



The Beacon

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YOUR GUIDE TO SECURING THE
POWER OF PERSUASION

COACHING AND TRAINING SERVICES
TO DEVELOP POWERFUL AND PERSUASIVE
COMMUNICATION SKILLS.

IN THIS ISSUE

Understanding the fundamental
distinction between confidence
and arrogance.

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Bea-con (bē/kən), *noun* 1. a guiding light. 2. a lighthouse or signal buoy to warn or guide vessels at sea. 3. a person, act or thing that warns or guides.

In Pursuit of a Powerful Presence, Part 2 Can You Be *Too* Confident?

“Remember that you are just an extra in everyone else’s play.”

• Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Confidence is an essential aspect of persuasive verbal communication. The confident speaker gets noticed. The confident speaker has credibility. The more confidence you have in yourself, your beliefs and your product or services, the more confidence others will have in you.

It is easy to know when you lack confidence. You may feel anxious, uncertain, perhaps a bit shy. It is easy to understand the risks of a lack of confidence. But now consider the risk of having *too much* confidence.

In the last issue of *The Beacon*, we focused on the topic of presence, which requires a certain degree of confidence to be effective and a great degree to be powerful (please see *In Pursuit of a Powerful Presence*, May 2007). In this issue, we challenge you to consider if it’s possible to have too much confidence.

If a lack of confidence reduces your verbal effectiveness, what about having too much? Can *too much* confidence impede your ability to persuade? At first glance, many might answer an emphatic “yes.” What do we say? We offer an emphatic “no.” Why? The answer is that over-confidence is a misnomer. When the pendulum of confidence swings too far, the problem is not too much confidence, but rather arrogance.

Confidence or Arrogance

We recently heard from a good friend named Steve, a successful high school coach and a student of great communication and competitive motivation. Steve is confident in himself and his abilities, and he should be. He is universally acknowledged as a strong and inspiring coach. But after reading the last issue of *The Beacon* about presence, Steve shared that his biggest fear is the perception he is *too* confident.

Steve is afraid his strong decision-making style, which is based on his confidence, may be perceived as arrogance. As a result, he continually scales back the certainty of his messages and the decisiveness with which he

How do you protect yourself from being seen as too confident and thus being perceived as arrogant?

speaks. He says things with less conviction, and therefore risks reducing his ability to persuade.

Steve’s question to us was simple – and common: *How do you protect yourself from being seen as too confident and thus being perceived as arrogant?*

In our effort to answer Steve’s question, we spent time speaking with clients and friends about confidence and what it means to have “too much” of it. We asked people to describe the negative connotations of confidence and what behaviors they associate with it. We then asked the same people to provide good examples and descriptions of confidence.

The result of this experiment showed that the problem is not one of having too much confidence, but rather when confidence transcends into arrogance.

Confidence	Arrogance
Confident people have their own opinions. They do not balk at or shrink from the opinions of others, even those in stark contrast to their own.	Arrogant people demonstrate an unwillingness to listen to others and their ideas.
Confident people invite the input of others and actually listen to it.	Arrogant people treat others on the team poorly.
Confident people are not afraid to be challenged or receive negative feedback.	Arrogant people display discomfort with receiving negative feedback but freely give it to others.
Confident people create a collaborative environment. They share credit with their colleagues. They promote the people around them.	Arrogant people can be intellectual “bullies.”
Confident people continually seek to improve their skills and the skills of those around them.	Arrogant people stop working hard. They rest on their accomplishments and act defensively to protect their positions.

None of the entries in the right column are traits anyone should aspire to. If you are described in these ways by your colleagues, it is likely that you are on the high speed train to ineffectiveness. Colleagues won’t want to work with you. Employees will follow you grudgingly, if at all. Customers won’t buy from you. Constituents won’t vote for you.

But while each of the characteristics of arrogance is negative, are any of them directly related to having *too much* confidence? When we compare the behaviors associated with arrogance to those associated with confidence, we do not see the

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difference being the degree of confidence. What we see when we look at the descriptors of arrogance is not an *overly* confident person, but rather a highly insecure one.

So let's return to Steve's question and his fear that his high level of self-confidence could be perceived as a negative. We believe that as long as Steve's actions reflect the positive behaviors of confidence, he has nothing to worry about. It's not too much confidence but rather arrogance that gets in the way of effective and persuasive communication.

