

COMMUNICATE TO INSPIRE: A Leaders' Guide

by Kevin Murray, Chairman, Bell Pottinger Group

To be successful, leaders must inspire others to achieve great results. How ironic then, that so few leaders are taught the critical communication skills that enable them to be inspiring.

Perversely, there has never been a more demanding environment. Today, leaders are living in a fishbowl where they are under more scrutiny than ever, where every action is transparently obvious and where the people they depend on for success pick over and debate their decisions in digital chat rooms with a global reach. Capturing hearts is now more important than capturing minds, though both still have to be done. But how do you achieve this when life is moving at the speed of light? When there is no time for carefully crafting messages and scripts? When you can only rely on a personal sense of true north to help navigate a perfect storm of change?

I believe leaders can easily derive competitive advantage by learning how to be more inspiring. To do this they need to be more authentic, more empathetic, and more engaging. And they need to learn how to tell stories. It is this mix of skills that can provide the super-fuel that will enable them to be even more effective.

My aim here is to share some practical tools, a tried-and-tested guide to being a more inspirational leader. There are five stages:

1. LEARNING TO EMBRACE THE FISHBOWL
2. DISCOVERING AUTHENTICITY: BEING YOURSELF, BETTER.
3. LISTENING – WITH INTENT.
4. ENCOURAGING HEROES THROUGH THE POWER OF STORIES.
5. USING AN EMOTIONAL EDGE TO ENGAGE WITH THE FUTURE.

Each links to the next, each supports the other. Together, they form a powerful system.

I. LEARNING TO EMBRACE THE FISHBOWL

Sadly, many leaders still believe that communication is what you do after you're decided what to do to. Wrong. Communication is what you do to achieve a result. It is what you do before, during and after decisions if you are going to be effective. Results are what leaders are judged on. But the results for which leaders are responsible are achieved through others - which means as a leader we have to inspire others to better behaviours.

Many leaders have found recent years a period of doubt and insecurity where reputation is key but fragmentation and lack of control are in an accelerating spiral. For them, today's 'fishbowl world' is the unremitting experience of being assessed with every decision and action almost instantly dissected. I worked, for example, with a company managing fundamental threats to its reputation. The leadership team were buffeted by the rush of modern media. Journalists would interrogate senior executives on interviews given by the CEO less than an hour before yet which were already posted and analysed on-line. The pressure was relentless, there was simply no chance for the leadership team to catch-up, consult or form a strategy.

In situations like these, consistency is urgently needed. But that requires leaders to give such clear signals of what is right that their people will make the correct decision even in the heat of battle when they cannot refer to the leader for a moment.

Unfortunately, few leaders can simply inspire from afar through their sheer charisma. John Hunt is Emeritus Professor of Organisational Behaviour at London Business School. His research '*Introversion among CEOs*' concludes:

“The majority of people who move to top jobs are not all the smiling, hearty, extroverted chappies espousing vision, values and emotional stimulation described in popular reviews. In fact, whether in the private or public sector, CEOs are more likely to be introverted, task orientated and private individuals who do not find the drama expected of leaders comes easily.”

Professor Hunt found that some 70% of the 105 CEOs he surveyed were trapped in logic and analysis, uncomfortable about displaying any vulnerability.”

What then are we introverted leaders to do? The solution lies in four essential principles of business success.

1., *Communication in business is what you do to change behaviours and get results.* This principle holds true at every level and every stage. It is critical that we move away from top-down messaging as the default position. Communication for leaders today is about managing relationships with key publics to get win:win situations. It is an iterative, ongoing dialogue in which the role of the leader has never been more important with the shorter tenure of leaders living in the fishbowl. So unless you are in dialogue with the people who matter – you meaning both you and your organisation – and making that of prime importance then the main determinate for success is blunted.

2. *Leaders must accept they have a personal brand and their reputation is key to the reputation of their company.* Some leaders still worry about what they see as ‘profile for profile’s sake’ but in the fishbowl world you are under constant scrutiny, your actions plain to see. How you position yourself, how you choose to be seen, the themes on which you communicate: these things define you – and you define your organisation. So stop thinking you don’t have a reputation, you do. Someone is managing it and it better be you.

