Window or Screen?
Online vs High Street Shopping

Plus
Challenging Your Inner Critic
Office Party Success
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Papers that make business sense
Welcome to the final issue of PA Enterprise for this year. It's been a good year for DeskDemon, with much positive change. We've expanded and redesigned our website. We’ve had some fantastic feedback from many of you and in the Hub, the DeskDemon forum board is proving to be an indispensable focal point of discussion and support. If this wasn't all enough, we launched PA Enterprise too! And this festive issue is filled with articles that are just too good to miss.

One of the first things many of us have to look forward to (or contend with, depending on your point of view) is the office party. But also, it is very often you, as PAs, secretaries and other admin professionals, who have to organise it. And organisation is critical to its success. The article ‘Making the Office Party a Success: The Planner’s Guide’ offers great pointers on making it memorable for all the right reasons. This time of year is also often the time of annual evaluations. ‘Making Annual Evaluations Work’ gives you the low down on how to make yours the success it should be.

This year, online sales are set to overtake high street sales for the first time. But many people still have doubts as to which way to go. Our article ‘Window or Screen? Online versus High Street Shopping’ highlights the pros and cons of both online and high street shopping. Both have their time and place. One word of advice though: if you intend to shop online for Christmas presents then do it as soon as possible now – otherwise they might arrive in the 2007 mail! And once you’ve unwrapped your presents, ‘10 Ways to Reuse Christmas Wrapping Paper’ shows you what you can do with the wrapping paper. And try out our Christmas menu for the perfect way to cook turkey.

We also have some skills-honing articles. ‘Business letter etiquette’ and ‘Self-Esteem for Women: Challenging Your Inner Critic’, are both fundamentally about improving relations with others and communicating effectively.

And as the days draw in, we’re all often in need of a little inspiration. If you feel that this is you, then read ‘A Day in the Life of…Sue France’, the Times Crème/DHL PA of the Year 2006. Sue highlights the importance of a comfortable work/life balance – a valuable lesson for us all!

We hope you enjoy this PA Enterprise. But more important even than that is that you have a wonderful winter break and recharge your batteries for the new year!

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25 Did You Miss Any of These Articles on DeskDemon?
Think you might have missed something? Find out what articles we’ve had recently at DeskDemon.
Annual reviews are a part of life. Often the feedback is not very pleasant, no matter who you are. The efficiency and accuracy of the reports are frequently debatable and often employees feel that their employers know very little about the staff and their responsibilities.

The problem doesn’t seem to lie with the concept of performance evaluations, as more than 90 percent of the employees at a company concerned about performance evaluation issues indicated that they thought honest appraisal of their performance was critical to their success. Some 40 percent felt they had never received such an appraisal – despite four-fifths of those employees having at least one signed review on file. The respondents were obviously not receiving what they needed from the documented reviews.

Based on the number of articles and books written on the subject, there is no lack of expert opinion. Experts tend to agree with employees that appraisals are important; the problem is none of them has the same opinion on what to do about it. The bottom line is employees want to know how they are doing, and their companies want to tell them. In a nutshell, the problem with most systems of performance evaluation is their failure to address more than a handful of specific traits the company deemed important at one time or another. The solution involves more than developing a new form, however. There are at least several key factors that will lead a company to produce a system that works for employees, managers, and the company.

**Performance**

The first factor necessary in the quest for the ideal performance evaluation is that it must be exactly that: performance based. While this may seem simple and self-evident, there are many companies and managers who have lost wrongful termination lawsuits brought by former employees on just this oversight. Performance based evaluation is the cornerstone of effectively communicating to employees where they stand with the company. To evaluate an employee on performance, three key elements must be in place first:

1. **Expectations:** The employee must have a clear understanding of the expectations that he must meet. This can mean having a formal job description, or forming specific goals that must be attained in a certain time frame, or any combination of the two. Whatever the method, it is of the utmost importance that the employee constantly knows exactly what “performance” means for him.

2. **Examples:** The manager must document any instances of both exceptional performance and poor performance. This will give her an opportunity to provide tangible evidence to the employee when discussions begin, and to identify the achievements that should be reinforced, along with those areas that need improvement.

3. **Examination:** The manager and employee should meet on a regular basis in order to review both of the above. Whether or not this is a formal review...
process each time, or an informal coaching session, this element will help foster the employee's willingness to work on issues, keep doing what he is doing well, and affirm that the employee and manager are still on the same page as far as the expectations are concerned. The meetings will also provide an opportunity for other issues and problems to be discussed. This type of dialogue strategy helps both parties to work together most effectively.

That being said, it is important that goals have the following five elements to be effective:

1. **Specific**: Goals must clearly specify the objective. It is not enough to say, “Jack will write code.” It is far better to say, “Jack will write code for the XYZ application…”

2. **Measurable**: It does no good to set a goal if the end cannot be determined, or if there is no clear understanding of the goal being met. Again, if Jack’s goal is “Jack will write five lines of code for the XYZ application,” this is far easier to measure.

3. **Attainable**: This aspect is probably one of the most critical aspects of writing goals. If Jack is not a software engineer, but instead an assembly line worker, setting a goal for him to write five lines of code is useless. If a goal is not doable, it should not be written. The biggest difficulty with this is understanding that “challenging” is not the same as “impossible”. There is a delicate balance between creating challenging goals and creating ones that are unachievable.

