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Gordon Brown's party conference speech: What entrepreneurs can learn

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All eyes were on prime minister Gordon Brown this week as he delivered his speech at the Labour Party Conference. Leadership expert Paul Bridle examines what small business owners can learn.

Talking about successes always comes over cheap and whether you are a business leader, a small business owner or a politician you should know that if you are going to talk about successes, be sure to give praise to those that did a great job otherwise it sounds like self gratification.

Gordon Brown's speech was given to an audience that was desperate for him to do well; he certainly went for the traditional framework of look how good we have been, attack the opposition and then promise them something. In fact Gordon Brown held it together and this was probably one of the best he has done. He is not a showman and presenting to a crowd is not his strength.

His attack on the Conservatives and, Cameron in particular, is normally where Gordon Brown is at his best and this time was no exception, with one exception - people are bored with it now. At a time when we need to build a new future, being good at tearing the opposition down is not a good quality. Leaders of all types in business or politics must focus on the future having learnt from the past. When he attacks with such passion, it reminds people sub-consciously of his track record, of being a bit of a bully and being aggressive and demanding.

A leader should never appear in the minds of the listener as someone who is prepared to push blame onto others. Saying "he would have done no better" is too close to "it is his fault". People do not respond to hate very well because they link it to fundamentalism and irrational behaviours.

The saddest part of the speech was his plans for the future. There was (or so it seemed) a

barrage of things that he planned to achieve by the end of the next term. Whilst every one was wonderful and appealed to the Party faithful, they seemed weak at a time when [Britain](#) is screaming for some clear direction. Britain has spent nearly 20 years basing its economy on the [financial services](#) sector and latterly on the property market. These have collapsed and the country knows it needs a new direction and a clear vision of the future. At a time like this, to be talking about spending money on teenage parents and other social issues, sounded too much like an appeal to the masses. What was lacking was the argument for tough choices in the future.

A leader shows strength of character in areas that are important. At this moment it is important to get Britain back in the race and making a contribution to the world so it can make a profit. A similar situation is faced by many businesses. What will be the focus in the next 10 years under Labour? What will be the focus for leaders in all aspect of life for the next 10 years? For Gordon Brown, more money on social initiatives (however well meaning) is not what was needed at this time. This confirmed Brown as a 'manager' and not as a 'leader' which has always been his problem.

Would the speech have worked if it was not his last speech before a general election and his supporters were not so keen for him to do well? I doubt it.

Paul Bridle is a leadership methodologist, speaker and managing director of [Bridle International](#).

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