

*The rough guide to  
being successful at  
work (real advice for  
real people)*

*by The Rough Guider*

*I dedicate this book to all the managers and staff that I have had the pleasure of working with over the last (nearly) 25 years. I have sincere gratitude for the knowledge you have passed to me downwards and upwards (and sideways) and for the experiences I have gained from working with you. This has taught me almost everything I know about the workplace!*

# The rough guide to being successful at work (real advice for real people)

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# Introduction

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For a while now I have been wondering why I can't locate a book that sets out in a clear no nonsense approach how to be successful at work. I'm talking about easily digestible practical steps that can easily be put into practice at the workplace. So what with having gained over 20 years of management experience across six companies all within different industries I thought it was time that someone (me!) put this right.

All the things I write about are from first-hand experience and have worked ever so well for me. You won't find any name dropping, famous or contemporary theoretical models, complicated flow-charts or difficult to understand diagrams. What you will find is simple words, simple vocabulary, simple paragraphs and simple chapters including ideas and advice that are very easy to implement in your day to day lives at work.

So my promise to you is to include advice and ideas that:

- are easy to follow
- are easy to try out
- actually work in practice (they are all tried and tested)
- can be remembered easily.

Easy really!

By the way I love bullet points. This is something that will become apparent very quickly as you glide through this book.

# Making a good impression and working happily ever after

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OK, so let's start at the beginning. It's your first day at work and you want to make a good impression. That's done by impressing those around you (obviously), but who do you really need to do to impress on that first day at the office and forever after?

- Your boss?
- Your boss's boss?
- Your staff?
- Your peers?
- The CEO?
- The receptionist?

The answer is of course all of them, BUT the ones you need to concentrate on first are your boss (this chapter) and your staff (see 'Managing Staff'). If they undermine you, you're out of there whether you like it or not.

So how do you impress your boss? Well I could go down the theoretical route of analyzing personality traits, determining where their personalities lie on the well-known scales and charts, but I did say that I wasn't going to do that.

So here is the REAL practical advice:

- **Like them and be liked.** By this I don't mean all that brown nose stuff or that you should try to become their friend (although becoming your boss's friend can help a career) but really try hard to understand them, work out what they like and what they dislike. "So what" I hear you say (email or text), let's see the practical stuff that you're talking about. Well, here it is:
  - Find out what makes them laugh – write down what things they react positively to. Was it an outright joke, an interesting anecdote or do they really prefer you to jump straight in there and ignore the niceties? Sounds corny I know, but if you make them laugh they'll think you're a good guy. By the way, if you tell a joke or anecdote or other humorist comment and they respond badly move on and don't dwell on it, and certainly don't repeat it. It could be a culture issue, language issue or simply a lack of GSOH on their behalf. But, whatever you do, don't see it as your fault or problem, don't lose any sleep over it but do try a different approach next time. Finding out what makes them laugh doesn't need to be done over night. If you are a cautious person you can monitor their approach to humor over a few weeks before making your move.
  - Find out their pet dislikes. In fact ask them outright.

- Do they dislike projects or tasks being delivered late, or do they dislike poor communication skills (which, in reality, may mean a lack of communication)? If your boss has to chase you up on something it probably means you should have updated them already! So find out how often they chase up on tasks and make sure you get in there first.
- Do they hate negativity? No-one likes the person around the table that is negative and unconstructive. How do you know if someone is a negative force? Simple. If after a conversation with someone you feel energized, they are a positive force. If after a conversation with someone you feel tired and drawn, they are a negative force. If you ask me, don't let anyone get you down and more importantly, don't be the person that gets everyone else down.
- Do they hate bad grammar? See the 'How to write' chapter to avoid these pitfalls.
- **Ask intelligent questions.** This is a tough one, as sometimes you may be in a meeting where you don't know very much about the topic under discussion. My advice is to follow the rules below to maximize your input and chances of being recognized as an effective contributor:
  - Be confident. If you have an idea, express it. It's rare that a group laughs or dismisses an idea outright even if it isn't really that good. Your ideas will get better and better over time as will your confidence. It's a never ending cycle of improvement.
  - Chat beforehand. If it's an important meeting try to speak to one or two people either inside or outside the meeting group in advance to help gain ideas. I don't mean steal their ideas by passing them off as your own, but if you agree with them, bring them into the conversation in a structured way.
  - Research. Sounds boring I know, but when you research the topic beforehand it's amazing what questions may come to mind, which actually may be pretty damn good.
  - Ask the obvious. It's amazing how many times you have an "obvious" question in mind and you don't ask it. Eventually somebody else gets the plaudits for asking that question or you leave the meeting wondering why you did not have the confidence to ask it.
  - Remember your core skills. If you're the finance guy then it is fine for you to ask the pressing finance question. If you're the sales guy it's fine to ask the sales question. Playing to your strengths is a good idea. It allows you to join in the conversation and add value. [Note: if the topic has absolutely nothing to do with your area of work, revisit the points above.]
- **Help your boss be successful.** Sure, I hear you say. I'll come up with ideas for improving their department and they will take the credit. Well, if that's what your boss is like are you working for the right person or indeed company? Look, if your boss's life is made easier and they look more impressive because of your help, 9 times out of 10 (I didn't have the confidence to say ninety-nine times out of a

hundred) your boss will reward you. This may be through verbal recognition, juicy project work (if that's relevant) or letting others know how well you are performing through both informal channels and the formal appraisal process. So how can you help your boss look good:

- Tell them what they are doing wrong (tactfully!) and make damn sure that you have some recommendations for them. No-one likes negativity remember!
- Find out what their goals are and make sure that your goals tie in to some of theirs. If it is unclear to you how your goals fit in with theirs, speak to your boss about this and listen carefully to their guidance.
- Come up with ideas for them on how to improve the performance of their department. If you have time, offer to help them improve things, but be careful not to upset others in the department if the matters you identify lie outside your immediate area of responsibility. I don't mean tread on eggshells but make sure that tact remains the order of the day.
- Say good things about them to other senior management leaders, if such praise is honest. Indeed there must be something good about them? Are they good at communicating, listening, recognizing valuable contributions, developing career paths, being flexible over your working conditions? Undoubtedly there is something good about them that you can share. Others will then see you as a positive force within that department. If I was a betting man I would put money on your boss hearing about this through their network and then mentally logging that you're a good person to have in their team.
- Let them know when things are not getting done (again, avoid negativity). They may have an important project or area of work that is not progressing as it should be. If you have clear and substantiated facts to support this then alert your boss. Avoid rumors and hearsay as this comes across as immature and may be considered as your attempt to discredit other people within their department. But at the end of the day your boss will thank you for your transparency and tactfulness in bringing this issue to their attention.
- Tell them when they have done well. If they have run a department-wide or group-wide meeting or perhaps smaller meeting for 2-3 people (if you work in a small team) don't feel shy about telling them how good they were. We're not talking brown-nose stuff here but rather constructive comments about how the time they have spent on something that has improved the quality of the department. "Hey boss, it was really great that you took the time to speak to the team about the company's strategy for the current year. They really enjoyed the visibility." Your boss will certainly remember your support and will value it.

**Is it too late to change?** One thing to remember is that it is never too late to change. I remember a situation where a member of staff had lost their manager (a careless thing to do) and was eagerly awaiting the arrival of their new one. The previous incumbent did not treat them in an adult fashion and did not view them as a mature and professional individual. Their concern was that the new manager



would immediately assume the same. My advice was to see this as an opportunity and not a threat to their career. I asked the individual in question to draw up a profile of how they would like to be viewed by the incoming boss. This ended up being a simple exercise and the staff member (also a manager, albeit at a more junior level) put together a pretty cool document. Once I saw the document I realized that they had a very clear view of how they would like to be perceived. The key was for them to not simply act like that person but **be** the person on the document, from Day 1 (first impressions last and all that). So, I sat down with the person in question and we came up with a plan on how to act, portray and in fact truly be that person from here on in. Given that the new manager had no pre-conceived ideas (I certainly wasn't going to give them any) it was not that difficult to continue work with this new persona, gravitas and maturity. Their boss had left and a new one joined (remember that they hadn't been promoted into their manager's role) but the impression their new boss had of them was entirely different and far more favorable. 2 years later the manager moved on and the individual was promoted into their role, which would not have happened if they had not taken the steps to grow, mature and effectively show themselves to be a more polished and complete person (from a work point of view). Remember, if you inherit a new boss (under any circumstance) it is your opportunity to reinvent yourself for the better. Don't miss that opportunity or doubt how significant a timely review of self can make to your career trajectory.

- **Towing the party line.** Generally speaking, people admire those that defend the principles and support the objectives of their boss and department respectively. You may disagree with your boss behind closed doors but it is important that you tow the party line in the public arena. Slating your boss is not a wise idea and is likely to be destructive to your relationship with them.

# Managing Staff

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You see, by writing 'managing staff' I'm already sending you down the wrong track. So between you and me I'd rather call this chapter '**getting the most out of your staff but in a way that also means that they get the most out of their job**'. OK, 'managing staff' it is.

The thing is, I can't believe how many of my friends and relatives tell me that they have a serious issue with their manager. Don't get me wrong, loads of people say that they are truly happy (yes, I admit that there are undoubtedly better managers out there than me), but too many still seem to go home very unhappy with the way they are "used and abused" by their boss. So this chapter is for those who want to improve the way they work with their staff.

