the Progymnasmata, with a Commonplace topic...

You're going too fast; don't slow down!

By Ewan Pearson

Ewan suggests this is not best advice, and instead recommends pausing more.

Key messages: the heart of your communication

By Dr. Richard Keith

Richard explains the difference between a key point and a key message.

Are you DONNE with Christmas yet? (cont.)

*For God's sake hold your tongue, and
let me love.*

*Licence my roving hands, and let them
go / Before, behind, between, above,
below. / O, my America! my new-found
land, / My kingdom*

*I run to death, and death meets me as
fast*

*What if this present were the world's
last night?*

*Death, be not proud... / One short
sleep past, we wake eternally / And
death shall be no more / Death, thou
shalt die*

*never send to know for whom the bell
tolls; / It tolls for thee (used as the title
of Hemingway's 1940 novel).*

During Donne's lifetime, public literacy was the exception, rather than the rule. He wrote for a select, elite audience who held "Metaphysical" wit and conceit in high esteem. The complex cleverness, the 'erudition and ingenuity'⁴ he deployed to amuse them has helped maintain his literary reputation through the centuries, and still keeps him soundbite-worthy. Coleridge later enthused: '*To read Dryden, Pope, &c., you need only count syllables; but to read Donne you must measure time, and discover the time of each word by the sense of passion.*'⁵ Even as I write, 'The Guardian' is exploring Donne's 'Holy Sonnet XIX' as their Poem of the Week.⁶

All of which lengthy preamble leads me finally to share with you a seasonal sonnet of Donne's. Internet searches reveal many Christmas websites and pages quoting from or sharing this. In fact, Donne's other writings frequently referenced Christmas, too.

As the Dean of London's St. Paul's Cathedral, from 1621–1631, his day-job often required him to work through the festive season (unlike many of us) speaking in public.

So we also have the texts of sermons Donne preached from the St. Paul's pulpit, on various Christmas Days. Here is an example:

*'Tis time that heart and voice be lifted
high / Salvation to all that will is nigh.'*⁷

Nativity⁷

*Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb,
Now leaves His well-belov'd imprisonment,
There He hath made Himself to His intent
Weak enough, now into the world to come;
But O, for thee, for Him, hath the inn no room?
Yet lay Him in this stall, and from the Orient,
Stars and wise men will travel to prevent
The effect of Herod's jealous general doom.
Seest thou, my soul, with thy faith's eyes, how He
Which fills all place, yet none holds Him, doth lie?
Was not His pity towards thee wondrous high,
That would have need to be pitied by thee?
Kiss Him, and with Him into Egypt go,
With His kind mother, who partakes thy woe.*



The Nativity. Photo by Al Elmes on Unsplash

How very topical - Merry Christmas!

By Desmond Harney

Sources:

1. Donne: 'The Reformed Soul' by John Stubbs (W. W. Norton) 2006
2. 'The double life of a poet' by Michael Schmidt – a review of the above (Stubbs) in The Independent, Books section, 4 Aug. 2006, p. 22
3. Lines taken from various poems in 'The Complete English Poems: John Donne' (Penguin Classics) 1976
4. The Poems of John Donne' Vol. II, by H. J. C. Grierson (OUP) 1912 – Introduction, pg vii <https://resources.warburg.sas.ac.uk/pdf/emh170b2451448B.pdf> (digitised in 2007)
5. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Notes on Donne's Poems" in Notes, Theological, Political, and Miscellaneous ed. Derwent Coleridge (1853), p. 249
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/dec/05/poem-of-the-week-holy-sonnet-xix-by-john-donne> The Guardian, 5 Dec. 2022, Carol Rumens's 'Poem of the week'
7. From 'Holy Sonnets, La Corona' by John Donne, c.1607-1609: #1 Untitled (see final lines); #3 Nativity

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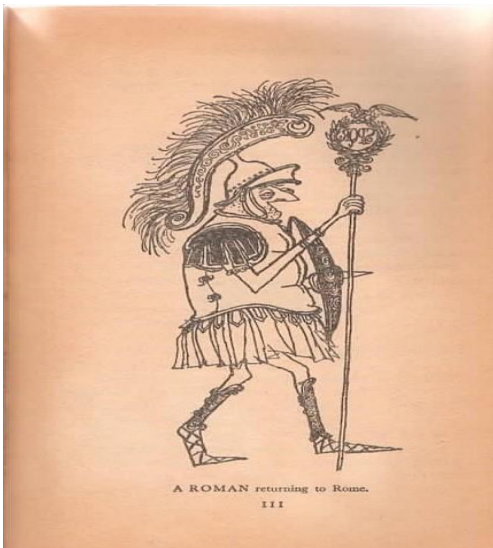
An ancient preliminary exercise for Christmas time

gpb

Lynda takes us through some of the Progymnasmata, exercises in building presentation skills.

