



**Welcome to the innovation zone! #51: Passion**

## Passionate is: using colourful language!

“It’s raining **BUCKETS** at the moment and it looks as though it’s going to be doing that **aaaalllll** day!”

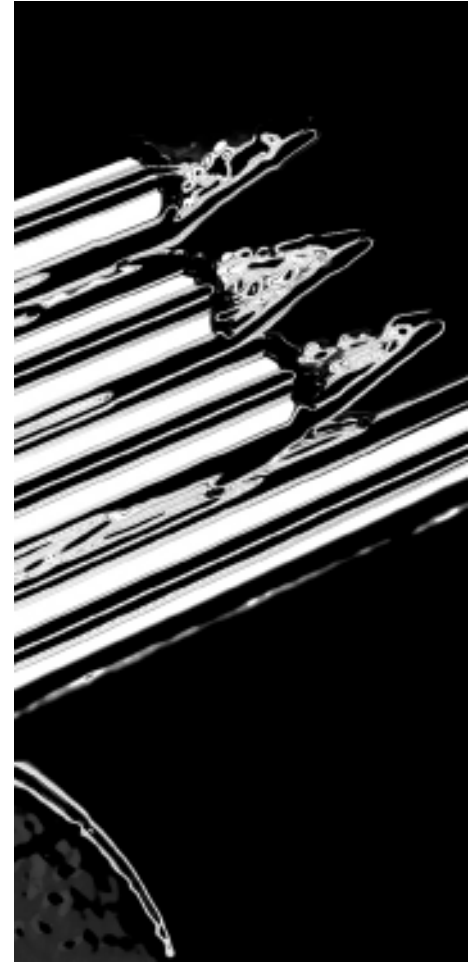
This was Carol Kirkwood – one of the BBC’s weather people. It was sometime after six o’ clock on a November morning. And there she was, standing on the top of some building in the middle of London, wearing a pink anorak and sheltering under a blue umbrella as the elements did everything in their collective power to demonstrate what she was describing in the weather forecast. More a sort of now-cast than a fore-cast!

What was wonderful about this little piece of television history was the enormous passion that was evident in every sentence she spoke. You could almost imagine her waking up that morning, hearing the rain banging off her windows and thinking,

“Great! Another day at the office!”

And the innovation trade secret that lies in the midst of this short tale is that we should get as much colourful language into what we are doing as we possibly can. Some people say, “It’s only words.” I think that misses both the point, and the opportunity. Here are some words:

“I want to make it go faster.” And, “I want to make it really zippy!”



Superficially, they mean much the same thing. Look beneath the surface and we see that one is matter-of-fact and the other is loaded with emotion. And if this is indeed the case, I believe that we are more likely to get a better outcome from the latter than we are from the former. Remember, more energy in, more energy out!

So give it a try – wrap some really colourful language around your innovation challenge, and a bundle of tone as well, and see where it takes you.

## On the importance of being passionate

So, this edition of the i-zone e-mag is all about Passion or, more correctly, **PASSION** – an essential ingredient in the mix of being a more innovative person. I say essential because passion enables us to demonstrate real commitment to something. If a picture tells a thousand words, rich language spoken with real passion conveys even more again. It's not something that wants to be measured, but you know when it's there and you know when it's not. Talking about something really important without passion is like having an ice cream sundae without the ice cream. Passion enables us to show real determination and communicate that we are willing to do that extra something that might end up being the difference between an outstanding outcome and something that's just OK. And it's contagious, as you will see from the next Trade Secret.

Innovation results in change – a departure from the comfortable familiarity that existed beforehand. As we all know, there is a real sense of inertia in the status quo. Even if change offers a better outcome, there will be some resistance. There is no doubt that we can navigate this resistance with the aid of reason. However, I am certain that what ultimately sways people is pretty well always in the emotional domain. And that's why being passionate is such an important part of the innovative behaviour set.

Check out the dictionary and it will confirm that passion is a strong enthusiasm; and enthusiasm is a strong interest. That makes passion a strong, strong interest!



Another definition talks about a strong, barely controllable emotion. I like the idea of ‘barely controllable’. It implies that we do control it, which is good because we can channel something we can control. However, it’s a close run thing, which conveys the idea that it is a major force that we are directing. As I type, I have a picture of the raw kinetic energy of a wild black stallion waiting to pit its wits with the horse trainer.

So, what can we do to become more passionate? Here are a few QuickTips but, as always, I would be delighted to hear any suggestions you would like to make and I will pass them on.