So how should you manage staff? It's bullet point time:

- **Treat them with respect.** They're not children, they have pride and they have feelings. So speak to them as you'd like to be treated. If your boss does not treat you well don't let this affect the relationships you have built up with your team. It's not fair to pass 'bad culture' down the line. If your boss shouts at you that's an issue for you and your boss to resolve but don't let that affect your relationship with your staff (peers and so on). In particular:
  - Don't patronize
  - Ask for input from staff at meetings
  - Be clear to them when they don't meet your expectations (seriously, they'll respect you for it)
  - Recognize good performance (see below)
- **Give them time.** Everyone has their own values in life and one of those important to many is to spend time with loved ones. Well, low and behold, it is the same at work. Make sure that your staff know that they can knock on your door to discuss something important to them and, even more importantly, they have the confidence that you will take their issue seriously.
- **Don't fob them off.** Staff have feelings too. When they bring an issue to your attention make sure that you agree on how you will help, logging down any action points for yourself, and come back to them with your feedback in a timely manner. If they ask for your help and you offer to help, make sure that you actually help and it is visible to them. Otherwise you'll be worse off than if you didn't offer to help in the first place.
- **Listen.** Ok, all good management books highlight the importance of listening. But this is a different kind of listening. Why don't you ask one of your key staff out for a coffee at break or lunch (or simply go to a meeting room or your office) and ask them to speak about their life at work; frustrations, likes, dislikes and so on. Agree not to interrupt them for (say) 10 minutes. And, whatever you do, don't interrupt

them. They will feel totally refreshed after the 10 minutes and you will feel really good too. (Weirdly) you'll also feel so much closer to them and that new bond will probably survive for a few months without much further effort. So just think how strong it would be if you repeated that exercise on a regular basis – perhaps 2-3 times a year. After they have finished you should comment and of course offer advice and guidance when this is required. Don't forget to follow up on the things you have agreed to look into.

- **Listen.** In case you skipped the paragraph above. Listening is so very important and by the way this isn't the time to skim read.
  
- **Set clear objectives and goals.** I know that this sounds so obvious and looks like it has been taken right out of a standard textbook but if they don't have clear objectives and goals (or whatever you want to call them) you can't fairly judge their performance. How do you set these? A concise bullet point summary is shown below:
  - Set targets (it's the same thing) that are achievable
  - Set targets that are challenging (but the bullet point above still holds)
  - Set targets that if achieved make them look good
  - Set targets that if achieved should certainly make you look good
  - Let them know how their goals fit into the overall goals of the department and business. Where do they fit into the overall picture?

If they achieve their targets they should know without doubt that you're happy with them. This leads me on nicely to the next point.

- **Recognize their contributions.** Staff wish to be recognized in different ways so get to know them. How you recognize your staff is very important and you should consider the following factors:
  - Frequency of recognition. Don't overdo it or you will come across as insincere but do make sure that you regularly thank your staff when it is merited by their performance.
  - Formalness of recognition. Recognition varies from a 'pat on the back' to a verbal thank you, to a formal email, perhaps copying or forwarding the communication to your boss as well. Whichever route you take, and it's good to mix these up, keep it honest, regular and clear.

**Profile sessions.** One other thing that I have found very useful is to run what I call 'profile sessions' with staff on a one to one basis. I have the weekly meeting where I run through all the tasks that should be complete, project stage gates that should have been passed and so on, but I also run monthly (sometimes every other month) meetings where we talk about nothing other than their brand within the company. What do I mean by this (also see '**Your brand**')?

- How are they perceived by others within the company and how can we improve that perception. Perhaps better writing or presentation skills.
- How strong is their network within the company (see '**Networking**')? Let's come up with actual names of people within the company that they should pro-actively contact and build relationships with.
- What projects or tasks are they working on that have gone well and could be recognized publicly? This is a double-whammy. If I email the senior management team about how well one of my members of staff have performed on (say) a project, they will not only email that member of staff to congratulate them, which means that member of staff is happy with me, but they will also email me to say what a great job I am doing in managing that member of staff. It's great, a win-win situation and it is so easy.
- Agree what communications they could send out to raise their profile. Rather than you sending a communication about the office re-fit, perhaps your number two could do this (come on, don't be a control freak).
- Review and agree whether their current profile within the company is enhancing their career. Correct that course if needed. In other words, if the things they are doing are not helping develop a good persona at work stop and think of some new ones. Now that you have the general idea, feel free to add to my bullet point list!

**The hard conversation.** As a manager it is part and parcel of your job to speak to staff to not only reward and recognize them for good work but to speak to them when they are not performing to the levels expected of them. Sometimes we can be tempted to shirk our responsibilities (particularly if we are time pressured) avoiding that hard conversation which often starts with the phrase "Can I see you for a minute?" However, top performance (or at least the most significantly improved performance) often materializes subsequent to such discussions. Their respect for you as a manager should actually go up rather than down as long as you have been constructive, realistic, fair, transparent and tactful. Let's take these in turn:

- Constructive – provide them with a clear picture of what needs to improve along with a workable plan on how to do so
- Realistic – make sure that they can achieve the goals set for improved performance
- Be fair, taking into account any mitigating factors. It is not surprising that (say) a death in the family can dramatically affect short term performance
- Be transparent – have a 2-way dialogue in which you should be clear that you are disappointed. Remind them of their strengths and why you believe in them. Ask them if there is more you should be doing to help them.
- Above all, be tactful. Stay patient with them but make it clear that you expect to see some significant improvement now that you have put a framework in place to assist them.
- Speak to your Human Resources department to make sure that you follow company protocol (don't slip up on any disciplinary processes if they are relevant).

**My first two weeks as a manager.** This is one of the best things I have ever done at work. I became the new manager of an office of 180 staff. Now, to be fair, I had 6 reportees who all had about 30 staff each so I only really had to manage 6 staff.

I had been told that this was a well run office where staff were satisfactorily motivated. There was an attrition issue (staff leaving the company) but apparently that was due to the fact that their jobs were inherently mundane. There was nothing that could be done about that or so I was told.

So, on my first day I decided to do something a bit different. I decided to stop, look and listen. I looked around the office and saw a drab, unmotivated work environment and staff with drawn and tired faces. I realized that it was time for some investment so I had a schedule drawn up so that I could meet 10% of the staff each day for the next 10 working days. I asked them to meet me on a one to one basis (at agreed times that worked for them) and to bring along with them a list of their current frustrations plus their proposals on how to eliminate those frustrations. The former without the latter would have made my life far too difficult and they wouldn't have felt an integral part of the process.

Anyway, after collating their comments, eliminating duplication and purely negative comments from those that had yet to be motivated properly, I came up with a 10 point plan. Each of those 'points' was followed by the suggestions and recommendations that has been forthcoming. I had also added my own for good order. To be fair they had come up 95% of the content and I made it clear to them that this was the case. I'm half tempted to list out the 127 suggestions they came up with, but they were largely specific to those teams in that office so it would only really be a filler.

However, their comments ranged from "we need a new drinks machine on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor as the current one is broken" to "we should introduce a new role of deputy supervisor for each team so that when the supervisor is away there is a second in command". That also helped solve part of the career progression issue as 6 staff (you do the maths) could be promoted almost instantaneously, subject to budget approval of course.

I communicated this plan (with deliverables and deadlines) to the senior management team and received approval for what was not such a significant financial investment (many things were quick fixes). The action points were delivered on time and within budget. The sun shone on all of us that day (both on my staff and on me). It's amazing what a little bit of listening can do. This was without doubt the single best investment of my time across my working career. In fact it was the start of a great career with that company.

I ran that department for about 3 years before being promoted to another larger more significant role (based on the fact that I now had a reputation for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the departments within the company). Those talented guys made me look good and I can never thank them enough for it. Lots of them did well out of our relationship too with a series of promotions, pay reviews and internal moves to arguably more exciting parts of the business. It's a 2-way process remember!

**The annual offsite ("Awayday").** These can be very effective in bringing the team together, building bonds, training and educating them, and allowing them to hone their own presentation skills, writing skills, negotiation skills and the like. As long as you take the day seriously, ask the team in advance what they would like to achieve and ensure that the day is varied, fun and interactive it should be a roaring success. Sound easy? Well it is! In fact half the work can be completed by outside speakers (ask the CEO if they can spend 15

minutes with your team or the global head of your function or the head of finance, sales or marketing for your business unit).

If your team is small think about combining it with some other teams. At one work place we combined Finance, Facilities Management and IT. It astonishes me how many shared issues different functions want to discuss and resolve. My favorite exercise for this combined group was to ask them to break into teams (each team had a few staff from each function) and put together a plan for our company to move premises (something we were thinking of doing). They had to put 3 sections in their plan. One for Finance, one for IT and one for (wait for it) Facilities Management. I gave them some information on a couple of sheets of paper so that they could establish the company requirements and available budget and they put together what I must say were some pretty impressive plans. Later on they presented the plans, so presentation skills were finely honed as well. It was a cracking day.

**There are two sides to every story - part 1 (for Part 2 see 'Chairing (running) meetings').** It is really important to educate staff that others within the business, particularly those in other departments, have different personalities, different goals, objects and priorities along with different day-to-day pressures. For example, someone in the finance department may feel frustrated that a salesperson delivers their expense claim form one day late. They are also irritated by the fact that the salesperson's boss will take no steps to reprimand them. When you look at the situation from the salesperson's lens things can be very different. They wonder why the finance person is being so hard on them when they are the top performer in their department (smashing through their quarterly sales goals), when they are always courteous and polite to the guys in Finance, and when they have been on the road for 2 weeks in back-to-back sales meetings so have not had time to complete the travel and entertaining expense claim form. Would the Finance person rather they put in the claim on time but missed out on a high value sale (perhaps yes?). The thing to remember here is that different factors drive the day-to-day actions of individuals throughout the organization. If your staff can get their heads around this it can take away of whole load of internal stress. It doesn't necessarily make things easier for them from a process point of view (although perhaps when they understand the issues they may look to change the process in order to 'buy in' the Sales department) but it will ensure that they can manage their frustrations by understanding the issue from the culprit's point of view.