4. **Results oriented**: Goals should be designed so there is some expected result. In other words, Jack might be writing the five lines of code for this XYZ application in order to be able to incorporate that application into a larger system that must be delivered to a company. If there were no actual purpose in his achieving the goal it would not be to his advantage to set it, let alone go after.

5. **Timely**: This aspect of goal setting is one that defines the objective in terms of getting it done. Again, it does no good to set a goal with no time limit, and further setting a goal for five years out is fine if there is some flexibility to change it, but if an employee is working for set time frame (usually a year) before the goals come due, it may be more useful to focus on goals that are achieved in that span. For Jack this might mean his goal must be met in a three, six, or twelve month period.

The second factor necessary in the quest for the ideal performance evaluation is related to the first, but while this element can be a component of the performance requirements, it can also be a separately developed set of expectations. That is to say, the setting of goals is critical to the success of any performance evaluation. This area is one that is always challenging for managers and employees alike. The idea would be to develop goals, with the employee's input, which align to the business strategy of the department, division, and company. In other words, while basing the analysis of an employee on performance, and the expectations that have been delineated in the first factor, the employee should also have an opportunity to develop objectives for himself that directly or indirectly impact the greater good.

To clarify, suppose that Jack is a software engineer. His performance (factor one) may be measured by his ability to develop software. The expectations and examples would be related to this general ability. Goals, on the other hand, could be set that raise the bar: Jack’s contribution is valuable only if he develops the right software application in a specific time frame. His goals could be related to quality, timeliness, and appropriateness. While the goals could be used to gauge his performance, the opposite is not true. It is not enough for Jack to be able to write code; he must also be able to do it well.
I’ve often made reference in my articles to the “chatterbox” inside your head that sometimes does her best to undermine your self-confidence and diminish your self-esteem. At times I’ve suggested that it’s a good idea to ignore that chatterbox when it’s clear that she doesn’t have your best interests at heart or when she’s clearly being prejudiced against you and is not looking at the facts of your particular situation.

Today, I’m going to cut your chatterbox some slack. And I’m going to show some good faith by referring to her rather more respectfully as your “inner critic” for the remainder of this article. Establishing a good relationship with your inner critic can bring tremendous benefit, and we’re going to explore how to do that in a way that will help you to make better decisions and create some peace and harmony inside your own mind.

One of my pet hates is the notion that “everybody’s opinions deserve equal respect.” I’m not going to get off on a rant about this; I’m simply going to say that I’d much rather listen to an informed opinion than an uninformed opinion on ANY subject. If you hear an opinion from somebody on a subject about which he or she is entirely ignorant, I suggest you seriously consider dismissing it because it will be worth less than an informed view.

But ignorance is not the only thing that can disqualify the usefulness of an opinion. Inappropriate motivation is another. If you speak with someone who knows something, but who chooses to use that knowledge to manipulate you into making bad decisions, then you would be well advised to be alert.
and on your guard. And you should give yourself permission to discount that informed opinion on the basis that it has no integrity.

And this brings me back to your inner critic again. We know, since she is with you every waking moment of every day, that she is not entirely ignorant about you, is she? But what of her motivation: is she working with you, or against you? Does she help you to make sound decisions, or does she undermine you and diminish your confidence?

Don’t Try to Silence Your Inner Critic

Let’s dispel that common notion that the best way to deal with an inner critic who has become overly harsh is to silence her altogether. Even if she has turned into that “chatterbox” we’ve spoken about, silencing her completely could only be achieved if you were prepared to suspend all internal judgement of yourself and your behaviour.

This is not a good idea, for a number of reasons. Firstly, unless you’re a psychopath, you couldn’t do it anyway. Normal people judge things all the time whether they admit it or not. It’s part of your survival mechanism and it’s hard-wired into your brain. (Oh, and I should point out that you’re not a psychopath, or you would have stopped reading this article long ago!)

It’s dangerous to stop listening altogether to somebody who has the potential to offer an informed view, because it’s likely that not all of what they have to say will be worthless to you.

It can be immoral to stop listening to your inner critic, because sometimes she is pretty well tapped in to your conscience, and ignoring what your conscience is telling you is a big step along a dangerous road. Just imagine what life could be like if you learnt to work with your inner critic as a team, knowing that you are on the same side, with the same objectives, and with a strong degree of trust between you – wouldn’t that be something? Criticism can be a good thing! I’ve had to listen to my own inner critic recently, and she had a couple of stern things to say to me when I reversed my car into a lamppost after picking up my kids from school. Candidly, she pointed out that it is a good idea to pay attention to the existence of large, immovable objects in my vicinity instead of whatever else it was that may be competing for my attention at the time. My inner critic has contributed to my considerable sense of embarrassment about my incompetence and that’s okay, because I think it’s good for me to feel embarrassed for what I did. My lingering discomfort will help me to be more cautious from now on when driving away from school, as indeed will the £300 repair bill!

While I’m in a confessional mood, I’ll share another – rather more serious – case of bad judgement. In my early twenties I left all of my friends in a nightclub to go off with a total stranger in the middle of London because I thought he was rather good-looking and I was feeling adventurous. My friends were furious at the time, but respected my right to make my own decisions. My inner critic was definitely on their side, and repeatedly told me that I was being stupid (on my own account) and selfish (by causing them so much worry and concern). The fact that I am here today to recount this story after eventually arriving home safely has everything to do with good luck and nothing to do with good judgement on my part. Afterwards, I felt ridiculous for being so frivolous, guilty for the anguish I caused my friends, and immature and foolish for refusing to listen to my inner critic when she had been clearly trying to act in my best interests as I was making my decisions.

