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Self

Development

- The HELLO Strategy to Networking
- How SMART are SMART goals?
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HELLO
Strategy to
Networking

The 'HELLO' Strategy to Networking

The first time I shared my “HELLO Strategy to Networking” training session was in October 2015 to an auditorium full of PAs, EAs and Admin Professionals at the much-revered PA Show (then called Office* Show) in London. My audience were hungry to understand more about the topic and, having been complimented many times in my career for my “natural ability to network”, I was only too keen to share some skills and knowledge.

My first presentation slide was simply the word “NETWORKING” displayed in big bold letters and I put the question to my audience “what does networking mean to you?” My question met with some interesting responses.

Firstly, networking was divided into social/personal networking and professional networking. It was further divided into “online” networking and “face to face” networking. Online networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Whatsapp and Pinterest were mentioned.

It was when I probed for more information on the face-to-face element of networking that the audience interaction shifted up a gear. There appeared to be some uncomfortable shuffling of bottoms on chairs before one PA shared:

“Networking is a bit daunting. Walking into a room full of people you don’t know – that’s scary. It frightens me.”

This comment was met with many nods from the audience. Granted, many of my audience had chosen to hear me speak because they already had a dislike, a fear or very little experience of networking.

They wanted skills and learning to overcome this dislike or fear. They wanted to understand how to ensure every networking opportunity was the very best it could possibly be. I wondered how often this “fear” of networking was holding back lots of PAs from tapping into a valuable way of ensuring they could progress in their career.

And networking is indeed a valuable way to progress in your career. According to research from The Institute of Employment Studies, career progression can be attributed to three elements, these being performance, appearance and networking. Performance accounts for 10%, Appearance for 30% and Networking for 60%. How incredible is that statistic? 60% of your career progression is down to networking. Isn't it also rather shocking that performance accounts for only 10%. We need to live by the adage "it's not what you know, it's who you know" maybe...

So how does one network? This is where I'd like to introduce you to The HELLO strategy, a simple acronym that will help you put into practice strategies and thinking to ensure your networking opportunities are the very best they can be. Whilst the bias here is on face-to-face networking, many of the tips shared in this article can be implemented when networking online too.

The 'HELLO' Strategy to Networking

H

Honesty

E

Engaged & Engaging

L

Listen

L

Learn

O

Outcome

H IS FOR HONESTY

So, let me ask you a question and I'd like your honest response.

Imagine you are about to walk into a large meeting room on your own ready to network with a group of people you've never met before. How many of you would be daunted by this prospect? Nervous or frightened? Physically shaking even?

1. Take ownership of your feelings

More of us need to take ownership of our feelings when we do feel daunted – or nervous or frightened – or whatever word you would use in such a situation. It's okay to feel the emotions you are feeling when you are in a situation that is outside of your comfort zone. It is human nature.

By being honest with ourselves about how we are feeling we can then truly understand our "starting point" for any situation. We are then in a better position to know what strategies, thinking or skills we can put into place to help ourselves.

F E A R has two meanings.
Forget Everything And Run
or
Face Everything And Rise
The **choice** is yours.

2. Change your label

Psychological theory advocates that we often label our emotions and feelings in such a way that is detrimental to us. If you label your feelings as "nerves", if you say "I'm really nervous" you have applied your interpretation of "nerves" and "nervousness" and all the negative connotations associated with these labels. It is more useful for you to change the label to something with more positive connotations, for example replacing the word "nerves" with "energy" or "excitement".

One of my favourite, most powerful "change your label" swaps is "problem" or "difficult" to "challenge" – we are all up for a challenge rather than feeling bogged down in something that we've labelled as a "problem" or "difficult". Give it a go!

3. Do some “Eeyore” thinking

Eeyore, the adorable donkey from AA Milne’s Winnie the Pooh is famous for his “negative” thoughts – rather “doom and gloom” thinking.

I invite you to do some “Eeyore” thinking before networking. Ask yourself “what’s the very worst that could happen at this networking event?”. Then ask yourself “is that really likely to be the case?”.

Then pin your tail back on with a satin pink ribbon and move away from the little black rain cloud to put into practice the rest of the strategies outlined here!

4. Use online networking to help you network face-to-face

Tap into the online networking platforms available to you to prepare yourself for face-to-face networking. Plan your networking experience and live by the adage “failing to plan is planning to fail.”

Research the name of the networking group organiser(s) or anyone you know who is going to be at the networking event. Find these individuals on LinkedIn. LinkedIn profiles will provide you with an image of that person so at least you’ll know what they look like when you enter a room full of faces.

Check out the networking groups website page or Facebook page. Read their tweets, Instagram and LinkedIn posts.

If you know someone is going to be present at the networking event who you want to meet, ask the organiser if they’d introduce you to them.

5. Buddy-up

Is there someone else who can go with you to the networking event? Or that you can meet there? Use each other as a “comfort blanket” when you’re in a room full of new people – just make sure you don’t “cling” to the comfort blanket and keep in mind your reasons for networking (which you can read more about in O is for Outcomes).

6. Prepare and practice your “Elevator Pitch”

An “Elevator Pitch” is a brief speech that will introduce you to your fellow networkers. The name derives from the notion that your speech should be delivered in the short time period of an elevator ride, usually 20-60 seconds.

In the context of PA networking face to face, think about the information you want to share (name, company, role, career/PA experience, your reasons for being at the networking event etc). Keep your language as jargon-free as possible – there’s nothing worse than someone talking in a tumble of acronyms and getting to the end of their elevator speech with you being none-the-wiser for who they are and what they do!

Seal your message with a KISS

Keep It Short & Simple

Remember, Einstein famously said “If you can’t explain it to a six year old, you don’t understand it yourself.”

“Practice makes perfect” so practice your elevator speech – with your networking buddy or a friend who will give you open and honest feedback or in front of a mirror when you can give yourself open and honest feedback.

Break the ice and create great rapport with your fellow networkers by using humour or sharing your true feelings with them. For example, sharing “this is actually my first experience of networking and I’m finding it a little outside of my comfort zone” proves to your fellow networker that you have embraced the H of the HELLO strategy and identified how you are feeling!

E IS FOR ENGAGED AND ENGAGING

1. Communicate with impact

In the late 1950s Harvard Professor Albert Mehrabian introduced a theory that face-to-face communication when sharing our feelings and emotions could be split into three areas, or the three Vs of communication – the Verbal (the words and vocabulary we use), the Vocal (the tone of voice we use and how we deliver our message with our vocal chords) and the Visuals (how we communicate through our body language, physiology and what people see when we communicate).

Mehrabian attributed percentages to these three areas according to the importance of communicating our message. Verbal accounts for 7% importance in getting our message across, Vocal for 38% and Visual for 55%. To deliver the most impactful message we need to ensure all three areas of communication are “aligned” or “congruent” so we truly “say what we mean and mean what we say.” Then we will be truly optimising the engagement of our listeners.

Always consider the networking experience as a two-way process. It’s an opportunity for you to share things about yourself and also to learn from others. To demonstrate to your fellow networkers that you are engaged in what they are saying, maintain eye contact, nod your head, smile (tap in to the 55% visual clues of communication) and ask questions to probe more into what they are sharing with you.