**Don't forget to listen to new ideas.** You are the chief of your team, department or business, which means you should know that most great ideas (although not all) come from the front-line. Ignore your staff at your peril. One analogy that remains firmly rooted in my mind is the situation where a Captain in the army is fighting off the enemy one by one using his sword. As they run towards him he is just about able to fight them off. However, at the same time one of his men is tapping him on the shoulder trying to get his attention. "Get off me" he keeps saying, "Can't you see that I'm really tied up at the moment". The Private groans and tries to grab his superior's attention a few minutes later but to no avail. The Captain worked really hard that day and, along with his men, just about managed to keep the enemy at bay. At the end of the day the Captain turned round to the Private and asked "So what was so important that you kept trying to interrupt me when you could see that I had my hands full?" The Private turned round to his Captain and showed him a box that had arrived that day. On the outside of the package was written the words 'Sub-machine gun'. If only the Captain had taken the time to listen to his team he would have performed far more effectively for the army that day.

**Crossing the divide.** Some advice I received very early on in my managerial career related to the 'us and them' syndrome. Once I had made the jump from the front line to a management position my boss called me in and explained that I was now part of the

management team and shouldn't fraternize with the troops. Now, to be clear, he was not suggesting anything other than a new approach to managing my relationships with staff. My boss stated that I should treat staff with respect, dignity, fairness and so on (he was explicit that this was extremely important) but I should become slightly more remote or aloof so that I didn't get in a tangle with my priorities or create conflicts of interest. If I was to spend a couple of evenings a week down the pub with my staff and perhaps include myself in conversations that were in conflict with the views that were expressed by the management team I would lose their respect when it came to dealing with disciplinary situations, annual appraisals, pay reviews and so on. The 'take-away' is to jump across the divide and become a strong, supportive and effective manager and recognize that to be so you may need to create some 'distance' from your staff.

**Be the boss you want your boss to be.** We're all pretty good at identifying the areas where our bosses could improve in terms of their management style and capabilities. Does that mean we are ourselves the perfect managers? I'd like to say yes, but when I write down all the characteristics I expect my boss to possess and all the skills I am sure he should have acquired I'm left with quite a formidable list. When I use this list to assess my own performance and qualities (perhaps rate each out of 10) I don't score anywhere near maximum points. Hmm, I've still got a lot to learn and am aware of the improvements I can make. Why not try this for yourself. It is a great way of prioritizing some of your management capability objectives for the following year.

# Leading

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There is much debate on the differences between 'leading' and 'managing' or on how one progresses from a manager to a leader. From my point of view great managers are also greater leaders. They may not set the strategy for the firm but they certainly lead their staff making them into more polished, experienced and developed staff.

Therefore, this chapter highlights a number of leadership qualities that all managers should aspire to. Hopefully you will find that you have many of these qualities already.

- **Practice what you preach.** As a manager (or leader) you should ensure that you conduct yourself in the same manner as you would expect your staff to do so. If you want the team to arrive on time in the mornings, not to take extended lunch hours and show respect for one another, you should do the same. If you don't follow the values and principles that you set out for your team, they won't take them seriously and almost certainly won't adhere to them and incorporate them into their daily working lives. In other words, be a great role model.
- **Integrity.** A good leader will possess a high level of integrity and will be a trusted advisor to their teams and peers. Ensure that this quality is apparent in your ways of working.
- **Gain and retain trust.** Be honest with your staff, gain and then retain their trust. Don't bluff. Don't lie. If you break the trust of your staff you will lose their respect. This may not manifest itself in day to day conversations and catch-ups but the relationships you have will be weakened and your ability to lead the team when times are tough will be that much harder. Why should they work late that night or give up a weekend for you if they don't trust that you have their best intentions at heart?
- **Trust them.** You will benefit as a leader if you can clearly demonstrate that you trust your staff. When you set a task or project trust them to complete it correctly and on time. Give them the space to grow as individuals by allowing them to 'mature' in the workplace.
- **Communicate effectively.** When communication lines breakdown or where directions given are unclear or incoherent staff will lose both trust and respect for you. Don't let all the good work of developing relationships go to waste by sitting in your ivory tower and assuming all is well on the front-line. The best communicators are often the best leaders and in many cases they progress high up the career ladder. Use this skill regularly and check in with staff that the frequency of communications along with the clarity and content within them is right to meet their needs as a team within the business.
- **Show interest in front-line work.** Great leaders ensure that they take time out of their hectic daily schedules to experience and learn about (in some detail) the pressures, issues and concerns of their teams. By shadowing a team member for a few hours or by reviewing with them one or two of the processes that they see as most ineffective you will very quickly begin to understand some of the issues facing them. By the virtue of the fact that you have a 'helicopter view' of their area, and how their role and the function interrelates to other areas of the business, you are



more than likely able to propose some solutions to their problems. At the very least you should be able to demonstrate understanding and empathy. So get out there, spend some time with your team and show an interest in their everyday working lives. They are sure to respond well. *[Caution: if you are going to review some of their tasks and processes communicate clearly the reason for doing so. Without an upfront briefing staff may misinterpret your actions as being a review of their personal effectiveness and capabilities or they may even think that whole or part of their role is at risk of redundancy.]*

# Building joy into your work

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I love my job. I can't wait to get up in the morning, get on the train and sit at my desk all day adding value and consciously acknowledging (and being acknowledged for) the terrific contribution I make to the business. My job is really my hobby which I love with a passion and I'm so fortunate to be paid for what I enjoy doing.

Does this sound like your job? No? Well it doesn't sound like mine either. It's not that I don't enjoy my role. I do, very much. It's just that 99% of us are not in jobs that are all about fun, adventure or about using some amazing inherent talent that we possess and get to exercise every day.

This is why I am a great believer in thinking through the aspects of my role that I really enjoy and focus at least some attention on how I can introduce things I like doing.

Examples of what you may (or may not) enjoy are as follows:

- Developing your team and seeing them prosper and progress through the organization (with all the acknowledgments that come your way)
- Specifically, running your own be-spoke short training sessions and encouraging your team members to get actively involved, enjoying the thankful and supportive feedback they provided
- Building great relationships both within and outside your organization (see 'Networking').
- Applying the skills you learn to support voluntary work you perform outside business hours. Perhaps you provide management support, finance training or support, mentoring or something else from your talent base.
- Improving productivity within your team and also assisting other teams with your process re-engineering experience
- Managing large scale assignments making use of your project management and diplomatic skills.
- Learning more about the marketplace. Perhaps understanding more about the cultures across different geographical regions.
- Traveling and seeing the sites, beyond airport lounges and hotel lobbies. If you organize things correctly can you perhaps see more of the world at no cost to the company?
- Would you enjoy playing with the 5-a-side team at lunchtimes or perhaps taking your team for a coffee more often?
- Would you enjoy introducing more out of work activities for the team?

My advice to you, particularly if you are not happy in your current role but have no intention of moving on to another role or career, is to build as many of these (the ones that you like) into your role. Some will lend themselves much more easily than others but I challenge you not to find at least 2 to 3 things that can help lighten up your day.

When one of your team members moves to another organization and thanks you for being such an amazing mentor (perhaps saying you're the best manager they have ever had) what would that mean to you? If perhaps a charity writes to you to thank you for all the skills you have brought to their business and how it has benefited those in need, how valuable would that make you feel?

So, if this is relevant to you, please take the time to look at your current work situation and ensure that you look after yourself for a change. You should of course discuss this with your manager to see whether they can also help to introduce additional enjoyment to your work-life.

# Actively managing your career

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What often comes as a surprise to many people is that in many situations you have great scope to manage your career. Waiting year after year for your boss to give you that promotion (that never comes) with the saving grace being your freedom to curse them in private and (in some cases, and unadvisedly) in public, is not a great place to be. So if you feel that your career is not being managed well by others (or even if it is) there is a lot that you can do to better your cause. These are:

- **Take credit for the things you have done.** Don't show off. Simply be clear and transparent about your accomplishments and communicate them.
- **Have a clear plan of where you want to be career-wise in (say) 5 years.** Note down the steps, perhaps in 6 month tranches, that you must take to get there and monitor that your career is tracking as required.
- **Do your core job well.** Remember that if you do your core job well it is a great launch-pad for career advancement. However, if the basics are not done well you will be continually pegged back and at some point the phrase 'don't run before you can walk' will be uttered and you will feel demoralized.
- **Challenging your pay or status.** This is a really tough one and hence I'm reluctant to provide advice as each situation is different as is every boss. However, I believe that a good rule is not to challenge your pay or status multiple times. I think that it is appropriate to question your level of compensation and/or your status if it is clear to you that you are punching well above your weight and that compared to your peers you are not being treated fairly. A good manager will try to pre-empt such conversations to ensure that you are fairly rewarded throughout your career but that is not always possible as the purse strings are often outside their control. If you make a play for (say) an increased base salary make sure that you are confident in the value you bring the business. If your boss says "no" you are left in an awkward situation. Your boss knows that you may now be upset (and may rightly or wrongly perceive that you are now less motivated than before the request was made) which could affect your position going forward. However, if it is clear that you add value and that you are not being properly compensated for what you do a conversation may be worthwhile. Make the conversation friendly, be tactful and make sure you don't lose the respect of your manager. If you are fortunate enough to receive a pay rise or promotion remember that your boss may have gone out on a limb to get this for you so thank them as appropriate. The thing to remember is that you can't and shouldn't play this game too often. Your boss may not thank you for repeating this exercise each year. However, my advice is to tread carefully, show respect and assess the situation carefully. Perhaps lobby some trustworthy confidants. Always remember that if your boss doesn't think you merit a pay increase or change in status or already believes that you are paid more than market rates, this could be the beginning of the end for you in that business.
- **Don't over expose yourself.** One piece of advice I received many moons ago, which has proven to be of such value, is the notion that you shouldn't take too many things on at one time. In other words it is far better to be remembered for doing one thing really well than to be remembered for doing five things really badly. The tip here is not to become overly ambitious and take too many projects or tasks on if

there is a reasonable chance that you will sink under all the workload. This doesn't of course mean that you shouldn't put yourself forward for juicy project work or tasks of specific interest to you, but rather to make wise choices and go for those that you either enjoy (if that is more important to you) and/or those that help demonstrate the value you add to the business. Take on too many and you could fail at all of them, including the ones that you would otherwise succeed at hands down.

