Top 7 Pitfalls of Goal-Setting and What You Must Do Instead

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Welcome to 2007. After a hugely successful 2006, the DeskDemon team very much enjoyed the winter break; but we’re now all back, refreshed and ready for action. And we’ve put together what we think is a positive and engaging first 2007 issue of PA Enterprise.

To complement the fact that many of us have just made New Year’s resolutions, we have a number of incisive articles on bringing positive changes to your life. We all know how relationships can lose their spark, but that doesn’t mean they can’t be reignited: “Rekindle The Magic In Your Relationship” shows you some methods how. We also have the informative articles “Do You ‘Work to Live’ or ‘Live to Work’?”, “Top 7 Pitfalls of Goal-Setting, and What You Must Do Instead”, and “The Behaviour to Bring Career Success”, all of which analyse possible work problems and how to bring lasting, positive transformation.

On the subject of change and renewal, knowledge should never be underestimated – it’s a vital asset. That’s why we also bring you “A Changing Workplace: Health, Safety and Accidents” and the “The Life Expectancy of a PC”, so that you know how to successfully manage the changes that inevitably take place in the workplace – regarding technology, maintenance, safety and legislation.

And like knowledge, skills should never be devalued. “Report Writing: 7 Tips to Improve Your Writing” and “Speakers: Making and Breaking Meetings” both give you some valuable tips on improving the way you go about tasks so that you are as successful as you can be.

So, all in all, in line with the drive of positive change and self-renewal that is often brought about by the passing of one year and birth of the new one, this issue of PA Enterprise is all about making 2007 a great year. At DeskDemon we hope that you had a fantastic break over Christmas and the New Year and that this year is everything you want it to be.

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Do You “Work to Live” or “Live to Work”?  
By Charlotte Burton

To find happiness in your life and work you must tackle the source of any problems head on

Let’s be realistic here – hands up all of you who bounce out of bed every single morning, raring to get to work and enjoying yourself every minute of the day?

If you didn’t metaphorically put your hand up, you’re not alone. There have been so many articles published recently about working statistics in the UK – that Brits work the longest hours in the EU and that we have higher risks of heart disease than our continental friends due to stress and poor diet – there has been a rise in people “downshifting” and moving to the country to raise chickens and weave baskets. But many people who dream of doing just that don’t, especially when there are so many television programs on that show all the grisly details about how people who do downshift simply exchange one set of problems for another. While there are many people who make a real success of changing their careers in such a dramatic fashion, it might be worthwhile sorting out what problems you do have with your current career before making that radical decision to downshift.

First Things First

The first place to start is to think about why you chose to do what you do – what was it about law that attracted you originally? Was it the logic? Or the feeling of winning? Or the love of solving problems? Or was it the “safe” thing to do? Were your parents lawyers and so push you in that direction? Was it for the money? Even if the last few questions ring true for you, you can still enjoy your work.

What Do You Actually Do?

Think about all the aspects of your job: what do you actually do during the day? Speak to people on the phone? Do research? Prepare reports? Present at meetings? If you do more than two of the above on a daily basis, you’re not so different to many office workers.

So think about what part of the day you look forward to – apart from going-home time. Do you enjoy the challenge of presenting, or love learning new facts, or talking and interacting with other people? Try thinking about your day in terms of the actual things you do and what you can get out of each different task. Could you delegate or reassign the tasks you don’t like doing and shift the majority of your workload towards the things you prefer? Or can you think about it all in a different way? How much of your day is spent doing the things you actually like? If it is less that 50 percent, will you settle for that? Try doing a rated pro/con list of everything you do, with each item being scored on a 1–5 scale, where 1 means you love it and 5 means you can’t stand it. If you have lots of 1s on your pro list and lots of 3s on your con list, that’s good, but if it is the other way around, and your pro items are all scored at 3 and your con list is all at 5, you may want to think about re-evaluating your career.

