

An imagination CAPTURED

Jane Howard explains how the concepts she learnt at LSE have helped her communicate the vision of Fair Trials International, a charity that seeks to create a world where every person's right to a fair trial is respected.

I've never forgotten the sense of immediacy and excitement that I felt during my LSE years. It seemed to me that the LSE community was at the centre of the capital's being, that it had its intellectual finger on the country's pulse. Of course, I was impressionable, as is every school-leaver, but LSE's world captured my imagination right from the start.

I was hooked by the broad and deep understanding that the lecturers had of their subjects and relished the opportunity to get to grips with my BSc Economics (Politics and History), which brought lots of big themes my way. We learnt how philosophers had worried and reasoned their way to a (usually) better understanding of the world around them. Courses on communism and socialism made sense of the modern world, with Professor Kedourie's views on nationalism being just as relevant today. There was the crystal clarity of Karl Popper's reason: how can you tell whether an argument is sound? Topical visiting lecturers, like Robert McKenzie the first pop-pollster, gave us the

inside track on his "Swingometer" and reinforced my belief that LSE was the very best place to be.

Inspiring as this time was, it didn't help to focus me in any particular direction and so I roamed professionally for several years, finally becoming the management trainee for NE London Regional Health Authority, where I worked with many terrific colleagues throughout the "Winter of Discontent". Eventually, however, I found the politics of health care frustrating and, with a neat sidestep, took up a post in one of the early communication consultancies.

Initially a small sector, public relations grew rapidly and my blue-stocking agency was soon purchased by leading international advertisers Saatchi & Saatchi. Now I look back on 25 years of creating and managing communications campaigns for all types of organisations from governments to NGOs and FTSE blue-chips. LSE had awakened my interest in ideas, how concepts inspire, and we harnessed this to methodology and measurement, breathing life into stakeholder messaging.

Eventually, I moved to run a UK network and joined its PLC board, and then set up my own consultancy, which I sold in 2009. I often reflected on how the media sector is a great place to be an entrepreneur, a near-perfect example of Hegelian "creative destruction". I now hold several professional roles and have become an active trustee of the legal charity Fair Trials International (FTI).

Like most great ideas, the core principle of FTI is very simple. It is to create a world where every person's right to a fair trial is respected, whatever their nationality, wherever they are accused. When you're involved in cases and campaigns in countries across the world, however, it can be tricky keeping track of what this straightforward concept means in practice – particularly given that most

of FTI's staff members are busy lawyers, not used to thinking in terms of branding or key messages.

Over the past five years, I've worked alongside the charity's chief executive and senior staff members to help FTI develop its core messaging and make sure that the charity is able to demonstrate its impact. This has included helping the charity to develop coherent and compelling messages for all of its campaigns. Here in London, for example, FTI has been instrumental in delivering vital changes to the UK's extradition arrangements, using the human stories from its casework to persuade Theresa May to give UK courts stronger powers to refuse unjust extradition.

But FTI is also having an impact across Europe and further afield. Since 2009, the charity has commanded a network of experienced defence lawyers across Europe – the Legal Experts Advisory Panel – to gather first-hand information on injustices occurring in all 28 EU countries. Together, we've developed a stronger "European" brand for FTI, ensuring that its work resonates with academics and lawyers across the EU, without diluting its key messages or alienating its non-expert audiences.

Last year, FTI finalised its new three-year communications strategy. The charity now has a much stronger understanding of how it needs to be seen – and, crucially, by whom. It has better mechanisms to monitor its communications and a greater appreciation of the risks it faces. This has helped a relatively small charity to punch above its weight and position itself for future growth. FTI has ambitious plans and bold campaigns, and with careful management of its development and positioning will continue to make a strong impact in the human rights sector for many years to come. ■



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