Trust Your Intuition

Plus
How to Get Along with Your Boss
Winning Ways at Interviews
Decrease Your Stress at The Office
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Welcome to April’s issue of PA Enterprise. Office professionals now do more than ever before. The old stereotype of the filing and typing secretary is now completely redundant. Today’s office professionals are information managers – vital cogs in the machinery of business. Actually, the machinery metaphor, too, is misleading, because office professionals are so often required to think outside the box and problem solve. With an understanding of the organisations you work in that is often second to none, more and more of you are being leaned on to provide solutions – whether process or management related. Often employers can be a bit slow to recognise the input that office professionals have. Too often taken for granted, the profession is populated by some of the most competent and accomplished people in society, shaping the future through a commitment to lifelong learning, professionalism, communication and teamwork. Keeping up-to-date with, and helping pioneer, technology is a great way of moving through the ranks, but it is only by utilising it in tandem with good soft skills – such as time-management and efficient communication – that the workplace experience and productivity really benefit.

With these thoughts in mind, our articles How to Get Along with Your Boss, Managing People for Performance, Trust Your Intuition, Winning Ways at Interviews, Business Travel: From Pain to Pleasure and Ten Things You Can Do to Decrease Your Stress at The Office all, in their various ways, look to improving the working experience and empowering yourself. Numerous studies down the years have pointed out the correlation between a healthy office environment and high productivity – as well as good employee wellbeing. In this vein – as it’s of course incredibly important to value life outside of work – we bring you a wonderful April menu, with three fantastic recipes that are perfect for this amazing weather.

Finally, because we’re all slightly mad about DeskDemon here, we’ve designed the DeskDemon’s-on-My-Mind Word Search for you. Okay, so maybe we’re being over enthusiastic, but what’s the harm in a bit of self-promotion now and then?

We hope you have a great April, and that you enjoy this spring issue of PA Enterprise.
5 How to Get Along with Your Boss
How to tackle that tough problem, a difficult boss.

8 Managing People for Performance
Managing people’s performance is key to productivity.

11 Trust Your Intuition
We all have inner voices. Find out how to make more of the positive one that is intuition.

13 Winning Ways at Interviews
Everyone has to go through an interview. Find out how to crack the interview conundrum.

15 Our Tasty April Menu
Spring is here. Our April menu is the perfect way to begin the new regime.

18 Business Travel: From Pain to Pleasure
Business travel is a fact of life for many people, but how do you turn it into an enjoyable experience?

20 Ten Things You Can Do to Decrease Your Stress at The Office
Stress can be beaten – you just need to know the ways how.

24 DeskDemon’s-on-My-Mind Word Search
We all know that it's good to love your job, but perhaps we’ve taken our love of DeskDemon one step too far.

25 Past Articles on DeskDemon?
Think you might have missed something? Find out what articles we’ve had recently at DeskDemon.
My corporate career, excluding my VA (virtual assistant) experience, spans over 25 years. I've had government office bosses, travel industry bosses, airline bosses, coachline bosses, hotel bosses, engineering bosses, manufacturing bosses, sales and marketing bosses, human resources bosses, small office bosses, countrywide business bosses, editing bosses, medical bosses, magazine bosses and probably some others I can't remember. I've experienced a wide range of personalities wearing the Boss hat, and I've come to this conclusion: if your boss hates you, you're in trouble. If your boss doesn't understand you, you won't fare much better. It doesn't matter that you're a Sister Theresa clone; if your boss doesn't like you, don't expect any favours.

What you have to remember is that bosses are human, and as with all other humans on the planet there are going to be those that you cannot get along with no matter how hard you try. Some people are like that. They are very hard to please. You can disregard the fact that they are highly regarded by upper management and have excellent experience and qualifications because you'll find that, despite that, they've never had any specific “people skill” training. They have absolutely no idea how to be a “Boss”. Simple as that. And is that your fault? No. But you do have to live with it. It might not be your fault, but it can be your problem.

A Captive Future

The truth is the boss holds your future prospects in her hands. She can make or break you. She can make your work life a joyous experience, motivating you to dizzy heights, or she can make each day “resignation day”. It all depends on her people skills and what training, if any, she has had in dealing with staff. If you doubt that is significant in this day and age, consider this: you can miss out on advancing up that corporate career ladder if your boss has it in for you. Bad boss-employee relationships are one of the main reasons for high staff turnover.

Your Boss isn't only your supervisor, the head honcho. She is supposed to be that person best equipped to assist you and the entire department to achieve set goals. One would expect she has some kind of understanding about the job you do. Chances are, she hasn't a clue. However, she should know what the company's goals are and where her department fits into the scheme of things. She should also know what the company looks for in its executives. She should know how your future career aspirations fit into this overall picture – and even if you have a future there. Cultivate a healthy relationship and this same boss can even help you up that corporate ladder. A right word in the right ear can make all the difference. You know what they say: it's not what you know; it's whom you know.

How to Get Along with Your Boss

By Donna Eliassen

How to tackle that tough problem, a difficult boss
know. As corny as that sounds, sadly, it's often the truth.

Don't despair – this is not a one-way street. Yes, you do need your boss on your side, but, believe it or not, she needs you in her court too. How can she accomplish her departmental goals without your cooperation? You can make her look good or bad. Mind you, if she makes her look bad, perhaps you shouldn't even be worrying about how to get along with her. Perhaps you should be looking for a new job!

