

# Journal

The Journal of Jo Ouston & Co

Winter 2005/06

## No Time for Tricks

*Communication, presentation, presence, rapport, charisma ... so many different words, suggesting many different ideas about how one person should connect with another - or with a group, or with a huge, expectant audience. Most business executives and professionals recognise the need to develop these 'connection' skills.*

But what's the secret? Do I need 'presentation techniques', or 'personal charisma', or to be 'a good communicator'? If I learn the right one will I be able to dazzle on the platform, persuade in the boardroom, inspire at staff meetings, and beguile my customers?

There's plenty of advice on offer, plenty of models to copy – from Winston Churchill and Martin Luther King to Henry V and David Cameron. Wow! Is that all? I just need to be charismatic, inspiring, persuasive, articulate and dazzling, and then I'll be OK?

But what, for instance, about trust? However charismatic, inspiring, etc. the person seems, if we don't sense an innate trust the connection's not made. Few professions are more articulate than journalists (increasingly polished in their TV appearances), and few groups give more attention to charisma than politicians. Yet in MORI's annual poll on trusted professions journalists, government ministers and politicians consistently score near the bottom.

Not much wonder then, that a lot of very intelligent people say, well, thank you very much, but I know I'm good at my job so I'll just keep my head down and leave the connecting to others. Or there's the other response, from people who have bought into 'presentation' – because someone's convinced them that there's a magic cloak they can throw over their everyday persona to transform themselves into platform stars. So they try to improve their power to connect by polishing their style.

But both are acting on the same mistaken idea: that in these matters there is an ideal model to copy. The 'heads down' group miss out because they just can't see themselves in the model. And the aspiring dazzlers miss out because the cloak doesn't fit.

Both are in the same trap, of believing that they need to undergo some sort of personality makeover.

The 'need to connect', not presentation or charisma or any of the others, is the real issue for people with a job to do. David Cameron for example, may have wowed audiences at his party conference and in Conservative members' meetings. With the sort of up-front presentational skills he has this was always likely. But as a working party leader, with everything that implies in terms of persuading, cajoling, elucidating, getting a consensus, selling a policy, listening and learning – to say nothing of being on top of his material and handling the competition in front of a demanding market – he's going to need a lot more than presentation. He's going to need the power to connect, at every level, in all circumstances, with a great variety of people, (and that's going to mean absorbing as well as projecting) – and to do that he's going to have to be believed.



Jo Ouston

But isn't that agenda very much what we all undertake, on our own scale, week in and week out – if we're really being effective? We have to connect, with different sorts of people, in different situations, with different objectives, every working day. And most of us know that you can't connect on the basis of style alone. Life's too short. People want to see the substance, of the message *and of the messenger*. When they do, they forget the style. The connection's made. Which is why, if you have something that's worth saying and you focus on that worth, you have the innate ability to say it effectively – no magic cloaks, no tricks.

What is communication? What is presentation? What is charisma ...? The integrity of the message and the messenger – that's what they are. And recognising the value of that integrity is a serious corporate responsibility as well as an important personal goal. Simon Loftus, Chairman of Adnams says: "public trust is a corporate asset, a matter of competitive advantage that builds brand loyalty..." Connectedness depends on it, and no one – corporate or individual – can go anywhere without connectedness.

In this issue of the Journal our contributors look at this idea from a number of perspectives. We'd love to know what you think too. ☉

Jo Ouston

# Brand Experience – a shared story



*A discussion with Ralph Ardill,  
Founder and CEO of the Brand  
Experience Consultancy*

**J**ournal: Ralph, you are known internationally as a pioneer of Brand Experience. What does that mean to you?

**R**A: Brand experience means a fundamental shift in the focus of our thinking – from products to people. It's not enough just to think about brand communication any more. People are becoming immune to marketing messages that are simply broadcast at them.

People have to invest time, money, energy and emotion in the transactions they have with brands and they now expect a more personal approach.

**J**ournal: Why is this important?

**R**A: Global markets are increasingly crowded and competitive. Faster development of increasingly similar products means brands chasing smaller slices of shrinking markets less profitably. Consumers empowered with information are more resistant to spin and less brand-loyal. In contrast, experiences create new kinds of value – for example, entertainment, education, enlightenment or even escapism – and by engaging customers can make them more a fan or an advocate than just a buyer.

