



**WINNING
MINDS**

SECRETS FROM THE
LANGUAGE OF LEADERSHIP

SIMON LANCASTER

Praise for *Winning Minds*

“Simon Lancaster is a polymath – excellent civil servant, brilliant speech writer, talented musician, and fantastic author. If you want to understand why this description breeches the rhetorical device of tricolon, read this wonderful book.”

–Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP, former Home Secretary

“From substance to style, *Winning Minds* is an excellent insight into the language of leadership written in the clear yet humorous way that is Simon’s hallmark.”

–Richard Solomons, CEO, Intercontinental Hotels Group plc

“Simon’s book unlocks the secret of how to be a world-class communicator and leader in a book that is as entertaining as it is packed with know-how.”

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–Mark Swain, Director, Henley Business School

About the author

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Secrets From the
Language of Leadership

Winning Minds

Simon Lancaster

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*To Lottie and Alice
Be who you want to be,
Do what you want to do,
Go where you want to go,
I'm always beside you.*

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Introduction

On 26 July 2012, my wife Lucy and I were in Hyde Park along with 250,000 others to celebrate the start of the London 2012 Olympic Games. It was a perfect summer day: drinks flowed, Dizzee Rascal boomed out blistering versions of 'Bassline Junkie' and 'Bonkers'... but then Boris Johnson, London's mayor, staggered on stage. The crowd murmured disapprovingly at the sight of the politician. Someone shouted 'wanker'. A few people took out their phones and pressed record.

Now, I am not a natural Boris fan. Most of my political experience was gained on the other side of the fence working with the other Johnson (Alan). However, Boris blew my socks off that day. In just three minutes, he turned the crowd from hostility to hysteria. It was a masterclass in the Language of Leadership:

I've never seen anything like this in all my life.

The excitement is growing so much I think the Geiger counter of Olympomania is going to go zoinck off the scale.

People are coming from around the world and they're seeing us and they're seeing the greatest city on earth, aren't they?

There are some people coming from around the world who don't yet know all the preparations we've done to get London ready in the last seven years.

I hear there's a guy called Mitt Romney who wants to know whether we're ready.

Are we ready? Yes, we are.

The venues are ready. The stadium is ready. The aquatics centre is ready. The velodrome is ready. The security is ready. The police are ready. The transport system is ready. And our Team GB athletes are ready... Aren't they?

There's going to be more gold, silver, bronze medals than you'd need to bail out Greece and Spain together.

Final question. Can we put on the greatest Olympic Games that has ever been held?

Are we worried about the weather? We're not worried about the weather.

Can we beat France? Yes we can! Can we beat Australia? Yes we can! Can we beat Germany? I think we can.

Thank you very much everybody. Have a wonderful, wonderful London 2012. Thank you for all your support.

Watch it on YouTube – seriously. Watch for yourself the authentic shifts in mood. Watch the first tentative laughs. Watch how energy ripples through the crowd. Watch how everyone joins in with the 'Yes we can' refrain. Watch also how, at the end, the crowd spontaneously erupts in applause and starts chanting 'Boris! Boris! Boris!'.

Lucy and I were also chanting 'Boris! Boris!' Then we stopped. Suddenly, we returned to our senses. 'Blimey. What happened there?' said Lucy. 'Drugs', I replied. And that was it. The speech felt emotional but the reaction was chemical. A few lines of Boris had left everyone high: intoxicated and irrational. So what happened? We know what the brain looks like on heroin. Let's look at the brain on Boris.

Boris's speech stimulated the release of three powerful drugs in the brain. The first was serotonin, the self-esteem drug. Serotonin makes us feel confident, strong and powerful. Prozac and other anti-depressants

mimic its effect.¹ Praise causes serotonin to be released and Boris laid it on thick with the talk about our great city, our great country and our great athletes.

The second drug he got going was oxytocin, the love drug. Oxytocin makes us feel warm, fuzzy and safe. Ecstasy mimics its effect. Oxytocin is released naturally when we feel a closeness with others – whether that comes from touching, holding hands, cuddling, having sex or, yes, even listening to a Boris speech. Boris united the crowd through his constant use of the first-person plural: his speech was all ‘we’, not ‘me’. And it was not ‘We, the Conservative Party’ as you would expect from some politicians, it was ‘We, Great Britain’. He also united us by reminding us who we were up against: the condescending Mitt Romney, the bankrupt states of Southern Europe and, of course – the Germans. What better way to unite 250,000 Brits than mentioning the Germans?