People Problems

What if the people that surround you are what make you dread walking through the door in the morning? Do you have an annoying boss, colleague or client? If you heart sinks when a certain person opens their mouth – for whatever reason (condescension, cattiness or plain stupidity) – try thinking about what exactly it is that is rubbing you the wrong way. You’re you – deserving of respect and care. But doesn’t that go the other way too? There’s that old saying, “Treat others as you wish to be treated”, but surely everyone is different? Shouldn’t that really be altered to say, “Treat everyone as they wish to be treated”? This requires you to actually attempt to understand other people; and while it takes that bit more effort, it can help you reduce unnecessary friction and make the people who surround you daily into more than just people who work in the same location.

Change Yourself, not Others

No doubt you’ve heard it before – you can’t change someone else. What you can do is change your attitude and behaviour towards them. If you’re being defensive around one person always, try thinking about why that is – is there some niggle in your mind saying that this person is not on the same
level as you. Are you jealous of the way they are and the way they live? If they are junior to you in experience and position, but are the “darling” of the boss, is their progress something that you wish had happened to you? What would happen if you started treating them as an equal?

Respond with Care

What about if you are being treated unfairly? If you are reacting to this with a very hostile manner, you are really tying yourself into a vicious circle where it will be impossible to escape with your self-esteem, dignity and reputation intact. I don’t mean to say “take it on the chin”, but you can do a lot about situations like these without actually bringing yourself down to a level where relations are irreparably damaged. For instance, you don’t need to show your boss that your colleague is being badly behaved by using the style of a schoolgirl tattling to her teacher. Try speaking to the person who is upsetting you and explaining why their behaviour is so hurtful, and suggesting an alternate way of interacting.

Often, people really just don’t realise that what they are doing is offensive or mean, and may actually think that it is a light-hearted joke. And if you are able to present this to them in a way that does not resemble a personal attack, you may be able to rescue the situation without any problems at all. Obviously there are times where this won’t work, and this may require you to evaluate the values of those around you – and if they don’t match yours, you will need to think your options through in rather more detail.

Case Study: Work-Life Balance

One client of mine recently posed the problem that there was no chance of her ever enjoying her job, and refused to consider looking for a new one. I was quite shocked by this statement – as she was basically refusing to do anything about her problem – but I couldn’t resist the challenge. So I set her the task of removing two “bad” things from other areas of her life (not her work), and replacing them with two “good things” every week, and introducing a weekly reward into her life for all the “bad” things she still had to do.
Initially she started by replacing an unhealthy breakfast with a healthy one, and secondly she replaced vegging out mindlessly in front of the telly every evening with going out for dinner regularly. As her treat in the first week she went and had a massage and facial on Saturday.

Each week she repeated this process, with things like getting a new chair for her home office so she could sit correctly while surfing the Internet, and going and doing the exercise she really enjoyed (squash) rather than going to the gym. One day, she told me that she was actually enjoying getting up every morning as she had something to look forward to every evening after work. She no longer slept late at the weekend and do nothing of note for two whole days; instead she got out and did things that she’d been missing, like going to galleries and the theatre.

She was in a highly paid job so all she had been doing before was watch her bank balance rise and rise, work harder and harder and never see any benefit from working herself into the ground. Most importantly, she started rediscovering her love for her work as she now had the energy to tackle her highly demanding job.

Case Study: Control Issues

Another client of mine was constantly rushing from one drama to another and loved her job in theory but hated it in practice, and realised that her lack of time was affecting her life outside her work as well as her health. We implemented a prioritising plan and she committed herself to learning a relaxation technique, but also we tackled the cause of her stress: her belief that each and every task had to be done immediately and by her alone. By learning how to delegate and prioritise – as well as understanding where her need for control came from – she was able to alleviate and ultimately remove the cause of her stress, and ultimately become happier and more fulfilled, and, most importantly, more productive: she’s just closed a deal which she truly thought she would have no chance on thanks to the sheer volume of work that needed doing in preparation. Her assistant now handles most of that, and appreciates the extra responsibility along with the pay raise!