- **Delegation.** I was debating whether to place this topic under 'Managing Staff' or 'Actively managing your career' as it fits equally well under both categories. To be clear:
  - By delegating work to your team they will learn new tasks and procedures and grow faster as individuals from a career development point of view. I have witnessed time and again managers trying to take on the full work-load of their teams (often individuals who have been appointed as managers for the first time in their career). After all, they may have done the work themselves beforehand and can certainly perform it faster and more efficiently than their staff. Of course the issue here is that by not delegating you are limiting the chances of your team reaching their full potential. Perhaps you are worried about losing your job, which leads me on to the next point.
  - By delegating to your team, training them up on the necessary tasks and ensuring that they develop the required skills, you are not only doing what's right for them (so you have a clear conscience) but you are also investing for the future. It shouldn't be that long, if they are right for the role and you are training them effectively, for them to be as good as you were, or at least on a clear trajectory to get to that state. As their level of competence and speed, increases you acquire more time to dedicate your efforts to higher level tasks. As a result you can go to your boss and ask for more interesting work to perform. Not only should your boss recognize that you have done a good job with staff development, they should also be able to pass on to you some of their work, which should free up their time. Everyone's a winner! Going back a few years from now, a senior colleague of mine summarized this approach with the phrase "You should always try to delegate yourself out of a job". That is, once you land a new role, train up your team to take on your workload so that you can move onto the next level, to some extent underwriting your chances of promotion.
- **Consider the Politics game** (see later).
- **Relative performance considerations.** Have you ever wondered why a glittering career within an organization suddenly falters without your effort, output or achievements going off track? Well, this can sometimes happen when you least expect it and it often appears to fall outside your control. Like with a 100 meter sprint or some exams, how good you are may not be as important as how good the competition is. In the workplace you may have been destined for a particular role, but then someone arrives who has more experience, more gravitas and better political skills 'forcing' themselves into prime candidate position. To counter this, work hard at all the elements in this book. By coming stronger at all these 'rough guide' skills I am confident that the person who gains the competitive advantage will be you.

- **Managing egos.** There is a fine balance between speaking your mind and damaging your career by upsetting one of the power bases within the company. Being open, honest and frank may be your natural approach and arguably lends itself far better to certain functions (Finance, Facilities Management, Operations and IT). However, whether you are within these departments or not it is very important to understand how to approach someone in a position of power and bring up what could be a sensitive or controversial issue. It's not hard to raise an issue with someone senior, expecting them to see your frankness as a positive skill, but if they don't take kindly to your 'interference' they may react in an adverse manner, either straight away or over the fullness of time. One example I know about, is of a peer (in a senior position) whose ideas were effectively railroaded in a meeting by their boss. Perhaps they hadn't briefed their boss appropriately beforehand or truly had ideas that didn't merit further discussion. Whatever the realities, the individual in question went to see their boss later and stated that they didn't appreciate being 'bullied' and that their confidence had been knocked as a result. Their boss duly apologized but then went on to add that the individual lacked gravitas for bringing the matter up and that they should try to find some course to go on that would improve both their maturity and credibility. That individual didn't last much longer at the company. They had effectively been told that they didn't have what it took to rise through the ranks of the organization. So tread carefully, think through any sensitive or contentious issues before raising them. Make sure that your actions don't backfire on you. Like yourself you boss has an ego and won't want to be reprimanded.
- **Build a strong brand for yourself** (see later)
- **Be treated as you want to be treated.** There is a phrase that 'behavior breeds behavior'. If you are petulant, moody, immature and unsupportive of your boss don't expect them to treat you with a high level of respect and treat you as someone with credibility and gravitas. You should act in the manner that you wish to be treated. If you exude confidence (not arrogance of course), maturity and fair judgment, your boss is likely to view you as a person that possesses such qualities. So, before you complain about the way your boss treats you, have an honest and diligent review of self and establish whether there is anything you can do to rectify the situation on a stand-alone basis. You may be surprised about how much you can sway their opinion by changing your persona.

# How to write

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This is the easiest thing to get right but the most common thing to get wrong. I see so many emails, letters and memos that have simple but yet detracting errors in them. Yes, this is one of my pet dislikes and I regularly remind my staff to do that one important thing - read through your communication before you communicate it.

It's not that any of us are that unintelligent that we would deliberately write glaring errors such as 'we **have did** very well on the project'. It's just that we originally wrote 'we **have done** very well on the project' and then meant to change it (for some reason) to 'we **did** very well on the project'. But guess what, one of our team came into the office we were distracted and couldn't be bothered to read through the email from the beginning again. So we just send it out. And so the risk is that our team, our boss and the senior management team all form the impression that we don't know how to write simple communications. Yes, REMEMBER TO READ THROUGH YOUR WORK BEFORE YOU SEND IT OUT. I remember one of my teachers telling me this when I got an 'E' for an essay assignment (he didn't give any 'Fs') as I had clearly failed to read through my work. Perhaps I was fortunate that this event happened so early on in my life. But hey, if this is an issue for you, it's the simplest one to correct. Whoopee!

So now that we all read through our work before distributing it let's move on to the all important bullet point list:

- **Read through your work** (couldn't resist it!)
- **Write in paragraphs**
- **Spell-check your work.** Oh, and by the way, spell-checking your work doesn't mean that it has now been 100% auto-corrected. Wow, the amount of times I see things like 'what have we leant **form** this' rather than 'what have we learnt **from** this'. The guy run it through spell-check but didn't read through before sending. [*By the way, this book has been proof-reader by the publisher along with most of my friends and family so if you find any typos or grammatical errors please write to them directly. If I remember I'll include their names and addresses in the reference section*].
- **Get someone else to read it.** If it's that important send it to a colleague, work pal or even to your boss (marked draft) so that they can use fresh eyes to pick up on the errors that your brain no longer has the capacity to identify.
- **Know your audience.** Is it the end of the story once you have developed your effective writing style? Well, no. It is important to remember that the style and content of your communication will change depending upon the audience. One example I came across was as follows: "You are one day late in submitting your expense claim and as such you have breached company policy. Please note that if the claim is not submitted within the next 3 working days or a valid reason provided for why that is not possible it will not be processed for re-imbusement". OK, this is a pretty strict email and the wording may be effective in making people jump and following protocol. However, in this particular case the email had been sent directly to the CEO of the company who had been on business travel for 3 weeks. Rightly or wrongly (you decide) the CEO did not take kindly to such an instruction and within

one hour the standard communication had been reviewed and updated. That is not to say that one rule should apply for more junior staff and one for more senior staff (that's simply unfair) but when you communicate with an individual think about their level of seniority and question yourself on whether the wording you use will generate the desired reaction from the recipient. So when writing a communication please think about the following:

- How senior is the person (or people) receiving the communication?
  - Is the tone of the email reasonable? Is it perhaps too harsh or indeed soft?
  - What is the likely reaction from the communication? Will it perhaps kick-off some type of 'email war'?
  - If there are deadlines set are they reasonable? It may not be wise to corner senior members of staff or show them up in a bad light. Some of your senior colleagues can certainly influence your career and reputation.
  - How would you react to the email? If your reaction is likely to be adverse then so is theirs.
  - Is the title clear, concise and 'eye-catching'? If it is truly important that all staff read the email (rather than them sending it direct to their email 'bins') then make sure the title includes 'Important' or 'PLEASE READ' or '\*\*\*ACTION REQUIRED\*\*\*' or whatever is necessary but reasonable to grab their attention.
- **Send the email to yourself for review first** (if it is an email). Do you know, it is amazing how often I spot spelling, grammar and other errors in one of my communications by sending it to myself to read first. As my brain becomes tired since I have drafted and amended an email multiple times, I send it to myself and then take a short break before reading it again, normally grabbing a coffee. I then typically spot all the things I should have detected earlier as my word blindness has disappeared. Try it and see whether it works for you.
  - **Imagine you are your own boss.** Another trick of the trade is to imagine that you are your boss and read the email from their perspective. If you are the ultimate boss of your company thanks for buying this book, but I feel that you should be reading one about strategy that incorporates impressive diagrams and flow-charts along with incompressible buzzwords and complicated diction. Seriously, if you look at your communication from your boss's point of view there's a great chance that you'll spot all the things that they would.



# Presentation Skills

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This is a biggy! So many people present poorly. It's not that they can't be good presenters. It's just that they have never been taught how to present, or even worse, no-one can be bothered to tell them that they need to improve.