At The Latimer Group, we believe there is no such thing as having too much confidence. We believe that the truly confident person is comfortable believing in others. We believe that the truly confident person is comfortable hearing other opinions – even those contrary to his or her own.

We devote significant time to coaching the less-than-confident professional and helping him or her acquire the skills to become more prepared and more skillful. By improving their skills, our clients increase their effectiveness.

Conversely, when a confident person like Steve asks how to protect himself from the perceptions of arrogance, we tell him to rest easy. We believe that if he is truly confident, he only needs to demonstrate the traits of the truly confident person. If he does so, it's unlikely he will be attributed with the negative perceptions he fears. Confident people like Steve should heed the following list:

1. Listen to what others have to say.
2. Encourage dissenting opinion.
3. Treat everyone with respect.
4. Share credit.

Public acts of verbal communication (such as being the keynote speaker, leading the town hall meeting, giving the presentation, making the critical sales call or leading the meeting or the conference call) make many people nervous. But not everyone. For those fortunate people who exhibit great confidence, they shouldn't worry about negative perceptions – as long as they follow the simple rules listed above.

Being an extremely confident person who believes passionately in your organization or team, your product or yourself will never put you at risk. Great confidence, however, combined with any number of other negative characteristics – lack of an open mind; an unwillingness to listen to others; an inability to work well with others on your team – brings enormous risk.

Readers of *The Beacon* and clients of The Latimer Group frequently hear us talk about the importance of knowing your audience. Without a thorough knowledge of your audience it will be difficult to be a persuasive communicator, which in turn makes it difficult to sell, lead and succeed. This analysis has led us to an important corollary of the “know your audience” rule. Knowing your audience first requires *caring* who they are and what they have to say. The confident person does. The arrogant person does not.

We welcome your feedback.

If you have any comments on this topic or suggestions for topics you would like to see addressed in future issues, please email:

Comments@TheLatimerGroup.com



Dean M. Brenner
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. M. Brenner".



Marni H. Lane
Media Specialist

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mlane".

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Practical Lessons in Leadership and Communication

The Eloquence of Tony Blair

I write this piece while on a business trip in Europe on the day that Tony Blair stepped down as the Prime Minister of Great Britain. Quite simply, while I do not share all of his politics, I am deeply saddened to see him go. There are plenty of Blair retrospectives that focus on his perceived failures – Iraq chief among them. But let's for a moment focus on what should be missed from Blair.

From a political standpoint, history should, in the opinion of this writer, judge him kindly despite current popular opinion of the Iraq War. He is the first Labour Party leader in the history of the United Kingdom to be elected in three consecutive General Elections. During his ten years as Prime Minister, he led the peace negotiations to resolve the longstanding conflict in Northern Ireland, an issue which had stymied his predecessors for generations. And his supporters point to real improvements in the British economy as well as significant change in the health care and educational systems in his country.

What I find most compelling about Blair is his unparalleled abilities as a speaker and a communicator. No other leader in my lifetime has possessed his combination of prepared and spontaneous public speaking skills. Regardless of the moment or the format, I have rarely heard him deliver words that were anything less than eloquent, thoughtful and appropriate – no small feat given the 24-hour news coverage our modern leaders must endure.

Many leaders speak well from prepared texts in ultra-controlled environments – even President George W. Bush has mastered that move. But Blair truly shines in

such moments. Witness his many public comments after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States or the July 7, 2005 terrorist attacks in Europe. At critical moments that call for great oratory, no one speaks with a greater combination of thought *and* emotion than Blair.

The true test of the great communicator is the ability to speak extemporaneously on the large stage and capture the emotion of the people you lead. There is no better example than Blair's comments after the death of Princess Diana in 1997. (*The clip can be found online at YouTube.com.*)

Here's the key point. I am not suggesting that simply because Blair is a great public speaker that we should ignore his record in other areas. Certainly domestic and international policy decisions are more important in the lives of real people than the ability to give a great speech. However, successful leadership is almost always dependent, to some degree, on the leader's ability to motivate and persuade his or her constituency.

Successful leadership requires the ability to articulate the message with both head *and* heart. Successful leadership requires the ability to build trust with the spoken word. Blair mastered those skills. While history may judge some of his policies and decisions harshly, we should acknowledge his unparalleled ability to motivate, persuade and speak from both head and heart.

While it is clear he will continue to play a large role on the world stage, I for one will miss having Blair front and center on a daily basis.

• *Dean M. Brenner*
June 27, 2007
Paris, France