“Say what you mean and mean what you say”

2. First impressions really do count

Human nature is such that we form 90% of our opinion of someone in the first 90 seconds of meeting them (predominantly based on what we see – Mehrabian’s 55% Visuals theory in practice!). Be aware of this and think about how you are going to arrive in to the networking/meeting room.

As all eyes are on you as you enter, what do you want people to think about you based on what you are wearing, how you are standing/walking or what facial expressions you are displaying?

3. Strike a pose

Check out [Amy Cuddy's Ted Talks video](#) about “power posing”! Social psychologist Cuddy introduces us to the theory that standing in a posture of confidence (even when we don't feel confident) can affect testosterone and cortisol levels in our brain and will impact our chances for success.

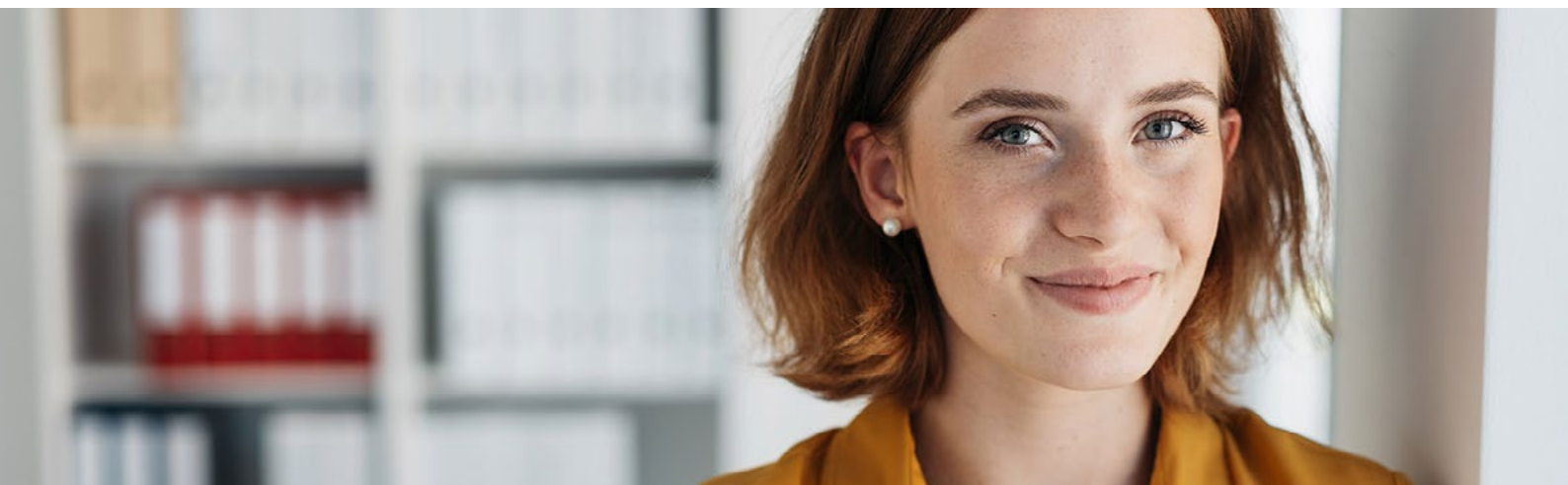
Superhero costumes are optional of course (remember the 55% Visuals!). Getting yourself in to the right “frame of mind” by posturing means you will be in a good place mentally to create that impact and approach every situation with the very best attitude and personal strength.

4. “Get out clauses”

Unfortunately not everybody is aware of the HELLO strategy to networking – they aren't aware of the ideas I've shared and they won't therefore be putting them into practice. Some people's elevator pitch will be longer than any elevator ride you've ever taken... some people won't have considered the “two way” element of networking...

Be prepared if you get “stuck” with someone who isn't engaged or engaging. Have ready some select phrases as your “get out clauses” to ensure you don't spend the entire networking experience with that one person, who, if we are totally honest with ourselves, we really don't want to spend all evening with. Be polite but firm – for example you may want to say:

“It has been very interesting talking to you/listening to you/learning about you. I am going to move on now. I wish you all the best with your business/career/position.” Or... “I came with a networking buddy and guest this evening and have just seen them waving to me – do excuse me...”



L IS FOR LISTEN

Listening is the key to creating and maintaining rapport, and an absolute essential skill for any networking opportunity. It is also a skill that many of us could improve on.

The crème de la crème of listening involves listening with your whole body and then mirroring or matching the person we are listening to in order to create and maintain rapport, based on the popular saying that “people like people who are like themselves.”

We can use Mehrabian’s research as a basis for putting this “whole body listening” into practice.

1. Listen with your ears to the Verbal element:

We all have a preference for phrases, terminology and favourite sayings. Our own personal interpretation of vocabulary may be very different to someone else’s. Notice what specific words and phrases the person you are listening to has used. Pick out particular phrases and words to repeat back when talking to them.

Based on the popular saying “people like people who are like themselves”, by using the same “language” and words as the person you are listening to this demonstrates your respect for what they are saying. You are keeping the conversation “clean” by using their language without “dirtying” the conversation with your own preferences. This accounts for a lot in creating and maintaining great rapport and ensuring you optimise your networking experience.

2. Listen with your ears to the Vocal element:

Listen to how someone is using their voice. What tone of voice are they using? What emphasis are they placing on words with the intonation of their voice? How fast or slow are they speaking? What volume are they using? What does this tell you?

3. Listen with your eyes to the Visual element:

Based on Mehrabian’s research we know that 55% of communication comes down to what we see – the Visuals. As a listener we can assess a lot from noticing what is happening in a person’s body language including their physiology (facial expressions), gestures and movement.

What can you see happening? We can listen with our eyes and use this information to be curious about what is going on for that person.

L IS FOR LEARN

Every and any situation is an opportunity to learn and networking is top of the hierarchy in terms of learning experiences. You are standing in a room full of individuals who have knowledge and information that you can potentially tap in to and learn from. Remember, every person you meet knows something you don't.

1. Pre-networking

Ask yourself "what is it that I want to learn at this networking event?" When you have a clear idea of what it is you want, or need, you are more able to move towards achieving that very thing. Read more about identifying your Outcomes in the "O" of the HELLO strategy.

2. Post-networking

Give yourself feedback by asking:

What did I learn?

How can I put this learning into practice to benefit myself, my manager or my organisation?
What went well?

What did not go so well?

Be open and honest with yourself in identifying what you will do more of and what you will do less of when you network again.

Next time what will you continue to do, stop doing and start doing? This will ensure your networking experiences are absolutely optimised based on every experience.

O IS FOR OUTCOME

1. Do some Tigger thinking.....

Very often we hear people talking about what they “don’t” want – “I don’t want to be overweight” or “I don’t want to have a holiday in rainy England any more.” This type of thinking is called “away from” thinking. When we make these “don’t want” statements our minds create a representation of the things we do not want – in effect we are doing some “Eeyore thinking”.