So you know, it doesn't really matter whether there are 4 of you in a meeting or you are presenting to five hundred people (I've done both). The same rules apply. These are:

- **Have fun.** If you go up there to have fun this will rub off on the audience and, to be frank, they will thank you for it. Even if you are nervous put on a big friendly smile and feel good about yourself. Everyone has to listen to you for a change and you have their full and undivided attention.
- **Rehearse.** Even the best speakers rehearse multiple times. I'm talking in front of a mirror or in front of your friends, family (unless confidential!) or a work colleague. Not quietly in your mind but aloud. Be vocal.
- **Slides.** If you use slides or other visuals please ensure that:
  - They are not crowded. People gasp when the slides are crowded with words, figures, diagrams etc. Keep content down to a minimum.
  - They match to what you are saying. Don't have a slide that shows a diagram of how to put a wheel on a car while talking about the exhaust pipe. This is something I often witness. So please don't talk about something that isn't on the slide to avoid confusing the audience.
  - They are fun (if possible and appropriate). Avoid immature jokey slides but do include visuals that will grab the audience's attention and will wake them up.
- **Make them laugh.** If you have the confidence, make the audience laugh. We're not talking about being a stand-up comedian but some amusing anecdote (short) or some dry wit can come across well. If in doubt, then leave this out. You'll get the feeling after a few presentations whether you can pull this off. But if you can make it fun the audience is far more likely to remember your conversation. Do you want a real life example? Yes? Well, I once worked for a company that was expanding very rapidly in the following markets: Tobacco, Drugs (not that sort), Beverages and Health. I wanted to portray to the audience that we were doing well in these so called 'recession-proof' sectors (that is companies that do well even when we don't have much money to spend during a recession). So I stated that 'the results indicate that our customers are down-hearted and hence drinking themselves to death, smoking themselves to death and taking drugs (yes I used artistic license here) and then ending up in hospital'. Ok, I was joking, but two years later a colleague came up to me and reminded me of the joke and said that their part of the business had invested in those markets and become the fastest growing part of the company. I just stated a fact in an amusing way. My colleague had used that fact to improve the business. But the great thing is that my presentation had been remembered by someone two years later. I slept well that night.

- **Time your presentation.** The length of time it takes to run through your presentation is critical. Even a presentation that is full of interesting content and is professionally delivered will not be received well by the other presenters (or audience as a whole) if you significantly (or in many cases even marginally) overrun. So, it is important to rehearse it thoroughly ensuring you know how long it will take to deliver. If, for example, you have a thirty minutes slot, make sure that you allow a minute or so for the change-over from and to the previous and subsequent presenters respectively. Allow sufficient time for questions and answers (Q&A) where this is an essential part of the education exercise. Also, remember that it generally takes a little longer to present in practice than it does in rehearsal as you have to allow for audience reaction and the fact that you generally slow down your pace of speech in a public arena. Remember, that if there is a series of presenters and there is also a 'hard stop' (finite time) for the overall presentation, you will be eating into someone else's time by overrunning. Just make sure that it is not the CEO or head of department following you in the line up!
- **Plant Q&A.** Quite often I see really good presentations that seem to be accompanied by a shy audience. When the one-way communication is over the two-way or multi-way dialogue does not always open up as wished. In other words, people don't ask questions. Therefore, my recommendation is to plant some friendly faces into the audience and arm them with pre-loaded questions. Not only does this allow the two-way dialogue to open up but it encourages others to join in the conversation as the barriers break down before you. It also allows you to show off your Q&A skills as you can rehearse the answer to their question in advance ensuring a pristine delivery.
- **Check that the technical set up works.** It's not that an uncommon occurrence for there to be technical glitch. Perhaps your file containing the presentation has become corrupt (always carry a back-up) or perhaps the projector or laptop are not working correctly. The best thing to do is to arrive in good time to check that the technical aspects of the presentation work as required. If possible have an Operations or IT guy on hand to sort out any problems. Better still, get them to check the set up for you and confirm that everything is all right. As I say, technical glitches are not that uncommon and the more you rely on electronic visual and audio aids the worse things seem to the audience when they don't work. Finally, as a back-up perhaps have in mind what you will say/do if the technical aids fall down part way through your presentation. Know your notes inside out and practice staying calm in such situations. Although things may look unprofessional to the audience they are unlikely to blame you for any technical hiccups.
- **Arrive in good time.** Your presentation may be in your office or in a town hall somewhere across the globe, but in either event you should ensure that you arrive in good time. This will allow you to check out the technical facilities, get a feel for the surroundings and ensure that your voice carries well (depending upon whether there are microphones or not). Arriving late, under pressure with your nervous system under attack, is not a great start. [BTW, if you are late, certainly have a routine to keep yourself calm and at ease. Taking 3 deep breaths really does work.]
- **Liaise with the other presenters (where possible).** It would seem an injustice if you have spent hours honing your presentation skills, hours putting together a lively, informative and engaging presentation and hours rehearsing your speech in front of the mirror only to find out on the day that part of your content has been

covered by another presenter in the overall line up or indeed that your anecdote or witticism has already been communicated to the audience. I would highly recommend that you cut these problems off at the past. Perhaps there is someone centrally coordinating all the presentations, but if not it would definitely be worth checking that all that hard work doesn't disappoint at the end of the day.

- **Nerves.** I feel that I could write a book (and you would be bored reading it) on how to steady your nerves before a presentation. But I won't. I'll summarize this down to a few, hopefully very useful, bullet points. First of all, what can you do to reduce the level of nerves? Try some of the following techniques and see which work best for you:
  - Follow all the steps listed above to optimize your level of confidence.
  - Take 3 deep breaths before you start (see above). It really works.
  - Rather than standing at the front of the room perch on the side of a desk (if there is one at the front) or adopt another stance or position that naturally puts your body at ease. It is strange but true, but where you stand and how you position yourself can make a significant impact to the way you feel.
  - Enjoy yourself. Practice shifting the nervous energy from fear to enjoyment. This, I suppose, is more of a mental exercise, but I guarantee that if you go out there with the intention of enjoying yourself the nerves at least partially move to a place where they are more constructive.
  - Perform as many presentations as possible while you are going through the learning curve. Like with any skill practice makes perfect and the more presentations you deliver the more relaxed and confident you will become.

There are also techniques to hide/shield nerves if you find it hard to overcome them. These are as follows:

- Don't hold anything in your hands, such as a piece of paper with notes on, as it will flap around due to the nervous energy within you. Rather place it on a lectern or desk or better still have a PowerPoint or other electronic presentation that negates the requirement to hold anything.
- Don't have any change or keys in your pocket in case you start jangling them. This can be done sub-consciously and can prove very annoying to the audience.
- Don't worry about 'pauses' in your speech. They can be up to several seconds long and if timed right (that is, not too long) they actually come across really well in a live environment adding to your sense of gravitas and credibility.
- Don't pace around the room or continuously step forwards and backwards. This provides an indication that you are nervous. You certainly don't have to be rooted to the spot, but if you decide to move around the 'stage' make sure that it is a purposeful action (for instance, to point at something or to grab someone's attention) rather than a general aimless wander.

- **Quick reference guide.** I often find it useful to refer to a quick reference guide on how to present well. So here are some tips that I hope you will find very useful:
  - Provide an overview of what you are going to speak about to provide context.
  - Be passionate about the topic you are presenting.
  - Be interactive; obtain audience engagement, perhaps through asking questions.
  - Use eye contact wisely. Don't just focus your attention on the CEO! Keep everyone engaged and feeling a part of the meeting/event.
  - Use your footwork wisely. If you are going to walk around the stage limit the number of walkabouts you undertake and make them work for you. Use them to re-engage the audience (if it is a large crowd). However, don't walk around too much as you'll tire them out.
  - Use arm gestures, but again make these controlled and infrequent. Continuous arm gestures make it look like you are flapping (literally).
  - Keep your hands out of your pockets (it looks untidy and you may jingle the keys or change you have housed there).
  - Don't hold anything in your hands if you are nervous (it will shake)
  - Don't be mono tone. Change the pitch of your voice, otherwise you may send the audience to sleep.
  - Think about the speed of delivery. There's no need to rush through your presentation. If time is tight say less, more important things.
  - Don't be negative. Don't say "I feel nervous" or "I don't feel prepared". This puts you under pressure from the start.
  - Speak clearly with a strong resonance (a strong voice).
  - Remain natural when you speak. Don't force your voice or manner.
  - Introduce yourself if no-one else has.
  - Smile. Everyone likes a smiley rather than grumpy individual.
  - Be informative. Make the points as interesting as possible.
  - Don't use acronyms or abbreviations that members of the audience won't understand. You risk them getting lost on the way.
  - Have some clear takeaways for the audience to remember.

- Above all, be memorable (for the right reasons).

# Negotiation skills

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I suppose the alternative title for this chapter could have been "Getting your own way". Why on earth do some people end up with great deals (or get their way) when others don't?

Well here are some tips you can follow:

- Be stubborn. If you have a solid negotiation stance don't allow the other party to ride roughshod over it. Stay firm, if it clearly makes logical sense to do so, and be iterative in your discussion if the other party is effectively ignoring your argument.
- Turn the conversation around. Don't let the other party lead the discussion. Make sure that you have an agenda and follow it.
- Follow your logic not theirs. Don't fall for what appear to be clever arguments or tactics that don't actually stack up in the cold light of day. Stay true to what you believe in.
- [However] Be fair and reasonable, or expect to lose.
- If possible, reach an agreement that keeps everyone happy. If you push too far, the other party will walk away – perhaps not now but as soon as they realize that there is no value in the deal for them.
- Assess who has the balance of power. The more power you have the stronger your negotiation position.
- Where appropriate make sure that you have more than one bid or tender. Even for relatively small contracts your position will be that much more powerful if you can demonstrate that you have alternative quotes that perhaps provide better value. From experience, unless at least 3 quotes are obtained from reputable companies you don't have even an initial feel (let alone an accurate one) for market prices. Also, let all the parties know that you are seeking competitive bids from other businesses to help focus their minds on the overall value for money of their offering.
- Don't be afraid to revisit the deal at any time before you sign on the dotted line. If you feel that you haven't done a good job on the negotiation front and realize later that the deal won't yield an acceptable to return for you (perhaps your planning wasn't a great as it should have been) then be upfront and transparent to the other party explaining that you can't sign until the deal hits a certain threshold in terms of financial return.
- Good cop, bad cop. One useful technique to try, particularly where you find it difficult in a face-to face situation to push hard on (say) price, is to leverage the fact that your boss has set some firm financial targets for you with respect to the deal. In other words they won't but the goods or service for more than £X or they won't sell your services for less than £Y. In practice, I have found this process extremely useful and it allows you not only to defer discussion at any given point in time by stating that you will have to run the proposal past your boss as it does not fulfill the requisite financial criteria, but it allows you to be seen as the person trying hard to

make the deal work in what are clearly difficult circumstances. You should ensure that you obtain your bosses' permission to cast them in the role as 'bad cop', as the tough, perhaps inflexible manager, in case they are somehow contacted directly or otherwise uncomfortable with the approach.