Note: It is all too important that when dealing with stress you attack it on both sides – the symptoms and the cause. If you only treat the symptoms you will keep having to treat them. By removing the cause, you remove the need to constantly treat the symptoms as well.

Stay or Go: Fix Your Problems First Either Way

If you are truly not enjoying your job, it is important to find out why. If it is due to something that is relatively simple to fix, there is no need to go through the hassle of up-heaving your whole life. However, there are many cases where the career you’re in is just not suited to you. Do you really want to be spending a third of your life (or more) doing what you’re doing? If you don’t, you’re not alone. Recent reports show that the average number of careers a person has in their working lifetime is three – and that figure is increasing. If you are truly bored by your job, gather up your resources and change! Remember though, that you may be taking the same problems with you, so it might be worth working them out now and getting them fixed before you make the move.
Relationships can’t be taken for granted; they are always a work in progress. Even though sometimes that certain special magic can die out, but it doesn’t mean that it can’t be rekindled! But, in order to rekindle it, you need to know what you want and what you are aiming for in the relationship. It’s always important to stay true to yourself and not compromise your core self. But how do you do this?

Making the Vision the Reality

Through visualisation – by having a vision of what you want your relationship to be like and how you see yourself and your loved one interacting within the relationship – you can create powerful images to strive for. As individuals and as part of a relationship, we must see ourselves being the best we can be at all times. By wanting our relationship to be even better than it is, we continue to learn, grow and improve in order to attain and experience the even better relationship.

Keeping an already good relationship alive and thriving can take dedication, but I also believe that a relationship that has lost that special feeling can be redeemed too. It is not a matter of being false to yourself but rather about wanting to be better than you are right now and wanting your relationship to be better than it is right now. This means being open to change, holding the vision of how you want your relationship to be and acting as if it is already that way.

From “Don’t Want” to “Do Want”

To find out what we want as our vision, many of us feel the need to know what we do not want. When I ask clients what they want, quite often they tell me what they do not want. Most people seem to find it easier to say, “I don’t want ______ in my relationship.” However, we should never focus too much on what we do not want; otherwise, as Wallace Wattles said, we will “get what we don’t want.” As soon as you know what you do not want you must cast it aside, let it go and turn your mind to what you do want.

So, during a session, after having spent a little time finding out why the client doesn’t want certain things, I will then ask them, “And what is the opposite of that?” Sometimes they may need a little time to think about it but soon they come up with the opposite; that is, what they do want.
We always know this somewhere deep inside, but we seem to find it easier to focus on the negative rather than the positive. However, it is imperative that we turn our thoughts to the good things we want – and there is always a polar opposite to our negatives. We cannot tell what is good unless we have evil. We cannot get rid of evil but we do not need to focus on it. Otherwise, I believe, we encourage it.

After ascertaining what is wanted, I find it useful if it is written down because it makes it more definite. As we write things down, we focus on them and may even think of other things that we did not think of before. So, write a list of how you want the magic in your relationship rekindled and be really specific.

The next step is to use your imagination and envision a future with all that you want in it. Decide on a time in the future that you want your relationship to have the magic rekindled. Let us say that it is in six months time. You might want to choose a different time span. I have come up with a powerful exercise to reach that desired mental space – where you know what you want and how to attain it.

Now you must make a decision to take the first step toward achieving what you want. Then use your will to do it. It only has to be a small step but do it. Take the risk – the possibilities are so great.

