

Leadership Communication

E C D *Insight*

Leaders in leadership communication

The latest on leaders and how they communicate

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Obama needs to learn the Washington way of persuasion in key healthcare debate



Glenn Whitney

BARACK OBAMA is rapidly discovering that being a great communicator requires more than incisive debating skills and inspirational speeches. The U.S. President's struggle to gain sufficient support for healthcare reform highlights his under-developed abilities to influence and persuade powerful people.

He is learning that, while being a Washington outsider means he doesn't owe anybody anything, it also means nobody in Washington owes him anything in return. One of the most powerful forces to get one's way is reciprocity: a coercive urge to return a favour. His relatively weak currency in this area was starkly highlighted by the death last month of Democratic Senator Edward Kennedy, a long-time crusader for public health reform. He was eulogized by one-time Republican rival John McCain, who said: "When he made a promise to you, he kept it, no matter what." It is that kind of consistent ethical behaviour that creates reliable relationships.

Reciprocity is only part of what's needed to influence others. Even more important is developing the right message, delivered in the right way and reinforced again and again. Here is where George W. Bush, even with his shortcomings as a public speaker, was more effective. Perhaps because of his relative lack of eloquence rather than in spite of it, he was able to reduce messages down to their simplest common denominator. Then he instilled discipline in his lieutenants to stick to the script and expound a consistently common theme.

Critical to his persuasive success, Bush used the power of negative communication. Only in recent years have social psychologists like Robert Cialdini proved that "going negative" is often more effective than trying to engender optimism with a positive vision. For example, it is usually more effective to highlight how a proposed solution can prevent the loss of money rather than how it might create profit. Bush and Co. repeatedly raised the now-disproved fears of Saddam Hussein deploying weapons of mass destruction to annihilate millions of Americans to justify

launching a war against Iraq. They managed to forge a "Coalition of the Willing" despite much scepticism from major countries such as France and Germany.

Obama, by contrast hasn't described a compelling negative vision for life in America if the status quo is allowed to continue. He should be painting a picture of a bankrupt government and millions of chronically sick people unable to afford decent care. Instead – like other Democrats before him – he has allowed the agenda to be hijacked by Republican firebrands who are keen to create resistance to change by invoking emotive imagery such as the Nazi's euthanasia programme and absurd but effective terms such as "government death panels."

For Obama to be effective, he will need to dial down his formidable intellect to create simpler messages that highlight the risks of inertia. He also needs to make those messages stick by repeatedly using compelling specifics, examples, anecdotes and metaphors.

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Obama: Test of leadership

Photography: Steve Jurvetson –
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Authentic leadership

An "ordinary" leader for extraordinary times



Paul Gallagher

SHE'S RELIABLE, hard-working, cautious, competent and unspectacular. But she's authentic and the German electorate love her for it.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's personal popularity exceeds that of her party and may put her on course for an election victory in the September 27 general election. In fact more than 60 percent of voters want her to stay in power. Far from being a liability, her lack of

charisma may help her secure a second term in office.

Voters gravitate towards different leaders at different times in history. And the qualities we seek in a leader vary from country to country and from era to era.

As media and presentation consultants we urge leaders to develop an "authentic" personal style, rather than trying to emulate others. While there is a rule book for crafting strong and persuasive messages, style is about making the most of your own individual personality. It's different for each one of us. It's about finding your own voice.

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Merkel: The genuine article

Photography: World Economic Forum – Severin Nowacki
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Many leaders have fallen into the trap in 2009 of trying to emulate the oratorical style of U.S. President Barack Obama. One example is former Social Democrats (SPD) General Secretary Hubertus Heil. He was widely ridiculed after trying to get delegates at a party conference to chant Obama's election slogan: "Yes, we can!"

Merkel won't copy others. You won't hear the East German pastor's daughter using the words of Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King.

"She's the antidote to the cult of political celebrity as we know it here, certainly as they know it in the United States. The endless manipulation of politicians' images, which is what politics is increasingly about, is a game she doesn't play — at least not in the way we're used to," Melanie McDonagh wrote in *The Times*. "She's famously uncharismatic, a kind of comic inversion of Obama."