3. *Managing your reputation means finding your actual strengths and ensuring that they are seen better in the fishbowl’s glare.* Managing your reputation successfully can never equal cynical manipulation. I interviewed some two dozen CEOs and chairmen on reputation

challenges in the 21st century. They said reputation itself is the wrong pursuit. It is the consequence of *what you do, what you say and what others say about you* – and that includes the leader’s personal brand. As a leader you must make sure you get the credit for the good you do. But you have to do good first, you can’t manufacture credit for nothing. That requires you to know what the relevant good is and be the exemplar of it.

4. *Integrity and success are indivisible.* Why? because integrity enables leaders to achieve the results they want from their business. It comes from applying yourself appropriately to become more passionate doing the things you can really do. Communicating integrity – and the integrity you find in your people - leads to the rise in discretionary effort for which every leader is held responsible. Through the force of such integrity your people will make the right decisions even in crisis situations. And that is what leadership is all about.

I have worked shoulder-to-shoulder with leaders in crisis all my working life. My recurring experience is that they have it in themselves to overcome their problems and concerns. My task is to help them realise their potential as communicators and drive their organisation forward. To become more effective and inspiring, leaders must embrace life in the fishbowl and realise their strengths to meet the significant challenges they face.

Based on actual examples, I want to show how every leader, extrovert and introvert, can put these principles into practice to achieve competitive advantage.

And it begins with authenticity.

2. DISCOVERING AUTHENTICITY: BEING YOURSELF, BETTER

“The answers begin with you. Unless you are clear about your purpose and your values and are clearly doing something you really care about it is difficult to act.” – Professors Rob Goffee and Steve Jones.

The need for leaders to be ‘authentic’ has been widely discussed. But what exactly does it mean and why is it key to business success?

George was CEO of a global management consultancy, had worked there since college and was in the running to become chairman. George needed to show the company around the world that he had the vision to secure the prize. He wanted help with his key messages, I could see he had a much more worrying problem.

George worked daily with the chairmen of multi-nationals. The ones he admired – like the current chairman of his own company – had gravitas, grey hair and exuded ‘captain of industry’. George was not like that and he knew it. His messages rang hollow because at heart he doubted that he was a chairman.

“Rather than word-smith ideas, let’s look at your strengths.” I suggested. Together, we drilled down to what George truly valued, what he was passionate about. “It was uncomfortable at first,” he told me afterwards. “I had never done this before, go down deep to what I really believed in terms of my business, boil it down to the essence.”

As we worked, George’s true strengths began to emerge. He was a great collaborator who valued warm relationships but also had a fierce belief in high standards. The combination gave him the desire to draw the best from people and move them forward. We mapped this onto the needs of his company, wrote it down, refined it. As George distilled his core beliefs on the page he became excited. “I could see how to make this resonates with people. It was rigorous, I could measure it by the new insights I gained.”

George's vision was to achieve the great client relationships that would drive his firm to be the leader of a global elite. George tested this vision, cautiously at first. A European colleague wrote, "This has stringent logic and authenticity". George now knew he had something he could take to the world. "It was a pledge, a promise I could make to our people because it was fundamentally what I believed in."

George's message was clear. Much more important, by finding his real strengths, he had banished the nagging anxiety that he might not actually be 'chairman material'. He now saw he could make the role his own by being himself.

"I became so much more confident to lead the firm with a real belief in my underlying message. I could go and talk to anyone in any country with real conviction, knowing this wasn't just something I was saying because I thought people wanted to hear it. The response was so strong because underneath I had a solid foundation of authenticity. That was the key."

George phoned me one April morning. I knew at once what his news must be. "Congratulations, Mr. Chairman." I said.

So what do we draw from George's story?

First, authenticity, means playing to your strengths, gaining insight on how to use them as a power source to achieve your objectives. It entails discovering your own appropriate style to be a great communicator. Because it is only when you understand your true strengths and operate from your own value system that you can know and passionately communicate what is right for your business. This is has long-term benefits: *it makes you consistently convincing because you are consistently yourself.*

Secondly, we need to understand here the real need for emotion in business communication. Recent research by Cognosis Consulting of 1,600 managers in the UK showed that reason and logic are not enough. The success or failure of any

business strategy depends significantly on the ‘*emotional engagement*’ of employees and front-line managers. Leaders, said the research, must go ‘*beyond reason*’ and conceive strategies that are not only intellectually sharp but have real ‘*emotional edge*’.