Telling that story made me shudder. But I hope it helps to illustrate my point that your inner critic is extremely valuable – provided that she is on your side.

Is Your Inner Critic Working Well With You?

To find out, spend ten minutes or so today writing down all the self-criticisms that you can recall saying to yourself in the last few days. Then review those self-criticisms to see if they have any legitimacy. Are they fair? Were they useful? Did they make you feel motivated to change for the better? Or were they just negative, cruel and demotivating?

Your inner critic needs to be one of your best friends and to have your best interests at heart. If she is over zealous, never shuts up, and chips away at your soul, then you need to either:

- Put her through some serious, firm training:
  Make her step up to the mark and do her job properly. To re-train your inner critic, catch her making put-down remarks, broad sweeping statements or a chain of negative or inaccurate comments and then challenge her to be more focused, accurate, positive, encouraging and helpful.

  For example, if your inner critic says, “Oh, you’ll never fall in love. You’re just so fussy and not attractive enough,” challenge her with questions such as: “Can you really not think of any couples who are clearly in love but who are not both drop-dead gorgeous?”

  “Is it fair to say I’m not attractive enough? Enough for what, exactly?”
You are pathetic. It's no wonder no one loves you. I wish you'd get your act together and stop looking so miserable! Well, if your inner critic is anything like as harsh then it's definitely time to find – within yourself – an inner critic who is better motivated!

Reinventing Your Inner Critic

Here’s what to do: start by visualising the inner critic who currently exists within you. Concentrate on giving her a personality and features. If she acts monstrously towards you, give her a monstrous and unsympathetic face and imagine that face contorting as she delivers her negative speeches. Get ready to banish this inner critic from your mind because you are going to – slowly but surely – replace her with someone who has more beautiful characteristics. Over the next month, each time she rears her nasty head, I want you mentally to push her away. Let yourself imagine her fighting back but failing to get the better of you. Force her out of an imaginary door before slamming it shut. Do this as often as necessary until she gets the message that she is NO LONGER WELCOME in your mind.

At the same time, I want you to introduce yourself to the new inner critic who will be moving into your mind. She is warm, approachable, objective, fair, just, positive, solution-oriented, truthful, caring, considerate, firm, knowledgeable, assertive, courageous, calm, smiling and she’s a great friend to have. Imagine her dressed up, laughing, looking her best. And be sure to notice that she looks just like you!

By the time your month is up you’ll have persuaded your old horrid inner critic to move out and leave you alone. Spend another couple of weeks continuing to put your energy into connecting with your new, more positive inner critic. Focus on strengthening your bond with her, and build up your trust in what she has to say to you.

To help you do this, each day choose two or three of the characteristics I mentioned two paragraphs back. Perhaps something like “warm and approachable”. Focus on these characteristics as you begin to bring your new inner critic to life in your mind. Make up words of your own to focus on if you prefer them to my suggestions.

Gradually Build up Your Self-Esteem

On Day One, for example, you might imagine yourself being positive, smiling and a great friend. On Day Two image yourself being courageous, calm and caring. You can mix up the words and allow your imagination – as the days pass by – to bring your new, wonderful inner critic to life.

After one week, continue to visualise your inner critic in the way described above but then, before you finish, ask her an important question that is relevant to the situation you both share: “What do you think I could do to make tomorrow better than today?” This will invite your new inner critic to help you do well and feel better about yourself.

Just think how much better life would feel if you simply stopped wasting your time listening to an overly-harsh inner critic and spent it instead on building up your self-esteem in the areas where it is weak, enabling you to think positively and build good judgement, believe in yourself, feel worthy, act wisely and succeed in the things that matter most to you.

Low self-esteem is not a permanent affliction, your inner critic can be your friend and you can overcome it and grow from this point forward. There is help out there to enable you to make more of yourself and your life, starting right now. Why not liberate your mind? What could be more fun than that today?

Swap her for a better one!

Think of your inner critic as having a personality of her own. If that personality is rude, obnoxious, unfriendly, cruel, insensitive, prejudiced against you, subjective in her assessments, out of control, unbearable, a nuisance, aggressive and destructive then it’s time to eject her from your mind and replace her with a personality more worthy of sharing your life! For example, I’ve known women who have lived for years with an inner critic who says horrible things like, “You’re just a big, fat, ugly lump of lard. I hate you.

Okay, I know that finding someone to fall in love with is never easy for anyone. Can you think of some things I could be doing better to increase my chances of success?”

Is it so wrong to be fussy? After all, it’s important to find someone who isn’t just going to fade away after a while.

By challenging your inner critic on a daily basis, you’ll be able to re-train her to provide you with constructive inputs and criticisms in place of self-sabotaging ones.

Alison Finch is the founder and creator of http://www.selfesteem4women.com, which has become the most popular self-esteem website for women on the Internet. Since 2004, she has reached out to over 200,000 women from over 90 countries and provided the much needed help to build their self-esteem. Her unique approach to building self-esteem has a twelve-year proven track record of success.
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The office party has become an institution of sorts in recent years, but there are also regular backlashes against it; some managers find it causes more problems than it brings solutions. After a year of repressed feelings and whispered gossip the office party can loosen tongues and bring bad feeling bubbling to the surface. That or it causes your otherwise restrained colleagues to lose all inhibitions and do something – from photocopying parts of their anatomy to making a move on a superior – that they may regret as they awaken to a hideous hangover, late for work.

