Off mic with Phil smith: skin deep

Those of you who know me from work will recall my rugged physique, chiselled features, six-pack and piercing blue eyes. More or less. Over the years such debonair style has come effortlessly, but last Christmas I was given serious pause for thought.

My progeny - egged on by their grandmother I think - decided that I needed to start some serious work on keeping myself in shape, so they told me in no uncertain terms that a skin regeneration regime would at least partially offset the predations of age and global warming. I could just come clean - pardon the pun - and admit that I now moisturise, but to be honest it's a lot more complicated than that.

My day currently starts with an important choice between an anti-tightness foaming gel, which wakes me up without drying me out, and a cleansing exfoliator. The secret of this answer to middle-age prayer is aluminium oxide crystals - it feels like you're rubbing your face with an emery board but has what the blurb calls an "immediate new skin effect".

Then I have a shower that softens the beard after which I can shave using a special anti-irritation shave gel designed for sensitive souls (or perhaps it reads "sensitive skin", the eyes aren't what they were). Once shaving is accomplished I am skewered on the horns of a major dilemma. Should I choose the anti-fatigue moisturizing lotion with vitamin C or opt for the 24 hours hydrating balm? Decisions decisions.

To conclude the operation I rub on some special cream that reduces the dark circles under my eyes. Can you just hold on while I apply some - I communicate effectively with the cream of the profession if I look like a panda.

I'm sure you'll agree I'll have my work cut out keeping to my regime over the coming year, but will also understand that we all have to make these sacrifices to look the part of the well-groomed interpreter, at home with ministers, diplomats and assorted celebs. The drawback is that I now have to get up an hour earlier so that I can complete my ablutions in time for the meeting, an operation that calls for a high level of concentration because it's important that I avoid using the skin renewer (maximum use is twice a week because you need to leave some skin in place) on a day when I should be going for the non-tightening foam experience.

I've had to invest in a bigger overnight bag for the quick dashes to exciting locations because of all the potions and lotions I must now take with me. When making said QDs to exciting locations I generally just have hand luggage, and with the enhanced security I can imagine I'll have some awkward questions to answer when they came across my stash: "Is Sir terminally vain?"

Nevertheless I shall persevere. Do feel free to suggest your own patent methods for ageing
gracefully. Next time our paths cross professionally we can compare notes on what products are best and whether cucumber is good for the eyes. The girls are welcome to chip in too.

A popular present for Dad at Christmas is aftershave. If you ever walk around a department store in the run up to the high days and holidays, you're assaulted on all sides by people trying to sell you their latest fragrance. Once they've doused you in two or three you can't tell the difference any more. There are two aftershaves that deserve a space on any interpreter's bathroom shelf: Quorum and Contradiction.

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