

## Lynton Crosby

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**Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one to one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today, I'm joined by the political strategist Lynton Crosby. A veteran political campaigner, many credit Lynton for winning the 2015 general election for the Conservatives, and putting David Cameron back in Downing Street despite pollsters saying a hung parliament was on the cards. But the 2015 victory was only another notch on his election-winning belt. Born in Australia, Lynton started his career as a petroleum market analyst, but soon jumped into politics, joining the Liberal Party. He quickly ascended through the ranks, serving as both the party's federal director and campaign director. He helped former Prime Minister John Howard win the Australian national election four times in a row, the final time from outside the party, having set up his consultancy Crosby Textor. He replicated this success in Britain for Boris Johnson, helping him win two consecutive turns as mayor of London, despite many saying the city would forever be a labour stronghold.**

**Lynton, thank you for joining me.**

Pleasure.

**I suppose the burning question that everyone's got on their lips, as it were, is, did you always know in the last election, 2015, that the Conservatives would win?**

Well, I always knew that the Conservatives could win, I fully expected that David Cameron would be Prime Minister, and I was confident the strategy was right, and if we stuck to it, that meant we could win an outright majority. And we don't conduct polls in the way public polls are conducted, but the work that we did gave me confidence to know that, on the day, we could absolutely win a majority. It's like anything – you can have a great show, get a great actor, book the theatre, sell all the tickets, but you still have to have people come through the door and sit on the seats. So you always have that pensive feeling on Election Day, but I was very confident that the strategy was the right one, and that therefore should deliver the goods.

**Without revealing the secrets of your trade, how did you set the strategy? Did it come from the gut, or was there some kind of qualitative, like focus groups, like Philip Gould used to do?**

I think... the first thing is, no one person wins an election. There's no silver bullet, no one individual. It's always a team effort, and a lot of it very much comes down to the policies, the manifesto, the parliamentary leader and so forth. But in terms of setting the pathway for any campaign, I mean, it could be an election campaign, it could be a campaign to enhance someone's reputation, it could be a campaign to reposition a product or encourage people to take up a share acquisition, the first thing is to understand what's really going on. And one of the things that struck me about the UK in particular, particularly amongst political commentators and the media, is there seems to be sort of an over-reliance on theories rather than measurement. Now, having said that, of course the last election was dominated a lot by the public polls, but I liken those polls to going to the doctor and getting your temperature read. That is, they just tell you what the temperature is. You go to the doctor and the doctor tells you you're 39.5 or 41 degrees or 36 degrees, the temperature doesn't tell you why. So those polls are similar; they're not diagnostic, and when we run campaigns, I think it's very important to understand the why – so we always build, whatever we do, whether it's an election campaign or any other campaign, on some sort of knowledge base, generally opinion research, taking in multiple elements, so quantitative research, qualitative research and other analysis, to understand what is truly driving voters, or consumers, and why they are behaving in the way they are. So if you look at a public poll that says today the Tories are on 40% or 30% or 25%, there's no real explanation as to why; it's a very superficial report. As I say, it's just like recording someone's temperature. What you try to do when you develop a campaign is go to the why – understand who will decide the outcome you seek, what matters to them, how you can influence them, and then how you can constantly monitor the impact of the campaign you're running – and that's what you try to do.

**How do you get to the why?**

By asking the right questions. By proper analysis, not pursuing pet theories, which often seems to be the case with some people. There are lots of truisms about politics in this country, and I suppose I'm in a way repeating it and making it a truism myself when I say that there are no truisms in politics. And what you critically need to do is get to the core of what motivates voters, and that means understanding the way they really think about things. So to give you an example, during the election campaign, Ed Miliband – according to the media and the commentariat – was very clever and set the political agenda for a week or two with his plan at his party conference to freeze energy prices. And there's no doubt that people were feeling a bit of a financial squeeze and the cost of living was important to them, and in that sense he was responding to something that people were concerned about, and energy prices obviously are an important part, a not insignificant part of a family budget. But if

people don't think he's really got a plan that he's strong enough to deliver, that he is about to make the decisions, the difficult decisions, needed to take on the energy companies if that's what's needed, or to hold the line in some other way, then he can promise all he wants but it doesn't really matter because they don't believe he's got the ability to deliver. That's an example of what we found in relation to Ed Miliband. So his weakness, his inability to deliver, people's fear that in the end he wouldn't be able to stand up to noisy special interest groups or take the decisions needed to turn the economy around, meant that he could promise whatever he wanted but that they didn't trust him to be able to deliver, so... he got points for acknowledging an issue, but he wasn't someone who could credibly make the commitment to fix the problem.