### **QuickTip #1: Be real!**

You can’t fake true passion. The real thing shines through like a lighthouse on a stormy night. Equally, the façade that sits in front of the sham is as transparent as a window after a spring-clean. It’s all about congruence. When it’s real, everything works in unison creating a sum that is indeed greater than the parts. When it’s fake, things don’t match. I was following one of my colleagues up a motorway one time and he was stopped by the police because he was using the telephone whilst driving. As he had been stopped, I pulled over onto the hard shoulder as well. Malcolm had his lecture from the policeman and then emerged from the car indicating it was my turn. I was unsure as to why I needed to talk to the policeman but didn’t want to do anything to rock the boat – Malcolm had emerged with a stiff talking to and no penalty. So, I sat in the front seat of the police car and took my lecture. It was when he suggested that we were racing each other that my mouth got the better of my caution. The second I interrupted to proclaim my innocence, his countenance changed out of all recognition. He switched on anger and gave me a good dressing down. The weird thing was the vacant air about his eyes. This wasn’t real anger – this was what he did to intimidate people. As soon as I saw through the forgery, I relaxed, did ‘demure’ and let him finish his rant. The impact was zero. If it had been real anger, I am sure I would have been seriously rattled. Like I said, you can’t fake it.

## QuickTip #2: Be appropriate.

This operates on many levels. First, you must be appropriate to yourself. If you suddenly go from a quiet, retiring person to this over-zealous fanatic, people will rightly suspect foul play or the influence of illegal substances. If you want to ramp up your passion, take it in smallish increments. Secondly, you must also be appropriate to the subject. If, for example, you were talking about anti-social behaviour, there might be one range of 'passionate' that would be appropriate to, say, dropping litter, and another range that work with the sort of bad driving that puts people's lives at risk. Finally, you must be appropriate to your audience. You could be extremely passionate when talking about a subject close to your heart with a group of close friends. On the other hand, you would probably be a little less passionate on a less emotive subject in a business situation – perhaps...

## QuickTip #3: Be spontaneous.

This ties in closely with making it real. I won't mention any politician by name but watch most of them and you'll see where this can go badly wrong. The speechwriter put the words together in the first instance – so the politician doesn't begin with any real emotional attachment to the content. He then gets up in front of the crowd and the elements that require passion are underlined in a particular way in the script. The moment comes and they start waving their arms around in a demonstrative way and they add extra tone and volume to the words. And yet it lacks real emotion, and therefore impact. What they



needed to do was what I saw John Cleese do on one occasion – begin reading from the script and then, with a heart-felt flourish, tear up the script and ad lib. That’s spontaneous – even if it wasn’t!

#### **QuickTip #4: Be proud of your feelings.**

This might not apply to you but it still amazes me how many people apologise for showing emotion, especially in a business context. Emotion isn’t a sign of weakness. Quite the reverse, it’s a sign of strength, of the deeper humanity that lies within us all. So, if you are so passionate about something that you find your voice cracking or quavering, resist the temptation to say sorry to your audience and plough on regardless. It’s OK to be passionate – really!

#### **QuickTip #5: Realise that not everyone wants ‘passionate’.**

One person’s passionate is another person’s bad smell. I believe that the vast majority of people relate at a subconscious level to displays of emotion – it’s hard-wired. Some, however, would prefer to distance themselves from strong emotions, especially in a public or business situation. Fewer again wouldn’t recognise an emotion if it poked them in the eye – a tiny minority. So, don’t worry if you lose one or two people in your travels – the vast majority will go with you.

The final QuickTip is to follow the example of the (not so) ordinary people that are mentioned in the remaining stories in this edition of the i-zone e-mag. Read on and enjoy!

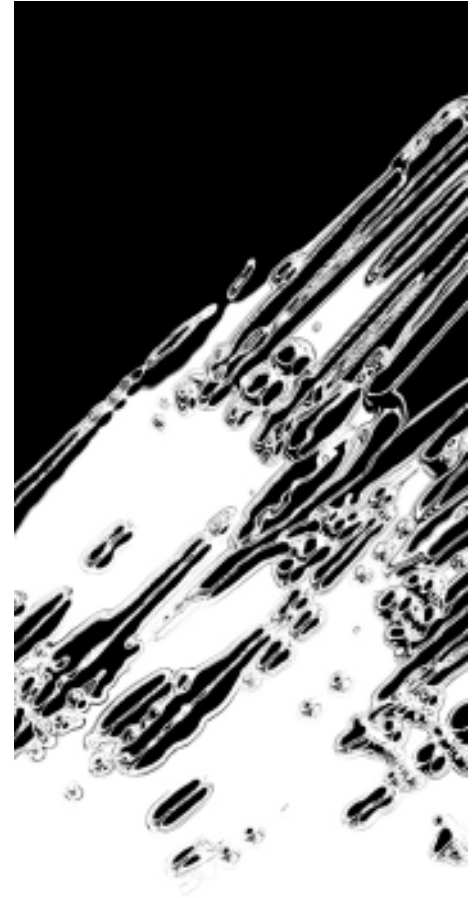
## Passionate is: infecting someone with your feelings!