Deloitte have just released results of a survey on Christmas Spending. They put forward the interesting point that spending on Christmas socialising versus gifts works in a two-year cycle. In 2005, Christmas spending on socialising was very high, and spending on presents was accordingly low. This year, it’s expected to be reversed, with spending on socialising to be down by an estimated 16 percent and spending on presents up. And then next year the spending on socialising is expected to increase and the spending on presents to decrease, and so the cycle continues. Why does this happen? It’s got to be something to do with hangovers and not wanting to repeat the mistakes of last year. If only our memory worked for longer…

So, all in all, it looks like the office party is here to stay. And in actual fact, there’s a lot to be said for the letting of hair down that an office party offers. The letting off of steam is an essential human requirement – that's one reason why winter celebrations have been the part of the culture of the peoples of this country a long way before Christmas. And what better need for the release of steam than months of restrained professionalism! Life would be boring with too much of that!

However, that doesn’t mean that the office party can’t go wrong. There are a number of ways to make sure it works and doesn’t spoil reputations and soil relations.

Christmas Party or Winter Party?
It is important not to insist that everyone attends the party. Whilst it can be a good bonding event, some people have family commitments or just don’t enjoy large social events. Demanding attendance can cause all sorts of conflict. If nothing else, a person forced to be there is unlikely to

Ensure your office party goes off with a (dignified) bang
have a good time. Also, as we live in a multi-faith country (and that seems to include “Jedi” now, as 390,000 people registered it as their religion in the 2001 census) calling the party the “Christmas Party” may unintentionally push away non-Christians (I don’t think this includes Jedi Knights though). Why not call it the Winter Party rather than the Christmas Party? After all, many firms do have a Summer Party too, so it maintains consistency.

A Party to Fit: What’s the Point?
Remember that there are a number of different types of party to have. It’s likely that yours has already been planned by now, but even so it’s always good to remember that it doesn’t have to involve the enforced consumption of great quantities of alcohol. What kind of people do you work with? Would they want something more sedate? The choice of music and venue can really set the mood.

It’s always good to keep an eye on the reason for having a party – that is, to thank everyone for their work over the year and bring people together to bond and catch up. Why not make this an overt part of the night – either with speeches, gifts or fun prizes? You’ll loosen everyone up, make them feel good and increase the chances of a great, enjoyable and non-problematic evening.

If many employees just want to get ridiculously drunk and act recklessly then perhaps there are other issues at stake in the company and you need to work on team morale. Whilst it is great for everyone to let their hair down, it should be because they enjoy their work and feel happy at a job well done during the year, not because they’re desperately unhappy in their jobs and need to drown their sorrows on the company credit card.

Weekday Celebrations
If the party is to be held during the week then let everyone know beforehand the rules for being in the office for the next day. What you tell your employees really depends on your company culture. Some companies expect everyone in on time the next day, without a hangover, and ready to hit the day running. Other companies turn a blind eye to employees coming in late the next day if they’ve a hangover or stayed out partying late. If you want your employees in bright and early, hangover free, then provide lots of snacks and non-alcoholic drinks during the party.

Misconduct
Misconduct, in the form of discrimination or harassment, by any employees, must under no circumstances be tolerated or condoned. Any sober or drunken misconduct must be dealt with swiftly.

Raising the Bar and Getting Home
Office parties very often include a bar. It’s important to let everyone know whether they will have to buy their own drinks, or if there is a certain quota for the evening. Though you want people to feel they can let their hair down it can be good idea to remind people to drink responsibly. An unlimited free bar works against this and so is probably a bad idea – only provide as many free drinks as you want people to drink! This goes hand in hand with ensuring that people can get home safely. Make sure the party finishes before public transport ends for the evening, or that taxis have been booked and everyone has a space in one. Looking after the welfare of employees at this time is as important as making the evening fun.

In Conclusion…
The office party can be a brilliant way of boosting morale and thanking everyone for their contribution over the year. It should be all about bringing people together, to learn about each other in a social, happy environment. If you remember this, then you’re on the road to putting together a memorable – but not scandalous – event.
Business etiquette is fundamentally concerned with building relationships founded upon courtesy and politeness between business personnel. Etiquette, and especially business etiquette, is a means of maximising your potential by presenting yourself positively.

Writing a business letter is not simply a matter of expressing your ideas clearly. The way you write a letter and the etiquette you employ may have a significant impact on your success or failure in business. Failure to observe correct business letter etiquette can result in you adopting an inappropriate tone, causing offence or misunderstandings, lack of clarity or purpose and hostility or soured relations. The foundation of good business letter etiquette is “Think before you write”. You should be considering whom the letter is addressed to, how and why. This will then influence style, content and structure.

Here we cover some of the main issues relating to good business letter etiquette:

Addressing the Letter
Always make sure you have spelt the recipient’s name correctly. It may sound simple, but you would be surprised at how many people fail to do so. The recipient’s name should include titles, honours or qualifications if deemed necessary.