By thinking about what we do want, similarly our mind will create a representation and start to recognise it. This type of thinking is called “towards thinking” or, introducing a Winnie the Pooh analogy – “Tigger thinking”. Establishing what you “do want” enables us to be motivated, clear and precise and it can give us a sense of direction or movement, similar to our bouncy, energetic tiger in the form of Tigger.

2. Use precise language

Once you’ve identified what it is you want to get out of the networking event, you need to use precise language to articulate this.

Always start your outcome statement with “I will...” By using the word “will” you are introducing a definite action (rather than “I’d like to” or “I want to”) so it becomes a motivating fact in your mind.

So, there we have it:
the **HELLO** strategy to networking.

H

Honesty

E

Engaged & Engaging

L

Listen

L

Learn

O

Outcome

As with any new skills and learning that you've taken on board, the next step is for you to implement this learning, so I encourage you to put the HELLO strategy to networking into practice and wish you every success!



How SMART are SMART goals?

Why SMART goals need to be SMARTER

The star of “goal setting” since the 1980’s when first introduced by American Consultant George T Doran in his whitepaper “There’s a SMART Way to write management goals and objectives”. SMART is the simple and effective framework to ensure your goals can be defined, measured and achieved.

How proud are you when you can run through this SMART acronym and apply it to your goals asking yourself:

S: Specific

Is my goal clearly defined and can it be interpreted correctly?

M: Measurable

How will I measure my goal so that I have tangible evidence that I have achieved it? Is there a number associated with it?

A: Achievable/Attainable

Is this something I am able to do? Have I got the balance right between stretching myself and ensuring I have the necessary skills, knowledge and abilities to achieve the goal?

R: Relevant

Does my goal fit with my needs and wants? Is it fulfilling for me? How does it fit with my other goals?

T: Time bound

When will I achieve my goal? What target date will I set to achieve it?

But in today's demanding and fast-paced business environment how robust is Doran's method? How SMART is SMART?

The SMARTER option

E: Exciting

It's all very well identifying your SMART goal but unless you have the excitement and motivation to achieve that goal, it will remain just that. A written goal. There is more likelihood of you achieving your goal if it's something you REALLY want.

Hone in on the "R" of your SMART goal by ensuring the Relevance also has an element of "E" excitement in it.

Ask yourself:

How exciting is this goal?

What score out of 10 would you give it? (10 being the most you want this)?

If you're scoring it 7, 8 or 9 what can you add to your goal to make it a 10?

Imagine you've achieved this goal. Does it really excite you?

What are you going to gain from it? What's in it for you?

Now identify the first step you will take. However small that first step is, this is the momentum that will ensure you're on the path towards achieving your goal. Write your first step in SMART terms and set your Time bound criteria as the next 24 hours.

R: Recorded

Brilliant. You've recorded your SMART goal by writing it down.

Now take this "recording" one step further. Share your goal with someone else. Go you're your work colleague, your mum, your partner, yourself in the mirror! You've shared your goal with others and by doing so you've "put yourself on the line" and are likely to be more committed to achieving it.

Now that's much SMARTER.



Let's all head to the swings!

Here's a reminder to take "time out" for YOU!

Last week I spent the day with one of my oldest friends (for clarity, that's "old" in terms of the time I've known her – not age!).

My friend is going through a tough time at the moment having just separated from her husband and taking up residence in rented accommodation – so I was ready to listen and provide a much needed hug. Or two. Or three.

We took a walk into my friend's new hometown and crossed a children's play area, overlooking a crumbling old church, the ground sprinkled with confetti (the irony of which wasn't lost on either of us).

I suggested that we sit on the swings and made a beeline for them expecting my friend to follow. However, with her feet firmly planted on the ground and a puzzled expression on her face, my friend announced "we can't – we don't have any children with us!".

I matched her puzzled look and replied "says who?" and, abandoning my handbag on the ground next to me, I squeezed my (noticeably adult-sized) bottom into the (noticeably child-sized) swing seat and "pushed off" with great flourish and energy and a mischievous smile on my face. Abandoning her own handbag next to mine, my friend grinned in response and (with similar squeezing on to the seat) she also "pushed off" with enthusiasm.

Employing the "legs-stretched-out-when-you-go-forward-legs-tucked-in-when-you-go-back" practice, we spent a good thirty minutes chatting, our cheeks getting rosier in the crisp breeze, creating a woosh of air around us.

Our space.

Our "woosh of energy".

Our freedom to head up to the sky.

And that glorious thirty minutes of "playground therapy" got me to thinking...

And that glorious thirty minutes of “playground therapy” got me to thinking...

It got me to thinking deeper about the article and corresponding training session I run on “acting your shoe size not your age”. Yes there are enormous benefits to tapping in to the enthusiasm and energy you had as a 6 year old child.

But more deeply there is an immense sense of freedom to be experienced when “playing” and using your imagination – with no rules or confines imposed by others to stifle creativity. And what better place to experience that freedom than on a swing – in the open air with your own power to create that “woosh of energy” and head to the sky.

It got me to thinking about my regular trips into London Kings Cross when I pass by that gorgeous swing in the middle of the rainbow-lit gazebo immediately outside the station. And how I resist the urge to join the queue of children waiting patiently for their turn because I’ve imposed my own “rules” around what would be socially acceptable.....

It got me to thinking about my lovely mum, who is sadly no longer here “in body” but, according to my daughter, is very much here “in spirit” on her fluffy cloud in the sky (“wearing pink shoes” apparently) and watching over proceedings!

Mum loved the swings – so much so that when she and dad bought their “forever home” in Oxfordshire, dad was given the task of constructing a swing slap-bang-in-the-middle-of-the-garden for her. At the grand unveiling of the swing, not once did my mum mention Josh, my son (her baby grandson) as “justification” of this “folly”. But actually, why would she?

I think she was well aware of the therapeutic qualities of the swing and would regularly detour from hanging out the washing to creating that “woosh of energy” and freedom. Ditto, when I visited Oxford, I would head out (Dettol wipe at the ready to clean the seat of bird droppings!) and do the very same thing. And I have countless photos of Joshua on the swing and later Lottie, my daughter, also mastered the leg action as she made her way up to the fluffy clouds to “say “hi” to Granny”.

It makes sense, surely, that there is therapeutic power in the rhythm of swinging to and fro. As babies we are rocked in our parent’s arms, in “rock-a-tot” carseats, pushed in prams and pushchairs, soothed to sleep by the motion of car journeys. Even before birth, carried in our mother’s womb we would have been calmed and lulled by movement.

And think of the ubiquitous image of an older person rocking away on a rocking chair too. As well as the calming quality of this rocking movement I am well aware that physical movement – movement in body – can create movement in your mind, both emotional and intellectual movement.

So on the first day of my daughter’s recent half term school break, when she asked to go to the village park, it took little persuasion for me to join her on the swings. And one day, who knows, you may find me abandoning my self-inflicted rules on what’s socially acceptable and, in full view of London commuters, I’ll be on that rainbow swing..... who’s joining me?