1. Close your eyes and sit as you would in meditation. I prefer to sit upright and with both feet flat on the floor.
2. Relax and notice your breathing. Focus on your breathing until you feel you are in a calm place.
3. Then, imagine yourself in six months time being with your loved one and having the magical relationship you want, down to the very last detail. Yes, detail is so important.
4. Within this visualisation, notice what you are wearing and what you have on your feet.
5. Notice how you feel, what you can see, hear, touch, taste, think and what you are doing and saying.
6. Notice how you are interacting with your loved one.
7. Really make sure you are in this picture. Now make it bigger!
8. Now imagine the relationship as even better than you first envisioned and this will expand how wonderful you feel.
9. Imagine you are experiencing your magical relationship. Look back over the last six months and see how you achieved this. What did you need to do differently, what did you need to say differently, how did you need to be? How do you see your loved one being and how are you interacting together?
10. Really notice everything that brought you to where you are, six months into the future (or whatever time frame you choose). Take your time – this really helps.
11. When you have done this, step into yourself in the future. Physically get up and act as if you are six months into the future – really feel all of those same feelings; notice how you are standing and how wonderful you feel.
12. Really embody everything as much as possible; feel yourself interacting with your loved one in the way you envisioned.
13. Then, mentally look back at your original self at the beginning of the exercise and tell your original self what he/she needs to know in order to move forward and have the rekindled magical relationship that you are experiencing. Spell it out.
14. Now step back into your original self by returning to your original position and so receive the message from your future self.
15. To finish the exercise, reflect on the message, the vision and how you felt and now feel. Think about how you can act and think differently from now on.

Anita Jackson is a speaker, counsellor/psychotherapist and author of Rekindle The Magic In Your Relationship! Making Love Work (A free chapter can be downloaded at www.rekindlethemagic.com/newsletter/tabid/1765/Default.aspx). She runs group workshops and guidance sessions for individuals and couples and is available for interviews. She can be contacted at anita@sparklingoasis.com and on 0208 440 0495.
NEWS FLASH!
To all success-minded entrepreneurs and leaders: “Traditional goal-setting – as toted in millions of books, seminars and expensive programs – just doesn’t work!”

Yes, that’s right. The likelihood is that the way you have been setting goals is actually the very reason why you are not achieving goals.

Be honest with yourself. How many goals have you set in the last year in which …

• You did not take action on?
• You gave blood, sweat and tears to achieve with little results to show for it?
• You lost your focus or motivation to keep going?

The good news is, through the tools of NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming), you can learn the most powerful goal-setting techniques of top achievers to create powerful compelling outcomes in your business.

First, let’s take a look at the top 7 pitfalls of traditional goal-setting and how the new turbo-charged techniques can ignite your most ambitious goals into high velocity results.

Pitfall 1: Lack of Precision
Vagueness is deadly in any business, especially in the area of setting goal. Vague goals create vague, if any, results. When you write your goals in specific, precise language, your subconscious mind, which is the part of you that actualises your goals, gets busy in the “how” and drives all its energies toward accomplishing your goals.

“I want to earn more money” or “I want my employees to be more productive” is like speaking Greek to the subconscious mind. It doesn’t know how to interpret what you want. Instead, a more precise goal is stated as “I want to earn £100,000” or “I want my employees to get their reports out by 3pm daily.” That goal is precise, specific and measurable. Now the subconscious mind will go to work and keep you focused, until you get to that end result.

Pitfall 2: Not Knowing Your Compelling “Why”
Most people set their goals in a vacuum. They set goals on what they think they want, rather than on what they really, really want – goals that will motivate them and create meaning and fulfilment in their businesses and lives.

The secret? Ensure that you are defining goals congruent with your most important values. Values are your subconscious drivers that motivate you to do or not do anything.

For example, let’s say you set the goal “I want to make £100,000. Yet family, fun and recreation are your most important values. If your goal is not congruent with your top values, you will produce marginal results with that goal. Your subconscious mind will always drive you to take actions and decisions that feed your most important values.

Always, always ask “why is this goal important for me to achieve?” It’s a “power question” that will link your goals with your values.
Pitfall 3: Lack of a Time Deadline
It has been said that a “goal is a dream with a deadline”. Without a deadline, it’s likely that achieving your goal exists only vaguely sometime in the future. “I want to achieve £100,000” lacks any sense of direction. The old “someday” syndrome kicks in and your subconscious mind takes a nap, thinking it has all the time in the world.

Instead, a goal with a deadline alerts the subconscious mind that you are ready to take action, focus your energies and achieve your desired outcome within a certain timeframe. “I want to earn £100,000 by 31st December 2007” is a goal that creates a sense of urgency and gives you momentum.