Using Communication to Unlock the Door
Let's assume you would like to establish a healthy working relationship with your boss. How do you go about it when she is the ogre to beat all ogres? The key is in communicating with her.

Study her. Know her. Understand her priorities and what is expected of her. When you know that, think about how you can help her achieve it. You want to make her look good, because by making her look good, you make the department – of which you are a member – also look good. You want to look good, right?

Know her work style. If her instructions have confused you, ask for clarification. Don't be afraid to ask for feedback, and if she roars, count to ten and accept her roars with gracious dignity. (Honestly, if she is the bear you believe she is, she will be found out by management in the end, and her days with the company, or at least in your department, may well be numbered. You can outlast her!) Not all bosses are so scary, and let's just assume your boss is merely inexperienced. So let's have some compassion and persevere here. If she believes you are sincere in your work efforts, she may be more inclined to help you and try to understand your own aspirations. You might not be able to expect “friend” status, but if she understands you and accepts you, you're half way there!

So, get to know your boss's priorities and goals. No, go further than that. Anticipate her needs before she asks. Impress her. Do your job well and help her do job well. Will she appreciate this? You betcha!

Of course, there are also those personality clashes that are a bit harder to handle, so what can you do? Well, for starters, what is her personality type? Is she informal or conservative? Does she use an open door policy or does she prefer you to make an appointment to speak to her? Do you have to call her Mrs, or does she prefer you use her first name? What little idiosyncrasies does she display that you can use to your advantage? Does she appreciate someone sharing a joke with her? Does she prefer a deadly silent department where a pin dropping sounds like a bomb explosion? Know your boss!

Always show respect. Yes, even if she doesn't deserve it in your eyes. As the boss, she automatically has the upper hand. Try to eliminate habits and behaviours that you know rile her. Show initiative and interest. Don't wait to be told to do something you know needs doing. Respect your boss's time. And, most of all, never badmouth your boss to others. Regardless of how trustworthy you believe the gossip recipient to be, badmouthing always gets back via the notorious office grapevine.

A Common Humanity
Remember, your boss is only human, like you. She will have her off days, like you. She will make mistakes, like you. And, as with all professionals, some bosses are “naturals” and others struggle because it's not their strong point. And you never know… maybe her boss is a pain in the neck to her! Maybe...
upper management are hard to get along with and make her life miserable. I’ve emphasized the need to get along with your boss, but it is important that you do not become a “yes man”. “Yes men” are phoney and very obvious, and nobody, not even an ogre boss, respects such a person. So forget any false flattery if you want to be respected and taken seriously.

Also, don’t try to be “buddies” with your boss. This may well make her feel awkward and uncomfortable. She may feel her position is being compromised or that you will no longer respect her or that you will expect special treatment. Besides, this can also backfire on you. If this boss likes having you around and comes to rely on you too much, do you think she is going to be keen to see you promoted out of her department where she will have to manage without you?

Keep your nose clean; do as is expected of you and a little bit more; don’t abuse sick days; be respectful, cooperative and trustworthy; and prove you are a valuable team player. Okay, maybe you are already all of these things and you are working for a true ogre whose management style needs a major overhaul. Maybe, despite your best efforts, your head ogre growls at you and makes your life miserable. If you have done all you can do to get along with her and do your job you can now do one of two things.

If all Else Fails…
You can approach the HR department and ask for a departmental divorce on the grounds of incompatibility. Or you can decide how important working in that particular company is to your future goals, because if it doesn’t look like your boss is moving on anywhere soon you might have to consider doing so yourself. Maybe you have to look for a new job either in a new company or a new department.

And look on the bright side… such an experience will be invaluable one day when you become a boss. You’re ahead already because, even if you aren’t sure what you should be doing, at the very least, you will know what not to do!

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Managers who have had any form of training will be familiar with the idea of setting goals or objectives, and probably with the principles of appraising performance. With this in mind, why is it so many managers keep asking about how to motivate their staff or how to get more from them?

This whole area is a key differentiator of good managers and is a large part of what managers are being paid for! In this article I want to offer some ideas to help you become better at getting the performance you desire from your teams. I will suggest some of the reasons why you, and other managers, do not perhaps do it very well and what the benefits will be when you begin to apply the principles.

Let us begin by stating the obvious: in order to manage people for performance you need to clearly establish what denotes good performance for each person and role. Too many managers think that this just means setting the goals. Not so, as you cannot manage those. Defining good performance can include what the outputs and results are, and how they are being achieved. That is the part you can manage. Recognise that managing for performance is an ongoing process and not an occasional intervention or snapshot.

Reasons for poor performance management:
- People do not understand what is needed to manage performance.
- Managers assume people will work towards their objectives.
- Too many managers think that money is all that motivates people to do what they need to.
- Managers are too busy spending their time on the wrong priorities to manage for performance.
- Organisations think that because they have an annual appraisal process that they are managing performance.

If you rely on an annual appraisal (or review) as a mechanism for setting objectives and reviewing how people have performed, what problems does this encourage? Are the objectives meaningful? Do they stay in the forefront of people’s minds? Do they stay relevant throughout the year? How are they monitored throughout the year? When you come to reviewing them, how valuable is the conversation?

What to Do
Firstly, everyone should have clearly defined standards of performance and/or key performance indicators (KPIs). These are same for all those doing similar roles and provide a baseline for performance. There are two types of these: the quantitative and the qualitative. The former are more straightforward to do as they will involve numbers, for example, number of calls handled per day, time to respond to queries and so on. The latter are more challenging because they require some thought in order to clearly define the standard in a behavioural way that removes most of the
subjectivity. This can refer to, for example, quality of work, appearance of someone’s workplace, answering the phone or following corporate standards. When people are working to these KPIs they should be in a position to deliver the performance you want.