One of my assignments during the first term of my MRes in Rhetoric and Oratory was an exercise from the *Progymnasmata* (preliminary exercises) which formed part of the curriculum for boys and young men in the ancient Greek and Roman world. Despite being an *early* exercise for such boys and young men, it was still surprisingly challenging for me!

The first record of formalised preliminary exercises was in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, though many individual exercises that later became the rhetorical curriculum had been taught and practised far earlier. Indeed, the handbook 'Rhetoric to Alexander' (originally attributed to Aristotle but believed by modern scholars to have been written by Anaximenes of Lampsacus), estimated to have been written between 340 and 338 BC, contains at least one reference to *Progymnasmata*.



Source: LRW from "Down with skool"

These exercises evolved, as can be seen from pedagogical texts by rhetoricians such as Quintilian and Cicero.

For example, an early form of the exercise around a *Commonplace Topic* (*koinos topos/locus communis*) was simply to amplify an accepted fact. Another example was *Thesis*, an

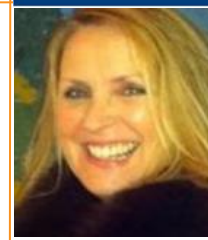
exercise to prepare and deliver a complete argument on a general issue. Later, the *Commonplace Topic* exercise was adapted to be used for facts that might be disputed, allowing boys to learn how to argue both sides of a point. They would have done this in an early exercise, where they were tasked with arguing for and against a specific question (*anaskeue kai kataskeue/conformatio et refutatio*).

For this SpeakUp!, I am keeping it simple as well as light-hearted, so a festive theme appealed. I thought I would closely follow the formula of one of the ancient Greek rhetorical exercises. The theme of Christmas seemed to fulfil the criterion of being both seasonal and a *Commonplace Topic* (*koinos topos*), so here goes!

My Commonplace Topic: Christmas

Christmas is celebrated by many people throughout the UK and the world. For some, it is a religious observation where the priority is to give thanks for the birth of their saviour, Jesus Christ, from where the name originates. It begins on the first Sunday of Advent, which usually falls at the end of November, and ends with Epiphany, or Three Kings Festival, on 6th January. The latter is a popular celebration in Roman Catholic and Christian Orthodox countries. Some leave the exchanging of gifts until this date.

For others, Christmas holds no religious meaning; instead it is simply a time to catch up socially face-to-face with colleagues, enjoying the company of good friends and spending time with close family members on Christmas Day. Some people maintain the tradition of writing cards, posting them at the beginning of December; others wait until closer to Christmas Eve. The sending of virtual Christmas cards by email became more popular a number of years ago. These often feature beautifully-designed animated graphics of snow, Santa Claus and reindeer! Many people put up decorations, including what has become the star of



Lynda Russell-Whitaker

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An ancient preliminary exercise for Christmas time (cont.)

the show; an evergreen conifer tree, large or small, where they hang baubles and fairy lights. Again, there is dispute on when decorations should be put up and taken down! Some are even superstitious about the latter, insisting that it is bad luck to have decorations up after Twelfth Night. Decorations are often taken out of boxes in cupboards and lofts annually, and for some families the hanging of small ornaments around the house and on the tree has become a much-loved ritual. For some, it has become a tradition to add one or two new decorations to their collection. There are some delightful novel tree decorations out there: felt reindeers, elves, polar bears, angels and fairies. There are even baubles in the form of miniature aubergines, sprouts and peas in a pod! Christmas trees can sometimes seem like a sort of competition, proudly displayed in full view for anyone to see - or at least those who walk past the living room window.



Photo by Felicia Buitenwerf on Unsplash

Christmas also seems to be a time for a month's over-indulgence for very many of us. In the UK, we are spoilt for choice when it comes to seasonal treats. Not only do we have a wide selection of the

home grown variety, such as turkey, whisky, stilton and mince pies, we now also have access to an array of goodies from our European neighbours. Some of my favourite Christmas sweets hail from Germany, such as lebkuchen and stollen!

