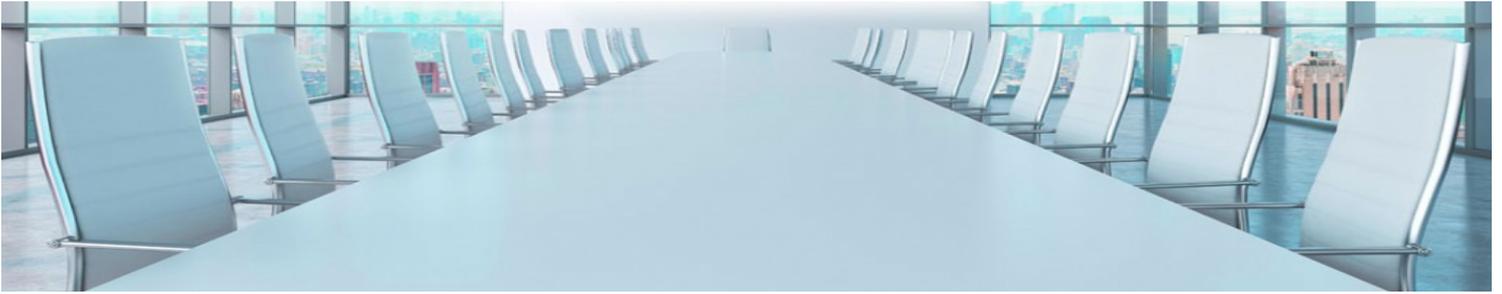


CASE STUDY

Public Speaking



Background



Zurich Financial Services is the UK's largest unit linked life assurance, pension and investment organisation.

The company prides itself on good communications – a factor that led to its nomination as one of the best three companies to work for in the UK.

Sandy Leitch, Chief Executive, has been with the company since its launch as Hambro Life in 1974. In 1996 Sandy Leitch was appointed Chairman of British American Financial Services and in 2000 became Chief Executive of Zurich Financial Services.

Challenge

It was his promotion to Chief Executive of Allied Dunbar in 1993 that prompted Sandy Leitch to contact spoken communications consultancy Aziz Corporate.

“Communication well from the top of an organisation is crucial. It sets the direction, tone and style and it gives a key competitive edge,” he comments. Although already an accomplished communicator, his new position entailed a heavy schedule of speaking engagements to audiences of all sizes around the country, culminating in an annual presentation to over 2,000 top achievers in the massive auditorium of Wembley Conference Centre.



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The Aziz Programme

Aziz Corporate devised a personalised programme carefully tailored to his capabilities. The Corporation believes that spoken communication is a skill like any other that can be improved upon and, given time and tutoring, excelled at. Sandy Leitch's intensive half-day tutorials took place over a four month period and were always videoed so that he could see himself in action. In addition, his tutor provided objective criticism in a way that colleagues could not, ensuring clinical scrutiny of his performance.

Sandy Leitch remarked:

"As a professional from outside the company he could look at me objectively as an individual. He could be very direct and home in on my idiosyncrasies," recalls Leitch. "I clearly remember my first tutorial – it was somewhat robust! But criticism was always constructive, designed to improve how I presented myself."

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Having always delivered formal speeches from written scripts, Aziz Corporate encouraged Sandy Leitch to discard this prop. "My norm is now to speak from bullet points written on cards. It means I can ad lib, relax, adapt to the audience and be myself." For the 40 minute Wembley presentation, which involved videos and slides, he also learned techniques that helped him use Autocue more effectively.

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Benefits

"The acid test at the end of the day was did Aziz Corporate enhance my communications skills? The answer is definitely "yes"! I put what I had learned into practice immediately and noticed a significant improvement in my delivery to groups of all sizes. I know that it is not just what I say that matters, but how I come across to my audience – enthusiasm, posture and confidence are all equally important in getting the message across.

Sandy Leitch comments:

"As a busy chief executive with a million things to do, it would have been easy to neglect spoken communication skills. But speech making is a vital part of a chief executive's job and I could not afford to be complacent. Aziz Corporate's tough programme of one-to-one tutorials ensured I got maximum benefit from their expertise. The course really tested my abilities but brought immediate and noticeable results."