Although these KPIs need to be clearly outlined and understood by all involved, the key to managing for performance is to follow the Pareto principle and identify which 20 percent are the ones that contribute to 80 percent of the outcomes. These are the things you need to manage. You want to be able to monitor them, to revisit them and raise the standard in order to get even higher performance.

The other thing people need is clear goals or objectives. These should be clearly stated, perhaps following the SMART principle (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bounded). The measure can be either numeric or behavioural, which means clear definitions. Goals help in many ways, especially as they link to many of the models of motivation and the fact that a sense of achievement is a powerful buzz for most of us.

When setting goals for people in the workplace, especially if you want to manage performance, think about the timescales you aim for. Giving people three or five goals at an appraisal with a long timescale will not necessarily provide much drive or motivation. To make them meaningful consider setting several goals with different time deadlines, mainly short and medium term. When they are completed set more – and so the process becomes more dynamic. It also enables you to reflect any changes in the business and ensure the relevance of the goals.

How to Do it
Make sure you think of this as a key priority – so give it time! Make sure that the KPIs are clearly stated, written down and that everyone has a copy.

When you agree the goals with your team members, get them to develop an action plan for how they will achieve each one. Have them do it and give you a copy within 48 hours of setting the goals. A simple way of doing this can be to use a simple diagram such as a stairway.

Ask them to identify the key steps to take in order to move from “now” to the goal. Between you, agree the timescales for the key stages and also discuss any help required and possible problems. Once this is all agreed and finalised, you will have a copy and the team member has theirs. Now is the first key action for you: put those dates in your diary to make sure that you will sit with the team member and review their progress. This is an “A” priority activity and should not be moved!

As your team members work through their action plans and you have your regular reviews, you will be monitoring their progress in a timely and effective manner. These reviews are almost mini-appraisals and by carrying them out at the agreed times you will make life easier for all concerned when the time comes for the annual appraisal, because it will be a consolidation of these meetings.

During these reviews ask for what needs to be improved, what has gone well and what is going to happen next. Talk about the KPIs that are relevant to their plan and make sure they are meeting these. This monitors and manages for performance. Provide feedback (on performance or behaviour, not personality) whether it means criticism, a reprimand or praise. By having these regular reviews, you can avoid the management fault of not telling people how they are doing!

When the goal is achieved, carry on and set the next goal. Get the action plans and continue as before. You are not only managing performance, you are helping your team to feel more involved, more successful and more motivated. Remember, people just want to know what is expected of them, be given the support to do it and then told how they are doing. What it requires from you is to make time to have the regular meetings with your team; after all they are the ones who provide the performance you need. Give them your time and they will give you the performance.

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Your documents grow but your pockets don’t. That means your pockets get torn under the strain of too much paper. Not any more. With a 20mm fold along every edge, the new Expanding Pocket from Esselte can expand to accommodate up to 200 A4 pages. And with the option of a metal reinforced spine, even the weightiest document is held safely in place.

FROM TO DO... TO DONE
Are you aware of your inner voice? Do you pay attention to it? I'm not talking about the one who puts you down. I'm talking about the one that softly whispers ideas and suggestions to you – the kind that the other voice might shout down, crying “Are you mad? That requires stepping out of our comfort zone, and that is to be avoided at all costs!” (Even if the cost is living a life of mediocrity instead of the one of your dreams.)

Sadly, the latter voice is the one most of us are aware of and pay attention to. The gentler one that is our intuition is often ignored – that is if we’re hearing what it tells us at all. The great pity here is that it’s our intuition that really has our best interests at heart. Our gremlin (the louder, more aggressive voice) does have our welfare at heart too, but in a protective way. The intuition’s way is more expansive.

Protectiveness Versus Expansiveness
What’s wrong with protecting us? Well, it limits us and ultimately erodes our wellbeing at a soul level. And believe it or not, that’s not good for our physical or emotional wellbeing! If you’re unfulfilled at a soul level, you will slowly and imperceptibly develop a nagging feeling of general discontent which can have a rippling effect on your mood, self esteem and ultimately your physical and mental health. But that’s for another article!

The gentle voice of your intuition will, if
listened to, stretch you beyond your comfort zone, but never more than you’re capable of. It will challenge you, but also support you. It always has your best interests at heart at every level: physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. It will not only gently nudge you in scary directions that will yield huge and unimaginable rewards, but it will also gently warn when to stop or turn around.

From Challenges to Options
When you tune into your intuition and allow yourself to be guided by it you will be surprised at how much easier formerly assumed “challenges” will become; and how much good fortune lands in your lap (a process we call synchronicity); and how good you feel: at ease with yourself and all your life experiences, even the ones you wouldn’t choose!

If you’re not used to listening to your intuition, learning to tune into it will require time and patience. At first, you may be unsure which voice is which (especially as your gremlin often sounds very reasonable), and using your intuition is very much like using your physical muscles. You need to use it regularly in order for it to be in the shape you want.

Gaining Familiarity With Your Intuition
So how do you get to know your intuition better? First of all, start to watch out for hunches, feelings and ideas that crop up. Pay attention to the voice that accompanies it. Is it gentle, positive and supportive? If it’s aggressive, domineering or using scaremongering tactics it’s more likely to be your gremlin. If you’re getting a warning feeling about it, ask yourself if it is loud and threatening (the gremlin) or an insistent “knowing” (your intuition).