**There's the old marketing adage that 'people buy from people'. Do you think that's something that you worked quite heavily into the campaign, because David Cameron clearly did look prime ministerial – I mean, he was the Prime Minister – but many people thought that Ed Miliband didn't carry himself as a prime minister, he didn't have that, and like you say, it wasn't necessarily about the policies, it was more about he person.**

Obviously when people vote, lots of factors come into play. They vote because of the leadership, they vote because of policies, they vote because of their view about parties, or even about local candidates in other things. I think the problem for the Labour Party, without getting into a dissertation on the last election, is the problem is that Labour really thought that if the Conservatives couldn't win in 2010 when Labour were led by Gordon Brown, who was hardly in the pantheon of the most popular political leaders of all time, and the economy was in the toilet, that if the Conservatives couldn't win outright in those circumstances, then how could they hope to win when they are in government, having to make difficult decisions and so forth. So I think the first mistake Labour made was actually, it's not about the personality or the individual in this sense, they didn't do the work – you have to do the work. And they didn't do the work, they assumed they could flop back into... over the line, as long as they sat on the horse and hang on, they would get to the finishing post – and if the Tories couldn't win in 2010, they couldn't win in 2015. So that laziness, I think, permeated the whole approach. And then, when they from time to time took a stand on anything, it was seen as just an opportunistic intervention, taking advantage of particular political circumstances, and I think the key thing in politics is that people have a sense of what your priorities are, what you believe in... you described it as David Cameron 'looked prime ministerial' and perhaps Ed Miliband didn't, I think 'prime ministerial' has a number of dimensions to it. It's not just whether you are an effective media performer, it's whether you are able to articulate a clear message, whether you are able to show people that you have a plan to take the country forward, at a time of insecurity with all sorts of unsettling things happening abroad in terms of international security, and then threats to the economy and the fragility of the economies around the world, you are looking for someone who has got authority, who has thought through the problems, has a plan

to deal with them... and I think that's where David Cameron set himself clearly apart from Ed Miliband. And also, I mentioned before there was a concern amongst the voters about Ed Miliband's weakness, that's not just a comment that he's weak, or in the voters' minds he was seen to be weak, but rather voters felt that that weakness could have consequences. So being weak means that you're not going to be able to effectively articulate and stand up for me, whether at home, in terms of taking tough decisions to turn our economy around, or abroad in terms of standing up to our nation's enemies and those who would either do us harm, or who were not pursuing... people who were standing against our national interest.

**And Nick Clegg never recovered from the toxicity of the tuition fees problem, did he? In a sense, was the result of the election largely what you thought it might be in terms of the dominance of the SNP up north, the collapse of the labour vote, and the collapse of the Lib Dem support?**

Well, the SNP situation was interesting, but not completely critical to the campaign outcome. A lot of people, I've read, say the election couldn't have been won without the SNP – well, I don't think that's the case at all, because at the end of the day, even if Labour had held the seats that they lost to the SNP, they wouldn't have won, but what worried people was that the SNP, led by two quite powerful leaders in their own right, so Alex Salmond who many people saw as very cunning leader, and in Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, although of course Salmond wasn't the lead SNP candidate coming to Westminster at the end of the day, he was such a dominant figure. And Nicola Sturgeon herself, strong in terms of her ability to have a firm position and make an argument in support of that position. They were a contrast to the lack of clarity as to what he stood for, and the weakness of Ed Miliband, and therefore people felt threatened that because Ed Miliband couldn't win in his own right he would have to rely on the SNP to be propped up, whether a vote, by vote, or as part of the government, or whatever the option might be, and the strength and political cunning of those two would outsmart and defeat Ed Miliband on a lot of issues, and voters thought in the end they would pay the price for that.

**There was only two people throughout the last parliament, me and Dan Hodges, that were consistent in the fact that we thought that Ed Miliband could never win the election, and I called that as soon as he was elected leader. Do you think that's something that was a boost for the Conservatives, that you guys must have really welcomed the fact that he managed to stick it out?**

No, look, it's easy to say no-one can win or whatever, but I don't believe... I think every election is winnable and losable, and it all depends on events as they unfold, on the way you campaign, and all power to David Cameron because he was a critical factor in the election victory, and absolutely critical factor, and he provided, particularly in the second half of his term I believe, a very strong and clear direction, and I think that Mr Miliband just failed to articulate what he was really on about. As I

say, he jumped in from time to time opportunistically, but he could have won. I'm not going to here and now say what he should have done, but of course you can win most elections in our sort of system. The truth is, they're relatively finely balanced, and always will be. He could have won the election but I don't think labour did the work. I don't think he... you know, David Cameron helped make Ed Miliband look weak and ineffective by his clarity and his strength of purpose. Yes, there are some things about Mr Miliband that didn't make him immediately attractive to the voters, but there's no... you can't say he's unelectable. I don't think that's the case for a moment.