Mental Health & Wellbeing

- The Art of the Smile
- I'm sorry but there's no need to apologise...
- Manage your Energy



Yup! That's me (aged 4 with my brother & sister who are twins). As you can see, I wasn't a very smiley little person!

I've definitely made up for this in my adult years though & hope some of my posts and articles also make you smile.

Like this one that I've resurrected from the article archives here at Your Excellency HQ.

The **Art** of the **Smile**

I'm excited about this article. Just typing the title (which I'm picturing Vegas-style in rainbowed neon lights) has a feel good factor to it. It's making me smile.

I've Googled the definition of "smile" and now I'm frowning. I'm a tad disappointed in the definition.

According to Wikipedia it's

"A facial expression formed by flexing the muscles near both ends of the mouth and by flexing the muscles throughout the mouth".

It sounds mechanical, devoid of emotion. That definition would fit "the act of a smile" – but "the art of the smile" – now, that's something different.

Smiling is one of the earliest forms of communication – parents across the world coo over their 6 week old's first smile (before this we are told it is merely wind...). It is generally held that the smile is a universal language (albeit there are some cultural disagreements on the frequency of smiling and who we should actually be smiling at).

With every new gem of knowledge that I share with my clients I package it up with the WIIFM & WIIFT strategy. I'm an advocate for new learning and knowledge (a pre-requisite for a trainer I would hope!) and believe it's important to ask

WIIFM – What's in it for me? and

WIIFT – What's in it for them?

so you can truly understand the benefit of the new skill that you've acquired.

So, A SMILE – WIIFM? And WIIFT?

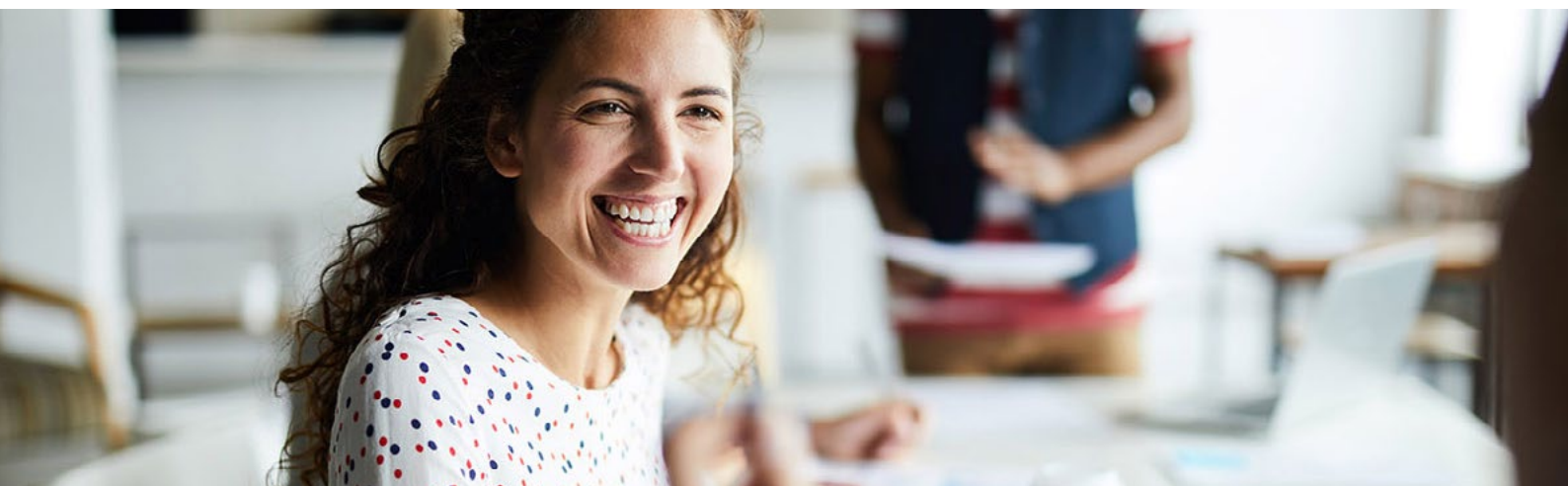
Smiling triggers the production of endorphins in our system that promote that "feel good" factor. Tackling your "to do" list with a smile and a "can do" attitude will ensure you are more productive and in the "right frame of mind" to get things done. And, of course, your organisation will find great benefit in you if you're being uber-productive and efficient. You'll be getting yourself noticed for the right reasons. Congruent smiling is the crème de la crème of smiles (when we are smiling on the outside and feeling it on the inside).

Even if you don't feel like smiling have a go. The endorphin trigger may give you the boost that you need to feel the smile inside.

I'm a great believer that the root of any successful working practice is in how well the team are "gelling" and working together. When you smile it can have a knock-on effect and influence on others who perceive you as being more likeable, approachable and trustworthy – therefore promoting team work.

Your co-workers are more likely to approach you with suggestions, ideas or involve you in projects – the scope for taking on board more responsibility (and promotion) is optimised for you.

Now, with all this knowledge, what is there not to smile about?





I'm **sorry** but there's no need to **apologise**...

I love "Precision language" – using the very best words in the very best order. Ensuring the message you want to deliver "lands" in the way you intend and want it to. So, naturally I get a tad perturbed when I hear people using language that isn't "precise".

And there is one violation of "precision language" that makes me outwardly cringe.

Yes. Sound the alarm. Look startled. Run around waving your arms in the air (okay – too much melodrama maybe?.....) We are in the throes of an epidemic everyone – an epidemic of apologisers who start their sentences off with the words "I'm sorry but.....".

Please own up to it if you're infected with this violation of language and you're now asking "im sorry but what's the problem with that?".

The problem is this. The phrase "I'm sorry but" normally precedes you putting your opinion or viewpoint forward in situations where you don't have to be sorry – you have nothing to be sorry for! And when you say "I'm sorry" you've put yourself on "the back foot" as the one that has done something wrong or needs to apologise – when in fact you have nothing to apologise for! It puts you at a disadvantage by demeaning yourself and diluting your message.....

Take this as an example – a situation I observed just yesterday morning as I commuted in to London.

My local train station ticket office was closed and both ticket machines were "out of order" so, along with tens of other passengers heading in to London we all boarded the train ticketless with the intention of buying a ticket either during ticket inspection on the journey (which, of course, didn't happen) or when we arrived into Kings Cross.

Upon arrival in London, I joined a rather sorry excuse for a "queue" of epic proportions that formed around the mobile ticket inspectors. Commuters crowded together to buy tickets to exit the barriers and, in true British fashion, even without an orderly queue everyone "clocked" who was next in line and we all "waited our turn" – apart from, that is, Mr Pinstripe (no offence to Savile Row suit-wearers but I have to give this old gentleman a name).

Mr Pinstripe, obviously deciding he did not favour queues and was obviously already running late as he glanced at his watch and “huffed” loudly, strode brazenly to the front and began to request his ticket from the inspector. To which “Miss Boden” (again, no offence to Boden clothes wearers but again I have to give this lady a name) frowned at him and said

“I’m sorry but there is a queue here.....”