However, only one in twenty managers interviewed by Cognosis strongly agreed that their company’s strategy was either exciting or inspiring. So if ninety-five per cent of managers are not fired up by the strategy, how few other employees will be? And what kind of message will they send out to customers, clients and other key stakeholders? Yet emotional communication is not vague or abstract: any leader can achieve and benefit. Because the power of emotional communication is centred in leaders themselves, it is leaders who are able to change behaviours in a positive way. And that, let us remind ourselves again, is the fundamental purpose: *to change behaviours and achieve results.*

When I work with CEOs, as I did with George, I begin by helping them identify their real strengths. The primary question is ‘How will this business succeed?’ We look at every aspect of the leader’s situation – their challenges, aims and concerns, their business environment, past and defining moments – until their strengths emerge. Amazingly, most leaders find their own strengths an extraordinary revelation - they have often thought of them as run-of-the-mill until we put them into perspective.

When leaders do realise their true strengths, it’s cathartic, enlightening and, crucially, the springboard for action. For George the revelation was that there are many valid leadership styles. By being himself he could lead with an inspiring personal style – collaborative, warm with a drive to offer the best to every client – that drew people to him like a magnet.

Next we examine what success for the leader and their business would be like, what prevents success and what communications will get over the hurdles. These will be communications that carry integrity, that will be effective because they stems from the

leader's own passionately-held beliefs mapped against established organisational values. Leaders can indeed *'be themselves, better'* because authenticity in business means leaders *match their beliefs and values to the values of the organisation, understand where they overlap and use the overlaps to gain powerful results.*

Note that the 'Cognosis' research does not exclude reason and logic. What it says is that emotion is necessary to support them. David Morley, Senior partner at 'magic circle' law firm Allen and Overy, agrees this is true even in the legal profession:

"As lawyers we tend to be very logical, reasoning people. Emotion is almost squeezed out of you because you're trained to be objective and critical. But we live in a world where people are bombarded with messages and information and we respond on an emotional level as well. So if you want to motivate people, win them over and persuade them of the case you are trying to make, you've got to appeal to people's emotions. Not in a blatant or manipulative way. But if you can get your message across, you can persuade people to go the way you want to go."

Finally, understanding your strengths allows you to locate the channels you can employ with authenticity and confidence to communicate emotionally. It might be through video-streaming, a speech from the podium or the old-fashioned practice of 'walking the floor'. Or it might just be about listening to small groups, responding to what they say and being seen to be out there doing it.

As we shall see, 'Listening with Intent' is the next key step for leaders to gain true competitive advantage.

3. LISTENING – WITH INTENT.

In today's fishbowl of constant scrutiny, many leaders fear admitting any doubt. But doubt can be a positive driver. The essence of good leaders is to challenge everything, above all themselves. Not necessarily to become the extrovert CEO of legend – though that may be their authentic strength - but to learn how to listen harder. Because listening is powerful as is a source of inspiration and to *gain leaders credit*.

I was lucky enough to work for Peter Watson when he became CEO of AEA Technology. Peter was tasked with moving AEAT from a Civil Service culture to a consultancy-based business capable of thriving in a commercial world. Many employees were extremely angry at what they perceived to be un-necessary changes enforced top-down. It must have been tempting for Peter to surround himself with a layer of management and hide behind his authority. Instead, he did the opposite: he took away the barriers, went out on the road and had conversations with people everywhere.

Peter chose meetings small enough for his audience to feel personally engaged and for him to hear individual opinions. He listened to everyone's point of view and answered everyone's questions. If he did not know the answer, he promised to find out and respond individually. He always did so. This resonated, people felt they had been heard. Anger began to dissipate, the organisation was able to evolve.

Peter understood what every leader needs to understand: the power of the '*Listening Contract*'. This says: "*I'll listen to you and hear what you say and think. Therefore you owe me the same.*" The contract is simple, but requires leaders to escape the trap of handing down messages to the troops. Peter faced a largely hostile workforce. Instead of lecturing, he listened. This gained him credit: as he had listened, so people listened to him. His authenticity won them over, they came to believe that Peter himself believed in what he was doing.