The scary thing about trusting your intuition when it’s new to you is that it’s not based on logic and often what it suggests to you cannot be justified logically. But with practice and trust you’ll learn that the “knowing” that something is the right thing to do is in your best interests. It’ll be easier to shrug off your own gremlin and that of others (who will fear for your best interests on your behalf).

From Humble Beginnings…
The key to developing the all-essential trust is to start small. Don’t make life-changing decisions based on your intuition if you’re not familiar with it (you might still be confusing your two inner voices). Do ask your intuition to guide you with smaller decisions, and wait for the gentle knowing feeling to arrive. Don’t expect an instant answer, but watch out for it – it will come, and you’ll know it when it does.

Over time, as you tune in more and more, you’ll find you suffer less and less with worry or anxiety. You’ll trust all will work out well, and often you’ll find it works out better than you could ever have imagined!

Hilda Carroll is a life and business coach who specialises in helping her clients to enjoy the journey, by realising the ability to be happy while they pursue their goals, the achievement of which then becomes a bonus, rather than the basis of their happiness. More details can be found at www.thehappinessbusiness.com.
Let's face it, job interviews are about as much fun as a hot wax with no anaesthetic. After all, attempting to showcase your talents to a bunch of strangers, usually against the clock and on someone else’s turf, is not a natural act. Nevertheless, if you really want the job then you have to crack the interview conundrum. Giving “good interview” is all about the three Ps: Preparation, Presentation and Positive thinking. All interviews are basically made of the same hellish stuff, so let's start at the beginning with the introductions.

The Introduction
The interview introduction can be a slippery customer and one that can easily get away from you. Once you enter that chamber of horrors commonly known as the interview room, you’re on your own, never sure if you’re saying or doing the right thing. The harder you try to relax the more nervous you seem to feel. Simply stringing a coherent sentence together seems like one of the labours of Hercules. Of course the room is unbearably hot and your mouth is unusually dry so your tongue swells, cutting off the oxygen to your brain. Panic grips you. Finally, just as you’re about to turn on your heels and make an undignified dash for the nearest fire escape, the kindly interviewer extends a friendly hand and welcomes you. Now what do you do?

Fear not. Introductions don’t have to be embarrassing, distressing or tearful episodes. Introductions can be easy and fun. You simply have to approach things calmly and logically. Stop and think about it for a moment. You’re meeting someone for the first time; it’s a clean sheet, an opportunity for you to write your own ticket without preconceptions or bias getting in the way. All you have to do is arrive on time, dress smartly, check your teeth for remnants of your last meal, be yourself and make sure you’re wearing industrial strength deodorant. What could be simpler? To build up confidence you can always practice introducing yourself in front of the bathroom mirror before you actually attend any interviews. You might want to try this in the comfort of your own home rather than in the washroom of your local pizzeria, where introducing yourself to fellow patrons might be frowned upon.

The Refreshment Offer
Having successfully navigated the interview introductions, your next big challenge is to deal with an offer of refreshments. Something as seemingly benign as a cup of tea or coffee can wreak havoc during an interview. Having to juggle hot liquids in flimsy plastic cups while convincing a stranger of your marketing expertise or business acumen should always be avoided. Accepting or declining refreshments is something of a judgement call, as you don’t want to appear ill at ease, but remember the risks are high. Loud slurping or gulping won’t endear you to the interviewer while spilling hot chocolate down the front of your cream and oatmeal business suit is a blunder few candidates can easily recover from. So, if you find fear and anxiety has made your mouth as dry as Death Valley on the hottest day of the year simply ask for a glass...
of water. It's probably your safest option.

The First Few Minutes
According to certain eminent psychologists, who study such things, the first few minutes of any interview are crucial in determining the final outcome. It seems that first impressions really do count. With the preliminaries over, it's time to tackle the main event. By this stage of the game you'll either be brimming with confidence or desperate for the lavatory, a cigarette and a family-sized candy bar. Whatever happens you must stay focused on the task at hand. 105 seconds is all the time you're going to get to make the right impression.

The key is not to panic. DON'T PANIC! If you're properly prepared then nothing can go wrong. You should know exactly what questions to ask, what to say, and when to say it. Try to anticipate the questions the interviewer is likely to ask, and have your answers ready. But remember, pause for a moment before answering. It looks more natural. Keep your delivery clear, consistent, positive, short and simple; then you won't go far wrong. And try not to get sidetracked or go off at a tangent.

Interviewers are People Too!
However doubtful you are, take it on trust that having your highly polished, recently manicured fingernails pulled out with rusty tweezers is far worse than your average job interview. Interviewers aren't the monsters they might first appear. They're just ordinary people doing a difficult job. If the interviewer makes a poor decision then both you and your new employer will suffer the consequences. The best thing that you can probably do is place your trust in the interviewer's experience while checking the chair you're offered for chains and thumbscrews. At the end of all this torment, after saying and doing everything right, you still might not get the job. Sometimes life is fickle. In such a case, try to get some positive feedback on your interview technique and move on.

The End: The Final Challenge
Typically, just as you start to relax and feel you're building a rapport with your interviewer you'll find the whole torturous process suddenly coming to an end. And it's now, at the end of the interview that you face your biggest challenge. As your confidence levels climb it's tempting to drop your guard and divert from your original interview strategy. Resist this impulse. Technically known as “end-of-interview euphoria” you must fight the urge to say something witty or clever. In the intoxicatingly thin air of your newly found confidence the chances are that your wit and cleverness will be interpreted as glibness or even rudeness. Take it from someone who has suffered this fate; fight your urges and keep your mouth shut unless you're asked a direct question.