A lull came over our commuter huddle and all eyes were upon Mr Pinstripe to see his reaction. Too late as the ticket inspector was already printing Mr Pinstripe’s ticket and he made a hasty retreat from the dagger-glazers around him.

Good on you Miss Boden for speaking up – round of applause to you. Bad on you Miss Boden for starting your sentence with “I’m sorry but....”. You have nothing to be sorry for Miss Boden. Mr Pinstripe was in the wrong. Don’t be sorry. Replace your “I’m sorry but” with ‘Excuse me’ or better still you could have said

“I can see you’re in a rush but there is actually a queue here.....”

You’ve started your sentence appreciating Mr Pinstripe’s position (“I can see you’re in a rush”). Mr Pinstripe will feel pretty chuffed that you’re empathising with him. You’ve “got him on your side” for all of a split second before letting him know “there is actually a queue here....”

Don’t be sorry when you don’t need to be. There really is no need to apologise in situations like these.

Disclaimer:

Not all Mr Pinstripe’s will push to the front of the queue.

Not all Miss Boden’s start their sentences off with “I’m sorry but....”.



Don't manage your time, manage your energy!

I was privileged to speak to an internal Assistant network recently about “work-life balance”. I based my presentation and session on [an article in the Harvard Business Review by Tony Schwartz and Catherine McCarthy](#) (October 2007). The article introduces two facts, namely 1) time is a limited resource and 2) personal energy is renewable.

This immediately resonated with me. It makes absolute sense that we can replenish our own energy and in doing so build up our resilience in terms of our physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. We need to recognise what behaviours are draining us of energy and take responsibility for changing them. Then and only then will be able to “recharge” ourselves.

The changes that we can put into place are labelled as “rituals” by Schwartz & McCarthy – these are behaviours that can initially be practiced intentionally (preferably at designated times of the day) with the goal of them becoming a habit and unconscious activities.

Our personal energy can be divided into four dimensions – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.

For each dimension, we can practice rituals that will ensure we are replenishing our personal energy.

Physical Energy

- “Eat little and often”. Eating smaller meals/snacks every three hours will sustain our energy levels.
- Take a break away from your desk – every 90 or 120 minutes. Even if the break is only for several minutes it means you have disengaged from work and will return renewed and energised.
- Set a slightly earlier bedtime: our bodies need a regular dose of 7 to 8 hours of sleep otherwise we’re likely to wake up feeling tired.
- Make sure you engage in some form of exercise (Schwartz & McCarthy recommend cardiovascular training at least 3 times a week and strength training at least once a week).

Emotional Energy

We all recognise that we are more energised when we have positive thoughts and emotions. Unfortunately, human nature is such that we can't sustain positive thoughts 24/7.

When faced with the challenges and demands of our busy role, we revert to our innate human "fight or flight" response. This can drain us of energy and impact our logical and reasonable thinking.

We need a better awareness of how and when we are feeling different emotions throughout the working day so that we can take better control of these emotions and in doing so improve the quality of our energy. Build on positive emotions by expressing appreciation to others – this has benefits to the giver and the receiver. Set aside regular times to do this and think about different ways of expressing your appreciation (email, phone call, conversation, a lunch or dinner).

Rather than playing the victim and blaming other people or circumstances for your problems, change your story. Recognise that 1) you have a choice about how you view situations and 2) there is a direct correlation between your story and the emotions you feel.

Mental Energy

- Identify what things distract you and affect your concentration. If you know you need to remain focused on a task, move yourself away from distractions.
- At the end of your working day identify the most important challenge for the next day.
- Make this a priority when you arrive into work the next morning.
- Batch similar tasks together and complete them at designed times during your day.
- Turn off those email notification "pop ups"!

Spiritual Energy

- Identify activities that make you feel happy and fulfilled. What makes you come alive? Do more of these.
- Identify what's important to you (this is my optimum coaching question) and allocate your time and energy to these things.
- Identify what you value and then live up to those values – "practice what you preach".

Leadership Skills

- The Influential & Persuasive Personal Assistant
- The Language of Leadership



The **Influential & Persuasive** Personal Assistant

Consider your role a privileged position. You are privy to lots of information. You have contact with your Executives, team members, customers, clients and suppliers. In this blog post I will share with you the benefits of being able to persuade and I will introduce you to a model you can use to structure your persuasive communication so you can step up to being an influential professional.

Firstly, let's be clear about the definitions of "influence" and "persuading" so we have absolute clarity on what we are considering here

According to Merriam-Webster "influence" is

"the power to change or affect someone or something : the power to cause changes without directly forcing them to happen"

Influence does not use direct force and one word I personally twin with "influence" is "integrity". This is not "manipulation" which in contrast is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as

"controlling someone or something to your own advantage, often unfairly or dishonestly". Rather like a "back-to-school" English lesson then, the verb (my young daughter says "that's a doing-word mummy") "persuade" is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as

"to make someone do or believe something by giving them a good reason to do it or by talking to that person and making them believe it"

Using these definitions then, when considering yourself as an influential and persuasive professional remember you are then, first and foremost professional, discrete, confidential and integrity-driven.

Now let's consider the benefits of being able to persuade

A fun "back-to-school" activity is considering the benefits in an A-Z format. (For those who have a copy of my book "A-Z Pearls of Wisdom for Executive PAs" you already know my love for the alphabet and using it as a structure and framework for collating ideas and information).

Here is my input. This is in no way an exhaustive list as I'm sure you can think of some more benefits to add.

Persuasive communication will help you to:

- Avoid conflict
- Achieve your goals and objectives and build Authority
- Advance in your career
- Be respected and liked
- Build and maintain the best working relationships
- Build credibility in the workplace
- Collaborate with others and be Comfortable in challenging situations
- Contribute valuable ideas and proposals to your Executive, team and organisation
- Develop your skills and a self-perpetuating attitude of "I am capable..."
- Delegate tasks and responsibilities
- Engage with your Executives, team members, clients and customers
- Foster respect and empathy
- Further your career
- Get things done with efficiency and effectiveness
- Generate new ideas
- Grow in self esteem and abilities
- Be Happy
- Influence with integrity
- Join together as a team
- Keep to timescales and deadlines more easily
- Listen and be listened to
- Manage tasks, Manage yourself and Manage others
- Motivate yourself and others
- Notice where and when things need improvement and put forward your suggestions and ideas
- Open up opportunities
- Progress ideas and put forward solutions and proposals
- Apply Questioning skills
- Reach agreements more easily
- Realise your own potential
- Reduce stress
- Sway opinions
- Take control of your role (and career)
- Increase your Time management effectiveness
- Unite your team

- Understand others better
- Feel Valued
- Put forward your Viewpoints
- Work more effectively and efficiently
- Excel in whatever you do
- Get “Yes” answers when you most need them

Let’s consider how to communicate persuasively.

The 3Vs

Harvard Professor Albert Mehrabian advises us that when engaged in face-to-face communication and sharing our feelings and thoughts we communicate with three key elements. These are the Verbal element (7%), the Vocal element (38%) and the Visual element (55%).