Secondly, after meetings were over, Peter acted on the things people said, not only by finding answers to questions but in the way he built and communicated his plans for the

organisation's future. He capitalised on the benefits to be derived from listening 'beyond the words' by hearing *not only the concerns but the positive ideas that lay behind them*.

Peter's story demonstrates how listening is one of the most valued attributes of leaders, how it can open up audiences, influence and refocus them on more positive and profitable objectives. It changes behaviours and achieves results.

Peter brought into AEAT another form of listening which paid dividends: 'team listening'. Organisations are too often structured around team briefing with leaders relying heavily on reports from their managers. To find out whether people understand and connect with the goals and vision needs dialogue. Consistent 'team listening' can elicit what really troubles, inspires, angers and moves people. This means putting supervisors in dialogue with employees, referring up as necessary. It means all levels of management having informed conversation with all levels of employees as well as each other. And it requires leaders to go out and listen hardest of all.

This may seem a daunting task for the more introverted and task-based leaders. What should they talk about? What are they listening for? There is inevitable anxiety about wasting time with small talk or appearing ill-at-ease. My answer is to encourage every leader to walk about among their people and consistently ask these four questions:

- What should we keep on doing?
- What should we stop doing?
- What should we do better or do more?
- What should we start doing?

These questions - 'The Four'Do's' – are straightforward and extremely productive. However you phrase them, they are easy to ask and get people engaged in talking about the business. People contribute because they are being listened to and so will listen and respond in return. Ask the questions at all levels consistently and what emerges is

systematic, proactive listening that, quite naturally, becomes an emotional version of a SWOT analysis which can be deeply insightful.

The idea of ‘The Four ‘Do’s’ relies on the fact that ‘Do’ is about behaviour and behaviour is an expression of belief. What we believe generates our behaviours. It is behaviours that leaders must influence. ‘Listening with intent’ works because it reveals unknown barriers and stimulates inspiring ideas. The plus for leaders is more informed decision-making and a continuing dialogue from a position of growing strength.

This listening process is, of course, not restricted to internal use. It applies equally to all stakeholder groups. Sir Peter Davis, former Chairman of J. Sainsbury, told me.

“Our management team must know what is coming down the line both good and bad. This influences our decision-making processes and our strategic decisions by representing our external audiences and making sure our decisions are stakeholder friendly. We need to be able to respond very quickly to what is being said and what is appearing in media. It is easy when you are riding high but the challenge is to hold your nerve in the midst of turmoil and avoid knee-jerk reactions.”

‘Listening with intent’, then, arms leaders to be influential in the court of public opinion and ready for timely response.

It also unearths stories – the single most effective communication tool in the authentic leader’s armoury.

4. ENCOURAGING HEROES THROUGH THE POWER OF STORIES.

Craig Tegel, Managing Director of Adobe Systems in Northern Europe, has always been concerned about communicating with large groups of people. “When you work for a multinational it can be hard to convey their message in a way you can put into your own voice and real life experience and get over in an authentic way.”

Now Craig faced a crucial presentation in front of 300 customers. He had to engage these people, be truly authoritative and spark change. He was armed with a battery of communication materials – slides, video clips, a carefully crafted script – yet he was still worried. Something felt wrong. “What you need,” I told him, “is a good story. In fact, four stories. No slides, no script, just four stories you enjoy telling.” Craig hesitated: “But I put so much work into all this,” he said, looking back at his mountain of close-written slides. “Trust me. Four stories well told will do more for you than these materials ever could!” He paused and drew a deep breath. “OK, let’s do it...”

Stories are the super-glue that make a point stick. Research shows we have a new short term memory approximately every eight seconds. To get anything into anyone’s long-term memory, you must grab their attention and hold it. Only if you engage your audience heart and soul does an idea takes root, firing their imagination and touching their heart.

Story-telling in business is indispensable to giving leaders the ‘*emotional edge*’ that leads to real competitive advantage. Used correctly, their combination of strong narrative and defined objective fills the vital gap between logic and people’s need for emotion. This is why I collect them, relish their structure, characters and colour. I admire their ability to hook the imagination and their versatility to fulfil varying needs at different times.