The third drug he stimulated was dopamine, the reward drug. Dopamine makes us feel *great*. Dopamine is the same drug that is released by taking cocaine, heroin and speed. Dopamine is released in greater or lesser quantities according to whether or not our expectations are met. Boris surpassed expectations. Instead of a self-congratulatory political speech we got a short burst of patriotic fervour, peppered with such craziness as ‘Olympomania’ and ‘zoink’.

So, Boris’s speech was just a bit like taking ecstasy, Prozac, cocaine, heroin and speed all at once. There were more drugs circulating in Hyde Park that day than when the Stones played in 1969. And the effect was amazing, leaving everyone feeling united, proud and invincible. Complete strangers greeted one another as friends, goofily exclaiming ‘Good old Boris!’ and ‘Total legend!’ The wave of euphoria was similar to a rock concert or evangelical sermon.

But then, as always, after the high comes the low. The comedown. And this is the miserable bit. Now, there are no fun drugs being released, just toxins, and they leave us feeling grim. But it is within the depths of depression that the leader draws strength. Because, as the low kicks in,

so does the craving for the next high. And when we look for the high, to whom do we turn? Whoever made us high last time.

That's what draws people to their leader. They're craving pride. They're craving connection. They're craving purpose. They're addicted, junkies, hunting for their next fix. That is the secret contract upon which great leaders trade. That is what gives leaders power. I'll meet your emotional needs, but in return you give me your support. That's the contract. That's the deal. That is the basis of the Language of Leadership.

Winning Minds – The Secret Science of the Language of Leadership

It's Christmas 2014 and I'm in the Red Lion, a snug, warm pub in the heart of the Brecon Beacons. There's a roaring fire, I'm sitting in a big leather armchair but, although I've come here to work on the final draft of a speech about leadership, I'm not making much progress. A group of men on the table next to me are raucously arguing about how much money they would need to win on the lottery to stop work. A guy turns to me. 'What's the annual interest on a million pounds?' '£30,000?' I guess. The guy smiles. 'There. You can buy a house in Merthyr Tydfil for £30,000.' Someone snips in. 'Yes, but what would you do with the other £29,000!' More laughter. I'm invited to join their table.

Our conversation over the next two hours is like a whirlwind tour through recent history – from the mines closing in South Wales to immigration from Central and Eastern Europe to tensions with Islam. What is striking for me is how much of the conversation comes back to leaders: from Arthur Scargill ('What was going on with that scrag of hair?') to Margaret Thatcher ('She had the devil in her eyes') to Michael Heseltine ('Wasn't he into swinging?') to Barack Obama ('They said he could walk on water') to David Cameron ('I'd like to put a bullet between his eyes') to Nigel Farage ('He's a neo-Nazi. Does that matter?') to Ed Miliband ('Complete clown') and Ed Balls ('He looks like someone has shoved a pineapple up his backside').

Leaders arouse huge strength of feeling – for better or for worse. They touch us deeply and emotionally. And, right now, there is a global crisis in leadership.¹ It's evident in conversations like this in pubs in Britain but also in the riots in South America and the uprisings in the Middle East. The world needs leaders. Without leaders, the advance of civilisation can falter.

Great leadership is intrinsically about great communication. Branson. Obama. Jobs. Roddick. Thatcher. Blair. You can't be a great leader without being a great communicator. But communication now is getting harder than ever. People spend more time looking down at their phones than up to their leaders. This is the challenge which must be overcome.

The good news is that there is a secret Language of Leadership: a secret set of physical, verbal and vocal cues and signals that has existed for tens of thousands of years which still determines who makes it to the top in business and politics today. Many in the past have tried to decode this secret language but it is only now, with recent breakthroughs in neuroscience and behavioural economics, that we can say with much greater certainty what works and why.

This book is a user's guide to that Language of Leadership. It opens up a treasure chest of tips, tricks and techniques which you can instantly use to become more effective, engaging and inspiring.