The percentages shown relate to the relative importance of those elements in creating an impactful (persuasive/influential) communication. The most impactful communication aligns all three elements to deliver a congruent message.

Have a look at those percentages again. This is such an interesting concept to consider given our reliance on written communication and email in particular. Because, of course, with written communication it’s sometimes hard to convey the Vocal element to your message. Our message may be received and read with a different tone of voice than we intended. And, of course, we can’t see the Visuals and what body language or facial expressions are being displayed by the originator of written communication either.

Your challenge is to ensure your written messages are not ambiguous and can only be received in the way you want them to be received. One way to do this is to add contextual or background information to your message. Another strategy is to italicise the words you want to be stressed so the reader uses inflection in their tone of voice to add (the correct!) Vocal meaning, dependent on your agreed office practices of course.

The best, most impactful communication is one that is face to face where all 3 elements can be conveyed, noticed and “listened” to. A challenge at the time of writing is that many face-to-face and “in person” comms have been curtailed by COVID.

And indeed even when we are in the same physical space as someone else, wearing a face covering means we could miss some Visual cues as we’ll be masking certain facial expressions. You can’t always “see” a smile in someone’s eyes.....

Consider the use of virtual platforms like Zoom or Microsoft Teams as your next best communication delivery.

Now let's consider the benefit of using "The Power of Three" in your persuasive communications. It's one of my favourite learnings around communication as it's so easy to apply – and yet so very impactful.

"The Power of Three" is a principle that implies that things that come in threes are more satisfying, effective and memorable.

It's fun, thought-provoking and, more importantly can add real impact and persuasiveness to your communication.

The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

Think about it. When you introduce three things, this is the smallest number you can use to produce a rhythm or pattern to your communication, whilst still remaining catchy, simple and memorable. That's all good then (not Bad or Ugly).

You'll notice the use of the Power of Three in storytelling, films and advertising. At the time of writing (October 2020) even the UK's new public information campaign employs the Power of Three with the "Hands, Face, Space" message urging us to continue to wash our hands, cover our faces and make space to control infection rates and avoid a second peak of COVID. And our challenged Events industry are using the hashtag #WeMakeEvents to highlight the support that is so urgently needed from the Government for the live events industry. And of course we're all so aware of #BlackLivesMatter.

Think back to your favourite childhood books – "Goldilocks and the Three Bears", "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" or "The Three Little Pigs" (excuse me whilst I have a flashback to my Ladybird book collection!).

Cuddled up on the sofa watching a movie you might choose "The Three Stooges", "Three Amigos" or "Three Men and a Cradle." Or, with the festive season on our doorstep, you might settle down to watch a Dickensian classic such as "A Christmas Carol" (not the Muppet version please!) where Scrooge is visited by the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future.

Traditionally sporting events (think back to our Olympics and Paralympics) award Gold, Silver and Bronze to worthy winners.

Famous advertising slogan examples are the UK's "Stop, Look and Listen" campaign to promote safety when crossing our busy roads. How about "A Mars a day helps you work, rest and play"?

Even hashtags are joining in the fun with one of my favourites being #ThisGirlCan, the Sport England campaign inspiring more women to be active.

For the more cultured of our readers, three priests and three boys appear in Mozart's 1791 Opera "The Magic Flute."

The Holy Trinity is the father, the son and the Holy Spirit.

On the witness stand your oath is to “tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”

Some of the most famous and memorable speeches practice “The Power of Three.” In Martin Luther King Jr’s “Non-Violence and Racial Justice” speech he compares “insult, injustice and exploitation” with “justice, goodwill and brotherhood.” And an example of the attraction of “The Power of Three” is evident when we quote “blood, sweat and tears” – an amendment to Winston Churchill’s original “blood, toil, tears and sweat” (his verbatim message appears on a £5 note – have a look!).

By including the principles of The Power of Three in your own communication (whether written or verbal) your audience is more likely to remember what you have shared. Let me share a format that you can use to structure your persuasive communication. I call this the IMPACT Model. It’s easy-to-follow yet, as it’s name suggests, it’s incredibly impactful.

The Model incorporates The Power of Three which you learned about in my last blog post. It helps you pull together the Verbal element of your persuasive communication, the words and the phrases you use, whilst you will, of course, be considering the Vocal and Visual element.

IMPACT stands for:

I

Introduce your idea/proposal and employ KISS (Keep It Short and Simple)

M

Main Reasons: identify the main reasons and use the “Power of Three”

P

Problems: Be ready to answer any potential problems or queries that could arise

A

Appeal: to Logic (e.g. it will save us money) and emotion (e.g. it is good for team morale)

C

Credibility – add this with supporting evidence/stats/info

T

Thank your audience for listening and take any questions

Here are two examples of IMPACT proposals and suggestions (with the inclusion of a cheeky, blatant promo for the qualifications we deliver here at Your Excellency Limited!)

IMPACT PROPOSAL EXAMPLE ONE

I suggest you put into practice “The Power of Three” when communicating (I).

You will be able to share knowledge that is 1. more effective, 2. Highly impactful and 3. Truly memorable (M).

I agree it might take some practice, but “practice makes perfect” (P).

By using “The Power of Three” you can better engage, inspire and lead those you are communicating with (A).

Think about some of our famous orators such as Martin Luther King Jr and Winston Churchill(C).

Thanks for taking the time to let me share my proposal with you and I’m happy to provide any more information or answer any questions you have (T).

IMPACT PROPOSAL EXAMPLE TWO

I suggest you book onto an accredited, professional EA qualification with Your Excellency Limited (I).

Your Excellency have a high standing in the EA community for delivering learning that is 1. accredited, 2. relevant and 3. instantly-useable for the EA professional (M).

You think it might be expensive? Your Excellency prides themselves on remaining competitively priced in the market.

[The Essential PA Programme](#) which incorporates an Ofqual regulated qualification is priced at £1,995 plus VAT which equates to just £399 for a day’s training. We can also help you with payments if you have to self-fund your development.

You will be able to apply your newfound learning skills to ensure you’re working more effectively and efficiently. It will also be a real boost to self-esteem as many of [our videos from learners and Graduates](#) attest to.

I appreciate you taking the time to listen to my proposal and I’m happy to answer any questions you have (T).



The Language of Leadership

I love sharing management and leadership theories with my PA and EA clients. There is something immensely satisfying about the PA who, eyes wide in realisation, announces

“So there’s a copyrighted theoretical name for that? Really? But we’re doing this stuff every day!”

Yep. Absolutely. Many of the practices you’re already employing have their foundation in leadership and management theories and strategies. And how great does it make you feel when you discover that? That awareness, that discovery can be a huge self-esteem boost. The EA/PA is a leader in their own right and that’s something you need to be proud of and something you need to take ownership of. From this awareness you can then hone your management and leadership skills to ensure you are employing the very best practices. And in doing so you are well on the way to not only raising your own profile but that of the profession itself.

In this article I’ll be sharing one particular element of management and leadership – The Language of Leadership. We will explore the impact you can create by choosing specific words and being selective with your communication style and delivery. I’ll share instantly useable and practical suggestions that will gain you the respect of your team members and ensure you can inspire and motivate yourself and others.