Many people use the “Dear Sir/Yours faithfully” formula when addressing the receiver. Although this is acceptable for routine matters, it is impersonal and should not be used when dealing with those you know, or queries or complaints. With these the “Dear Mr.../Yours sincerely” formula should be adopted. Once a certain level of familiarity is reached it is not considered bad etiquette to use phrases such as “Kind regards” or “All the best” at the end of the letter.

Confidentiality
If the content of the letter is sensitive, personal or confidential it must be marked appropriately. Marking the letter “confidential” will suffice in highlighting this fact. If you only want the letter read by the receiver without the interception of a secretary or PA, mark it as “Private”, “Personal” or “Strictly Confidential”. If you have received such a business letter it is good etiquette to reciprocate and ensure that all future correspondence is kept at that level of confidentiality.

Style
Proper business letter etiquette requires that a consistent and clear approach, combined with courtesy, be employed. As a rule of thumb, aim to keep all business letters formal in style. Even when the receiver is familiar to you, it is advisable to maintain a certain level of business etiquette as the letter may be seen by others or referred to by a third party in the future. However, this does not mean you should use long or uncommon words to express yourself. This merely looks odd and makes the letter unreadable. It is best to read a letter first and consider whether you would speak to that person face to face in the same way. If not, then re-write it.

Letters should be signed personally. It looks unprofessional, cold and somewhat lazy if a letter is left unsigned. However, having a secretary or PA...
Humour
Humour can be used in business letters but only when the writer is completely positive the recipient will understand the joke or pun. From a business etiquette perspective it may be wise to avoid humour. This is because firstly, the letter may be read during a crisis, after receiving bad news or on a sombre occasion. Any other time the humour may have been appreciated but under these circumstances it may dramatically backfire. Secondly, the written word is open to misinterpretation. Your sarcastic or ironic remark may be taken the wrong way. Thirdly, it is possible that the letter may be read by a third party who may deem the humour inappropriate and pursue a complaint of some sort.

Responding
Good business letter etiquette calls for letters to be responded to promptly or within certain guidelines. This may normally be considered as five working days. If this is not possible then some sort of acknowledgement should be sent either by letter, fax, phone or email. Always use reference numbers or clearly state the purpose of the letter at the top, for example, “Re: Business Letter Etiquette Enquiry”. This allows the receiver to trace correspondence and immediately set your letter within a context. When replying to points or questions the proper etiquette is to respond in the same order as they were asked.

Managing Conflict
Letters are often an arena for conflicts or disputes. Even in these circumstances there are rules of business letter etiquette that should be adhered to. If you initiate the dispute then, firstly, explain and set out your case simply and clearly to the most appropriate person, secondly, offer information that may be required by the other party to help answer questions and, thirdly, indicate a time scale by which you expect a reply or the matter to be resolved.

If you are receiving the dispute then, firstly, inform senior colleagues who may be affected or who may be able to offer assistance, secondly, submit all replies in draft form for a senior colleague to check, thirdly, stick to the facts and the merits of the case and do not allow emotions to become involved and, finally, be polite, patient and courteous.

Using business etiquette in all matters and especially in business letters will ensure you communicate effectively, avoid misunderstandings and maximise your business potential.

Neil Payne is the director of cross cultural communications company Kwintessential, which can be found at http://www.kwintessential.co.uk.
Since Sue France won the prestigious Times Crème/DHL PA of the Year Award 2006 she has been inundated with congratulations and is continually being recognised, interviewed and talked about. She has also been approached to speak at PA conferences and train secretaries for the clients of Persuasion, the company she works for. She has been featured in the Institute of Director's North West magazine and was also in the Manchester Evening News, where she was likened to Madonna whose picture was on the same page as her dressed as a secretary!

Sue is the PA and marketing manager to Bill Docherty, an international motivational speaker and trainer who founded Persuasion in 2000. Bill is also the chairman of the Institute of Directors Manchester and chairman of the YMCA Manchester. Sue said, “I am delighted to have won the award and even more delighted that Bill appreciates me enough to have taken the trouble to nominate me. I cannot believe the amount of congratulations and recognition I have received and continue to receive from winning the award. I am now really excited and looking forward to the fabulous prize of a two week holiday in a four-star hotel in Cape Town, including a Winelands tour where I intend to really celebrate in style! Plus I have received £500 spending money.”

Sue says Bill is such fun to work for it’s a pleasure to come to work. “I am always laughing, especially when he is trying out the magic tricks he incorporates into his training on me. I am just waiting for the day he asks if he can saw me in half to make two of me!”

Sue worked for Bill as his secretary once before, between 1987 and 1990, when they were both working at Arthur Andersen, one of the big five global accountancy firms. Bill left Andersen to become partner at Robson Rhodes and was then headhunted back into Andersen to set up and head a UK tax investigations team. He built the team over five years to become a £4 million business and then decided to leave and set up his own training company, Persuasion, to give others the benefit of his knowledge and experience, using his skills as a master practitioner in neuro linguistic programming.

Over the years Sue has worked for many managers and partners of Arthur Andersen and started work as a shorthand typist/word-processing operator and worked her way up becoming a senior secretary, team supervisor, events manager and personal assistant to the head of Andersen in Manchester. From 1995...
Q What does a typical day look like for you?