Obama's predecessor in the White House, President George W. Bush, summed up her appeal, describing her as "authentic, open and direct" on a 2006 visit to Berlin.

Angela Merkel looks comfortable in her own skin. Nothing about her delivery in media interviews jars. In

fact, she instils a sense of ease, confidence and trust in uncertain times.

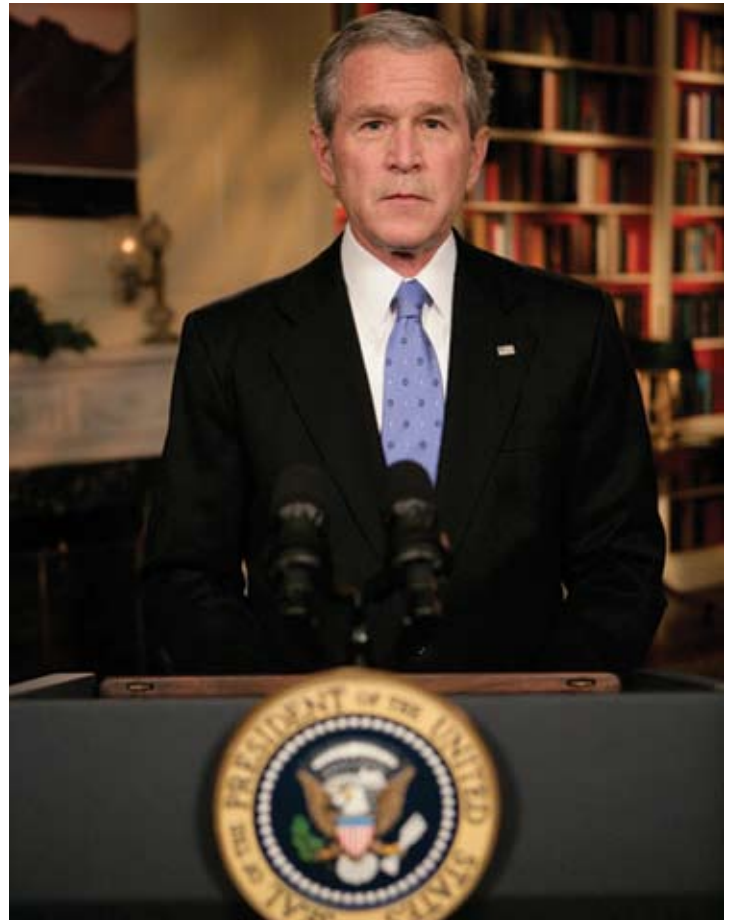
Named the world's most powerful woman by *Forbes* for the third time in a row in August, Merkel makes a virtue out of being ordinary. She is still seen doing her own shopping and goes on mountain biking holidays.

The 55-year-old physicist avoids yachts, the paparazzi and the glossy jet-set lifestyle embraced by European counterparts like Italy's Silvio Berlusconi and France's Nicolas Sarkozy.

But while Merkel's style is level-headed, grounded and predictable, she is clinical and precise in her media interviews. She presents her arguments in a clear and concise fashion. Her language and her messages are accessible and credible.

One German voter summed it up neatly in an interview with *The Daily Telegraph*: "Maybe she's boring, but I'd rather have someone who is serious than someone who looks good or who's good at making jokes. This is a time of seriousness. People are worried about losing their jobs."

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George W. Bush: A Merkel fan

Photography: Image Editor - Flickr.com / creative commons

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New York Governor blames media for poll mauling

“The governor’s wrangling with the media is not productive,” – Sharpton



Jean Lavin

POLITICIANS NEVER LEARN. When poll numbers are sinking, it just doesn’t pay to start blaming the media for their problems. Yet time and time again, politicians do just that.

New York Governor David Paterson’s approval ratings have fallen as low as 18 percent. He has members of his own party calling for him to withdraw his candidacy from the 2010 gubernatorial election. His response has been to lash out at the media for what he perceives as unfair treatment because of his race. The blame comes despite a series of missteps that have eroded the public’s confidence in Paterson’s ability to lead the state through a tumultuous economic period.

