

John Sweeney

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I watched [Panorama](#) last night. It was by [John Sweeney](#). It was about the [Church of Scientology](#). It attracted some considerable advance attention because consistent with that body's policy of seeking to discredit those who question it they had distributed 100,000 DVDs of their own film of the BBC making this Panorama.

Now I know John Sweeney. I'm proud to know John Sweeney. I'm proud that at one point he asked me to be involved in this particular programme. And I'll tell you. I would have taken part. The programme, as was obvious to those who watched it, took a different direction.

But I'll tell this as well. It began as an objective investigation of claims made about the Church of Scientology. It ended as the story of the Church baiting the BBC to the point that John lost his cool. He'd been followed, harassed and shouted at until he'd had enough. And then [it showed](#).

But that's what is good about John Sweeney. He's human. By that I mean he's passionate. Passionate about what is right. Passionate that wrong should not happen. Passionate to the point that it drives him to find the truth. And in this case I'm sure he told the truth that he found. Having seen him in action, and having worked with him to make sure that everything is scrupulous and fair, and having through that process seen the big man he is who remains compassionate, honest and accountable, I can also say this. I'm sure that anger was real.

Was it a mistake? No. It wasn't. That anger showed what an organisation that sets out to push a person to their limits can do to someone as tough as John Sweeney. Think about what it can do to others in that case. And then ask. Could you have stayed calm as long as he did? Could you have withstood that pressure? Would you have dared asked those questions?

The world needs people like John Sweeney.

It doesn't matter that he lost his cool. It does matter that he was willing to ask questions of those who did not want them asked. When people are too frightened to do

that we are in trouble.

And maybe we aren't that far from that point. I rarely think about the threat of reprisal before posting a blog. I did when writing this one.

Disclosure: I have been paid by the BBC to work on documentary programmes where I have worked with John Sweeney. I am a member of the Church of England.