**You speak to the 'normal' people at the bus stop as it were, and they are completely disconnected from the whole of the political process, and you see that.**

Of course they are.

**When we had the AV referendum, the referendum on Scottish nationalism, many people say, "We're voting against the Westminster establishment to shake things up." Do you think that people are just completely pig sick of Westminster business as usual?**

Well, no... I think what people want is pretty simple. They want their political leadership to focus on the things that are important to them, they don't see politics as entertainment, they don't analyse every blow in the way that so many in the media do, so you do have this problem in that the media, on the one hand, say, "We want more politicians to call it the way it is, to say what they really think." And then if they do, to jump on what they say and try to point to division in parties or whatever it might be.

**And say it's a gaffe.**

Yes, something's a gaffe because they have expressed a view that may not seem politically correct or whatever it might be. So it's certainly true that there's a frustration on occasion from people about whether their issues are getting the attention that they feel they deserve. I think some of this hate Westminster establishment stuff can be overdone, and I think that part of the phenomena of Trump or Bernie Sanders in the US, or even Jeremy Corbyn, dare I say it, or Nigel Farage here, is that these people are appealing to a fairly narrow group on one part of the spectrum, so if you take Trump, he's appealing to the right, Farage similarly, and what do you hear people say about them? That they're calling it the way it is, they're not white bread politicians, they are saying the things that should be said – that's from the Conservative right-wing perspective, if you can use those terms – and then if you look at Corbyn somewhat, the left are saying the same sort of thing about him. So he's making a populist appeal to the left, but it's a very narrow element of

the spectrum, and the difference between a Farage and a Trump is that ultimately they are not leading a major political party, but Jeremy Corbyn is. But people who have left-wing views would see him as authentic and true to that left-wing agenda, and therefore they've given him a... they've backed him in because they see him as authentic.

**Do you think that's ultimately... they're shooting themselves in the foot really because although they've got the leader they want, because it's not necessarily a prime minister in waiting that the country wants, that that's going to do no end of good to the conservatives, because they are going to be the only viable option that the electorate can vote for?**

Well, you know, firstly I don't like the phrase 'prime minister in waiting'. There's no prime minister in waiting. At an election, people make a judgement about a whole range of things that are important to them and they ultimately, hopefully, decide to use their vote in a way that they think is best designed to achieve what they want, whether it's a more secure future for their family, a prime minister who's up to the job, a strong local representative who understands them, or voting on an issue that matters to them a great deal. I wouldn't dismiss Mr Corbyn at all, I think his challenge is, having been in parliament for such a very long time, and being a relatively old person by political standards – he's in his late 60s – having never held office, and always run against things, so he's been anti- a lot, the challenge for him will be to articulate a positive and clear message that strikes a chord with enough voters to win the seats that need to be won, and the point of our system, the system in this country, is that it's a parliamentary system – you have to win seats. And sometimes the media say, "Oh, they're saying things to win votes." Well that's what they have to do! That's the politician's job – they have to win votes. If they don't win votes, and therefore don't win seats, they can't govern, they can't implement their policies. And I think the problem for Mr Corbyn is twofold; he doesn't actually have a positive story about a contemporary Britain, he's a throwback, you know... I think basically, Ed Miliband was Jeremy Corbyn Lite, and now they've opted for full fat, and I don't think that's an option that most people would want. And secondly, and clearly, his party is heavily fractured and divided, and unstable, and in an uncertain and unstable world where economies are still... although the British economy is doing very well, particularly by standards of job creation and businesses being started, the rest of the world's economy, you know, with what's happening in China, and confusing still in Greece in places, it's still an unstable and uncertain place, so if you are a voter looking at the two major political parties from which to choose, you see one that's led by someone who has now been in the post of prime minister for over five years, who has been a leader for 10, who's endured lots of pressures and come out the other side, and then a party that's at itself, fighting amongst itself, unclear about the sort of direction it wants to take things. Well, if you're facing an uncertain world, why would you choose a party that can't govern itself? If you can't govern yourself, how can you govern the country?

**What's interesting about this election to me, the most recent one, is I've grown up in the UK with having a kind of pendulum swinging between governments. So we had 18 years of the Conservatives under Thatcher and Major, then it swung to labour and we had three terms under Tony and Gordon, now we go back to the Conservatives, but in this last election, all hell seems to have broken loose. Do you think that kind of pendulum swinging of majority governments is coming to an end?**

Well, you just got a majority government, so I'm not sure of the point.

**I was about to acknowledge the question there, because you're not getting the strong majorities, you know, of the triple digit that we used to get. Do you think a prime minister might be able to win with those kind of numbers in future?**

No – not at all. As I said, I don't believe in any truisms, so I don't believe in saying – which I admit is in itself true – I don't believe that you can say, "They'll never be a majority government." Don't forget, after the 2010 election we heard Eddie the Experts around the place saying, "The Conservatives won't win more seats, it's not possible. They won't be able to get any more Labour voters to come across," for example.