In a radio interview with New York Daily News columnist Errol Morris in August, Paterson, the first African-American governor of New York, said that he was being undermined by an “orchestrated, racially-biased media effort” to force him to step aside.

Critics said the governor should focus on his own blunders.

“He’s given the media more than enough to feed on with the incompetence shown in his administration,” said state Senator Kevin Parker, an African-American.

The governor’s comments failed to rally support among even his strongest allies. The Reverend Al Sharpton failed to come to the governor’s defence and recommended he stop blaming the press.

“The governor’s wrangling with the media is not productive,” said Sharpton.

Paterson’s next mistake was to draw other politicians into the fray, predicting that President Barack Obama would suffer the same fate. “The next victim on the list — and you see it coming — is President Barack Obama,” he said, citing his efforts to change health care.

White House aides were furious and released a scathing statement asking Paterson not to drag President Obama into his “troubles.”

Hours later, Paterson said he was not calling all media racist and that his comments were misinterpreted. But in an interview with a blogger just three days later, he repeated the same claims.

Media coverage of Paterson at the start of his tenure was overwhelmingly positive. State legislators were thrilled to have a governor who was a conciliator, not a steamroller like his predecessor Eliot Spitzer. And the media had a politician that communicated. His sense of humour and openness were welcomed by the press.

But that didn’t last. His poll numbers plunged 20 points after he botched the replacement of New York Senator Hillary Clinton after she became U.S. Secretary of State. Paterson and his staff used the press to plant negative stories about Caroline Kennedy, who expressed interest in the seat. That act misfired, sparking a public backlash.

Paterson needs to acknowledge his own mistakes to regain supporters if he has any hopes of retaining his position.



Paterson: Losing the blame game

Photography: 2008 in ny - Flickr.com / creative commons

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Media Mishaps

Reality check

During his weekly radio show, billionaire New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg declared that pharmaceutical executives aren’t raking in the dough. “You know, last time I checked, pharmaceutical companies don’t make a lot of money, their executives don’t make a lot of money,” Bloomberg said.

Not quite. Chief Executives at big pharmaceutical companies make hefty salaries by most people’s standards. The CEO of Merck received \$29.1m last year, while Johnson & Johnson’s CEO made \$25.8m.

While still on-air, Bloomberg realised the gaffe and soon declared that some of them are “making a decent amount and more than a decent amount of money.”

He was immediately derided as needing a “dose of reality” by William Thompson, the Democratic opponent for mayor, who has stressed that Bloomberg

doesn’t feel people’s economic pain in a recession because of his immense wealth.

Gender row hits athletics

International athletics suffered a public relations setback at the World Championships in Berlin by allowing a gender row to mar the victory of a rising star in track and field. A decision by the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) to make public that it was carrying out a gender test on 18-year-old South African runner Caster Semenya overshadowed her spectacular 800 metre victory.

The news became the top media story from the games, even trumping the world records of Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt. Not only that, it caused outrage in South Africa, embarrassed the athlete and her family and raised all kinds of questions about the testing of international athletes at major events.

The IAAF general secretary Pierre Weiss later admitted that such tests should be conducted quietly to protect the rights, dignity and privacy of young athletes from the media. But that will provide little comfort to Semenya, her family and fans.

Marriage misguidance



Japan’s Prime Minister Taro Aso has done little to win over young voters in the country’s election. With opinion polls predicting his defeat amid concern about unemployment, the gaffe-prone politician scored an own goal by advising young people who are poor to stay single. “If you don’t have money, you’d better not get married,” Aso told students on the campaign trail. “It seems rather difficult to me for someone without means to win people’s respect.”

Taro Aso – Photography: World Economic Forum - Sebastian Derungs - Flickr.com / creative commons

BEST OF BLOGS

Go to www.ecdinsight.com for the latest blogs on leaders and how they communicate

A milestone for PowerPoint

It’s time to blow out the birthday candles. Happy 25th Birthday PowerPoint! Since it was created in August 1984, the ubiquitous software has come to dominate business presentations around the world: the good, the bad and the ugly.

Managing the media: The wired generation

A report by Britain’s communications regulator Ofcom highlights the winners and losers in the battle for our ever decreasing attention spans. Internet-based news and information is a clear winner and many other forms of media are being ignored.