**J**ournal: Could you give us an example of that?

**R**A: The Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, opened in 2000 to replace an outmoded visitor centre, presented a serious marketing challenge – how to reconnect a younger generation with a brand that was seen as the choice of an older set. The brand emphasises community so, rather than creating a corporate cathedral for worshipping Guinness, our aim was to create a place for interaction between tourists, local people and Guinness staff, particularly new employees undergoing training. The Storehouse has become a leading attraction and destination in Dublin. Events, parties, exhibitions and shows based around the Storehouse make it a magnet for people in their twenties and thirties and the experience helps younger people to re-evaluate Guinness as a brand ([www.guinness-storehouse.com](http://www.guinness-storehouse.com)). Other examples would be Virgin Atlantic, with its fusion of original ideas and passionate customer service, or Sony Playstation, with its formidable technology creating enticing environments, communities and sheer entertainment.

**J**ournal: What is the key to that success?

**R**A: Design for brand experience is increasingly about designing relationships rather than designing things. Things are relatively easy but thinking in terms of relationships forces you to consider the people and the context – how they will relate to your product, how it will affect their relationships and, above all, how they will remember the experience and recount it to others.


**J**ournal: So how do you put that into practice?

**R**A: It demands a new range of skills and attitudes. As well as thinking holistically about the customer experience, companies have to think holistically about the employee experience too. As well as developing new business models, strategies and methodologies, organisations need to be innovative and creative in developing people. We need to foster cultures that enable cross-functional team working and where people avoid preconceived approaches, ask brilliant questions and listen to the answers. As in an orchestra, you need good players but you don't want an orchestra of soloists. At the end of the day they must want to be there as part of a team.

I find it helpful to work with images or archetypes – for example, we're making a movie, building a bridge or creating a hit single. These are complex activities that bring together multiple talents and different disciplines. This approach encourages you to focus on how your 'production' will be experienced by the audience or customers.

**J**ournal: Do you think this approach has relevance beyond consumer brands?

**R**A: Yes indeed. Most project work depends crucially on relationships and most business and professional services are based on building effective relationships. However, there are forces that work against this. It is often harder for large organisations, driven by their own cultures and processes, to get close to their customers. In other cases, procurement processes make it impossible to foster constructive and creative relationships.

Brand experience means that we have to open up to customers in new ways. In place of the pre-determined one-way communication, we have to be responsive and entrepreneurial, meeting customers in new situations and locations, allowing the unexpected to happen and enabling shared brand experiences to evolve. We need to be genuine and committed and brave enough to put passion before immediate profit in redefining what our brands are and can be. 

Ralph Ardill founded the Brand Experience Consultancy in 2005. For 10 years previously he was Marketing and Strategic Planning Director of the Imagination Group, a leading design and communications consultancy, where he was responsible for defining and developing their core 'Brand Experience' offer. He holds an MBA in Management Science from the University of Warwick.

# How to find the best staff? Let them find themselves



*Hiscox is an insurance group that makes headlines for all the right reasons – they have featured regularly in the Sunday Times list of the 100 Best Companies To Work For and in autumn 2005 they were able to announce record interim financial results.*

Not only is this top rating Lloyds company acknowledged on objective measurements to be ‘a good employer’, but research on the Hiscox brand produces descriptions like ‘challenger mentality’, ‘don’t follow the crowd’, ‘dare to be different’.

“We strive to be a dynamic insurer, focused on solving problems and providing cover against specialist risks in our in our chosen areas,” says Chairman Robert Hiscox. “We aim to be distinctive in the insurance industry and will achieve that distinction through integrity, flexibility, innovation, efficiency and above all – service.”

These values are central to the Hiscox business philosophy, as are people – not only employees, but also clients. The company is recognised both for the high quality of its people and its reputation for acting as a ‘playmaker’ in the marketplace by challenging conventional ways of thinking.

“Hiscox is only as good as its people”, says Robert Hiscox. “We aim to attract and select the best people for each job, since each job at Hiscox makes a difference.”

This is dramatically illustrated in a unique staff development programme initiated in 1998 after discussions with Jo Ouston & Co.

With no inventory except brains and no product except promises kept, Hiscox knew that their business was 100% dependent on the performance of their staff – not just their technical performance, which other companies might match – but their performance as advocates, communicators, listeners and relationship builders. While Hiscox knew they had valuable individuals at every level, they were less sure that this value was always seen, by colleagues or by clients, often because it was not recognised by the individuals themselves.

Jo Ouston & Co devised a personal development programme which many of the people involved say has transformed their lives. Right from the start the Hiscox board were so impressed by the results that they made plans to let everyone in the organisation, from the Chairman down, benefit from the process.

A recent Hiscox recruit, Operations Manager Claire Ingoldsby, echoes this response. “Other courses tell you some of the effects of your behaviour, but you don’t understand

continued overleaf

## Corporate values? Convince me.



Darell Moulton

For years marketing people have talked about ‘brand values’ – the extra dimension a brand should have beyond the way the product works.