**And they always point to studies.**

Yes, that's what you did. Studies are fine, but when you're dealing with human beings, what do you know? Human beings are not rational individuals – they are persuaded through rational argument but they are motivated by emotion, and they have all sorts of fears, hopes and aspirations, and therefore you can't model them and say they will definitely vote this way or that. At the end of the day, they all have some very common hopes and aspirations – a decent life, a better life for their kids, chance of a good education, a health system that works, a country that keeps them safe at home or abroad, and all of those things. A sense of purpose, and so forth. They are ultimately what motivates people and it's how the parties show they are best equipped to deal with those aspirations that ultimately, I think, has most impact on whether they are successful or not as a party – but I don't think you can say... look, I think it's entirely feasible that the conservatives could gain more seats in the next election, or they could lose – that's the reality of the world. And you can't say it's one thing or the other this far out. I think that what is true is that you don't get the big – if it ever was true – that you don't get the standard uniform swings across the whole country any more. Individual candidates and members of parliament can make a big difference to the voting intention, the voting outcome, in a particular seat, so I think what we're seeing is less impact of national politics alone, although still

important, but an increased impact of sort of local candidates and local issues on election outcomes.

**Where do you get your political antenna from, as it were? In a sense, in the modern media age, there is information overload. You've got social media, the daily commentariat, there's innumerable sources of information You've got the ear of the Prime Minister... how do you distil for your own mind what matters to people and what's happening in any one particular week, what's important?**

I'm back to my business, I'm not so much... I don't so much have the ear of the Prime Minister any more, if I did at all. Look, I... a lot of people probably find this hard to believe, that I don't spend a lot of time obsessing about media coverage – obviously I have views about some media coverage, because I've expressed it, but I don't... for example, during the election campaign, I never listened to the Today programme. I know lots of people in the political world do, I listened maybe to one or two part programmes, I never listened to a whole programme, I never have. I take a lot of interest in stories and things being expressed beyond the M25, so understanding what people are talking about across the country. You can get very caught up in the world of Westminster, in Washington DC, they call it The Beltway, in Canberra it's sort of what goes on in Capital Hill, but for most people, as you said right at the outset, politics, although it impacts on them in so many ways, politics as its practice is not something they think about all the time. They take an occasional interest, you're quite right, there is so much static, so much noise out there, it's very hard for issues to cut through. So where does it come from? Well, I just think you've got to hear what people say. I think one of the tragedies of the last election is the way many people abdicated to the polls, their responsibility to find out what was really going on. The polls became the prism through which people had a view about... those who comment on elections and those who report on them... it was the prism through which they had a view of what was going on in the election. When actually, if you talk to people, as we do in a whole range of ways, everything from getting feedback from people through knocking on the door, through to telephone calls, through to opinion research, told us that there was something more happening than what appeared to be reflected in the views of a lot of those who were commenting and following the election. You know, I'm not British, obviously, by my voice and accent, but I think if you keep your eyes open and your ears open you can get a sense of what people really think, as long as you understand what motivates people, then I think you can respond to that and help craft a campaign that will deliver the outcome.

**Did the polls help you in a way, indirectly, because it might have motivated some lazy, Conservative voters who thought that actually, the thought of an SNP/Labour coalition isn't something we want, and I'd rather... I'm going to**



**have to get out of my chair and vote conservative to make sure David gets a second term.**

Well, I'm sure there's no lazy Conservative voters! But I think the polls, in that sense, may have helped a bit. I wouldn't overstate it, but I think what they helped people realise was that their vote mattered. So if the polls were saying, "I'm not sure what the outcome is going to be," if people were looking for stability and security and consistency, which they were, there's no doubt about that, because it's an uncertain world, then that could lead them to think, "We'd better be careful with our vote." So I think in that sense, they were helpful, but in many other ways they were a huge distraction to the campaign because all this perceived wisdom about what was going on, and we had no one commentator who said there was no way the Tories were going to win on election night itself, from one polling company that shall remain nameless, talking about inept campaigns and so forth, all based on opinion polls that didn't reflect what was going on. So there's a down side, but in some ways they may have helped.

**Do you think opinion polling per se is ultimately flawed? One of the earliest elections that I got involved with was 1992, and of course we were convinced that Neil Kinnock was going to be prime minister, and everyone was saying how the polls have got it wrong and it's this shy Tory syndrome.**

Yes.