So what stories should we choose? The key principle, as always, must be to change behaviours and achieve results. Leaders who gain competitive edge through their stories recognise that tasks of analysis and strategy which often form their background are very different from leadership which is about ‘How do I get people to do this?’

The first step is to define your purpose. Since stories in business are designed to provoke action, be clear what your stories are *for*. Remember: *it is the takeout that is key, not the message*. Ask yourself who you need to influence and what you want them to do. Give particular attention to ‘*What’s In It For Him?*’- i.e. what benefit accrues to the people you want to behave differently that will persuade them that acting differently

is in their interest too? Finally, know what you want them to take out of the story, but don't make this your message. Let people come to that conclusion themselves.

You may believe your organisation must embrace change. Look for a 'future story' that talks so vividly about your vision of typical day in the future that it will make everyone else want to get to this inspiring place. You might want your people to have a different value. Then look for a great story about a principled decision. But be warned: you better be someone who really aspires to that future or makes those principled decisions otherwise all the story shows is the fatal gap between the story-teller and the story. Because *the story-teller has to be authentic*.

When leaders ask me for powerful stories, I start by helping them develop their strong point of view. This derives directly from their authentic beliefs and values. It means examining how they behave, the benefits they gain as a result and so how they think others should behave. I, for example, firmly believe the old adage that 'if you are not learning you are dying' (BELIEF). I do my best to take time every day to learn something new and give free rein to my curiosity (BEHAVIOUR). What I gain are unexpected opportunities, new relationships, new perspectives, personal satisfaction – even an improved vocabulary for my stories (BENEFIT). So, of course, I am pretty certain that you too should spend more time looking to open your mind and learn a new thing every day (ADVOCACY).

If you really know your point of view, it will lead you naturally to stories based in your values in tune with the needs of your business which you can use to recruit others to your cause. Their reaction and the way they act (and the way you listen to them) will tell you whether you are getting through. It is practicing what you preach that gives you the real authority to urge others to do as you do. Integrity is all – and stories communicate that integrity. So let me tell you a story.

Some years ago, I was asked to counsel the CEO of a construction company. He was passionate about Health and Safety but his staff knew 'Steve' as angry, controlling and adversarial; they had no sense of what drove him or why he pushed so furiously for

every last detail to be checked. Steve fumed that his people “weren’t paying attention”, hated that they merely responded to crises and never sought active ways to tackle problems or bolt the fine points down.

We dug into his beliefs and values to find what really drove him. Steve told me how, at a previous company, a boy had strayed onto one of his sites. He had managed to get through a gap in the fence after everyone had gone home, fallen into a deep pit excavated for foundations and been impaled on the iron rods at the bottom. When he heard how the boy had died, Steve had taken on the agonising responsibility of telling the boy’s mother himself. He was the leader, he felt it was his duty, but it was the most harrowing experience of his life. It was made more bitter when he learned the gap in the fence had not been secured or the pit protected properly; minor omissions but a confluence of details which proved fatal. Steve’s credo became that no detail was too small when it came to Health and Safety. No-one could have mistaken the strength of his feeling when he told me, “I never want to have to tell another mother that her child has been in an accident on one of our sites.” His story, when told, had a profound and positive impact on his business.

Steve’s entire workforce saw that Health and Safety was important and responded wholeheartedly. His story moved them in a way that no amount of rules and regulations could. Authentic, based on his strong point of view and entirely appropriate to his organisation, it changed behaviours and raised the benchmark for safety. His people did what was right whether he was there or not and were happier doing it. Steve had acted rationally in pursuing a strategy of active Health and Safety for his company but this alone left him frustrated and his people cold. His story channelled his passion and produced a win:win for all the stakeholders – especially Steve who now knew what his integrity could achieve.

What, then, are the characteristics of a good business story? Like Steve’s story, it should be easy to remember, short, simple, concrete and about ‘doing things’. It should be appropriate to its context and flexible enough to allow improvisation. It must be true to the mission, convey the teller’s passion and enlist support for the

excellent endeavour the story illustrates. Steve's story takes no more than a minute to tell but it is memorable, with a protagonist to care about, strong characters and vivid imagery. There is a turning point, a resolution and a message, arising from a strong point of view, that invites us to 'say yes' – to change our behaviour and join in ensuring that safety is paramount.