A I don’t really have a typical day, as every day is different. I love the challenge of the job, as I never know what’s going to happen each day or whom I might meet or talk to and the consequences of that. However, each day does include checking mine and Bill’s e-mails and answering them, or liaising with Bill if I need his input. I have to arrange all Bill’s appointments and meetings, which involves liaising with clients and booking travel arrangements well in advance, including overnight accommodation if required. I have to check the diary every day and make sure that Bill has the correct papers, maps, training materials, delegate materials and information required for all his forthcoming meetings/coaching sessions/conferences/training days and I have to make sure he is in the right place at the right time with the right people.

I also actively market Bill and several times a month I attend networking events and lunches where I build relationships with attendees, who hopefully become clients or refer us. I also attend Persuasion’s own public training workshops to make sure the room is set out correctly with all equipment in working order, meet and greet delegates and take part in the training exercises if there is an odd number of exercises and delegates are required to work in pairs.

When Bill is out of the office, Bill and I also maintain constant communication so that we both know what is happening, because whenever Bill presents to a group we invariably gain new work and this needs to be documented and processes put into place. I, therefore, often take dictation over the phone.

Since being awarded the prestigious award of The Times Crème/DHL PA of the Year I have been asked to present at conferences for Persuasion’s clients and I have also been conducting one-to-one two hour coaching sessions to give PAs the benefit of my experience and knowledge to help them become the best PA they can be. I therefore have to spend time researching and putting my presentations together into a bespoke structured and informative framework, depending on the needs of the PA or the aim of the conference and also spend time at clients’ offices.

Although I try to keep my voluntary work out of my working day, invariably I will get asked questions or will have to spend some time dealing with, for example, the organising the forthcoming Medequip4kids Charity Ball and also the National Training Day/social weekend for European Management Assistants (EUMA), as I am the UK national training and development officer for EUMA – a voluntary networking organisation for like-minded PAs.

Sometimes I attend client meetings with Bill and have also attended client meetings instead of Bill.

What is the biggest challenge you have faced and how did you tackle it?

A One of the big challenges I have faced is my work-life balance. I have always worked hard and in the past I have worked long hours. I enjoy what I do and I like to see results and go home listing out the things to myself I have covered that day, when I was sometimes travelling home at 11 pm and even midnight! I suppose I could have been described as a workaholic.

I used to want to be able to go into the office the next day with a clear and tidy desk ready to start afresh. At the same time I have two children whom I like to spend quality time with, as a single mother, and I have lots of friends whom I also want to spend time with. I have been a member of European Management Assistants for around seven years, for which I am the current UK national training and development officer. I also do a lot of charity work for a local children’s charity Medequip4kids, who put medical equipment into North West children’s wards and ambulances – raising sponsorship money for treks such as the Inca Trail in Peru and the China Wall challenge, which also means that I have to spend time training for the treks.

I tackled my work-life balance because my children are very important to me, and I needed to spend more time with them and also have some time for myself, so I gave myself a good talking to and I now make sure that I finish work on time every day at 5.30, with the occasional late night.
for networking events. I also realise that it is okay for me to leave work pending for the next day and that there will always be work waiting for me to do; in fact, if there wasn’t then I should be worried! I use time management and prioritising tools to help me manage my workload.

I make sure I spend quality time with my youngest daughter and I drive her to school every morning, which gives us a chance to chat, and we spend time together at some point each evening as well as at weekends. Now that my eldest daughter is living away I make sure we spend time together over some of the weekends and I also take both my daughters on holiday where we can have mother and daughter time. As my youngest daughter likes to have friends over and sleepovers I use these times to see my friends and have “me time” or to do my EUMA work or even just to chill out. The treks I do and training for the treks are also very good to keep me fit and healthy, for meeting friends and socialising, and to give me some time for myself too.

**Q** What are you doing to make sure they happen?

**A** To make sure this happens I follow the three Rs:
- Respect for myself;
- Respect for others;
- Responsibility for all my actions.

**Q** Do you have a key piece of advice for PAs who want to get into this sector?

**A** My key advice for PAs wanting to get into this sector would be to:
- Gain professional secretarial qualifications;
- Join a networking organisation for PAs like European Management Assistants;
- Show enthusiasm and the willingness to embrace change and new challenges;
- Be enthusiastic about continually developing yourself;
- Maintain a good and healthy work life balance;
- Simply have fun and enjoy what you do.
A nutritious, hearty and healthy menu for the Christmas season

Chicken is an incredibly versatile bird to cook, and can be made to taste fantastic in a number of ways. The grilled chicken and tomato salad is a perfect starter – nutritious but light. And the roast chicken dish is an ideal main course for the cold winter months ahead! The flourless fruitcake for desert is full of taste and a great complement to the main course.

Serves 4 Grilled Chicken and Tomato Salad

Ingredients:
- 4 Chicken fillets
- 250g cherry tomatoes
- 750g butter beans, drained
- 150g mixed baby leaves
- 1 red chilli, deseeded and diced
- 6 tbsp olive oil
- Juice of 2 small lemons
- Olives, to garnish
- Sea salt and ground black pepper

1. Grill the chicken breasts for about 10 minutes on each side, until thoroughly cooked. Slice the chicken breasts into thin strips.
2. Cut the cherry tomatoes in half and place in a bowl together with the sliced chicken, butter beans, mixed baby leaves, chilli, olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Garnish with the olives and serve.