Pitfall 4: Not Considering the Consequences of Your Goal
In NLP, we always check for the “ecology” of achieving a certain goal. Does achieving your goal conflict with other areas of your life? Does it negatively affect others? Does it negatively impact the planet?

In today’s high stress, cooker-pressed business world, business owners and leaders often pursue goals that cost them in other areas of their life. In some cases come serious consequences, such as divorce, heart attacks, loss of friends, etc. Management guru, Steven Covey, reminds us, “It’s one thing to move up the ladder. It’s another thing to find out your ladder is against the wrong wall.” Always check your goal’s consequences. Ask yourself, “Does the goal conflict with any other area of my life?” “If I achieve my goal, does it create win/win or win/lose outcomes?”

Pitfall 5: Stating the Goal in the Future Tense
Stating the outcome in the future tense keeps you in that hoping, wishing state: a state in which all your fears and doubts creep in. You begin to hear those nasty inner voices, such as, “you’ve got to be kidding; you’re a loser.” “Why bother! You’ll fail anyway.”

When you write your goal in the present tense, you bypass those inner voices. Why? Because the subconscious mind does not know the difference between that which is imagined and that which is real. Writing the goal “as if it already happened” sets a strong inner
intention and decision that the goal is already achieved, at least in your mind. Thus, your goal becomes more compelling and achievable.

For example, instead of stating your goal as “I want to earn £100,000 by 31st December 2007,” use “It is now 31st December 2007. I have successfully accomplished my goal of earning £100,000.” Yeah! Now your mind is cheering you on; the present tense makes it more compelling and real.

Pitfall 6: Lack of an “Evidence Procedure”
This one secret is worth its weight in gold! No other goal-setting technique incorporates this powerful secret. It makes the difference between mediocre results and extraordinary outcomes.

Your evidence procedure is your “proof” statement that your goal is already achieved. How will you know when you have achieved your desired outcome? What is the last step that needs to happen to ensure your goal is achieved?

Use sensory based language to make your proof statement compelling and real. That is, what will you see, hear, feel that proves you have accomplished your goal?

For example, this is your goal statement with an evidence procedure: “It is now 31st December 2007. I have successfully earned £100,000 in income this year. I know it because [proof statement] I am looking at my 2007 financial statement with a big grin on my face as I hear my wife congratulating me for a job well done.” BINGO!

Pitfall 7: Not Identifying and Enrolling Your Success Team
As Walt Disney said, “You can have the most beautiful dream in the world, yet it takes people to build it.” Trying to accomplish your goals on your own is the hard way.

Goals, as defined above, along with a success team give you the fuel and the leverage to achieve big audacious goals that once seemed impossible. Whether you are an executive trying to get your team to rally behind your goals or an entrepreneur wanting the support of like-minded business owners, the critical factor is to make sure you link your goals and vision with what each member on your team wants to achieve.

“How can I assist my team members to self-actualise through the accomplishment of my goals? How can I help them get what they really want?”

In summary, if you want to become an unstoppable force in your business, follow these top 7 principles in goal-setting…turbo-charged style. When you do, invite me to your celebration party.

Denise Corcoran is the CEO of the Empowered Business, assisting CEOs, executives and business owners in taking a quantum leap from the ordinary to extraordinary. A business and leadership coach, strategic consultant and Master NLP Practitioner, Denise’s latest e-book The Mindset of Greatness: 21 Principles to Becoming an Unstoppable Woman... Oprah Winfrey Style! can be found at www.EmpoweredBusiness.com.
Many articles have been written about PC life expectancy but none of them really apply to any industry in which PCs are left switched on 24 hours a day (such as the booking and taxi industries). Because of this, let us look at the raw data and extrapolate what we can from it.

Both Intel and AMD specify the expected life of a home/office PC CPU at 30,000–50,000 hours at ambient temperatures. That equates to 3–5 years of continuous use. The life expectancy can be considerably shorter if the electronics are stressed in any way. Most failures will be as a result of thermal stress and therefore to ensure the full 30,000–50,000 hours the PCs should be well ventilated and the fans and filters checked and serviced every 3,000 hours (approximately every four months). Every time your PC CPU is operating above its ideal operating temperature it is ageing much faster.