**And fast-forward all of these years later, and we still can't predict the outcome of an election.**

Well, firstly, you don't poll to predict the outcome – I think that's part of the mistake. And people think the polls are a prediction – they're not; they're just reporting how people respond to a particular question. But they're heavily influenced by the assumptions and methodologies that are deployed by the pollsters concerned. I have been critical in some ways about the impact of polling in the election campaign, but I'm not particularly critical of a lot of the pollsters, because they are accurate in what they measure, but what they measure is not what's relevant to the election outcome. They often don't get a good read on turnout, some don't even ask turnout questions, or they have their own weighting methodology, which means they often over-represent young people, and people from the BME community, who tend to have a high propensity to vote Labour, so it's quite likely that at the last election they overstated the Labour vote because of that. They make some assumptions about how the don't know voters or won't say voters are going to behave, which at the end of the day are only assumptions. When you are using polling in an election campaign, if you're a practitioner and you are using polling... firstly it doesn't tell you what to believe, you know, if you're in politics and you don't know what you believe, you shouldn't be in politics. Polling is a navigational tool to help you get to a certain

destination, that is to get people to vote for you, given what you believe. Polls shouldn't tell you what to believe, but consistent with that statement I've just made, polling helps you more effectively communicate to change or reinforce behaviour, and so the polls that political parties conduct – or at least political parties should conduct, they shouldn't be relying on the public polls because they only measure one thing anyway, which is voting intention, pretty much – the polls that we conduct are much more attuned to understanding why people behave the way they do, what really matters to them, not just how they're going to vote – and that's what you use to help conduct your campaign.

**You mentioned at the start of your answer about you obviously not being from round here, being a foreigner, as it were. Do you think that helps in terms of your analysis, having that step back, that you've got a slight disconnect? You're not immersed in the culture, as it were.**

You could argue either way. Because I've worked on campaigns in all sorts of countries, places where English is not the primary language and so forth, and you've got to be... whilst I don't think politics changes all that much in terms of the deep motivators, hope for a better life, and the things I mentioned before, you've got to be alert to cultural sensitivities and what have you... interestingly, in Australia, we have compulsory voting, and I've heard some people say, "That means you can't possibly understand how to run a campaign in the UK because we have voluntary voting." In a way, it makes it easier to understand how to campaign here, because under compulsory voting, everybody has to vote. If they don't vote, they get fined, if they don't pay their fine, they go to jail. I don't think we've had many political prisoners, but some people haven't paid their fine... and so you have to ensure that you connect with every voter, even those who absolutely hate you, or hate the lot of you, and that means you have to be much more considered and effective in the way that you communicate with voters. So rather than making it easier to campaign, it's probably harder to campaign because you have to... there's a lot more nuance and sense of degree to things, which I think actually helps when you come to a voluntary voting system, because you can really campaign more powerfully, communicate more powerfully, because you've got to get the absolute tone and essence of it right.

**We have more career politicians than ever in this country, and indeed in many of the other countries that you work in. Do you think that's an issue? You started out in the real world, didn't you? You were a petroleum industry executive. Has that given you a better sense of perspective, that you came into politics later on?**

No. I've never been elected, I did run once but didn't win, I turned a marginal Labour seat into a safe Labour seat. I actually... I think your question's pejorative, by putting 'career' in front of the word 'politician'. I have great respect for people who have been prepared to dedicate their lives to public service, and I think it's all too easy

sometimes to take a shot at people who offer themselves up for the judgement of their peers, that is other members of the community who get to vote on them. And I said at a meeting just before we went into the final phase of the election, just as parliament was being (probed? 30:35), we would say in Australia, dissolved I think you say here. I acknowledged to that meeting of MPs, my respect for their willingness to stick their head up and to be judged by the public. Now, you can say someone is a career politician, that's all they've done, and of course you want people who represent the full gamut of life and have a full range of experiences, but more than that, you want people of judgement and ability, because they might not have had lots of other jobs but have given themselves to public service over a long period of time – it doesn't mean they don't have judgement, they don't have ability and they don't have commitment. In fact, you could argue it's quite the opposite. So I think that people who are prepared to devote themselves in that way... it's easy to take pot shots, but those who are prepared to devote themselves and run as candidates, good on them! And I encourage people, whatever their political persuasion, to do so, because it's easier to stand on the side lines and take pot shots, but at the end of the day, our system is best served when people do get involved.

**I agree with you. In 2005 I stood for parliament for the Labour Party in a really strong Conservative seat of Rydale in North Yorkshire, and it was the best year of my life! To say that you get to meet people from all walks of life, people that you wouldn't meet in your normal social circle, was an understatement – it was just incredible. It changed my opinion on so many issues in so many ways, so I do agree with you. It's tough!**

I hope it changed your opinion on parties, too!