Serves 4 Roast Chicken with Celeriac

Ingredients:
- 1.6kg whole chicken
- 450g celeriac, chopped
- 3 slices bacon, chopped
- 1 onion, diced
- 40g/3 tbsp butter
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh parsley
- 3 tbsp chopped fresh thyme and tarragon leaves
- 75g/1½ cups fresh brown breadcrumbs
- 1 egg
- Salt and ground black pepper

1. To make the stuffing, cook the celeriac in boiling water until soft and tender. Drain well and chop finely. Chop the bacon and the onion. Heat 25g/2 tbsp of the butter in a saucepan and gently cook the chopped bacon and onion until the onion is soft. Stir in the celeriac along with the chopped herbs and cook, stirring occasionally, for 3-5 minutes. In the meantime, preheat the oven to 200°C/400°F/Gas 6.
2. Remove the saucepan from the heat and stir in the breadcrumbs, the egg to bind the mixture, and season it with the salt and pepper. Use the mixture to stuff the neck end of the chicken. Season the bird’s skin with some salt and black pepper, and then rub the skin with the remaining butter.
3. Roast the chicken in the preheated oven, basting occasionally with the juices, for 1½-2 hours, until the juices run clear when the thickest part of the leg is pierced with a sharp knife. Allow the chicken to rest for about 10 minutes before carving.
Serves 4-6  **Flourless Fruit Cake**

**Ingredients:**
- 450g/1½ cups mincemeat
- 350g/2 cups dried mixed fruit
- 115g/½ cup dried figs, chopped
- 115g/½ cup dried apricots, chopped
- 115g/½ cup glace cherries, halved
- 115g/½ cup walnut pieces
- 225g/8-10 cups cornflakes, crushed
- 4 eggs, lightly beaten
- 400g can evaporated milk
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp mixed spice
- Walnuts, halved, to decorate

1. Preheat the oven to 150ºC/300ºF/Gas 2. Grease a 25cm round cake tin. Line the base and sides with extra thick greaseproof paper and grease the paper.

2. Put all the ingredients together into one large mixing bowl. Beat well. Turn the mixture into the cake tin and smooth the surface.

3. Bake for about 1¾-2 hours. Check to see if the cake is cooked by inserting a skewer into the centre of the cake, making sure it comes out clean. Allow the cake to cool in its tin for 10-15 minutes. Turn out onto a wire rack; peel off the lining paper and leave to cool down completely. Decorate with the halved walnuts.

**Did You Know?**
Figs are one of the first fruits mankind learned to dry and store.
10 Great Ways to Re-use Christmas Wrapping Paper

By Liz Palmer

1. **Snowflake shapes**: Cut our snowflake shapes and stick them on card. Add a tie and hang it on the Christmas tree.

2. **Christmas tree shapes**: Fold wrapping paper lengthwise. Cut out the shape of a Christmas tree, where the edges are touching the folds. Unfold the paper to reveal a chain of Christmas trees.

3. **Christmas placemats**: Give children a piece of wrapping paper. Ask them to create a Christmas design using it, glue and scissors. Laminate it and use it as a placemat.

4. **Paper chain**: Cut the wrapping paper into strips. Make them into links and create a paper chain.

5. **Festive verse**: Cut small pieces of card and use wrapping paper to cover the back and create a frame on the front. Write a festive verse inside the frame. Attach a tie and hang it from the tree.

6. **Bookmark**: Use pieces of wrapping paper to make a nice bookmark. Keep it yourself or give it to someone.

7. **Present bow**: Use pieces of wrapping paper to make a nice bow to place on top of a present.

8. **Party hat**: Make a party hat for dolls or teddy bears.

9. **Christmas crackers**: Use used cards and wrapping paper to create some Christmas crackers.

10. **Sweet wrapping**: Wrap small lollypops or sweets. Attach a number (1 to 24) to each and use them as next year's advent calendar.

*Liz Palmer is a writer. Her book Over 61 Ways to Reuse Christmas Items can be purchased at www.knowledgedownload.com/lizpalmer001/.*
Use DeskDemon’s Powerful Advanced Search to Make Booking Your Next Meeting More Effective by Searching Over 650 Venues

www.venuedesk.com
Over the last few years online shopping seems to have come into its own. In products across the range it seems that more and more people are turning off the high street and onto the web. In fact, there has been a 350 percent increase in online shopping in the last five years. Online shopping offers an escape from the hectic run up to Christmas and there are great deals to be had and savings made. You can just make a few clicks and your Christmas shopping’s done. What could be better? On the other hand, you can’t actually pick up the products and feel them in your hands. With items like clothes and shoes, there’s nothing like actually trying them on to see if they’re right for you. Shopping can actually be an enjoyable experience and there’s no substitute for seeing two products side by side and choosing your favourite. And who wants to be turned into a nation of stay-at-homes, who never venture away from their screens, unless it is to sign for a delivery.

So, would we lose something special if the high street vanished? There are definitely issues at stake, such as the fact that a few sites, such as Amazon and eBay, have great reach and might now. However, so do the supermarkets. Tesco apparently takes one in every three pounds spent in the UK, which is such an astounding statistic as to be virtually incomprehensible. Whilst Tesco is now a major online player too, it hasn’t built its business on this – it’s a high street/out-of-town shop – and highlights that the question isn’t so much about whether the Internet is going to destroy the high street but instead what the rise of huge corporations – whether Tesco or Amazon – mean for the market and society.