The office Christmas party has become a bit of an institution. These can range from an intimate gathering of team members in the local pub to a large and lavish themed party with professional caterers and DJs. As these were seriously curtailed for the last two years due to the coronavirus pandemic, it seems even more important this year to celebrate with those who are still with us and remember those who are now departed.

Sadly, there are too many for whom Christmas is a stressful time. This might be due to a lack of money that means they are not even able to buy a proper meal, let alone buy presents. Or it may be because their nearest and dearest are long gone, and no friends or family with whom to celebrate. Thankfully, there are always those who are kind and generous enough to donate their money or time to those less fortunate than themselves. This epitomises the Christmas spirit: The sharing of love and joy however we are able to, according to our means.

Wishing you all the best for the New Year - and 2023!

By Lynda Russell-Whitaker

Footnote: Here are the Progymnasmata listed by Aphthonius of Antioch, (Source: Wikipedia):

1. Fable (mythos)
2. Narrative (diēgēma)
3. Anecdote (chreia)
4. Maxim (gnōmē)
5. Refutation (anaskeuē)
6. Confirmation (kataskeuē)
7. Commonplace (koinos topos)
8. Encomium (enkōmion)
9. Invective (psogos)
10. Comparison (synkrisis)
11. Personification (ēthopoeia)
12. Description (ekphrasis)
13. Argument
14. Introduction to law (nomou eisphora).

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You're going too fast; don't slow down!



Many presenters rush through their content. Friends with good intentions suggest they slow down...

The title of my article is a Paraprosdokian, let's get that out of the way now, shall we? It's one of our favourites from our list of Rhetorical Tools. It's not what I really want to write about, so to learn more about these mysterious creatures, go to the Research section of our website.

No, what I want to write about is a common problem, rushing. I first started rushing when I was at school: As a Monitor (aka Prefect) I was required to read the lesson from the Bible in school assembly once a week, to over 700 fellow pupils plus teachers. I hated it, and figured the best way to get off stage quickly was to talk fast and not pause, even where the good book made it clear that I should. My Head of Religious Studies would often encourage me to slow down, and castigate me after the many times that I didn't take his advice, but there was no slowing me!

To his astonishment, I told him much later that I had built a career in public speaking. I then had to make it clearer that I meant that I was coaching others, not actually doing much of it myself. "Ah, that's a relief" he said. I didn't have to ask him why...

Now I hope none of you rush through Christmas, because it's just too good a festival for that, whatever religion (or not) you may hold.

Returning to rushing, this can happen to anyone anywhere, not just in a presentation or speech, but in any event where there's pressure; media interviews being another example area, despite it's more conversational Q&A style. Friends and colleagues try to help, but the advice to 'slow down' is not the best way to deal with this.

Our key advice here is instead to ***'pause more often and for longer, especially if you're feeling nervous at the start of a presentation or***

speech. Let me explain why:

It is actually uncommon to find someone who literally 'talks too fast', using syllables per second (s/s) as the true measure of pace. The general research finding is that an ideal pace is 4.5 - 5.5 s/s. That's about 2 words/second on average. Most people go at that speed or slower. Going even slower does not help; you just lose dynamism, without fixing the pace problem.

Instead what 'rushers' do is fail to pause where they should, or fail to pause for long enough, or both, even though some of them will think their pauses were if anything too long.

Information Output Rate (IOR)

This is the rate at which ***useful*** information is delivered. If the delivery is disfluent, this rate is slowed even though the pace (in s/s) has not changed. The ideal combination is the right pace (see above) and IOR.

Rushers often include disfluencies such as 'um' and 'err', or repetition, or filler words such as 'y'know', 'kind of', 'like' and 'well' to fill in hesitation pauses that either result from (bad) habits, or from being unsure about what they are saying at the point. It's not intuitive, but these actually slow the IOR, as useful information takes longer to be delivered, thus also reducing *information density*.