But before we get to all that, let me scoop you up out of that little pub in Wales and zip you back in time 2500 years ago to Athens: from the Red Lion to an ancient Greek tavern. Around us now are men in togas, slurping from urns of red wine and enjoying just the kind of indecorous conversation we just witnessed in Wales. So let's sit down, enjoy a goblet of wine and nibble on some olives. Take a look in the corner. See that earnest-looking man scribbling away? That is Aristotle. The book he's writing is called *Rhetoric*.

／ Rhetoric

Despite the passage of thousands of years and the advent of all sorts of new technologies and changes, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is still, for me, the

ultimate guide to the art of communication. Lots of people bang on about Machiavelli and Dale Carnegie but, as far as I'm concerned, Aristotle is the master. *Rhetoric* was a work not of scientific deduction, but of observation. And what is most extraordinary is that, way back when human civilisation was just a dot, he nailed it.

Aristotle said that great communication requires three things: ethos, pathos and logos (as you'll soon discover, all great things come in threes...). Now, if those terms are all Greek to you: ethos means credibility, pathos means emotion and logos means logic, or the *appearance* of logic (and it was Aristotle himself who insisted that it was only the appearance of logic that mattered: it didn't have to be real scientific logic).

Aristotle said great communication requires ethos, pathos and logos

And that is right, isn't it? Because ethos, pathos and logos answer the three perennial questions that are buzzing around the minds of any group of people who are weighing up a potential leader: namely, 'Can I trust you?' (ethos); 'Do I care about what you are saying?' (pathos); and 'Are you right, or do you sound right?' (logos).

Great leaders need each of these three questions to be answered with a resounding 'yes'. It's like three cherries on the fruit machine. Getting just one right is not enough. You can't make an appeal purely on the basis of character or purely on the basis of emotion. You need all three to be present.

It is a three-legged stool: if one of them fails, the others collapse. If people don't trust a leader (no ethos), they won't care about their argument (no pathos) and they'll doubt its veracity (no logos). Likewise, if they don't care what the leader is saying (pathos), they will distrust their character (ethos) and won't bother listening to the argument (logos). And if someone says something plainly wrong (logos), then this casts doubt over their integrity (ethos) and will cause emotional shutdown (pathos).

Aristotle's rhetoric gives us an instant insight into the problem with most modern communication. All of the focus goes into getting the logic right, without regard to character or emotion. In fact, we are actively taught to banish these elements – we are told it is unprofessional to show emotion

and too egotistical to talk about oneself. But these two elements are, as Aristotle said, essential, and they sit at the heart of the current crisis of leadership.

Just one in five people trust business and political leaders to tell the truth.² Only 13% of people are engaged at work.³ People now spend more time online than they do with real people.⁴

A revival in rhetoric could help tackle this current crisis. I make this claim not because I'm a big fan of all things ancient, but because new developments in behavioural economics and neuroscience are proving that Aristotle's theories were astonishingly accurate.

／ Ancient rhetoric meets modern neuroscience

So now, if you don't mind, I'll lift you out of that ancient Greek taverna – yes, by all means, grab a couple of olives for the journey if you must – and whizz you forward to Parma, Italy, in 1994. We're in a cutting-edge laboratory full of brain scanners and computers. Amidst them stands a kindly faced, silver-haired Italian neuroscientist called Giacomo Rizzolatti who looks exactly like a scientist should look: white coat, a bit spinnny-eyed, not unlike Doc from *Back to the Future*. But Rizzolatti is no crackpot, he is one of the world's greatest neuroscientists. Today, he is looking at motor co-ordination: observing a monkey's brain activity as the monkey scratches his arms and chews on his nuts (now, there's a sentence you must take care to get the right way around).

It is a hot day... Rizzolatti goes over to the fridge, grabs an ice cream and takes a bite. As he does so, the scanner jumps. Hmm. Rizzolatti turns around. He looks at the reading. It shows activity in the part of the monkey's brain associated with eating. He licks the ice cream again. Once more, the scanner leaps. He tries it a few more times. Each time, the response is repeated. Rizzolatti pauses. How extraordinary. Even though the monkey is absolutely static, it is clear his brain is imagining that it is he who is eating the ice cream at the same time as Rizzolatti. The monkey is mirroring him.

This was a momentous event. It represented the kind of profound scientific breakthrough that takes place only once every 50 years: indeed, Rizzolatti's discovery has been put up there along with the discovery of DNA. The insight that emerged that day was this: when people see someone acting with purpose, they mirror in their minds what the other person is doing. Their brains respond as if they were performing the task themselves.