It's maybe not the big finale you imagined or rehearsed, but it's safer by far to conclude your interview with a thank you, a smile and a gentle reminder of your contact details. Before you stand up to leave, especially if you're one of that daredevil breed who recklessly accepts liquid refreshments, make sure that everything spillable is out of harm's way. Now, all that remains for you to do is get out of there. At this last delicate stage of the proceedings it's advisable not to run. Hazards are everywhere, and tripping over the wastebasket, upsetting the coffee table or ripping the telephone line out of its wall-socket will usually go against you. Whenever possible it's best to leave your potential new employer's office building, fixtures and fittings just as you found them. Play by the rules and you'll walk out of there with a new job in the bag. Congratulations. Alternatively, tomorrow's another day and another interview. ■

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Our tasty April menu heralds the warmer weather to come

Spring is here. The need for hearty fuel to heat us through the winter is gone. In fact, it’s really time to eat lighter food, to change our eating habits to adapt to the new season. Our April menu is the perfect way to begin the new regime. After a fantastic Thai prawn salad – a wonderful mix of herbs and nutrients – the salmon with herb butter is a beautifully light but tasty main. Then, what better way to herald the onset of the warmer months than a chocolate layer cake with strawberries? Enjoy!

Thai Prawn Salad
Serves 2

Ingredients:
- 250g/2½ cups peeled, cooked extra large tiger prawns
- 1 small fresh red chilli, finely chopped
- 1 spring onion, finely chopped
- 2 tbsp fresh coriander, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp fresh parsley, finely chopped
- 2 cm piece fresh lemon grass, finely chopped
- 1 small garlic clove, crushed
- ½ tbsp soft light brown sugar
- 15ml/1 tbsp lemon juice
- 30ml/2 tbsp lime juice
- Salt and black pepper
- Fresh coriander sprigs, to garnish

1. Place the prawns in a bowl. Add in all the remaining ingredients. Stir well, cover with cling film and leave to marinate in the fridge for approx. 2-3 hours, mixing and turning the prawns from time to time.

2. Spoon the prawn salad onto a plate, garnish with fresh coriander and serve.

Salmon with Herb Butter
Serves 2

Ingredients:
- 25g/2 tbsp butter, softened
- Rind of ¼ small lemon, finely grated
- 15ml/1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh dill
- 1 tsp chopped fresh parsley
- 2 salmon steaks
- Salt and ground black pepper
- 2 lemon slices, halved, to garnish
- 2 fresh dill sprigs, to garnish

1. Place the butter, lemon rind, lemon juice, dill, parsley and seasoning in a small bowl and mix together with a fork until it blends well.

2. Spoon the butter onto a piece of greaseproof paper and roll, making it with your hands into a sausage like shape. Twist the ends tightly, wrap in cling film and place in the freezer for 15-20 minutes.

3. Preheat the oven to 190˚C/Gas 5. Cut out two squares of foil big enough to encase the salmon steaks and grease lightly. Place one salmon steak in the centre of each square.

4. Remove the butter from the freezer and slice into four rounds. Place two rounds on top of each salmon steak. Lift up the edges of the foil and crinkle together until sealed.

5. Put the parcels onto a baking sheet and bake for about 20-25 minutes. Remove from the oven and place the unopened parcels in a large plate. Open the parcels and slide the contents onto the plate with the juices.


Did You Know?
Domestic cats hate lemons and other citrus fruits
Chocolate Layer Cake with Strawberries
Serves 6

Ingredients:
Base:
• 225g can cooked whole beetroot, drained with the juice reserved
• 115g/½ cup unsalted butter, softened
• 550g/2½ cups light brown sugar
• 3 eggs
• 15ml/1 tbsp vanilla essence
• 75g dark chocolate, melted
• 285g/2 cups plain flour
• 2 tsp baking powder
• ½ tsp salt
• 120ml/½ cup buttermilk

Frosting
• 450ml/2 cups double cream
• 500g milk chocolate, chopped
• 15ml/1 tbsp vanilla essence

Optional Garnish
• Chocolate curls, to decorate
• Whipped cream
• 4 large strawberries, halved

1. Preheat the oven to 180°C/Gas 4. Grease two 23cm cake tins. Grate the beetroot finely and add it to its juice.

2. Beat the butter, sugar, eggs and vanilla essence until fluffy. Beat in the dark chocolate.

3. Sift together the flour, baking powder and salt. With the mixer on a low speed beginning and ending with the flour mixture alternately beat in the flour and buttermilk. Add the beetroot, the juice and beat for one minute.

4. Fill the two tins and bake for 30-35 minutes, until a skewer inserted in the centre comes out clean. Cool for 15 minutes, then unmould gently.

5. To make the frosting, heat the cream until it just begins to boil, stirring occasionally to prevent scorching. Remove from the heat and stir in the milk chocolate and vanilla essence until the chocolate is melted and smooth. Strain into a bowl and chill, stirring every 10-15 minutes for one hour.

6. Sandwich and cover the cake with the frosting. Top with the chocolate curls and dollops of whipped cream with a halved strawberry added on top of the whipped cream. Allow to set for about half an hour. Chill before serving.
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For some people, including a great deal of PAs, travel is an integral part of their job. However, whether this is a blessing or a curse depends on a number of issues. Fortunately, there are a number of things you can do to make it the former rather than keep on suffering the latter.