Chunking

How can you get pace and IOR to be optimal? The answer is to 'chunk'. There is a bizarre term used by voice scientists when analysing a speaker's speed of delivery, which is 'chunking'. This most simply put describes how much a speaker's content is divided up into 'chunks' of words, using # words/chunk and therefore #seconds/chunk. The words in a chunk may constitute a sentence, but they don't have to. For example, "Hello" and "Good morning" are chunks, but not



Ewan Pearson

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You're going too fast; don't slow down! (cont.)

sentences. We're often asked how long a chunk should be. It's a hard question as there is such a big range: Anything from one word/syllable up to something around 20-25 words would be fine (subject to the Information Unit caveats below), so long as the chunk does not include many sub-clauses or continuations. Chunking therefore includes control of how fast the words are spoken *and* how many words are spoken between pauses.

Continuation

Instead of pausing where they should, many people use joining words like 'and', 'but', 'if', and 'so'. These are 'continuation' words, that can easily make each chunk much too long. This in turn makes the information almost indigestible to the audience.

It's OK to have a short list of items (e.g. a shopping list style), but not anything much longer. Each chunk should ideally be one information unit.

Information Units

No, here I don't mean a 'bit' from the computing world, or 'Prosody' from Linguistics. Here it is related to the concept of chunking, as it measures the number of words in a 'unit' of information. The ideal unit differs in size depending on factors such as the complexity of the words used, the degree of abstraction, medical conditions such as aphasia, and whether the language is a 'mother tongue' or second language. An ideal unit size in a mother tongue is a relatively simple concept (e.g. a subject or object noun with adjectives) within spoken sentence, which averages out at (say) 18 words or about 40 syllables. This chunk could on average be said in under 10 seconds. But there should also be quite a variation in the length of a unit, to avoid a speech pattern that sounds too uniform.

Thinking Pauses

One thing that 'rushers' do is that they don't think for long enough about what they're going to say before starting. This can have disastrous results for the speaker and their audience. One infamous example was the comment

made by Hank Paulson when CEO of Goldman Sachs in 2003 when he said in a shareholder presentation¹: *"I don't want to sound heartless, but in almost every one of our businesses, there are 15 or 20 percent of the people that really add 80 percent of the value."* and *"we will take more people out"* and *"I think we can cut a fair amount and not get into muscle and still be very well positioned for the upturn."* Five days later, on Sunday evening, 4th Feb 2003, in a firmwide apology email Mr. Paulson said that he had given a *"glib and insensitive response"* when he had discussed the possibility of more layoffs at Goldman.

Digestion Pauses

You may want a few of these over Christmas! After that, the term takes on a metaphorical meaning - to allow an audience to 'digest' properly what was said in the previous chunk before the speaker continues. Counterintuitively, the more a member of the audience knows, the longer they need. Put most simply this is because they have bigger thoughts. Without these, the audience will be unlikely to remember what you said, which would be a shame, especially if what you said was a key point or a key message.

My key point is that pauses are what prevent a speaker from going too fast, not word speed.

I wish you the best of the season's greetings and look forward to seeing a good number of you, our readers, in 2023.

By Ewan Pearson

1. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/04/business/markets-market-place-chief-goldman-sachs-apologizes-for-remarks-firm-s.html>

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Key messages: the heart of your communication



Richard Keith

Richard explains the difference between a key message and a key point

It is widely accepted tenet of professional communication that most acts of persuasion (such as a pitch or an important speech to stakeholders) require key messages. But whilst we may agree with this idea and therefore strive to include key messages in our professional communication, creating and delivering these elusive little gems can be tricky. So what exactly is a key message? How can we find or build them? And perhaps most importantly, how do we know if they are any good?

Let's start with the simplest bit – what are key messages? Key messages are the most important takeaways that you want your audience to receive, understand and remember. A key message is a valuable tool to maximise the capacity of your words to get what you want from your audience; that is, they can help substantially in guiding an audience to think, feel, or do whatever you want them to think, feel, or do.

Following the above definition, a key message needs to be transmitted effectively (to be received), it should be clear and simple (to be understood) and it should be 'sticky' (to be remembered). If your key message lacks one or more of these elements, it won't have the same power to persuade your audience of your point of view (i.e. "hire us", "buy this", "follow me" etc etc).

Another key element here is... well, the very idea of something being key. Your key messages are the most important things that your audience should take away. Therefore, it is unlikely (although not impossible) that you will have more than three key messages in any presentation or pitch. If you are delivering key message number four or five, you are likely to be in the realms of "nice to know" rather than "need to know".