This led to a new term – 'mirror neurons'. These neurons provided the answer to all sorts of previously inexplicable phenomena, from why we wince if we see someone hit their finger with a hammer, to why we feel such disappointment if we see someone miss a bus, to why it was that following the death of Diana, millions of people went out and bought that really appalling version of 'Candle in the Wind'. Once you know about mirror neurons you'll see them everywhere: from the way crowds hurry along and slow down collectively to how one person yawning at a dinner party makes everyone else yawn. It all comes down to mirror neurons.

Since then, billions of pounds have been invested in neuroscience. It is the new rock 'n' roll. We have neurosales, neuromarketing and before long the

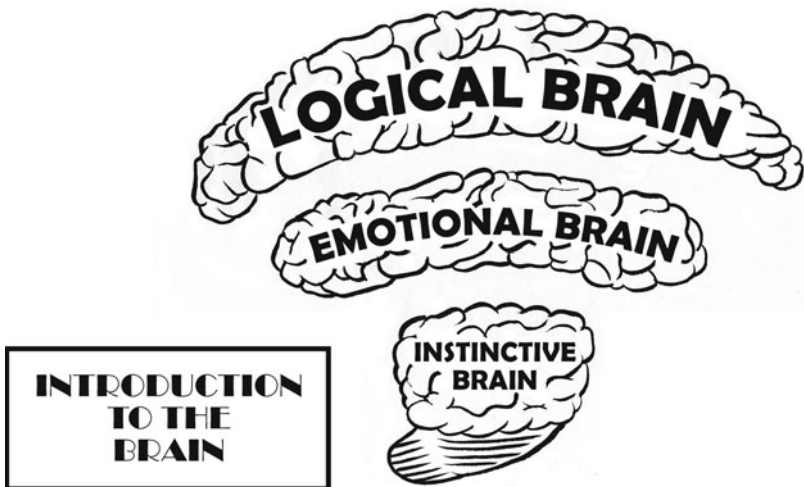


FIGURE 1.1 Introduction to the brain

neuromantics will probably make a comeback – good news for Spandau Ballet. But the point is that neuroscience has provided unprecedented insight into the inner workings of the brain. This means that great questions that were once the subject of speculation can now be answered with scientific certainty.

Now, I'm not a neuroscientist, I am a speechwriter, but I have been struck by how closely neuroscience links to ancient rhetoric. Aristotle's big three link perfectly to the big three parts of the brain: the instinctive brain, the emotional brain and the logical brain.

Let's take a deeper look inside the brain and see (Figure 1.1).

／ The instinctive brain

The instinctive brain sits at the base of the brain. It can also be called the intuitive brain, the unconscious brain or the reptilian brain... It is the oldest part of the brain, dating back 5 million years, and it is very impressive. Not only is it incredibly busy (95% of brain activity takes place here), it is also incredibly powerful, working at 80,000 times the speed of the logical brain with no conscious effort at all on our part.

It's just as well it's so efficient because our survival depends on it: literally. The operating mandate of the instinctive brain is to ensure our survival, not just as individuals, but as a race and as a species. To that end, it has supreme power to override every other part of our brain if it wants. That's a good thing too. After all, what's more important than survival?

The instinctive brain ensures our survival in two ways. On the one hand, through keeping our heart pumping, blood circulating, lungs breathing and so on – we know about all that. But it also has another function which is less well-known: the instinctive brain acts as a kind of internal guardian angel. It operates an incredibly advanced CCTV detection system with thousands of cameras spinning around every which way, constantly

taking pictures, processing them against past memories and then producing powerful impulses. These impulses instinctively draw us towards people and environments that it perceives to be safe and rewarding, whilst instinctively guiding us away from people and environments it perceives to be dangerous or threatening. Isn't that great?

Well... it would be seriously great, were it not for one flaw. The trouble is that, although the world around us has changed beyond all recognition in the last 5 million years, the instinctive brain has not. The instinctive brain still thinks we're Neanderthals prowling around on the savannah, when we're actually lying on the sofa snacking on Doritos, fiddling with our phones, watching TV.

Leaders speak to the instinctive brain's needs. They offer the promise of safety and rewards but, before we get to how we do that, let's step up, move on and have a nosey around the next level: the emotional brain.