- If you are unable to reach agreement during the process of negotiation here are some ideas to consider:
  - Would a longer term deal allow either party to be more flexible on price?
  - Would an exclusive relationship seal the deal?
  - Would the introduction of enhanced service levels better your cause (or a fall back to more basic/standard service levels if price remains the absolute sticking point)?
  - Would a dedicated account manager provide the added ingredient to allow you to finalize proceedings?
  - Would either a discount for prompt payment or a discount for signing before the month is out add the incentive required?
  - Would the advertisement of your relationship (Public Relations exercise) make the deal appear more interesting?
  - Would future price caps be of interest?
  - Would enhanced data analysis be of importance?

## Down time

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Down time isn't great. You're bored, your boss thinks that you're not doing much and everyone seems to be losing.

I sometimes see people surfing the net or having pointless conversations (and hence stealing the time of others) as they haven't got enough to do.

Well, without doubt it can be very hard to self-motivate yourself when you haven't got much to do. Each request or task starts becoming a chore or at the very least a distraction from watching sport live on the web or perhaps doing your shopping on line.

So what should you really do?

- Remember that one of the most effective ways to get on in business is to impress your boss. So tell them the situation as it is. Hey, what if they decide to make you redundant? Well, to be fair I can't legislate for that but what I can say is that all the managers I have worked for have held me in high esteem for my honesty and transparency. This has culminated in them having the trust to send more, normally juicy, work down my way. Now let's make this clear. If you are being lazy and simply not doing the work you are meant to be doing that is bad. However, if you have completed all your work to an acceptable standard (or higher) then that's good. I can't give guarantees here, but if I was a betting man I would expect your boss to see such honesty and openness as a good rather than bad attribute.
- However, before you go running to your boss you should really make sure that you have done all you can from an added value point of view. Like what? Well, like this:
  - Review your weekly (or other frequency) task list to ensure all the jobs have been done. Complete the ones that you have pushed to the bottom of the list time and time again. If they are of no value then discuss this with your boss and get permission to eliminate them; they may not agree with your point of view but it is certainly worth a try.
  - Review the way you work to see whether you can come up with any ideas to help you do your job better (your boss should admire you for this).
  - Review your work area to see whether there are any other added value tasks you could perform.
  - See whether you can assist other team members if they are struggling. Do this in a transparent manner so you receive the credit where this is due.
- If none of the above yield more work then consider the following:
  - Read more widely (trade press, relevant articles etc). Let your boss know that you are doing this as they will enjoy seeing the initiative you are demonstrating.
  - Offer to assist others outside your department if that is possible. This could also be good for your profile, but take care not to become a general dog's



body. I'm talking about stuff that will help you gain knowledge and experience, not introducing tasks into your job that do not make use of your skills and/or experience.

- Write up notes on your tasks and procedures (if this is not already done). That will help focus the mind and will also help the next person to do your job when you move on to better things.
- Consider applying to other jobs within (or outside) the company if you believe that the situation will not improve in the longer term.

# Body language

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In my humble view advice on this is overrated and perhaps great if you're on a date but not when you are in the workplace. People like people that are friendly, kind, receptive, open, energetic and fun. If you put as many of these into your work-life (even if you don't feel like it) everyone around you will feel better and as a result you will too.

Look, the first thing I do when I am feeling miserable at work is go up to the first person I see (there are only one or two maximum that I would avoid) and start a light hearted or even jovial conversation. Their face lights up, they feel good and the next thing I know I am trotting to my office feeling so much better. It works. I'm not talking about a major disaster in your life of course, I wouldn't pretend that a two minute conversation by the water cooler makes everything seem better, but when you've had a pretty hard session at work and you need cheering up, you can actually kick-start the process yourself.

Now here's the thing. If you feel good about yourself, and hence friendly and cheerful, what are the chances that you will sit there in a meeting with you arms crossed with a glum face on? Pretty unlikely eh?

Sure, a firm rather than 'wet' handshake can make a small difference and sitting up straight rather than slouching will give a better impression. But what rank much higher than all these are energy, fun and amiability. The last one comes with the first two. How often do you hear "I didn't give that person the job because they had their arms crossed"? Or, "I'm not meeting with them again because they slouched in their chairs"? Hey, but what about "that person didn't smile at all, had no energy and made the meeting flat."

Yup, it's energy and enthusiasm that you need. If you have no energy and enthusiasm then make out that you have as the real stuff will surely follow.

But for those who still want some body language tips here you go:

- Shake hands firmly
- Sit up straight
- Look at people when they are talking to you (rocket science stuff). I must admit that it is indeed annoying when you are speaking and the other person is looking anywhere but at you. In fact, it you want to play a good game when you suspect someone is not listening to you, make sure you ask for their input, opinion or agreement at that time. I guarantee you will get one of the following responses:
  - *Sorry, could you repeat the question*
  - *I'm not sure where you were coming from*
  - *Run that past me again*
  - *Yes*

- *Could you add some colour (detail)?*

So what you have to do is make sure that you have been very clear, have given them all the colours of the rainbow and have not left them any excuse for not understanding. If you want to make a point close the conversation down (end it) and let them suffer in silence. I dislike rudeness both inside and outside the office and don't see why we should tolerate some superiority complex. Of course, if you have gone on and on about a single issue until the end of time it may be that they are too polite to leave so above all be fair to both them and you.

- Smile. Clearly if you disagree with something you shouldn't be sitting there smiling and nodding away, but if one of your objectives is to put the other people at ease and to support them during a meeting, then remember to look positive (smile) and react positively to the contributions they make.

# Chairing (running) Meetings

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This can be one of the most rewarding experiences at work and as such I strongly recommend that you Chair (or run) as many meetings as possible. There are a number of benefits in chairing meetings as follows:

- **You mature fast.** Yes, this is pretty much an automatic process. The first time you chair a meeting (just like the first time you present) you may feel quite nervous. But as long as you prepare for meetings beforehand, don't bluff your way out of difficult situations and treat the participants with respect, things should be fine.
- **You learn to make decisions and direct people.** The Chair will often be looked upon as the person who makes the final decisions (even if this isn't the real purpose of their role). But perhaps even more importantly the Chair should direct the conversation, ensure that all the relevant arguments are heard and that air-time is properly distributed amongst the group.
- **You become better at time-keeping.** Although as Chair you could always appoint someone as timekeeper it is your responsibility to ensure that the meeting runs to the allotted time and that all the items on the agenda are discussed. You should think hard before the meeting about the length of time each topic requires and ensure that the time set aside for discussion is sufficient. From my experience meetings often overrun and if they don't you still find that there was insufficient time to discuss some of the agenda items. It's your job to ensure that this does not happen. After all, others may have prepared thoroughly about a topic that is very important to them. They'll be disappointed and may not see you in a good light. So what are the tips to ensure a meeting runs on time:
  - Be clear about the rules on timing. No overruns. If a discussion looks like it will blow out of all proportion then it's probably best to take it 'off-line' and have the relevant individuals (perhaps a sub-group of the original meeting) look into it further. If you are tight on the timings those involved in your meetings will be forced to get better with their own conciseness.
  - Allow enough time for a topic to be discussed. Don't tag on an extra item at the base of the agenda with a 10 minute slot if it is clearly going to last longer. In fact, spend some time making sure that the time slot available for each agenda item is sufficient (and whatever you do make sure you get buy-in on the length of the time slot from the individual).
- **You learn to set action points.** One of the joys of being a Chair is that you can summarize all the action points at the end of the meeting and ensure that each point has:
  - A clear and concise note of the action to be taken.

- The name of the person responsible to get the job done.
- A deadline for completion and where, when and how progress and completion is communicated to the group.
- **You learn to be inclusive.** As the Chair you should ensure that all the relevant points of view are taken on board. If you have one or two individuals in the meeting that hog the limelight during 'open discussion' this could prove to be destructive as other points of view are not brought up for consideration. With that in mind, you should prompt the quieter members of the group to add their thoughts. If it is obvious that certain members literally have nothing of value to add then they are probably at their limit in terms of intellectual capacity or (more likely) do not have experience in that particular field. So my advice is to be inclusive, but apply fairness to ensure that discussion continues to flow and that nobody feels that they have been shut out of the conversation.
- **There are two sides to every story - part 2 (for Part 1 see 'Managing staff').** This principle doesn't only relate to the chairing of meetings. Any complaint, argument or issue raised should be considered with an open, balanced and fair approach. On many occasions an issue or complaint is raised that at face value demonstrates, or at least implies, that a wrong has been performed or that an injustice has taken place. However, a fair Chair (or indeed any fair individual) will seek out all the facts from all the relevant parties and only draw a conclusion once they have sufficient evidence to do so (just like being in a Court of Law). The process may or may not be lengthy; depending upon the issue at hand, but all parties should feel that their opinions and evidence have been taken into account and that the decision made is both just and fair. I'm sure we can all think of situations where we have shot from the hip and then lived to regret our initial decision which was taken without knowing the full circumstances. Remember, there are two sides to every story, so hear both first before taking action.