It sounds great when you tell people that you’re always jetting off somewhere; it conjures up images of, “this week Tokyo, next week New York, and then on to San Francisco, Paris, Berlin…closing deals…meeting exciting people…enjoying perks and fine dining.”

Unfortunately, for the vast majority of business travellers the truth is far removed from this happy “jetsetter” picture. Travel can simply mean seeing the inside of one corporate hotel after another, spending hours hanging around in identical airports, and endless taxi rides from airport to hotel and from hotel to meeting (if it’s not in the hotel itself) and then on to the airport again. There is something horribly disorientating about the whole process. And on top of that there’s the jetlag, bleary eyes, airport and airline food, work on planes, weekends away from friends and family…this hell has nothing in common with the wonderful image above.

So, how can work travel not destroy your life as you know it? Or, even if you don’t have to travel regularly for work, how do you make the whole trip an adventure rather than a dreary bore? Here are a list of possibilities and ideas to consider:

**From Work to Play**
Why not extend the trip into a holiday, bringing partners, children and/or friends? Your own flight and accommodation is paid, so part of the costs are already covered. Of course, you’ll need to okay these extra people with your boss and make sure that you’ll actually be able to take time off (i.e. not be in meetings the whole trip) so that it proves to be a proper break away from work. Extending your stay can turn what would have been a quick run-of-the-mill business trip into an adventure and learning experience.

**Learn About Your Destination**
Put your destination into some kind of context by learning a few facts out about it beforehand, even if it’s just on the flight. Otherwise, the place just becomes an airport and hotel and nothing else. Website and travel guides are invaluable in this respect. Hotel concierges are generally founts of local knowledge, knowing the best places to eat and some wonderful local tourist sites. If you have some choice over your hotel then try to pick one that isn’t part of a huge corporate chain, and in an interesting area. This will give you the best opportunity to explore your area with the limited time you have. Even if you only have one spare hour, try not to spend it in your hotel room or in the airport departure lounge: get out and take a look at where you are staying. Go for a meal or a coffee – make sure you don’t just remember the place as just more of the same.

**Air Travel: Peak Time Travel**
If possible, it’s advisable to not travel at peak times. This obviously depends on your itinerary but, if possible, it can prove to be a good decision. Firstly, the airport and your flight will be quieter. Secondly, the flight will be cheaper
(which is more a concern for your company). And thirdly, if you can plan it so you arrive the night before your meeting, rather than just before it, then you will have a chance to see the place, limiting the dizzying feeling of plane hopping.

Air Travel: Specifying Your Meal and Choosing Your Seat
You should remember to do both of these when booking your ticket. If you are a vegetarian or vegan, then choosing your meal is especially important. When choosing your seat there are a surprise number of things to think about:
- Front of plane: Allows you to get off first (generally).
- Over the wings: Gives you the least turbulence.
- By bulkheads and exits: More legroom, but no seat in front for you to stow your bag.
- Window seats: For if you like to see the view and escape from it all to sleep.
- Aisle seats: For if you are nervous of air travel, or want to get up often to stretch your legs or use the toilet.
Whether you are sitting aisle or window, do get up and stretch your legs during the flight, and washing your hands and face can give you a semblance of freshness.

Air Travel: Online Check-in
It is now possible to check-in online beforehand on a number of airlines, making your airport experience simple. Just print your ticket out at the airport (remember to bring the payment card you used to book the tickets along with you) and take any extra luggage to the baggage drop. Beforehand, you can also check for delays, but remember that planes can get pushed forward again, so you might need to be at the airport either way.

Air Travel: Leave the Kitchen Sink at Home
We so often take far too much stuff with us when we travel. Really think about what is a realistic amount of clothing, books and shoes. How many days are you away for? Are you really going to get through three books on the flight? And if you’re just not sure what you’ll want to wear just make that decision now, rather than in the hotel room with your huge bag crushing the bed. If you’re going to be away for a long time then just wash your clothes on the trip: there’s something nice about getting laundry done whilst travelling – it makes you feel fresh and in control, because you’re travelling light! Some luggage makers sell bags that are just small enough to go in as your hand luggage. They are a good idea because firstly it speeds up your trip at both ends and secondly gives a strict limit on how much you can bring with you.

Keeping a sense of bovine tranquillity is generally the best way to deal with travelling long distances and the accompanying delays. In fact, it is a good state of mind for the whole travel experience. The phrase “long-haul” really sums up what business travel can feel like. If you can just try to get some time and space for yourself during it, and take the travel experience out of the airport and corporate hotel then you can turn it from a curse and into a blessing.

Business Travel Tips
- Extend the trip into a short (or long) holiday.
- Bring friends or family (after okaying it with the boss).
- Read a travel guide about your destination before you get there.
- Choose an independent, “non corporate” hotel – ask colleagues and friends for recommendations.
- Ask your hotel concierge about the local attractions.
- Spend that hour before you need to catch your flight exploring the local area instead on dozing on your bed.
- Travel at off-peak times if viable.
- Choose your flight meal beforehand, especially if a vegetarian.
- Reserve a seat in your favoured position beforehand.
- Check in online.
- Don’t take what you won’t need – pack light!
- Stay calm and collected during the trip – stress doesn’t get you anywhere.
The world we live in is nothing but a sphere of chaotic pressure that keeps building until it bursts like a volcano. We are bombarded with pressure from our employers, our customers and families to the point in which some people break. Most of us spend between eight and 16 hours a day at the office, which equates to almost two-thirds of our lives being in a place we really do not want to be. However, there are things you can do to decrease the stress in your office – and so improve the quality of your life as a whole.