Based on the assumption that most home or office PCs are only switched on for 3–10 hours a day, this makes the life expectancy 8–15 years. It also makes the fan/filter service interval about three years, which is when most people are thinking about upgrading to the latest whizzo chipset or soundcard anyway.

So nearly everyone who consumes PCs are happy, as technological development leaps forward faster than the failure rate of the PC components and therefore PCs tend to be scrapped or upgraded long before the hardware needs servicing or breaks down. If we now look at an industry where the PC is required to work 24/7 most suppliers would recommend purpose-designed fileservers. Fileservers are usually rack mounted in temperature controlled dust free cabinets. It is therefore not unfair to assume that such environments and the purpose built “ruggedised” machines may double the life expectancy of a CPU.

So let’s think about the booking and dispatch environment where the PCs are left on permanently. The environment is generally very poor indeed. Most offices have incredible temperature variations between winter and summer and day and night. Coupled with this, the air is full of dust, exhaust soot and human detritus. On many sites I have found CPU fans and filters totally blocked after only nine months of use. This will cause the CPU to operate at a higher temperature and therefore decrease the life expectancy to 15,000 hours.

So, assuming that you actually clean the fans and filters every four months, you must still accept that the temperature controlled environment of most taxi offices is less than ideal. The longest you could expect trouble free operation of your PC would be a little over three years. Also, assuming that you would want to change your PC long before it starts to play up and potentially corrupt your data or cause financial loss to your business you should be planning it at least six months before this.

Now lets take the worst-case scenario. You place your PC on the floor in a dusty office, you leave it on 24/7 and nobody ever cleans out the fans or filters. After approx nine months the PC is overheating and in another six months the CPU will be malfunctioning, so after only 12–18 months you once lovely new PCs appear to be nearly scrap (sound familiar)! Even cleaning out the fans at this point will not reverse the thermal ageing process. In this scenario you should be ordering replacement PCs in a little over a year.

What is the Answer?

Well, there is no real answer, but knowledge and education are probably the best weapons against premature thermal aging and extending your PC life expectancy. Protect your PC from elevated operating temperatures. Firstly try to make sure the room temperature (the ambient temperature) does not exceed the recommended levels of 18–22 degrees C. Coupled with this, choose a PC manufacturer who does not skimp on the cooling arrangements and has designed a PC with extended operating hours in mind.
Some CPU cooling fans can cost as much as £7.00 because they have ball bearings and thermal sensors. Other cheap ones have nylon bearings and only cost 90p. You will often hear these cheaper fans making squeaks or rattles as the bearings fail. Once this happens your PC is aging much faster than normal. Avoid cheap knocked down PCs. If you have someone building PCs for you, pay the extra money and have a larger than needed power supply fitted (it will run cooler). Also insist that the fans are expensive bearing fans with a 50,000-hour or lifetime guarantee. Try and use machines with industrial four-inch fans and not the one-inch hobby fans fitted to most cheap PCs.

If your PC has CPU temperature warning alarms make sure these are set to the lowest recommended threshold to warn you if the cooling is failing. All server PCs built by Diplomat have raid hard drives with built in thermal sensors; these trigger an email alert in the event of a hard drive failure or if the PC has a temperature problem. This enables servicing to be proactive and not reactive.

Dell Optiplex computers are to be recommended. They have been designed for high-usage business environments and have two (yes two) large industrial four-inch fans. Due to the size and quality of these fans they rarely wear out or become blocked.

Accept the Life Expectancy and Plan Ahead

Even with perfect care and consideration your PC is not designed to last much longer than three years in a 24/7 environment. You should plan your replacement schedule carefully and demote or retire mission critical PCs to less critical positions after about two years.