Once you understand the power of stories, finding the right ones for your business is just a matter of looking and listening. Stories have the potential *to encourage the heroes around you*. 'Listen with Intent' and you will find stories everywhere. Think about your stakeholders – your customers, employees and shareholders. Look for strategy stories, product benefit stories, brand stories, stories about history, quality and image. You can use water-cooler stories, stories about the future, failure and its lessons or springboard stories – those stories about the past which point the way to the future. Armed with these stories you can challenge, enable, inspire and encourage the behaviours the organisation needs from all of your people. Use them to celebrate the everyday heroes around you and they may even make a hero of you in return.

This not to banish logic – use analysis when analysis is better, sense when a story is wanted and when one is not. Never use a story you don't love or one that is half-baked. But a story you believe in when used well offers a route to the heart. That's where we go to get people to take action with energy and enthusiasm. And remember – practice makes perfect.

Adobe's Craig Tegel did indeed take his courage in both hands, threw away his graphs and stood before his people armed with four stories that we knew had the right takeouts. They all came from his experience, reflected his values, cut to the core of what needed to be done and powerfully, emotionally demonstrated why clients needed a new relationship with his company. We found those stories, articulated and rehearsed them in less than twenty-four hours. Afterwards, he was jubilant. The feedback was incredible.

“You really knew what you were talking about... authoritative, clear – and with no damn slides to distract, people really heard!”

Craig’s relief was immense, his clients engaged and his confidence redoubled. He is a strong advocate for the real bottom line business benefit of stories now. “The right use of stories constantly opens up new leads and new possibilities. After presentations, clients come up to me and say, ‘I relate to what you were saying, I believe you understand what we’re going through, I would like to talk to you about what Adobe can do for me.’ More customers come to us from listening to the head of the company and I have the pleasure of knowing that what I get out of it overlaps completely with what the company needs.”

Does his story inspire you? Then start living your own. Stories are in your DNA. You already know how...

5. USING AN EMOTIONAL EDGE TO ENGAGE WITH THE FUTURE.

“Reaching into myself to find what I really believe in, being able to articulate that. The ability to get my authentic message across more powerfully to convince others, picking up stories that can help illustrate key points. In all sorts of contexts at work I’ve certainly changed how I think about the way I communicate. I see this process as a foundation for my leadership that will benefit the firm’s direction and the bottom line.”

- David Morley, Senior Partner, Allen and Overy

For every leader, the super-fuel of inspiring communication comes in a series of systematic steps.

It begins with authenticity – *being yourself, better* – which locks into what you believe and the things you value. This leads to behaviours, both yours and those you wish to encourage in your organisation. You harness stories that mean

something - *your stories, your passions* - and become a proactive listener to the stories that *celebrate the genuine heroes around you*. The result will be the emotional engagement that leads to changed behaviours, greater buy-in and the rise in discretionary effort for which every leader is held responsible. After all, motivated people putting in extra discretionary effort are your asset – and that’s your job if you want a good reputation.

This process takes work. Anything worth having takes effort, good communication is never just ‘something you do’. You need to find the right channels and the courage to perfect your own style. But working to your strengths tends naturally to produce a quiet confidence.

I want to use an example that pulls these threads together. It is longer than others I have used but it makes clear the real power of emotional engagement. It is the story of a leader in crisis who discovered authenticity and gained the ‘emotional edge’ to create motivation, buy-in and belief where before there was none.

Hannah is the London-based CEO of an international conglomerate of manufacturing companies. The origins of the company are male and British colonial but Hannah is French and grew up in the Middle East. Nevertheless, she has risen fast: Hannah may not fit the company archetype but she is driven, commercial and has always kept the bottom line in sharp focus. In short, she delivers results.

Recently, however, her parent company radically changed its business model. It moved much of its manufacturing to the developing nations from which it once took only raw materials. Hannah was tasked to drive the change from London against tight deadlines while simultaneously down-sizing the London office. It was a big ask. “I had people I needed to do hectic and important work. They all knew that if they were successful they basically worked themselves out of a job.”

When I arrived, I found Hannah’s people understood the project, they could see it was rational. But from senior executives down, they were detached, confused and fearful

about the future. Hannah needed to deliver ‘people’ results – discretionary effort in adverse circumstances – but her customary focus on the bottom-line was not connecting. The work began to grind to a halt. Her people needed more.