Remember this, what we call stress is really what we put on ourselves. Whilst other people can influence the way we feel, ultimately we are the ones who choose whether we are going to be stressed or not. You are in control of how you are going to feel, no one else. Stress as such is going on in our heads, so the real secret to de-stressing is to find things that would make us happy and content within. Here are ten ideas to decrease that stress.

1. Have a Photo of the Happiest Time in Your Life
Think back through your life: what is the happiest moment? It could be the birth of your child, getting married, going out on a fantastic date, visiting some outstanding place or when you bought your puppy dog. No matter what it is, you will almost certainly have a photo of that time. Take that photo and put it on your desk to remind you of that happy time, as this will be one of the tools you need to beat stress in your office.

The happiest time in my life, and where I felt like the luckiest man in the world, was the day my wife stepped out of the limousine at the church for our wedding. I had never seen my wife look so beautiful and I made sure when I felt those feelings that I would remember them forever. So, on my desk at work, I have a picture of my wife getting out of the limousine and each time I feel stressed I simply take a few moments to look at that picture and remember that moment in time. You brain is an amazing part of your body; no matter how many times I look at that photo, my brain releases the same feelings I had on the day and helps me snap out of feeling stressed. Use the happy times to control the times when you feel the most vulnerable and stressed.

2. Think of Your Boss Yelling at You Naked
Everyone has nightmare stories of their bosses being a grouch and I have certainly had my fair share, but most
people who talk of being excessively stressed often relate that stress to a boss who is abusive and yells a lot. Well, first off, if you are working in an environment where you boss is abusive, get out now! Nobody has to put up with that and, remember, life is far too short – regardless of the money. Is money worth so much that it is worth dying tomorrow for from a stress related heart attack? No!

However, if you have a boss who yells at you a lot, just for the sake of yelling, and really is quite rude, simply imagine them yelling at you naked. If someone flew into your office absolutely stark naked, would you take them seriously. Of course not! So, why take a boss who comes in and yells at you seriously? If your boss were an effective communicator he or she would not need to yell at you.

The next time your boss comes in, force yourself to think of him or her absolutely naked. When you do this, see how you react. After a bit of practice you will find you are able to handle the situation much better than before and cope with that grouchy boss.

3. Get Up and Do Some Office Exercises
No one on the planet can deny that doing exercise gets the blood going and burns off the stress. Though sneaking away during the day can be really difficult, there are other office exercises that can bring you a lot of benefits. Office exercises such as rolling your shoulders, clenching your hands and releasing them, and neck exercises all help release the stress.

Often, much of our built up stress is simply due to sitting at the computer all day looking at the screen. Make sure that every hour you get up and stretch for at least five minutes. You will find that if you do not do this, over a period of time it will lead to aches and pains, which can help increase your stress.

To get the best office exercises for you to do simply talk to your GP or visit a physiotherapist and they’ll be able to help you develop an exercise plan. You’ll be surprised how much easier life is to cope with.

4. Schedule Enough Time to Go Between Meetings
I worked for a bank about five years ago and I have never met an organisation that has so many meetings. My whole day constituted of going from one meeting to another and I learnt one very important lesson: if I did not run my schedule then my meetings would. Make sure that when you schedule an appointment or a meeting you include travel time to and from a meeting.

At this firm I worked for, if you did not schedule travel time they would simply book meetings next to each other – even if the next meeting was across the other side of the city. They would simply expect you to immediately appear at that other meeting.

Message to all workers: Instant teleporters only exist in science fiction, so make sure you give yourself enough time to get from one meeting to another or you are going to stress out.

5. Plan Your Day
We talked about scheduling time to get from one meeting to another in the previous point but there is an extension
to this. Make sure you plan your day, not your business associates. All too often I hear management say, “I did not get lunch today,” or, “I have been on the run and have not had a chance to stop.” Come on, get a grip; you are in control and it is up to you!

The first thing you should do in every job you work in is to make sure you schedule two decent breaks a day, which should include at least half an hour for lunch and a 20 minute break at some other time. If you are like most people you will use something like Microsoft Outlook or Lotus Notes to manage your day. Both of these allow you to schedule unavailable time in your calendar, so do it!

By scheduling your time, you can ensure you have enough time to take a break, do a little meditation, and relax and prepare for the rest of the day. If you are like me and work long hours, then you should also be putting into your plan a decent break of at least an hour and half an hour to exercise, even if it is just using the treadmill. If you do not do this, it will catch you up to you and you will be a statistic at 40. Do not laugh: my leading hand lost his life because he did not look after himself. It could happen to you.

6. Limit the Amount of Time Spent Dealing with E-mails

Technology is a wonderful thing, but when technology rules your life you have a big problem. Very quickly technology like e-mail can overwhelm you, causing you to become stressed. One of the rules my team and I have in the office is that nobody must respond to e-mails for more than 60 minutes per day. The reason we have put this rule into place is that many of my team and our corporate clients spend their whole day emailing each other rather than dealing with the issues at hand.

How often have you received an e-mail on one topic and then had the content of the e-mail go off in another direction right before your eyes? At one time I was working in a corporate organisation as an external consultant and noticed that people simply responded to e-mails all day long and got nothing done. Most of the e-mails could have been dealt with a two second phone call.