These values are often embodied

in a corporate vision. But a vision in itself does not constitute a physical reality. How do you translate good intentions into practice?

If one of the values is, say, respect for customers and colleagues, can that be achieved by means of a management directive? Or by an inspiring address from one of the company’s charismatic leaders?

Being given a direction to respect others doesn’t mean you feel it. And

pretence leads to inauthenticity – the formulaic ‘have a nice day’ syndrome. We may think we’re showing respect, but if the other person feels that our behaviour is phoney, they may not feel respected at all.

And even where the intention is genuine, we can be blown off course in the pressure of meetings and the heat of the working day.

Nervousness, rather than deviousness, is often the reason for people not coming across as genuine, and so not performing convincingly. Getting control of that nervousness, moving from behind the emotional barrier so that we can genuinely pay attention to the other person, is a well understood, practical process with a distinctly physical basis. The secret is in understanding the connection between the body and the brain. In earliest childhood we made the automatic link between

breathing, speaking and moving. Re-learning that physical hierarchy and discovering how to use it is the surest way to unwind the physical tension that can block our minds and so prevent us from connecting with others.

So, everyone in the organisation may know what its corporate values are, and be able to repeat them loyally. But what makes the customer believe the message?

First, they must believe the messenger. Unless the person in front of them is able to express themselves in an authentic way, the message of corporate values will be lost.

Darell Moulton, a member of the team JO & Co, has extensive experience in the study and teaching of performance. He regularly coaches and trains on our open courses and corporate programmes.

the reasons. This one was more subtle because it gave real insights into how behaviour works. I feel more confident now in new situations because I know why certain things have the results they have, so I understand how to use them.”

Hiscox puts a great deal of faith in relatively young people, trusting them to take responsibility, encouraging them to excel. Simon Williams is Head of Marine Underwriting. “Our business is a people business,” he says. “And our age profile means we’re often dealing with older, apparently higher status people. When we talk to them it’s very important they see the maturity of the personality rather than just the age of the person. This course did wonders for that. Because of the inner confidence we learned, I now feel I can handle a heavyweight subject, in front of a heavyweight audience, without any sense that I’m not in control. I have the resources to match the needs of the situation”

On the other hand David Bruce, Head of Speciality Division, has been with Hiscox for over thirty years, and views the question of status from a different perspective. “The course showed me a lot about the importance of skilled listening, of observing others and reading the signs. I’ve been in this business a long time and I tend to be pretty sure of my ground. But playing that hand from the word go doesn’t always get the right reaction. The course showed me that reading people is an important skill and usually gets better results.”

Bruce is one who declares that the understanding he gained on the course changed his life. “Previously, though I usually achieved my objectives, there was often a cost. Now I know how to achieve the same, without the cost.” Simon Williams is convinced of the go-anywhere nature of what he learned. “It’s great for business, but I know I can call on it in any situation, not just at work. That’s a great comfort.”

“The company aims to be the employer of choice in the sector”, says Vivienne Ayres, Talent Manger. And listening to Hiscox people talking about the company’s approach to personal development it becomes clear why the company is happy to live with their reputation, to quote the research, of ‘a management style which gives people responsibility and freedom to think, but expects 100% commitment in return’. The Hiscox approach gives new meaning to the term ‘good employer’.



## Course Schedule

Our open course schedule for the first half of 2006 is now available and is enclosed with this Journal.

An up-to-date schedule with additions or changes to the programme is always available on our website at [www.joouston.co.uk](http://www.joouston.co.uk) > What we do.

# Masters in Creativity



Melissa Addey (left) and Theresa Huxley (right) with Louise Grisoni, Head, School of Organisational Studies, Bristol Business School

At Jo Ouston & Co we have been working closely with clients on creativity for more than five years - both through bespoke in-house programmes and through our open course: *Releasing Creativity*.

In November 2005, we were delighted to celebrate the success of Melissa Addey, Theresa Huxley and Cathy Port, who were awarded Masters Degrees by the University of the West of England (UWE).

All three are ‘alumni’ of a practical creativity programme – the Post-graduate Diploma in Creative Talents and Solutions – developed by Jo Ouston & Co with the Bristol Business School at UWE for Sainsbury’s Supermarkets Limited. By undertaking further study, Melissa, Theresa and Cathy took the opportunity build on the Diploma and progress to a full Masters Degree.

Creativity and innovation – in the ways that businesses operate as well as in the design of products and services – are recognised as critical to the UK economy in the face of global competition, points emphasised in the DTI study *Creativity Design and Economic Performance* and the Cox Review of Creativity in Business, both published in December 2005.

Our ongoing partnership with UWE enables us to extend the range and depth of our courses and to offer programmes with academic accreditation.



*Career and management development consultants*

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