**Oh, well... indeed. That was the first election that you worked on, wasn't it, 2005?**

Well, it was the first I worked on in the UK here, and I came here at the request of my friend Michael Howard, who I had known for some years, who asked me to consider coming over and helping out. So our company got involved, and through our company I got involved.

**And what were your impressions of the 2005 election?**

Well, I think, you know, back in 2005, Tony Blair was still an asset, the economy was going pretty well, so it was always a tough challenge. Michael Howard had become leader at a time when the party was seen to be struggling somewhat and people rallied behind him to try and give the party the best chance to make some gains, and I think he did well in that context. I think 2005 was always going to be a tough election, as I said, because for all his faults, and even the Labour Party seemed to be able to name more of them than other people, but for all his faults, Tony Blair was a very

effective campaigner and performer, and the economy was going pretty well. Fast forward to 2010 of course, you had Gordon Brown, and the economy was going down the gurgler pretty fast. I was always confident that David Cameron would be prime minister after the election.

**How did you first meet David, and what were your first impressions of him?**

David Cameron? I think I met him maybe twice in 2005. He had responsibility for the manifesto, I came into the campaign late in 2004, had a few issues, my mum died whilst I was here, so I had to go back, and various other factors interrupted a little bit, but I wasn't heavily involved in the manifesto process, a lot of the campaigns, thematics, were well-established before I arrived. But he was clearly... I did meet him a couple of times, and I think he and George Osborne, to name his sort of fellow traveller in many respects, were both clearly very able younger politicians who had a strong future ahead of them. When you look at some of the challenges he's faced in terms of his son and the pressure that puts on someone, and the way he coped with that, I think that has really tested him and proven his mettle.

**I think some people have unfairly people have unfairly criticised David for being lazy; they say he likes to chillax. But in a sense I said that makes him a good leader, because you've got to have that time to think about strategy and not be a manager. You don't want a prime minister who's a manager, surely?**

Well, I think the first thing is, he works incredibly hard. Actually, people say the same thing, or have said the same thing, about Boris Johnson. Both of them work incredibly hard, Boris works in a different way perhaps, but they do both work incredibly hard, and the PM starts very early in the day. You say chillax... his ability to remain calm and apply judgement in a sort of very calm and considered way, isn't a bad quality to have. You don't want someone who's running around like a chook with their head cut off, and I actually think, particularly at a time of challenge and instability and the threats we see abroad, and the economic threats that we're having to address, although we've clearly turned the corner, at least in Britain, not else in some parts of the world at least, having that calmness and sense of perspective is a good thing, so I think it's a fine quality. Some people misread it as, I think, sometimes misread it as disinterest or diffidence, but actually it's just he's a very measured person who is not going to get spooked and not going to overreact, consider things, and then make decisions, and the thing that has struck me about him is his willingness to make decisions; he doesn't agonise or torture himself for days, and that's a good thing. It doesn't mean that he doesn't obviously weigh very carefully some of the very important decisions a prime minister has to make, but he does so with a calmness I find reassuring.

**I've only met David and Boris a couple of times very briefly, but it does strike me that Boris is the kind of personality type to be mayor, and David prime minister in a sense, because Boris is quite outspoken, he's a bit cheeky, he's a card, isn't he? Do you think that kind of personality resonates as a mayor, rather than, say, as a prime minister?**

I think, you know, clever people and good politicians, and good leaders, will adjust to the circumstances they face, and I think Boris has been a very effective mayor, I think most people would say he has done a good job as mayor, I am sure that a lot of people weren't sure when he was first elected, they liked him, but the jury was out in terms of, you know, his effectiveness. I think he's been a very effective mayor, it's been confirmed that London has overtaken New York as the financial centre, that's down to the national economy and the leadership of David Cameron and George Osborne, but it's also down to the promotional strengths and the ability to articulate the case for London that Boris Johnson has.

**What do you think it is about Boris then, that lets him kind of cut through the media narrative? Because you talk to normal people and they feel they know him, they feel they have a sense... a connection to him as a person, above and beyond that of, say, a normal politician, and he often polls above the party.**

Yes.

**Because he's got that personal appeal.**

Well, some of these things are indefinable, you know? It's just... I saw a study in the first mayoral campaign, which... I forget who did it, but I think an advertising agency did it, and it was one of these new approaches to assessing how voters may behave to something, and it said – I don't know if it's right or not, but it's interesting to think about – in this exercise, they showed a bunch of voters the faces of various figures. When they saw Boris, they smiled. Now, if that's true, that's an intangible – it's just a quality... it's not a quality that you can necessarily create, it's something that sits there within one's personality and demeanour.

**And do you think the kind of... if I could say the strength of his personal brand, do you think politics is going that way now, or do you think it will stay in terms of issues and party politics – because party politics to me seems to be dying out.**

Winston Churchill had a pretty strong personal brand.

