



Conor Neill Interview

“An entrepreneur is anyone who has more ideas than resources”

Conor Neill is a teacher at IESE Business School, one of the World’s top MBA schools, where he runs Persuasive Communications seminars. He is also an entrepreneur and author of different works on communication skills.

Conor Neill gave an academic review of the Augere study about leadership in Spain and South America.

Augere has run an study about leadership in Spain and South America taking into account the opinion of 1.000 leaders. The research establishes that some of the characteristics to be improved by leaders are the resistance to stress or the provision to take calculated risks. Do you agree with them?

In 1910 two adventurers, Scott and Amundsen, were on a race to the last unexplored point on the planet, the South Pole. Scott was the hero of the British Empire: older, more experienced and with lots of resources at his disposal. Amundsen was the hero of Norway. They both arrived at the shores of the Antarctic about the same time and both began their journeys of 1600 miles on foot, carrying everything they would need.

Scott would wake each morning and open his tent door. If the sun was shining and there was no wind, he would set his team a goal of 50 miles. If it was a terrible day, windy, cold: he would stay in the tents and wait for a better moment. Scott's journey continued this way, day after day. Each day he checked the conditions and then decided how far to travel.

Amundsen woke up each morning and pushed his team for 20 miles. Every day 20 miles. Some days were sunny and they would achieve 20 miles by lunchtime. Some days were harsh and it would take until the last hour of light to achieve the 20 miles. Every day 20 miles. Amundsen won the race to the pole, and his team could have continued their journey for months more. Scott lost the race to the pole, and his whole team died on the return journey.

Stress is a result of believing I can control more than I can realistically control. Outcome goals are a driver of stress. I cannot control the weather. I can only control my own actions. If I set €1M in sales as a goal, I set an outcome goal. This is a big challenge in Spain. There is little education in setting healthy process goals. If I know that €1M in sales requires 3 meetings a week, and this requires 20 phone calls per day - a healthy process goal is 20 phone calls today. This is under my control.

From your academic point of view, which are the most positive aspects from leadership in Spain?

Professionalism. A desire to be better. A commitment to learning. Spain has 4 of the top 30 business schools in the world. This is often a surprise to me given that Spain, and my home country of Ireland were both agricultural poor countries 30 years ago.

You run Persuasive Communications seminars at IESE Business School and have trained over 4.000 executives, doctors, MBAs, entrepreneurs, politicians and directors. What are the seminars about?

The seminars are about how to move people to action. We cover how to prepare and deliver a compelling persuasive speech. We look at techniques to engage attention, to handle anxiety, to use story to make a speech memorable. We learn from 2,300 years of history, from Aristotles and Plato; to Cialdini and Pfeffer; to the very latest in neuroscience.

Who are they targeted to?

The program is designed for managers who wish to improve their communication skills and develop a style that fosters commitment among team members and stakeholders. The program is particularly relevant to professionals who manage client relationships or deal with the general public.

More information is available here:

<http://www.iese.edu/en/ad/EnfocadosWEB/1112/sfp/dycs/DevelopyourCommunicationSkills.asp>

One of the topics you speak about at your courses is public speaking. Are there some basic tips?

Preparation and structure are vital to effective communication. Most communication fails before a word is said. The speaker must take the time to clarify how the speech will affect the audience.

In my seminars I call this defining your Point X. I make all participants write down “When I have finished speaking my audience will _____” and complete it with an active verb. “understand more” or “believe me” are not active verbs. “Visit my web site”, “pick up a brochure”, “put the date in their diary” are active verbs.

Making clear the action you want from the audience serves to put you as a speaker into the shoes of the audience. What do they need to know, believe and feel in order to take action? Now, you can build a communication that is relevant to the audience.

When speaking in public it is also really important to manage well your body language. Are there any keys to a powerful body language while speaking?

Yes. There are three aspects to body language – authority, energy and engagement. Authority is that the audience see you as someone worth listening to. Energy is that the audience see that you care. Engagement is that the communication feels 2 way, not just a broadcast of words.

Three elements of body language contribute to transmitting authority to the audience. One key element is your voice. You can watch a video “5 Aspects of a Powerful Voice” on my blog here: <http://www.conorneill.com/2011/01/video-5-aspects-that-give-you-powerful.html>

Conor Neill is also an entrepreneur. How would you define the role of an entrepreneur?

An entrepreneur is anyone who has more ideas than resources, but is capable of moving forwards anyway.

Which are the lessons you learnt as an entrepreneur?

- **You have to sell.** Yes, you. You have to sell. You have to get good at it.
- **You need lots of help.** More than you can imagine. You need to learn to ask for it.
- **Incremental Improvements** always win.
- **Learn to Motivate yourself.** Self-Discipline first.
- **Listen.** Not just to the words. To the emotions of the other. To the real reasons underlying her position. To the hidden messages in their communication. To yourself. To how you feel. To your unconscious. It is a very very clever beast. It just doesn't do directness very well.
- **The Demon is inside.** Our greatest enemy is not outside of us, it is the little voice inside our own head. The voice that says "John can do this better than me", "What is the point?", "What difference does 1 phone call make?", "Who am I to do this?" - this is the voice that is most damaging to our potential.