You often hear people talking about a person's enthusiasm being contagious. Rarely do we hear that passion is catching. However, any emotion, if felt strongly enough, can be infectious. Let me illustrate with a lovely story from Vicky Grimshaw. She writes...

At a meeting at the start of this academic year, the governing body of my boys' primary school announced that the school would close in July because they had been unable to find alternative accommodation. They had been trying for two years but had failed to get planning consent. They had spent all of the school's cash reserves. They were burnt out and could see no alternative but to throw in the towel. The problem, you see, was that the school roll was falling. And as it did so, it became progressively more difficult to raise the finances required to purchase our own premises.

Most of us had been expecting this announcement. Even so, you could hear a pin drop in the school hall. Without warning, one of the Mums in the front row jumped up and turned round to face the rest of us.

"I'm not going to allow this to happen," she said with real passion. "We have another twelve months to find somewhere else for our kids. We've all got a responsibility to sort this out!" Her enthusiasm and determination were irresistible. The tone in her voice made it clear that she would consider nothing less than total success. All she needed was a little support and the confidence



to stick with her. Over the next few weeks, she committed herself completely to our cause. She called regular meetings for the dwindling numbers of parents and persuaded enough of us to hang on in there. She was sure she could convince a bank that they could lend us some of the required funding. Her determination stemmed the flow of people leaving the school. It also persuaded parents, friends of parents, and local interested parties to put their hands in their pockets to invest in this new venture.

And, to cut a very long story short, we did it! We move into our new school in the last week of February.

This is one of those stories with a happy ending – one that would have been impossible had it not been for the passion, confidence and single-mindedness of this brave lady. And the wonderful thing was that it rubbed off on the rest of us.

So, you see, passion is indeed contagious. So get out there and infect someone else! Thanks Vicky.

## **Passionate is: doing it with feeling, regardless of the circumstances!**

Simon used to be something of an amateur thespian. For a couple of years in succession, he entered a competition for solo acting in the Bath Festival of Theatre and Music.

On one occasion, he chose a very dramatic Shakespearian piece. As he began, he held a bloody (descriptive not expletive) handkerchief aloft, and then... completely forgot the first line! This would have floored many of us – but not Simon. He remained calm, waited for the lines to come back to him – which they did – and delivered his piece with real passion.

Anyway, you've guessed it, he won the competition! But not before the judge remarked on the silence at the start of the performance.

“That dramatic pause was masterly,” he said. “It drew the whole audience into the horror of the situation.” In fact, the horror was Simon forgetting his lines.

However, acting like the true thespian that he is, he made the best of the hand that he was dealt, added a dose of passion, and won the day.

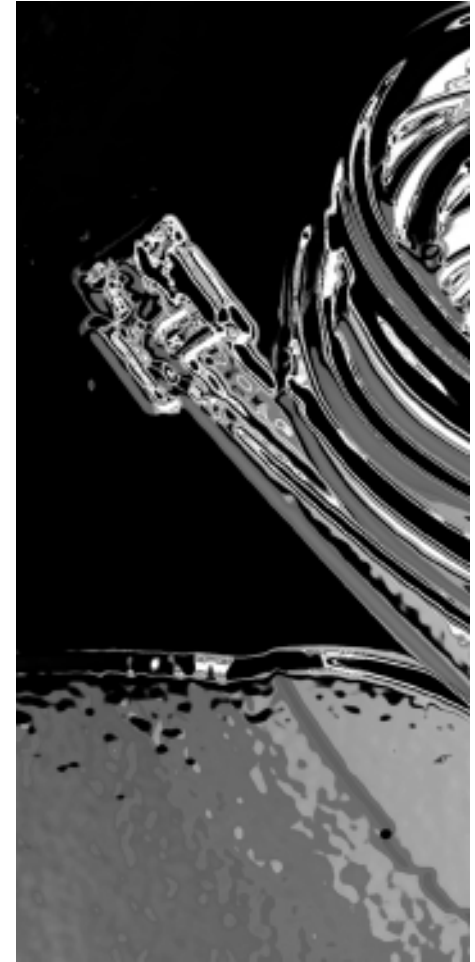
Maybe you can do the same.