／ The emotional brain

Now, simply using the word 'emotion' in a professional context can be enough to make some bristle. Emotion can still be considered a pejorative term – a 'women's issue', proving my earlier point about mankind still being basically Neanderthal. But emotion cannot be discounted in any analysis of leadership because you simply can't move people without emotion. The clue is in the word. 'E-motion': the word derives from the Greek – motion from within. Motion = movement.

There is a story about a guy who suffered a terrible car crash: a crash that left the emotional part of his brain irreparably damaged, whilst the logical part of his brain remained intact. Someone hatched the bright idea of sending him to Vegas, counting cards – as in *Rainman* – so they could all become rich. The trouble was, after he arrived in Vegas, they couldn't get him to do what they wanted. 'But we'll make lots of money!' 'So?' 'We'll make you rich!' 'So?' 'It's going to be fantastic.' 'So?' Without emotion, there is no motivational pull.



The emotional part of the brain is 20 times as powerful as the logical brain.⁵ Emotions are overwhelming. We all know this. We can drown in emotion, and this is not some poetic metaphor, but a literal description of what happens. When we feel emotional, powerful drugs are released which flood our mind, be it oxytocin (the love/connection/cuddly drug), serotonin (the pride/esteem/confidence drug) or cortisol (the stress/fear/shock drug). The feelings induced by these drugs are so intoxicating, they reduce our capacity for logical thought. We love these drugs and crave them, and spend much of our time hunting them down, so desperate are we for the emotional fulfilment they provide.

Great leaders know this. They meet people's emotional needs. In return, they are given support. The American people felt afraid – George W. Bush made them feel safe. The British people felt anxious – Tony Blair gave them hope. People feel subdued and silenced – Russell Brand articulates their anger. There are heaps of emotions – 412 at the last count⁶ – and great leaders know just how to tap into them.

I could talk for weeks about the different ways different leaders get different emotions going but there's not time: we still need to move up and look at the logical part of the brain. It would be rude to ignore the logical brain completely... particularly as it's so large.

The logical brain

The logical part of the brain represents 85% of its mass so it is by far the largest part of the brain. Relatively speaking, it is also the newest. It was the evolution of the logical brain that set the human race apart from our simian brothers, giving us our amazing powers to communicate, write music and invent: from the wheel to the printing press, antibiotics to the internet, the jet engine to the iPhone... Many have waxed lyrical about the amazing intelligence of the logical brain through the ages, from the ancient philosophers to the Enlightenment. But come closer and I'll tell you a secret. The logical brain is not actually half as clever as it's cracked up to be.

Just because the brain *can* be logical, doesn't mean it always *is* logical: to believe that would be to fall for that old fallacy of mistaking the specific for the general – the kind of thing a decent logical brain would have no problem sussing out, if only we had a half-decent logical brain that could draw such distinctions. We're not as clever as we think. As Aristotle said, it's not logic that is needed to prove a point, just the *appearance* of logic and anything, but anything, can *appear* logical.

The logical brain just does not have time to pause, scrutinize and test every piece of information that comes its way, weighing it up for truth and veracity; instead what it does is look for patterns, working largely on a rule-of-thumb basis. For instance, this person has told me the truth before, so they are probably telling me the truth now. That sounds right, so that probably is right. That sounds balanced, so it probably is balanced.

This is not to say the logical brain is a bit stupid. It's not. The logical brain is capable of the most extraordinary thinking – when we are completely calm, well fed and focused. It's just... well... how often does that happen? Right!

So, those are the three parts of the brain. Those are the parts of the brain we need to win over. This book is divided into three parts to reflect those three parts of the brain. Let's have a quick look at what lies ahead.

Winning the instinctive mind

The first part of the book looks at how leaders win over the instinctive mind. As I mentioned, the instinctive brain has two prime needs that must be met: avoid danger and find rewards. Leaders meet these needs.

This means the leader must be seen as friend, not foe. People instinctively determine whether someone is good or bad.⁷ It's a snap judgement, happening almost instantaneously: Princeton University has it down at one-tenth of a second.⁸ And it happens without any conscious intervention.

Everyone likes to claim that they are non-judgemental and free from prejudice, but this is wrong. It's the way we're designed and it's to protect