Window or Screen? Online versus High Street Shopping

What’s the best way to get those presents?
The Internet has actually been great for small business in many ways: specialist shops that have harnessed the potential of the net can see their business grow. After all, you can sell to customers on the other side of the world, not just those who can travel to the shop. Even before the Internet came, huge corporations were eviscerating high streets around the land. We’re now a nation of over 30 million vehicles, shopping malls and DIY stores. The high streets that remain are populated by the same chains, and if you were plonked down in one it would be virtually impossible to tell where you were in the country. So, after this overly bleak picture of contemporary Britain, what are the pros and cons of shopping online and on the high street?

Pros of Online Shopping:

- **No car?** If you don’t have a car it can be difficult to get to out-of-town malls and retail parks. With the Internet, all the products come to you.

- **Discounts:** Online buying can result in great savings. This is mainly because online stores have much lower operating costs than high street shops. However, it is a good idea to make use of comparison sites otherwise the Internet might not save you money.

- **Reviews:** You can read reviews of products on impartial websites, which can help you to make your decision on a product.

- **Beat the queues:** With online shopping there are no queues. You just click and pay and wait for it to come to you. With Christmas shopping often being stressful and rushed it’s a welcome antidote that will give you back valuable pre-holiday time.

- **Security:** According to a recent survey, though 55 percent of people think entering your financial details online presents a great security risk, in actual fact much less people have been victims of online fraud (15 percent) than property theft (35 percent).

High Street Pros:

- **No Internet access?** If you don’t have Internet access you can’t make use of online shopping and the potential discounts. The high street is accessible to all if you have the transport to get there.

- **Customer support:** Good shops have knowledgeable and helpful staff, who can give you the low down on products and answer specific questions.

- **Get it right now:** You can purchase your product and take it straight away – which is essential if you’ve left Christmas shopping to the last minute! With Internet purchases you have to wait for something to be delivered. And then, if you’re not in, you may have to arrange redelivery or go to a depot to get the product – a real pain!

- **Touch the products:** With many things, such as clothes, shoes and furniture, it is pretty much vital to actually look at the product. There’s only so much a picture on a website can tell you.

So…Both Window and Screen

What the above points show is that there are no absolute answers. Both “physical shopping” and cyber shopping” have advantages. It actually depends on what you are after. Online shopping will never completely replace shopping in person. After all, we are physical beings and so many products need to be seen, felt, tried on in person. The Internet is a powerful tool for sourcing products and getting great discounts; and without a doubt it has transformed, and is still transforming, shopping. But the way to be a “successful” consumer is know when and where to go online, and when and where to shop on the high street.
**CHRISTMAS PUZZLE**

From Santa and the elves to mistletoe and holly, test your Yuletide knowledge and get yourself in the festive spirit.

**Across**
1. Shiny trinkets and ornaments
2. Where Santa lives
3. One of Santa’s Reindeers
4. Traditional seasonal food
5. Traditional Christmas weather condition
6. A large calendar with 24 windows that open
7. Mother to Jesus
8. Edible sweets that can come in a box
9. A bush with green glossy leaves
10. A traditional vehicle that is pulled by animals and used by Santa
11. The object that Santa slides down when delivering presents
12. Long strands of glittery paper used as Christmas decorations
13. A dessert
14. The people who help Santa make toys
15. Placed sometimes at the top of the Christmas Tree
16. The last month of the year

**Down**
1. The day after Christmas day
2. Wears red and has a white beard
3. The human name of Messiah of the Christian Faith
4. Religious songs sung at Christmas
5. A sock hung on Christmas Eve for Santa to fill with presents
6. Wrapped boxes placed under the Christmas tree
7. Crown made of thorns
8. An item that can be pulled apart with a loud bang when played as a game
9. A semi-parasitic plant that grows on certain types of trees used as a Christmas decoration
10. A well-known white long feature of Santa’s face
11. Alcoholic beverage
12. The bag that Santa carries that is filled with presents

Solutions:
Did You Miss Any of These Articles on DeskDemon?

1. The Origins of Kissing Under the Mistletoe
   It's nearly Christmas time again, so it is time to hang up the mistletoe. But why are people supposed to kiss beneath it? Find out the origins of this Christmas tradition.
   http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/lifestyle/mistletoe-origins

2. Use Those Longer Evenings
   The art of achieving success in life is to ensure that you see every challenge or opportunity in its most positive light. Attaining this state of mind can change your life for the better.
   http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/career/longer-evenings

3. Make the Most of the Job You Have - The Top Five Ways
   Maybe you're not in the job of your dreams, but now what do you do? There's only one thing for it - try to enjoy it. Here are the top five ways to make the most of the job you have.
   http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/career/enjoying-your-job

4. In PAs We Trust
   As part of everyday duties, many PAs see or control confidential information. How we deal with this knowledge affects the very fabric of the office.
   http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/career/patrust

5. Not Another Ice Breaker! Team Building with a Purpose
   How can you ensure your offsite exercises are successful at building teams and getting things done at the same time? Consider the tips in this article on successful team building.
   http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/events/teambuilding

6. Running Successful Meetings - Getting It Right
   Many complain that meetings are a waste of our time. When you organise your meeting will you make sure it's effective and does the job it is supposed to?
   http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/events/successfulmeetings
You can trust Holiday Inn to make your meeting a success. It’s not just the quality of our facilities, or the extensive range of locations we offer. You’ll also benefit from the personal touches we bring, focusing on your individual requirements. So give us your next meeting’s brief, and rest assured you’re in safe hands.

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