If you’re interested in learning more about management and leadership, check out our industry first [Mini MBA Programme](#).

What makes a leader?

Let’s kick off our learning by understanding what makes a leader. And one of the best fitting quotes and my favourite is this, from John Quincy Adams, the 6th US President “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader”

I believe the key word here is “inspire”. In order to be a true, effective leader we need to be an inspiration to others (and equally to ourselves).

Take time to find out what inspires your work colleagues – what “pushes their buttons”? What is the “sweet spot” of those you are working with? What are their interests, belief and values? Because when the focus of our language, subjects and topics are aligned with these things, when we tailor our language to fit the person we are leading, then we are more easily able to inspire them, “get on the same wavelength” and create and maintain the very best rapport.

Tailoring your language to the person you’re communicating with means they can better identify with what you’re saying. It’s a surefire way of getting on the same wavelength as someone and creating that deep rapport.

Let’s explore something called “representation systems” and gain an understanding that as humans we use our senses to “make sense of the world”. We all process information in different ways and record it for future use. Your world is processed through your senses – sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. Generally everybody has a primary sense that they use to establish an experience within their conscious or sub-conscious mind. Usually that primary system is either visual (sight), auditory (sound) or kinaesthetic (touch or feelings).

Of course, you will access all five senses but your behaviours, language, and creation and memory of experiences will be prevalent either in a (V)isual, (A)uditory or (K)inaesthetic way (VAK system).

“Everyone lives in their own unique model of the world”

Think back to your favourite holiday and relive the most memorable pieces. Take a few minutes to do this and collect those memories in your mind. Then think about how you remembered:

Did you create a visual picture of the events? Were the scenes vivid and maybe moving and in colour?

Did you notice the sounds within the experience? People’s voices, music or natural sound of the surroundings?

Was the memory more about feelings inside, of being happy, excited, relaxed etc.?
If one of the above was the recognisable approach to your method of reconstructing the memory, then this indicates your likely lead representational system.

An indicator of a lead representational system is the language people use.

Here are some examples (known as predicates)

Visual

"I see what you mean"

"I get the picture"

"Things are looking good"

"Show me what you mean"

"We need to focus on this aspect"

"He has a bright future here"

"I have an insight into this"

"This is how I look at this situation"

"He uses colourful language"

Auditory

"I like the sound of that"

"I would like to listen to your ideas"

"That struck a chord with me"

"I hear what you say"

"He told me relevant ideas"

"That was pitched well"

"We discussed the situation"

"I am getting into the rhythm of the job"

Kinaesthetic

"I like the feeling of that"

"I have a sense of what you mean"

"He has got his finger on the pulse"

"Things are really moving now"

"She's a soft touch"

"He is hot on quality control"

"I cannot get to grips with this"

"I am under pressure"

"Give some shape to the strategy"

Tailoring your language to include more predicates that match the lead representational system of others will ensure you deepen rapport and communicate more effectively as a leader. Of course you or others may be a combo of two or all three language preferences – and if you're communicating to a large audience then you'll want to include a mixture of language that will engage everyone.

‘If you talk to a man in a language he understands that goes to his head. If you talk to a man in his language that goes to his heart’ -Nelson Mandela

‘If you believe you can or believe you cannot do something, either way you are likely to be right’ -Henry Ford

To inspire and motivate (yourself and others) you need to make sure you are using Towards language – rather than Away From language.

Away From Language:

- Don't want...
- Can't
- Hard
- Difficult
- Struggle

Can be considered “negative” and draining - Shaking of head

Towards language:

- Do want...
- Will do...
- Can...
- Solutions
- Opportunities

Can be considered “positive” and inspirational - Nodding of head

Towards language promotes forward movement and momentum in order to achieve, gain and get what you need and want. It is considered more motivational and inspirational due to it's “can do” approach, energy and resulting inspiration.

Identify what your natural tendency is. If you're more of an “away from thinker”, make a conscious change in your language when you want to inspire and step up to being an effective leader.

I use an analogy with AA Milne's “Winnie the Pooh” for the Away From and Towards characters. You've guessed it – Eeyore is our Away From and Tigger our Towards characters. So, be a bit more Tigger to inspire!

Consider Words, Tone & Body Language

Based on the research of Harvard Professor Albert Mehrabian, face-to-face communication when sharing our thoughts and feelings, can be broken down into three areas –

1. the words that we speak
2. the tone that we use and
3. the body language that we use.

The words that we speak account for 7% importance in getting our message across, the tone for 38% and the body language for 55%.

The language of leadership extends beyond the actual “words” we are using then. We need to be aware of the tone and body language we use in our face to face communication.

We need to understand that when words, tone and body language are aligned or “congruent”, when we “speak the meaning, not just the words”, we are ensuring our message has more impact thus contributing to the inspiration it imparts.

Workplace Skills

- Role of the Personal Assistant
- Promoting a Solution Focused Office
- Criticism vs feedback
- Optimising Written Communication

Role of the Personal Assistant



What do you think are the top skills required of an exceptional Personal Assistant?

How do your current skill sets meet the needs of this profession and are there any gaps that need filling?

These are just two of the questions I will pose to a new Essential PA learner.

This is the perfect training course to kick off our accredited Level 3 qualification as it provides an overview of the role with discussion time on the historic, present and future challenges of the profession, a consideration of the responsibilities and an identification of the resulting skills and qualities you need to excel.

During today's training, I will be sharing details of [The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report and citing the growing skills for 2022](#).



2022 Skills Outlook

Growing

- 1 Analytical thinking and innovation
- 2 Active learning and learning strategies
- 3 Creativity, originality and initiative
- 4 Technology design and programming
- 5 Critical thinking and analysis
- 6 Complex problem-solving
- 7 Leadership and social influence
- 8 Emotional intelligence
- 9 Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation
- 10 Systems analysis and evaluation

Declining

- 1 Manual dexterity, endurance and precision
- 2 Memory, verbal, auditory and spatial abilities
- 3 Management of financial, material resources
- 4 Technology installation and maintenance
- 5 Reading, writing, math and active listening
- 6 Management of personnel
- 7 Quality control and safety awareness
- 8 Coordination and time management
- 9 Visual, auditory and speech abilities
- 10 Technology use, monitoring and control

Source: Future of Jobs Report 2018, World Economic Forum

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM
COMMITTED TO IMPROVING THE STATE OF THE WORLD

The Report identifies a shift in the division of labour between humans, machines and algorithms. “Automation, robotization and digitization” are impacting the way we work. That resulting impact is determining the growing skills required by 2022:

- **Analytical thinking and innovation**
- **Active Learning & Learning Strategies**
- **Emotional Intelligence**
- **Reasoning, Problem solving and Ideation**
- **Leadership & Social Influence**

Isn't it fascinating to note that the growing skills make up the “human element” of the role – things like emotional intelligence, creativity and leadership? Are these skills you have and are you implementing them in your role?

