

# The oblique view



We continue our series in which Consultant Interventionist Dr Michael Norell takes a sideways look at life in the cath lab...and beyond. In this column, he dissects the 21st century obsession with corporate rationale.

## Our mission: to boldly state . . .

Most people don't notice them. Or perhaps just glance. Some might take no more than a passing interest as they scan a letterhead, footer or billboard. Others have no choice but to observe the back of the van they are stuck behind or the side of the truck as they are eventually able to overtake. What phenomenon is this? I suppose it is best summed up as 'the philosophy'; a few words painstakingly combined over many hours, which succinctly describe an organisation's *'raison d'être'* – its motivation or organisational ethos, its mission or positioning statement.

Apparently, if more than one person is employed, then no self-respecting firm, society, business or multi-million dollar, multi-national conglomerate, can hold up its head in the market place without one. Why is this? From where did these phrases come and what purpose do they serve? What demarcates a memorable and witty use of a few choice words, as opposed to 21st century business-like twaddle and a complete waste of some focus group's energy, time and money?

I found myself engaged in this quest when involved

in a video conference call earlier this year. Instead of spending five hours down and up the M40 in a vain attempt to attend a two-hour meeting, I suggested utilising some modern gadgetry instead. It meant that I missed out on some impressively novel sandwiches, as well as the opportunity to finish one or two articles on my laptop whilst sitting between J10 and J11 (*Br J Cardiol*, *passim*), but the time saved was just about worth it. In order to link up, I had to get onto the website of the firm that hosted such contact, and it was there that I was struck by their understated strapline: "We must start meeting like this". Now, is that clever or is that clever?

### .... on numerous levels

These phrases need to work on a number of levels. They need to be grammatically correct for a start. They need to express what the organisation is quintessentially about, and frequently incorporate double – or even treble – entendres that allow the casual (or in some cases the more often anally-retentive) reader to appreciate all the underlying, subliminal and interspersed messages con-

tained therein. The most common seem to incorporate the words 'logistics' or 'solutions'. In the latter case, the only company I could think of that might successfully utilise that element would be a fully staffed Israeli or Jordanian business specialising in the export of surplus sodium chloride from the Dead Sea ('Saturated Salt Solutions').

The relevance to cardiovascular matters is two-fold. Many pharmaceutical and device companies have incorporated these catchphrases, and may consider them as some form of mantra – perhaps seen in the mind's eye as surrounded by a Turner-esque sunset, steaming rain forest, calm ocean or snow-covered mountain peak, which their representatives have to visualise as they promote their organisation. 'Delivering what's next' is a current example from a forward-thinking device business, although to me it seems more suited to a busy midwife. Interestingly, in this particular case, the phrase has been copyrighted (or patented), so that's bad luck for the Post Office as well.

I have tried without success to legally protect, in a similar way, a phrase of my own: the 'triangle of death'

that aptly describes the anatomy and consequences of inadequate stent coverage of a side branch ostium when addressing a bifurcation lesion. (I can't imagine why the general public are not the least bit interested in this; every four years our nation's football team find themselves qualifying for the World Cup in the 'group of death'. This predictable description is designed to anticipate a stormy course and thereby justify in advance our early departure from the competition.) As for branch vessel angioplasty, my silk has had no luck thus far, but I would still warn you to use this phrase at your peril.

### .... or none at all?

The second reason relates to the British Cardiac (sorry, Cardiovascular) Society and its ongoing re-branding exercise. I could not discern any parallel message or secondary meaning in 'promoting cardiovascular health'. It is simple enough, easy to understand and non-provocative; understated, unambiguous and undeniable. (Who said unnecessary?)

The more we become aware of this trend, the more of these we will

notice. Just last week I saw 'Health and safety is *no* accident' on a placard adorning a building site and on a water company compressor attending to a minor sewerage problem (wait for it . . .), 'Your waste *safe* in our hands' (. . . and I kid you not!).

Examples of poorly produced statements are numerous (although sometimes they deliberately appear clumsy in order to increase the likelihood that you will remember the particular business or product). I have no doubt that the florists who boldly announced: 'If your mother-in-law is at death's door, our flowers will pull her through' saw their stock rise considerably.

Ethereal and futuristic sentences suggest that the company in question has 'seen the light' and that it is only a matter of time before everyone else catches up with their unique working practice. Hence, "Someday, all banks/garages/taxider-

mists will be run this way", gives a warm sense of confidence as we leave our money, car or much-loved household pet in their charge.

There remains one classic line that enshrined succinctly the ultimate corporate philosophy, capturing perfectly the essence and ethos of the organisation. The fact that the English-speaking public found 'Vorschprung durch Technik' completely unintelligible simply enhanced its strength, mystery and vision, and thereby its authority and the confidence it engendered. Sheer genius!

**Michael Norell**  
Consultant Interventional  
Cardiologist and PCI  
Programme Director  
The Heart and Lung  
Centre, Wolverhampton,  
WV10 0QP.  
(email: Michael.  
norell@rwh-tr.nhs.uk)

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