# Networking

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You have 250 Facebook contacts and 300 linked-in contacts. Is that a great network? Well, having the details of friends, family, colleagues and acquaintances can be useful (you never know one of them could pass a job opportunity your way) but much more important is the building up of networks with those that can positively influence your career both within your organization and beyond it.

## Internal network

It's all very and well and good to have regular catch-ups with senior members of staff dotted around the company. Indeed it's great to hear and learn more about what's going on. However, for a relationship to become stronger, more fruitful and easier to maintain there are certain aspects of the relationship which you should focus your attention on:

- Is it a symbiotic relationship? Are you simply obtaining a down-load of information from your colleague or are you ensuring that the catch-ups you have are beneficial to them as well? If relationships appear to die, and the other party does not appear to make an effort to propose or find time for the two of you to meet, it's unlikely to be a personal issue but may reflect the fact that the meeting is not perceived as added value by the other party. However, if you wish to continue the relationship, as it is as added value from your career advancement point of view, consider the following:
  - Prepare an agenda before each time you meet (even if you are meeting informally over a coffee). You don't have to send through the agenda in advance but rather make sure that there are items listed on it which will be of interest to the other party.
  - Think about the frequency of your catch-ups. If you meet up very regularly you may run out of interesting things to say and debate. Make the meetings less frequent but more powerful.
  - Follow-up on action points raised by your contact. If they see you as someone who can get things done they'll be more willing to meet up again. But there is a balance. Don't become a gofer; that is where you end up with a list of action points after each meeting that suits their agenda but adds little to yours. The relationship should be balanced.
  - Follow up and thank them for their time setting out why the catch-up was useful and what issues, ideas or points you are going to take on, along with what you believe they have agreed to think through or act upon.

**Water cooler moments.** I've placed this under the section 'Internal Networks' but water cooler moments in reality serve a number of uses (beyond getting refreshed). But let's deal with the networking issue. When you are grabbing that glass of water of coffee and there is someone else there (who you don't directly work with) make the most of the opportunity by asking them what they do (if you don't know), what major initiatives their department is up to and think through what else from a business perspective they can impart to you. Most people enjoy being asked about the job they perform and are flattered to be asked about it in more detail. This is of

course a fairly quick conversation (don't time steal) but it's extremely simple to learn one or two important facts or facets which you can bring back to your team, peers or manager. Of course, one should avoid rumor and gossip and as such discussion should be mature and focus on learning about their operation and thinking through how your department could help them in some way, if that is relevant, or allow you to better understand the inter-relationship between your two departments. Having 'fun' Water Cooler moments remains essential in my mind (don't become a bore) but do use these short passages of time to help you add value to the business and potentially impress those around you. By showing interest in their work they form a more favorable impression of you, your team and your boss.

## External network

The importance of an external network, and indeed its size and content, clearly depends upon how far up the career ladder you are. The more senior you are, the more important such networks often become (but this is certainly not always the case). However, there are some distinct benefits of having a well structured and effective external network. These are as follows:

- **New job opportunities.** One of your contacts may be able to help you out with finding a new job opportunity if that proves necessary or desirable. In fact, with a wide network, or at least one where you have stayed in contact with colleagues from prior employments, you may well benefit from the occasional cold-call (or email) asking whether you would consider jumping ship to join them. For this to take place they would either be keen to have you on board as they value your skills and experience or they get some kick-back from their recruitment department for introducing new staff given that no agency fees apply. Believe me when I say that the latter can be a very strong factor for someone contacting you. But remember that it is almost certain that you will still have to go through the standard recruitment process so don't count your chickens before they hatch (if you chose to go for the job) and certainly don't resign until you have a written job offer.
- **Job references.** Staying in touch with your previous managers is certainly a smart thing to do as they may well be involved with one of your future jobs. On a number of occasions my former boss has been asked to provide a reference to my potential new employer. Many companies now only provide standard responses to reference requests but I assure you that verbal conversations could take place in the background or other communications could be made in the implied form which could affect your chances of grabbing that new role. The golden rule is to ensure that you don't burn your bridges.
- **Sharing ideas.** If you have kept in touch with colleagues that have had similar roles to you in the past then you should be able to benefit from the sharing of ideas and technical updates (not to the extent that you breach any of your company's policies!). In reality, some (particularly) senior people may rely more on a trusted ex-colleague than a professional or trade body or other type of network. So, for instance, if you had a really great boss make sure you keep in touch when you leave. If you valued your staff and trust their judgment then that's a really good reason for staying in touch too.
- **Business opportunities.** Another great reason for building a solid network and staying in touch with former colleagues and contacts is that they may be more willing to work with you on future projects or tenders (as a partner) or more likely to

take you on as a vendor. I've certainly brought on vendors from previous companies I have worked with; focusing on those that provided great levels of service and demonstrated value for money. You may be tempted to get into bed with a sub-standard or average vendor because they are a former colleague or contact (and/or perhaps a friend). Clearly, this isn't something I would recommend. If you are going to engage with a company that you have used in the past make sure that any contract arrangements are at arm's length and that you can demonstrate that there is commercial advantage to your business.

- **Perks.** This certainly should not be a prime reason for staying in touch with someone, but you may find that a fringe benefit of a strong working relationship is the existence of certain perks and benefits. Where possible make sure that this is a two-way process. Perhaps one has a holiday cottage that they are happy for you to use or you can offer some advice for a charity that they are involved with. Mutual benefits could also include sharing investment advice and tips (but not insider trading!), recommending places to travel etc. Sure, you have your own friends and family, but a good network (perhaps without the emotional ties) can sometimes offer you something a little different.



# Politics

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This is certainly the hardest topic to provide guidance on, partly because people often don't want to hear about or understand the nature of politics and how to play the game. I have learnt the following over the course of my career:

- Those that don't want to play politics lose out. It's very noble to say, I don't want to play those games, but at the end of the day if you want to get on you have to be prepared to play the politics game.
- **Competence versus confidence.** As a very rough guide I would say that where you get too in your career depends upon equal measures of competence and confidence. If you are really competent but not confident you will under-achieve but be damn good at your job. If you are confident but not competent you will be over-promoted and eventually found out. Sales figures will be low, IT developments badly managed, research poor and so on. On a number of occasions I have seen people shoot through the ranks on the back of confidence, with many others around them seduced by the confident air shown at meetings, presentations and the like. However, once it becomes apparent that they are not actually competent their world starts to fall apart. The thing to learn from this is that you should ensure that you are both competent and confident. Pick up the tools of the trade outlined in this book to build up your levels of confidence. Work on and be honest in your self-analysis to ensure that you remain competent throughout your career. One great year can seemingly make you, but one bad year will certainly hurt you.
- **Getting you way.** To be successful in business it is essential to get your way a lot of the time. Certainly not all the time but for the majority of it. So, with this in mind, ensure that you work hard on your persuasive and negotiation skills to maximize the chance of decisions going the way that works for you.
- **Know which battles to fight.** A very wise boss of mine once taught me to only fight the battles that I can win. This sounds so obvious when laid out before you but we all know how easy it is to take on someone or something and get beaten up in the process. If it's likely that you will lose the fight pick another battle. Don't feel shy about asking other people what they believe your chances are. [*Tip: think about where the ultimate responsibility lies. You may beat your opponent, but then their boss or boss's boss may beat you.*]
- **When you disagree say you agree.** This is an amazing facet of the politically aware that astounds me, but it really does work. When someone comes up with an idea or recommendation that is in conflict with your own agenda or idea, rather than at the outset say "I whole heartedly disagree" try saying "That's an excellent point." Then, little by little run through the argument the other party has put forward and explain in a clear but tactful manner why it is not correct. I know that it sounds counter-intuitive to do this (and remember that internal politics is not the same as public (party political) politics. Did you want an example? Well, here's how it works. You have said "I think that we should build a square". I want to build a circle as firstly I have already been lobbying for it and secondly I feel it is a battle I can win (see above). So my retort is "Yes, I think the idea of a square is an excellent one. Then I go on to explain that I would add extra value to the square by cutting away the sharp corners and smoothing around the edges. A square was such an excellent

platform to start off with. The trouble for the competition is that you have been really positive about their idea, and they are nodding away happily, and before they know it you have turned everything around to get your own way. Now I'm not suggesting that this will always be a successful tool but I would wager a bet that it will win some arguments that you would otherwise have lost.

- **The overlay.** This is a subtle point where someone has performed some excellent work and even communicated that fact. Your job (and you are not specifically taking the credit for what they have done here) is to "reply all" to their communication and overlay it with a message that takes a broader perspective. Again, don't be seen to be taking the credit for what others have done but rather add an "Executive" overlay that reads well, makes sense and invites people to respond saying "exactly" or "my thoughts exactly". This is one of the most common tools in the armory of a modern internal politician. Try it and benefit from it.
- **Act like their boss.** If you want to be their boss (perhaps moving from a manager of one team to a manager of five teams) then start acting like their boss now. Use techniques such as 'The overlay' to show that you are in charge and have the higher level view. Also, offer to review the work of others in your team and ensure you critique it thoroughly. You will need both the confidence and competence to do this of course (or at least the confidence in the short term – see earlier). Avoid arrogance. That is definitely not the way forward. Rather, use good judgment along with a measured but determined approach. ***Above all, act with GRAVITAS.***

## Your brand

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Once you have read through most if not all of the chapters above you will automatically work out which tips work for you and which (quite frankly) don't. When putting together your thoughts on how to succeed, and I believe that each chapter can be taken in isolation, you may also want to think some more about your brand within your workplace. How do people perceive you? Organized? A good time-keeper? Honest? Open? One of my recommendations is for you to write down the four to five things that you want to be associated with in terms of brand image. I've listed some ideas below, but you may of course add to these and/or substitute them with your own:

- Are you seen as trustworthy?
- Are you seen as an ideas person?
- Are you perceived as a fair judge?
- Are you seen as generous with your time?
- Are you seen as a good developer of staff?
- Are you seen as a technical wizard?
- Are you seen as a good politician?
- Are you perceived as putting the business's goals before your own?
- Do people associate you with energy and drive?
- Do people associate you with good time-keeping?
- Are you perceived as someone that gets the job done?
- Are you viewed as pro-active?
- Are you seen as someone that adds value?
- Do people see you as someone that supports the business culture?
- Are you perceived as someone that supports the party line?