For those of you who own a copy of my book “A-Z Pearls of Wisdom”, you'll know that I identify the skills of the Personal Assistant in an A-Z collation. The nature of the PA Role (“no two days are the same”!) means this is an impressive list ranging from “Assertiveness” to “Zeal”. And mapping across your own skillsets to align with these identified A-Z skills can be great to determine gaps in your learning and your development needs.

As ever, we'd love to support you on your learning journey.



Problem Solving: Promoting a Solution Focused Office

You're probably the "go to" person when problems arise at work aren't you? The expectation from your Executives and your team is that you have all the answers and with a wave of your metaphoric magic wand can deliver and save the day!

So how do you go about keeping your cool and doing just that?

I'm going to share valuable learning with you so you can more effectively problem solve and ensure a solution focused office.

Let's kick off with some interesting research conducted by the World Economic Forum and The Future of Jobs Report. The Report is really interested to understand the impact of AI and robotisation on our roles and recognise that this will impact the "human" skills that are needed to balance out digitalisation and technology. Consider [the Top 10 growing skills for 2025](#). Isn't it interesting that 5 of these skills are categorised as problem solving skills?

Now consider this quote:

"There is a solution to every problem"

In order to be the most effective at problem solving we need to believe this to be true so that we are striving for solutions. This is what we call an "enabling belief" – believing it to be true will enable you to achieve success.

Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company said "If you believe you can or believe you can't do something, either way you are likely to be right". Your mindset – your "can-do" attitude – is essential to set the foundation for a solution focused office.



Criticism vs feedback

There it is again. The “C” word. On a professional social media site too.

No. Not that “C” word. And No. Absolutely not that “C” word.

What I’m talking about is the word “criticism”. In my opinion an ugly word that makes me outwardly cringe and screw up my face into deep brow-furrows.

So what is it about this word that offends me so much?

Whilst the original definition of the word had both negative and positive connotations, more recently “criticism” has come to stand for “passing judgement” on something (or someone) often with objection. With a negative bias then, criticism is likely to be received in an accusatory way, thereby evoking a defensive response.

Criticism implies that you have “mind read” the world of another. “Judging” something or someone means you are likely to attribute all your own “baggage” – your beliefs, your values, your “stuff” to your opinions.

And there are even more furrows to my brow when we add the word “constructive” to “criticism”.....Now I read it as a snide passing of judgment implying that your personal objection can and should be considered valid. That you’ve passed judgment on me and are far more superior to me. I’m definitely not won over on that one.

So, what’s the solution here? It’s this.

Let’s avoid the use of the “C” word and instead replace it with the far superior “F” word. Feedback.

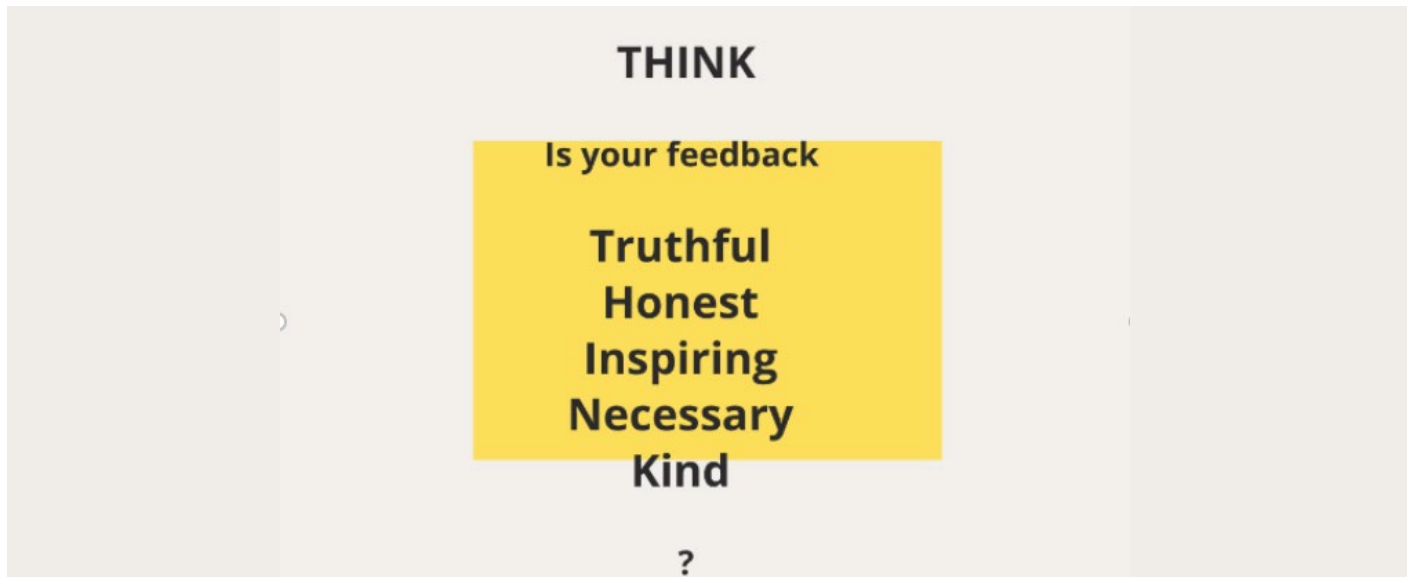
Let’s replace judgment with curiosity so we are better placed to understand the “baggage” and “stuff” that’s going on for someone else.

And, let’s ensure we consider the characteristics of high quality feedback so we deliver our message with the very best intentions.

In the case of Criticism Vs Feedback, there is only one winner.

The highest quality feedback is:

- **Delivered face-to-face and one-to-one**
- **Optimised when we are in the same room as one another**



About what is changeable – concentrate on the development of the person you are feeding back to:

- **A two-way conversation**
- **Based on two outcomes**

Motivational feedback to inspire and motivate someone to carry on doing what they are doing

Developmental feedback to help identify new and/or better ways of doing something

Delivered in a timely manner. Delivering feedback three months down the line at an annual appraisal will not have the same impact as feedback delivered soon after an event

Factual, with examples based on your first-hand experience (definitely not hearsay)

Focused on future development – suggest improvements or changes that will aid the personal and professional development of the person you are feeding back to

Offered and requested:

- **“I’d like to provide you with some feedback please – is that okay?”**
- **“I’d like to ask for your feedback please – is that okay?”**

Considered as a “gift” that you are giving to someone – it is an opportunity for them to improve

Received as data – thank the person giving you the feedback. It is now your choice what you do with this data



Optimising Written Communication

Let me share some interesting research with you. The image below is taken from one of our accredited training programmes.

Your Excellency
VIRTUAL ACADEMY FOR EAs PAs & EXECUTIVES

SFJ
AWARDS
APPROVED CENTRE

Written Communication

Based on a sample of 100 people given sentences of 27, 17 and 10 words in length to read. They could read the sentences only once. The results showed:

No of words in sentence	% understood
27	4%
17	75%
10	96%

Source: The Institute of Industrial Psychologists

Consider this when you are tapping away at your emails!

Apply this research when you are writing that business report!

Shorten those longer sentences for more impact and better understanding.

(And, by the way, those last three sentences were 10 words long!).

If you are interested in further training, contact us today



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