One of the offices I was working in was open plan and a man working directly across from me refused to speak to me or anyone else on the floor. When he had an issue, he would send an e-mail. This is a crazy way to do business. It does not work and only causes technology stress. My solution, each time he e-mailed me, was to speak the answer back to him. He got the point after a while and my e-mail load went down accordingly!

It does not work and only causes technology stress. My solution, each time he e-mailed me, was to speak the answer back to him. He got the point after a while and my e-mail load went down accordingly!

Technology is supposed to make life easier, not take over your life, so if you have a question and the person is sitting in the next office, get up and knock on their door and ask the question. By doing this you will be undertaking both number 6 and number 3 – which is to get up and do some office exercises. That little bit of walking will help get the blood flowing through your veins.

7. Be Prepared to Say “No”

We all want to get ahead in the world today and I am sure that there is a little part in everyone that wants to live the life of Bill Gates and Donald Trump and be as rich as them. However, most of us make the mistake of simply saying yes to everything that is thrown at us. Now, whilst it is great to say, “Yes,” people like Bill Gates and Donald Trump have teams of people to help them. All of us are only human and sometimes we simply have to say “No!”

Where is the point in saying to our bosses, “Yes we will have this 500 page report written for you tomorrow,” when in reality there is absolutely no chance of that occurring? Sometimes, in this world, you simply have to say “No” and that does not go just for the boss, it goes for the customers as well. My team and I have a seven-day schedule across the various businesses I run and whilst we do not all work seven days a week, sometimes we do work six days a week to get through our responsibilities. One weekend I had a customer – mind you, it was 6.30 am on a Sunday morning – demand that one of my team from our car cleaning business drop everything and clean their car straight away because an important family member was coming.

There were a number of responses I could have given but my simple answer was “No!” The customer ranted and raved for about ten minutes, by which time I was imagining him naked yelling at me – which really was a funny sight – and then when he finished I simply responding by saying, “Then there is your answer,” and I hung up!
up. The funny thing is, he rang me on Monday morning and apologised and we did the top car cleaning service on his car the following week. I charged him more as well!

Most customers will accept the answer of No when they understand why you are saying No. Some will not, but then do you really need them as customers anyway?

8. Take Your Shoes off and Walk on the Carpet
This is my favourite de-stressing activity and it shocks the living daylights out of everyone. I met a lady about ten years ago who was in her early forties. Nothing seemed to shake her. She was always calm and never flustered. I asked her what her secret was and she said, “I always take my shoes off as often as possible so I can stay in touch with the earth.” This was a really profound statement for me, because I never really thought of my shoes as a tool to disconnect us from our surroundings, but if you think about it, it makes sense.

If you go down to the beach, what is the first thing you do? You take off your shoes to feel the sand on your feet and it makes you feel relaxed. If you go to the park with the children, what do you do? Take your shoes off so you can run around and have fun or play in the mud. Whether we realise it or not, when we disconnect ourselves from mother earth we really do start to stress.

I now always take my shoes off when I am working in my office, including my socks, just so I can feel something more inspirational under my feet rather than the hard soles of my shoes. I know another corporate CEO, in Brisbane Australia, who used to walk down to Anzac Square every lunch hour to walk on the grass so that he could stay in touch with the world. Hey, if it works in the movie Pretty Woman, surely it must work in reality.

9. Play Music
Listening to the right type of music is really important when you are trying to reduce stress and find your inner peace. Some music, when listened to whilst stressed, can in fact heighten your stress levels. One type of music that research has shown to help reduce stress is Baroque music. This music is written so that there are only 60 beats per minute and, funnily enough, that is what our heart rate should be. Baroque music has been found to increase the alpha waves in the left and right sides of your brain, which help improve your learning ability, creativity and calmness.

Whilst you are working in the office on a demanding piece of work, simply put some music on and listen to it as you are completing the task – but do watch the type of music you are listening to or it can backfire. Most corporations are now realising the benefits of allowing staff to listen to music during the day. And, with virtually all business computers having a CD drive, it is possible to listen to music on your computer whilst doing your work. You may just need headphones. I work in hundreds of corporate organisations a year and only one had a no music policy and that was because it was a call centre, and so was a policy I can understand. There is no reason why you cannot listen to music during your break, though, to ensure you are feeling calm before hitting those phones again.

10. Meditate
Okay, I can hear it now, “Oh yeah hippy, want us to meditate do you?” Absolutely! Look, many researchers are now coming to the distinct conclusion that meditation can make a huge difference to our day-to-day lives and help us to overcome stress. The core advantage meditation will play in your office is to help you to relax and deal with challenging situations more effectively. The more relaxed you are the more creative you can be in dealing with any issues that arise. I certainly recommend that when you meditate you listen to Baroque music, as it will help increase the alpha waves that will help lead you to a calm feeling. This is especially useful if you do not have a long period to meditate. I recommend one, or preferably two, 20-minute meditation session each day. You will be really surprised the difference it makes to your day. Just try it out; you have nothing to lose and the rest of your life to gain.

The office environment in this millennium is far more stressful than it was a century ago, but there are things you can do about it. But it is up to you! Remember, we only have one life and it is not a dress rehearsal, so get out and reduce the stress your office gives you and have some fun.

Chris Le Roy is a writer and speaker. He has developed a six-step meditation program called Relaxation Techniques for Stress Management. More information can be found at www.1-on-1.biz/MeditationMusic/Relaxation TechniquesForStressManagement.asp.
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