**He did!**

Again, I don't subscribe to the view that there are these things now that don't apply any more, or do apply, that didn't apply before – I think it all depends on the

circumstance. I think one of Boris Johnson's attractions is his character, you know, he's not... just a white bread politician, there's something interesting and different about him. In certain circumstances, that's a really fine quality. There will be other occasions where people might say, you know, we want somebody who is authentic but has a different approach to things because of the circumstances we face. I think there's no doubt though that his character, his slightly independent nature, has been very helpful for him as mayor because to be mayor you have to be popularly elected, and in London, that means you have to reach out beyond the base of any... of just the Conservative party, and in that sense I think he's an ideal candidate, and has been the ideal candidate and has proved himself to be an excellent mayor.

### **Do you think he will be the next prime minister?**

Well, I think there's a lot of people who could be prime minister. The one thing that I don't do is speculate about those things, because you see it so many times, you know? So-and-so is the front-runner, then so-and-so is no longer the front-runner, then it's impossible for somebody to win, and guess what happened? Jeremy Corbyn just became leader of the Labour Party now. Pretty much before that was not on the cards, so... you know, I don't think you can... of course it's possible that he could lead the party, he's certainly capable of doing so. There's probably half a dozen others or more, or most would think they could, there who could lead the party.

**Do you think social media has changed political campaigning? Because there seems to be so many kind of divisions now across certain issues, like are you in favour of trident, are you going to scrap it, are you in favour of independence for Scotland... there seems to be a lot of bitterness and recrimination on both sides, particularly with the Corbyn supporters. I remember I supported Liz Kendall for leadership, but I used to get dozens and dozens...**

You and a few others.

**... quite horrible attacks on Twitter, and it didn't used to be like that in my day, if I can sound over for a second. It was a little bit more gentlemanly.**

You say that, but I saw a documentary on elections, I think Edward Heath was the prime minister, and it showed a couple of public meetings, and people were going hammer and tongs – they were screaming, people getting removed from the hall, all that sort of stuff. It was a real dust-up. And in some ways it reflected what some people were saying in that, “Where's the passion in politics, the way it used to be?” and all that sort of stuff. I don't think it's social media, I think you can... I think social media has definitely changed politics to this extent – you know, once in an election campaign, a news cycle was 24 hours or even longer. Today it's literally a few seconds because of digital media and social media. Things can happen very quickly,

they can move on very quickly, it risks giving voters ADD because things can change so fast, and it's very hard for things to cut through, which is why you have to repeat a simple message a lot of times to make an impact. But I do think you're onto something with Twitter. I think Twitter – I personally hate it, I've not tweeted very often, though I did during one campaign, not this recent one, one mayoral campaign, because I wanted to help contribute to the debate. I tweeted once afterwards when an airline lost my bags when I was on my way to a wedding – British Airways, it's not hard to work out which one – and I complained about that on Twitter out of frustration, and just got dumped on by a lot of people who said, "Why didn't you just go back to Australia? We don't want you here anyway." But I think that's the problem with Twitter, I think Twitter has become... firstly, a lot of punters don't really use Twitter, you know? It's much more... it's an angry echo chamber for those involved in politics and the media, so... it was really interesting during the election campaign to note, during some of the debates, some of the interviews that were being held, how quite a few journalists and commentators used Twitter as the reference point for how the public were reacting to that debate or that programme.

### **That's only how Twitter's reacting.**

Yes, but it's actually only how Twitter's reacting. But this is my point about how sometimes people over rely on polls, public polls in particular, and it's a similar sort of thing. People were saying, "Look at all that! They're trending on Twitter!" as if Twitter is somehow a representative organ – it's not. Twitter has its place, but in my opinion it's in many respects the voice of the angry, and it tends to get... people tend to be more aggressive and emotional on Twitter, and more uneven of temperament, than on other social media – and also it's very narrow. During the campaign, we kept getting people coming to us saying, "We've got this ability to record what people are posting on Twitter and what they're talking about on Twitter," as if it was representative of the community – and it's not.

**What would you say makes a good leader? You praised David Cameron in terms of his leadership, but in this modern age, you've got to be a good communicator, as you've said, you've got to know when to listen and when to keep to the strategy. Is it innate, or is it the kind of skill you can learn?**

Ultimately, you've got to have something in your guts, I think. You've got to believe in something, not indigestion! You've got to have... you've got to know what you want to achieve, you've got to be able to articulate that. There are a lot of people who would say that John Howard, the Australian prime minister, they didn't necessarily agree with him on many things, but they voted for him because they knew what he stood for, and I dare say if you walk down an Australian street today and asked people... and described the situation to people and asked them to explain how they thought John Howard would react or what he would say, they would very accurately be able to do so. And I think that reflects an important dimension of leadership which is

consistency. In an uncertain world, again, I'm repeating it because it exists, someone who can provide an anchor of consistency and continuity, gives you some confidence... if they've got that consistency and if they've got something at the core of what they believe, even if you don't agree with it necessarily, then that's a positive reassurance I think, it comes to motive, and I think ultimately good leaders are those who have the right motive and are able to articulate to voters in a way that is relevant to voters and to the lives they lead.