Think about the questions above and then prioritize what is important to you and what you believe to be important for the business you work for. You may feel that you are already perceived in a good light for many of the questions and that you'd rather concentrate on the one or two that present the most running room for further development. Being circumspect is a really good thing and I recommend that you review your brand on a regular basis (at least annually). If you have some close colleagues that you trust sincerely by all means ask them to critique your brand and then work on the aspects that they feel you can improve upon. If you have a thorough and robust annual or bi-annual appraisal process the results

of that exercise should also give you some clues on how to improve. If not, and if you feel that it is appropriate within your business culture, ask your boss to comment on your brand. This is a question that if answered well can deliver to you some concrete action points outside the normal skills discussed at such review sessions. By all means ask your boss to set up regular 'profile sessions' (See '**Managing staff**') to allow you and them to monitor the enhancement of your brand image over time.

You could certainly combine this analysis with a broader self-review incorporating your strength and development areas (in a similar fashion to the annual self-appraisal) if you wish to produce a wider more expansive, and perhaps holistic view one's persona and capabilities.

## Random tips (and some fun)

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There are a lot of tips and loads of advice that I've picked during my career, some more fun than others, but all very useful when introduced into our day-to-day working lives. I think that this would be best presented in bullet point format:

- **Get them out of my office or away from my desk.** If someone is in your office or by your desk and you need to get rid of them you can do so without even saying anything. This is a tried and trusted method which I was taught by the Chairman of a company I used to work for. He used to do this regularly to me! So this colleague is by your desk and the conversation (which may not even be work related) has clearly come to an end from your perspective. Take the bull by the horns and stand up and walk towards your door (if you have an office) or start walking towards to kitchen, toilets or reception (or wherever) as they are still talking. If you manage to take control of the conversation even better. My experience (we're talking a 100% record here) is that your colleague will stand up when you do (a bit like when someone copies your movements on a date, that is, if they like you) and will walk with you to the door, or wherever you are going. You then simply let them carry on walking away. You meanwhile return to your desk or office as they continue towards the horizon. It does work. Please try it and perfect it.
- **Organize your work space and have it looking great.** The thing is, you may think you know (or you may convince yourself that you actually know) where all your important documents are, but anyone looking at your desk will sub-consciously, or indeed consciously, place you in a box (not literally, unless you are unlucky) as the type of person who can't organize a..... you know the rest. Having a smart workplace is often translated in the minds of others as being smart. Go on, put aside that hour and make the desk look terrifically organized.
- **Don't get confused between hours and output.** As a manager I would much rather my staff completed their daily routine within the standard office hours than burn the mid-night oil. In my mind it indicates that the person is either inefficient, or is deliberately staying late to impress me and others or truly has too much work to do. But guess what, a thirty minutes conversation gets to the bottom of this very quickly. A good manager should sort this out pronto. Just remember, if the previous incumbent finished their work properly and accurately between 9 am and 5 pm why is someone else taking that much longer? Why should I pat you on the back or reward you with large pay rises? I'd rather award the member of staff who introduces a more effective process, meaning that they can now take more work off my plate, freeing up my time to take higher level tasks and giving them the opportunity to take on more interesting work.
- **Nothing is ever as bad as it seems and nothing is as ever as good as it seems.** This is a fabulous concept to keep in mind. When the chips are down and you want to resign or simply feel damn awful then take a deep breath and see things through. Things rarely turn out as bad as you originally expected. On the other hand, if a project or implementation appears to be progressing without a hitch, well within budget, beating all the deadlines, then you should be prepared for an unexpected hurdle to suddenly appear. A good gut check would be to check your thoughts and/or concerns with someone more objective than you (friend, partner or colleague from outside your domain etc). No doubt they will be able to put things

into perspective, helping you build back your confidence when things go badly and making sure you don't become too arrogant when things go well.

- **Yes, you can grow into a role.** At times people may not accept offers for promotion or fail to apply for a more senior role because in their mind (only) they do not have the relevant technical or management skills. I clearly remember my first larger scale managerial role. My inner-self had significant doubts about taking the role on as I was very worried about falling flat on my face. However, by taking a day-by-day approach (thus limiting stress and uncertainty) and putting in clear and measurable targets for myself ("I'll learn this function by that date" and "I'll meet that group of employees by that date" and "I'll come out with my recommendations by that date") it is amazing how well things turned out. That is, homo-sapiens have a natural propensity to grow into the roles that are put before them. Most of us cope with becoming a team captain or a parent or an owner of a pet. We grow and mature as our responsibilities broaden. Hence, I would say, on balance, go for the job with the steep learning curve. You'll look back a few months later and wonder what all the fuss was about. *[Note: if a new role requires extensive travel that could significantly disrupt your family life, or content that you would simply not enjoy, then think again. I'm not talking about a job that would reduce your quality of life, simply one that would be a big step up for you.]*
- **Bluff at your peril.** I don't recommend bluffing in any situation. You are likely to get caught out when the conversation gets deeper and even if you think you have got away with bluffing the other party may actually see through the sham. Don't bluff and be prepared to say "I need to look into that and get back to you by the end of play today" (or whatever is appropriate!).
- **Remembering impressive facts.** By this I don't mean that you should be able to recall the 50 States of America or the names of the seven dwarfs but rather one or two facts about a client or other key contact that demonstrates your interest in them beyond the pure commercial. By way of example, imagine that the son of an important client has just gone to University on a 3 year course to study economics and accounting. Doesn't it sound great if the next time you meet up (perhaps 6 months later) you can ask how John (the son) is doing now that he's six months into that course? I have often seen very capable and forward thinking managers noting down in their diaries the names of children, pets, other halves, football teams and so on within their electronic communication devices. They don't have to remember all this information (they probably won't be able to) but they are more than capable of running through the contact details 15 minutes before the client meeting and making sure that they have the facts at the top of mind. Not only will the client be impressed with the fact that you remembered something very personal and important to them (they probably will have forgotten that they told you about John in the first place) but they will also be flattered. What a great start to a meeting.
- **Standing out.** Here are some ways to stand out. I'm not recommending that you should try to stand out each and every day (that would be exhausting) but there are ways of raising your profile on a visible and regular basis. These are fun things not to be taken too seriously:

- Dress up on a dress down day.
  - Wear a tie for a day in your office if no-one else does.
  - Get in early, if that's something you rarely do (as long as you are seen to be in early).
  - Stay late, if that's something you rarely do (as long as you are seen to be working late).
  - Sit outside in a workspace for a day if you have an office.
  - Introduce yourself to some entirely new people at work.
  - Buy your team or colleagues a tea or coffee.
  - Walk past the CEO's door. In fact, pop your head in and say hello. [Make sure you have something of interest to say beyond that!]
  - Wear a suit for a day if everyone else typically wears casual clothes (but only if you want everyone to think that you have an interview lined up).
- **Leaving your worries behind.** You have been under a lot of pressure over the last few days and there are a number of issues that you need to think through and resolve before the week is out. However, it is Tuesday morning and you have a 3 hour meetings to attend where your thoughts and opinions are going to be important. The risk here of course is that you are unable to switch off. You may spend most of those 3 hours with your eyes glazed over thinking about the problems at your desk. Why are you thinking about them so much? Well, the reason is that you have not brought them to a close, or had an effective mechanism for 'parking' the issues for the time being. Perhaps then, one of the following could help your cause:
    - Write down the issues in enough detail so that when you get back to your desk you don't have to either locate the relevant emails and documents or begin the cognitive process from scratch. The act of placing the concerns and issues on a piece of paper (or email to self) may help you forget about them for the interim period. You know that you have recorded them and hence they won't be forgotten. You are free to let them go for the time being.
    - Time permitting and if appropriate, identify a trusted member of staff that can gather some useful background information or relevant details (perhaps copies of agreements, contracts or policy documents) allowing you the freedom to add value at your meeting in the knowledge that the ground work is being done on the issues that sit in your in-tray.

- Assess whether it would be appropriate and acceptable to request that the deadline for completion be pushed back if that would alleviate the underlying pressure and stress and allow you to regain comfort over your workload over the next few days.
- **Buzzwords and phrases.** To be clear I don't recommend using the following but for completeness and for the sake of good humor I have included them within the book:
  - *I'll take that on board* – translates as 'I'll consider that when putting together my plan of action' but in reality it may translate to 'I'll forget about your comment as soon as I leave the room' so tread carefully.
  - *Get ahead of the curve* – translates as 'do something early on' or 'get a job or task done before the agreed deadline'.
  - *Got it (usually by email)* – means 'I finally understand what you are saying'
  - *Good catch* – means that you have spotted something, often a hard to see mistake.
  - *My bad* – means that I made the error.
  - *Continuous improvement* – means 'we will look to make things better every second of every day'. With no target dates or specific action points this phrase is not particularly helpful.