## Passionate is: opening your heart!

For more than a year, Clive had been trying to create some real energy behind a wonderful idea called Leading with Open Arms. The proposition was a simple, yet powerful one: get people, who are passionate about a particular subject, to share some of their insights with organisations and pass their fees directly to the charity that intends to build an orphanage in Malawi for children who have lost their parent to AIDS. However, in his own estimation, he had made little progress so far – actually, he had made loads of progress but Clive is an over-achiever and he sets seriously tough targets for himself. Anyway, just the previous week, he had serendipitously ended up in a meeting with the President of the Public Speaking Association in the United Kingdom. He described his dream and his frustrations – and because he feels things deeply, the passion that he feels for Leading with Open Arms came shining right through.

The President was ‘blown away’ with the idea. He suggested enlarging its scope to include hundreds of speakers, rather than the dozen or so that Clive had gathered so far. He offered to write to Tony Blair and Nelson Mandela to enlist their support and suggest they call it Speakers for Africa. Clive was, as you might expect, over the moon! As he described his success, the passion that he feels for this endeavour was palpable. It’s the sort of passion that sees obstacles as something to find a way round. It’s the sort of passion that looks continually for a different angle and sees opportunity when it presents itself. The sort of passion that innovators everywhere would buy by the truck-load if



it could be packaged up. It was a privilege to see, and feel, Clive's passion. It made me realise that it's not just passion that sets great innovators apart – it is their willingness to let it show. There is this (pardon me) crazy British reserve that suggests that we should not show strong emotion. Rubbish!

Take a leaf out of Clive's book and be prepared to show what's in your heart. You'll get your message across with a strength that others can only dream of, and you will galvanise those around you to give everything they've got to ensure a successful outcome.

## Passionate is: knowing when to tone it down!

**“HI EVERYONE! HOW’S IT GOING? WHAT HAVE YOU ALL BEEN UP TO? CAN’T WAIT TO TELL WHAT I’VE BEEN DOING THIS MORNING!”** The words flowed so quickly that the next one seemed to be trying to overtake those that preceded.

There was a collective groan from the other Facilitators in the room and a sense of ‘I wish he’d take some tranquillisers or something.’

The situation was one of the regular get-togethers of the people who had been tasked with making sure that the organisation-wide change initiative succeeded. No mean task as we were working in a steel business employing 3,500 people across many sites. And the audience had a disproportionate number of the ‘seen-it-all-before’ merchants. So, if there was one attribute that this group of ten people needed in abundance, it was the need to be passionate about what they were doing. Their commitment had already been tested many times by some pretty aggressive and cynical audiences; and there was little doubt that it would be tested further before their task was done.

Don Ross was a shining example of ‘passionate’. He had it in abundance. He never went at anything with less than 140%. He seemed to spend his entire time hatching new ways of getting people on board with what was happening. If there was ever a job on the table, Don was the first to volunteer, regardless of the load he was already carrying – and he always came through for the team.



You just couldn't fault him...

Actually, that's not entirely true. We all loved him dearly. You can sense a 'but' coming, can't you? Well, you're right. We did indeed love him dearly and some of us actually envied his energy and enthusiasm. The difficulty was that he seemed to operate on the one setting: the button marked 'completely-over-the-top'. And there were times when we all needed a little time to chill and take things easy – recharge the batteries, so to speak. This just wasn't an option if Don was around. He had no idea of how he might tone down his passion for our collective endeavour. So much so that he was quickly christened Don 'Sickbag' Ross. It was an affectionate nickname, honestly – but it stuck.

The message is clear, if a little salutary. Passionate is a really good thing but, like any strength taken to excess, it can become a burden. So, know when to tone things down.

## Parting thoughts on passionate

So, before we close, here's a quick list of everything on the importance of being passionate:

- Use colourful language!
- Be real!
- Be appropriate!
- Be spontaneous!
- Be proud of your feelings!
- Realise that not everyone wants 'passionate'!
- Infect someone with your feelings!
- Do it with feeling, regardless of the circumstances!
- Open your heart!
- Know when to tone it down!

I have two parting thoughts on the subject of passion, both of which seem, to me, to get right to centre of things. The first is an Italian saying:

- Il cuore ha le sue ragioni e non intende ragione.

Hope I got the spelling right. Roughly translated, it means that the Heart has reasons that Reason does not understand. Passion isn't a rational thing – it's an emotional thing. Passion helps people to get on board because it bypasses reason and appeals directly to the person at a much deeper level.



And the second parting thought is:

- All passions exaggerate; it is only because they exaggerate that they are passions.

I don't know the source of this wisdom; but once again, it gets to the heart of the issue. Passion isn't a word that one can use lightly – it needs to be shouted out from the rooftops. So, let me end by encouraging you all to live life with passion and watch what happens!

Till the next time,

**Alisdair Wiseman – The Innovation Zone.**

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