It was when we dug down together into Hannah’s strengths that we made the key discovery. “Since I was a child fairness was very important but I’ve never really associated it much to the business. I always believed my private person was other than my business person.” Hannah’s ‘split personality’ was a revelation to her. “As we went through the process, it suddenly hit me that you can’t split one person out of the other. Because I found that basically even with all my commercialism, at the end of the day the things I would chose to do in business are about doing the right thing - giving back something better than I got, being fairer.”

I showed Hannah that her ‘two selves’ were actually compatible. Mapping her strengths onto the needs of the organisation produced a powerful fit since she genuinely believed her company was ‘doing the right thing’. It made a huge difference to her communication style. “I’m sharing with people. The story is still the same story - we are doing this because it’s more commercial, but it’s also the right thing: the resources belong to these countries. But the way I engage with people, I get into the emotional more. I can make it more alive and not be embarrassed to talk about those sorts of things.

Hannah began to listen more and use stories to celebrate and inspire. “I use all sorts of stories from other people in the company. Lots of examples of people behaving with integrity, behaving according to the values, some of them very small but making it much more human. Some were stories that I’ve heard many times before, some come because as you start talking to people you hear more.”

Hannah saw her new approach produce measurable results. “Beforehand I was much more businesslike. But giving time for talking to people about things which are not just “One, two, three, here’s what I wanted to tell you” created buy-in to the vision. I’m seeing people relate to the change. They connect to the stories, look at the issues and

think much more out of the box. Before it was about “We have to do this, but I will do what I have to do and that’s it”, now they are actually willing to try and find better, more creative solutions.”

Achieving this ‘emotional edge’ has delivered benefits to Hannah’s organisation at every level. Her staff are motivated, her senior executives engaged in ensuring best-practice change management. Everyone can answer the inevitable question ‘What’s in It for Me?’ “I’ve got them energised, committed and realistic, willing to look beyond “I’m going to lose my job” into “Well how am I going to do it best”. It’s pride - people have pride in what they are doing. It makes life so much better.”

There have been direct benefits for Hannah too. “I had a corporate communications department where was I was signing things off half-awake. I am giving much more time and attention to communication now. I’m more attentive to detail and the small things whether I’m chairing a board meeting, meeting Ministers and Presidents or talking to consumers and staff. The process gave me more confidence to do what I’m doing: it’s a challenge and I love challenges.”

Hannah’s story is a fine example of the principles and steps I set out when we began. It also has a final twist. Integrity, we have said, is the key to success, reputation the consequence of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Hannah has not only inspired her people but has raised her reputation as an exemplar of what she is asking them to do – work hard for the bigger picture rather than themselves. As she wryly observes. “I don’t think even I’ll be there in two years time and yet I am putting in this effort and I think people appreciate that as well. “

From communicating to inspire we inspire ourselves. I have seen leaders I have worked with command platforms they never thought they could own. As Adobe’s Craig Tegel puts it “I have such a higher level of confidence in my ability to communicate. Customers and clients now see me as a more interesting person for a continuing relationship. You get the satisfaction of doing a good job for the company and you realise that it’s actually OK just to be who you are.”

The glass of the fishbowl through which we, as leaders, are scrutinised will only get thinner and more transparent. As Sir Anthony Cleaver, Chairman of the Medical Research Council, told me. “People have to believe that the organisation will do what it says it will do. You cannot be inconsistent – there are no longer any watertight compartments between your stakeholders so things come to light faster and retribution is quicker than ever.” Everything we have discussed here is part of the ‘do’ of modern communications. There is no beginning or ending anymore. The old concept of ‘Get the message out, job done, task completed’ is gone. The new message is that this is a conversation that is not going to stop.

For leaders competitive advantage does indeed come from the super-fuel of communicating their beliefs and values. Today, we all must find our own authentic way to lead the conversation if we are to achieve the consistency of reputation and force of emotional engagement our organisations must have to succeed.

The great thing is, I firmly believe we can.

‘COMMUNICATE TO INSPIRE: A Leaders’ Guide’

c. Kevin Murray and Richard Spence, May 2008.