Photo by Magda Ehlers: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/blue-red-and-yellow-stripe-surface-1329297/>

How do we find or create key messages? GPB's Fire Bell Test will help you here. The tool works like this: imagine you are about to deliver your 20 minute presentation or pitch to a client when the fire alarm begins to ring. You are informed that it is only a drill but you will need to vacate the building: you decide to seize the moment before you have to congregate outside.

"Before we head out", you begin, "can I please take 30 secs to tell you the core of our argument to explain why we are best placed to help you?" Then you clearly and concisely deliver the key message(s) that are at the heart of your act of persuasion.

Those of you who have been coached by us may have used our Fire Bell Test outlined above. We give you 30 seconds to think of – and write down – the most important key message of your pitch or presentation. Then, if you have another key message, we give you another 30 secs to think of it; and finally, if you have another message, the third one. Hey presto, as if by magic, you have some key messages.

GPB have a 'Fire Bell' test worksheet for key points and key messages; if you would like a copy, just ask!

But even this doesn't ensure that you have come up with the most impactful messages for your audience. So how can you tell if your key messages are

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Key messages: the heart of your communication (cont.)

any good? Perhaps the best way to answer this is by detailing what usually occurs when our clients have come up with less impactful key messages.

When we hear messages from our clients that need more work, one of two things has usually occurred. Either

- a) Our clients have misunderstood the subtle but important distinction between a key point and a key message, or
- b) They've used a piece of evidence as a message rather than using that evidence as data that supports their key message. (As a general rule of thumb, if you have figures or an example in a key message, you are probably trying to use evidence as a message.) In the spirit of the season, let's illustrate this with reference to



a very well-known festive story, *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens.

Photo by Nadi Lindsay: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/photo-of-book-near-candle-3410287/>

If you were asked what the key points of this wonderful little book are, you could reply with something along the lines of: 1) Scrooge learns that Christmas is a time for celebration rather than isolated misery, and 2) that he is happier at the end when uses his wealth to support Bob Cratchit and save Tiny Tim's life.

Yet the key messages are ever-so-slightly different. They are the arguments that Dickens is making with these points. From this, the key messages could be:

- 1) We should celebrate Christmas as a time for giving and human connection, and
- 2) That those who have plenty have a responsibility to those less fortunate in our society. Going back to our rule of thumb above, the example of Scrooge's dramatic change for the merrier that comes about in Stave 5 of the book can be used as evidence to support the key message, which makes the message more persuasive.

Like the traditional festive season weight gain, really good key messages can stay with an audience for weeks or even months. If you have an argument to make, build it upon powerful key messages that are doing exactly the job you want them to.

Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy Hogmanay.

By Richard Keith

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Additional Client Resources



GPB Website (gpb.eu)

The Grant Pearson Brown (GPB) website has all previous issues of our 'Speak Up' Journal, containing plenty of great articles with useful advice. In addition, there are other interesting analyses including our dictionary of acronyms, a list of all the Rhetorical Tools, and a list of neologisms (new words). These are regularly updated. Please get in touch if you have any suitable words that we can add!

Please see those pages at www.gpb.eu, then look under 'Journals and posts' on the top tab.

YouTube

At GPB we like to provide helpful and entertaining playlists of videos about presentations, pitches, negotiations, giving speeches, and a lot more! Since our Spring 2022 Journal we have for example added to our channel:

- How to Catch a Liar (Assuming we Want to) by Dr. Paul Ekman
- Sir David Attenborough's Address to World Leaders at COP24
- Sir David Attenborough delivery of 'The People's Seat' address at COP24
- A Business Speeches Playlist

Please visit and subscribe to our YouTube Channel, where all this valuable video content is shared: www.youtube.com/channel/UCiF7nr4d3_il8j8z862uVHQ.

LinkedIn

GPB's LinkedIn page is also regularly updated with posts and content from topical areas of interest. Again, we value any comments or thoughts and encourage healthy debate. Please visit and like our page, and contribute your views at www.linkedin.com/company/grant-pearson-brown-consulting-ltd/.

A very merry Christmas from all of us at GPB!



(Source: Unsplash.com)

Our Services

Grant Pearson Brown Consulting Ltd 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, which are unique to GPB. We then provide voice and visual coaching, and content 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 Analyses,
- Prospect Relationship Management (PRM),
- the Information Iceberg,
- Clients' Rights Act,
- Feature, Benefit Impact (FBI),
- Buyers' Criteria Analysis, (BCA), and
- Our Q&A Methodology.

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