

Introduction

Communication is nothing less than a secret superpower for success.

Now, I realise that's quite a claim to start our odyssey together. But stay with me. Because I've got plenty of evidence to back it up.

Firstly, an insight of my own. A confession, if you like:

I fear that without the world of words I would have achieved nothing much in life.

I've never counted myself particularly bright. Certainly not in comparison with the brilliant minds which surround me here at the celebrated University of Cambridge. And yes, I appreciate it may not be smart to admit that, given you've invested time and money in *Compelling Communication*. But I make my confession for a reason.

It turns out I'm fortunate to be blessed with a gift those wonderful Cambridge minds, and many others besides, need. A certain talent with writing, public speaking, storytelling and the strategic use of communication. Because if there's one lesson I've learned in life, it's this:

Explaining your vision, inspiring a team, being noticed as an incredible employee, seeking an important promotion, spreading news of a world-changing discovery, starting your own business, strutting your stuff on the world stage, wooing the love of your life, forging lasting friendships, influencing and persuading anyone at any time, or any of a range of other noble aspirations is unlikely to make headway unless . . .

You can communicate. And not just do so, but do so well.

In short, you may be the most remarkable person, with the most wonderful ideas, that can make our beautiful planet a far better place. But if you can't explain, enthuse and energise with any of that, then what will it all come to?

Enough said, I hope.

Happily, that's where *Compelling Communication* steps in. It offers all the insights you need to make a mark with your message in any situation whatsoever. That goes from writing an elegant and effective report, or even social media post, to telling a story which leaves an audience spellbound, to giving a barnstorming speech before a crowd of thousands.

Importantly, there's something we'd best get straight from the start. This is not – repeat NOT – a dusty academic tome. You're banned from leaving it on the coffee table in order to impress visitors.

The book is for reading and using. It's intended to be rigorously practical, easily accessible and instantly actionable. Some of the points will be accompanied by videos and interactive exercises to offer added illumination. You can find those on the companion website to the book, www.cambridge.org/compellingcommunication.

Storytelling is a star turn of the communication cabaret, as we'll see. So *Compelling Communication* is designed to tell a story. We'll start at the beginning with the foundations of powerful communication, before moving on to the various elements, as well as strategic and sometimes shamelessly cunning ways to deploy your new skills.

On a personal note, I can highly recommend becoming an effective communicator. For me, it's meant an incredible life. With the BBC, I was privileged to meet a range of remarkable people in a series of memorable places while witnessing a catalogue of extraordinary events. My novel writing has been a fascinating exploration of the world and the self. My non-fiction books have brought travel and a fulfilling lifestyle.

But at the pinnacle of all sits my work here in Cambridge. I moved to this city of learning and enterprise as a break from the BBC, seeking a new

adventure. I expected to pick up work helping academics and businesses with their writing and presentation skills. But I was far from prepared for the demand for my insights and experience.

Having witnessed my work across the historic colleges and faculties, a kind professor suggested I create an online course for the University. I'm happy (and more than a little relieved!) to say that *Compelling Communication Skills* was a success. Demand came from across society and around the world, and the feedback was uplifting. People far and wide were using what they had learned to make a real difference in their lives, their careers and their countries.

That wonderful experience was the inspiration for this book.

I hope it will prove as effective as the course in helping a range of readers fulfil their potential by mastering the joyous art of compelling communication. For example, some of those I've worked with, and the difference their new skill set has made:

- A renowned Cambridge professor approached me for help with a prestigious lecture. Although he had given thousands of talks in his time, he confessed: *I never really think I truly nail it. I fear something's not quite there.* The result? In his own words: *That was what was missing. The showbiz of the talk, the tricks of the trade which you taught me. This time, I felt I truly connected with the audience and made a real impression.*
- A director of a major public service, who had an extraordinary story to share, needed support to ensure it made the impact it deserved. I helped create the presentation and media package, and the story was picked up by almost 5,000 news outlets internationally. After the talk the director gave on the experience, she was surrounded by people telling her what an amazing lecture it was and how they were entranced and inspired by her storytelling.
- An executive needed to change the way her company was working, but encountered strong resistance. She asked for my help and together we created a story imagining two different futures for the business. One led to prosperity, the other decline. She began to weave the storytelling into her communications, and, after a few months, succeeded in making the changes the company required.

- A researcher wanted to heighten her profile as she sought a new opportunity. Together, we produced a media release about her ground-breaking work in artificial intelligence. The story was picked up by newspapers, radio, television and news websites around the world, helping her to become far more prominent in her field, and to secure a prestigious new position.
- The chief executive of a medical technology business needed to raise tens of millions of pounds in funding. But he was struggling to make investors understand and support the venture. I spent a week working on the company's core messages, its website and the executive's pitch. Now the business has the investment it sought and is thriving.
- A PhD student was asked to give a high profile presentation about her work producing laboratory grown meat, but suffered a fear of public speaking. We drew out the narrative of her talk, added elements of entertainment, built her confidence, and it was a great success. She now looks forward to, rather than dreads, giving presentations, something she thought would never happen.

But anecdotes aside, and finally for this introduction – not to mention most importantly – a simple question. What single theme unites this array of very different experiences?

Yes, that's a no-brainer if ever you saw one. And surprise, surprise, given the nature of this book . . .

The answer is the power of effective communication in helping to achieve our aims, whatever they might be.

That's the motivation which lies behind *Compelling Communication*. To pass on this secret superpower, so that you too can achieve your ambitions and fulfil your aspirations.