**What drew you into politics in the first place? Because you started off in corporate life. What attracted you to it?**

Well, I didn't get attracted to it in the sense that yes, I ended up one of my professional activities has been involved in politics, but like a lot of people, the family I grew up in led me to taking a political interest, I grew up originally on a farm then moved into a country town, and our family were interested and engaged in politics, that sort of led me to be interested, and ultimately engaged in it as well. It's just one of those things that's hard to describe – it wasn't a burning ambition to one day want to be prime minister or something.

**You do corporate work as well, don't you?**

Yes.

**What's a typical day like for you? Do you enjoy a variety?**

I'm very lucky. I will often say to the team that I work with in their offices around the world that we're very lucky because we do lots of different things. We often help people who have problems, and that inevitably makes for a lot of challenge in what you do, nowadays the same really, because someone walks through the door with an issue they want to discuss, a problem they don't know how to deal with and they want to know if you can help. Election campaigns are really interesting because you've got so many moving parts and so many dimensions that you are working with, and one of the things I like about election campaigns which can be very challenging is that elections are really like a big retail sale – everyone's a buyer on one day. So the thing I like is people know whether you've succeeded or not. I hate the fluff of PR and so forth...

**There's a defined win, isn't there?**

You succeeded or you didn't succeed, you know?

**And then you move on to the next thing.**



And you can move on, but sometimes I think in the communications game there's a lot of fluff from people who don't really... or the risk is you can get caught up in the whole fluff of it all rather than in something where you truly are measured.

**You have to be disciplined in a sense. I've done that, where I've spent Sunday morning reading the papers and the commentariat, and three hours later I'm none the wiser. I've read a lot of words and...**

This country has got a lot of very good writers, so I wouldn't... well, I'm critical of some people perhaps, but I wouldn't be critical of them... I actually don't read the Sunday papers, I prefer to go for a walk and catch up with friends, or talk to my wife or whatever it is, but you can get caught up in the process. Politics is more than the process. This is more than the excitement and the entertainment, it's something real that affects people's lives, and it's a great opportunity to be involved in campaigns therefore because you're doing something that really can make a difference.

**There is the old adage that wanting to be prime minister must disqualify you from office immediately on the basis that no sane person would want to do it! I mean, if you look at David Cameron's in-tray, we've got the EU referendum, we've got ISIS, we've got all kinds of problems happening at the moment. What do you think is going to happen over the next few years?**

The future, I think, the world has a lot of challenges at present, I'm optimistic about it. One of the worrying things though was... some of the research I saw in the election, in the lead-up to the election, that suggested a lot of people are concerned that the life their kids led when they became their age, or would lead when they became their age, wouldn't be as good as the life these people have now. And I think there is a bit of pessimism in the world, but I think there are many reasons to be optimistic, and I think that's ultimately, you know, one of David Cameron's strengths, one of Boris's strengths, you mentioned Boris before, and George Osborne in the way he was very optimistic about the economic growth and opportunity for this country, and I think Britain's ideally placed for a strong future. I don't subscribe to the view that some people have had, and some people like Nigel Farage, frankly, who articulate 'Britain used to be better'. Well, I think Britain has got a lot going for it and there's huge opportunity, and you've just got to grasp it. And Malcolm Turnbull recently became prime minister of Australia, and it's a bit hard for Poms to understand that you could change the leader in half a day, but that's the way the system works in Australia, and he's been very interesting in the way he has come out very strongly and said, "These are exciting times in which to live, we've got huge opportunities if we grasp them," and he wants to provide the leadership and direction to the country to help Australia grasp those opportunities, and I think David Cameron's personal optimism and measured personality means that he has got the ability to provide that positive future direction as well. There's a lot on the horizon – dealing with Europe, the challenges of ISIL, whatever you want to describe it as –

**We can't seem to agree on what the name is.**

No, no – it's not a very good branding exercise.

**But look at Scotland as well – supposedly it was a once in a generation referendum and already they're agitating for another.**

It's a very short generation.

**I was going to say! It seems inevitable that the UK won't survive.**

I don't know. I doubt it – I think it will survive, but the good thing about a democracy is that it is in the hands of the people.

**Well, Lynton – we're out of metaphorical tape. It just remains for me to thank you for your time. I've really enjoyed it and I've learnt a lot.**

Thanks a lot.