Speech Doctor

Royal chinwag

Britain's Prince Philip has once again put his foot in his mouth. At a recent royal garden party, the 88-year old struck up a conversation with one of the guests and asked him what he did for a living.

The man, who was sporting a goatee beard, reportedly answered: "I'm a designer, Sir." To which the Prince awkwardly replied: "Well, you didn't design your beard too well did you?"

Prince Philip was then overheard saying: "You really must try better with your beard." The man was reportedly shocked. But as one observer noted, he certainly won't forget his day at Buckingham Palace.

Teleprompter magic

Technical glitches can throw off even the most experienced speakers. But Indonesia's President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono adroitly managed a teleprompter malfunction at an August political address. So, what was his approach? When the device stopped working, he stopped talking. "In the ensuing confusion, Yudhoyono remained silent until the teleprompter came back to life", reported the Jakarta Post.

Yudhoyono's approach obviously worked. Many failed to realize that he was even using a teleprompter – they're not regular support aids in Indonesian politics. One reporter asked: "How did he not miss a single comma or word? That's amazing."

Arsenal's English language foul

Corporations get a hard time for using jargon. Now London football club Arsenal FC has chipped in with the word "Arsenalisation", which apparently is something the club is doing to its new stadium.

Arsenal's chief executive Ivan Gazidis explained: "We have been working hard on Arsenalisation for the last couple of months, and will be phasing changes in over the first two or three home games." Speech Doctor was left scratching its head. Fortunately Gazidis also put this into plain English: "Listening to our fans, we were hearing a consistent message that, while Emirates is a superb modern stadium, they want us to make it more of a home." Why didn't he just say that in the first place?

Sparkling quotes

Learn lessons from financial media darlings



Jeremy Adams

THEY ARE NAMES we hear and see regularly in the financial media, commenting on the economy, stock markets and company results. But why do newspaper reporters and TV producers keep returning to the same sources time and time again? It's simple – these are people who offer that little bit extra: quotes that sparkle and make an impact.

Not everyone wants to be on the front page week in, week out. But it can be frustrating to spend time on the phone with a reporter, give them plenty of ideas for their story - only to see a rival quoted instead.

So what do the regular sources offer that others can learn from?

David Buik, a veteran stock market and economic commentator at BGC Cantor adds colour. Take this comment on the U.K. economy given to the London Evening Standard in August: "Public expenditure will be cut — Labour or Tory — and taxation must go up. This means less disposable income and Johnny will have to put up with just one Man United strip next year." You can see why the reporter has run with the quote. Buik explains his view and instantly outlines implications using an image that many readers can relate to. The comment is also light-hearted in tone.

Bronwyn Curtis, head of research at HSBC, used an "informative gift" in July to communicate her view that the Bank of England would pause its policy of quantitative easing (QE). "They've put twice as much money into their QE programme this year as the U.S. Federal

Reserve, so we really think they probably want to see what the impact is on the economic data," she told the BBC. The reporter would have been drawn to the simple and memorable statistic that the U.K. has injected double the amount of money into the economy compared to the U.S. The ratio is far more interesting than the actual numbers which are often too big for many readers to picture.

Bob Parker, vice-chairman of Credit Suisse Asset Management, delivers concise and straight-forward statements that are easily understood on TV. Take this comment to Bloomberg Television: "The global economy has now moved out of recession. Corporate earnings will generally be positive in the third quarter."



Parker: Concise

Photography: Credit Suisse

This quote, on China, was on CNBC: "We expect the Chinese rally to resume in the fourth quarter of 2009." Getting these messages across early on in an interview shows the anchor that he has a point, and helps Parker lead the conversation. It also generates further coverage from print and online media.

Two further ingredients are common to these quotes from Buik, Curtis and Parker: They are bold and forward-looking. They address questions on a reader or viewer's mind: "So what?" and "What does this mean for me?"

Each of these regular commentators have been around the markets and known to reporters for several years. But they had to build their reputations in the first place. Reporters and producers will always call back if they believe they will receive a quote that will help their article or show stand out.



Curtis: Putting it in context

Photography: HSBC

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