Moore’s law dictates that the replacement will be twice as fast or half the price, so don’t see replacement as a burden – just accept it as a running cost. Be philosophical. If you compare the life expectancy of a family car and then compare it with a family car that is being used as a taxi 24/7 it will be less than half. This also applies to PCs in the same environment. Ok, it’s expensive – or is it? At around £600 for 1,000 days’ work, this means your computer costs you 60p a day. It works 24/7, and never takes a lunch break or pulls a sickie.

Its replacement in three years will cost less, work faster and remember more. So all in all they are not such bad little critters after all – they just don’t last forever.

Stewart Harding is the CEO of Windowview Ltd. You can contact him at the www.diplomat.co.uk
Report Writing: 7 Tips to Improve Your Editing

By Tony Atherton

Report writing is not the easiest of jobs, and one of the biggest mistakes made by many report writers is to neglect the final stage of their task, which is to edit and proofread their report carefully. It is almost inevitable that your report writing will contain textual errors. It is far better for you to find and correct those errors than for your readers to spot them and possibly become irritated by them. So often this final task of editing is done casually, if at all, whereas it should be done carefully and systematically.

So, how do you actually do it? Different writers will have different approaches, but most professional writers are likely to use the following seven techniques:

Print it, Read it, Fix it
Many people find it easier to edit a printed document than one still on the screen, so print and read it. If you stumble then your readers will almost certainly do so too. If you, the writer, cannot read your report without hesitating, then what chance have your readers got? Fix the obvious problems.

Shorten it
Draft reports are always too long. Remove anything that does not add value to your report – so find them and delete them. Just because you sweated blood to discover a certain piece of information does not mean your reader needs to know it. If they do, include it. If they don't, leave it out. Be ruthless about this.

Keep Paragraphs and Sentences Short
Try to achieve average paragraph lengths of around five or six lines if printed on A4 paper and aim for an average sentence length of just under 20 words. Short paragraphs and sentences look more inviting and are easier to read than long ones. Obviously some will be longer and some shorter than these guidelines.

Use Plain English
Try to use plain English when writing reports; if your reader has to get a dictionary out to understand your report then you have not used plain English. When writing a report, your job is to get your argument across to your reader, not to expand his or her vocabulary. So replace unusual or obscure words with ones that are easier to understand.

For example, don't talk about a “paradigm shift” unless you really have to; instead tell them about a different approach or change of attitude or process. Also, delete unnecessary words. A crisis is always serious and dangers are always real so you do not need to say “serious crisis” or “real danger”. Are there trivial crises or imitation dangers?
Use Active Sentences

Tighten up your writing by preferring active to passive sentences. This point of grammar can seriously improve your report writing! Active sentences will usually have a subject-verb-object structure whereas passive ones have an object-verb-subject structure. Clear as mud?

Forget the grammar and just look at some examples. For example, “The dog chased the cat” (5 words) is an active sentence whereas “The cat was chased by the dog” (7 words) is a passive sentence. Active sentences are normally shorter and a bit more direct. It is usually a good idea to aim for about 70–80 percent of your sentences to be active when writing reports.

In technical reports you may have to lower your sights a little. Here are two examples from real reports: “Three sites were visited by the inspectors,” (passive – 7 words). “The inspectors visited three sites,” (active – 5 words). “Children were encouraged to use exploratory play by their teachers,” (passive – 10 words). “Teachers encouraged children to use exploratory play,” (active – 7 words).

Do the Obvious Checks

It is surprising how many people appear to skip the basic checks on punctuation, spelling and grammar. Grammar checkers are far from perfect but they will provide some help if used intelligently. Most punctuation problems can be avoided if you use short sentences. Short sentences need fewer punctuation marks and the grammar checker is more likely to get things right too. Set the spellchecker to the right version of English for your readers but do not rely on it.

You must also check spelling by eye. A spellchecker cannot check your meaning. If you mistype a word so that it ends up as a correct English word it will not spot it (such as typing “word” instead of “work”). In grammar, “subject-verb-agreement” usually means that you have muddled up singulars and plurals. Remember that “collective nouns” such as “the board”, “the committee” and “the industry” are actually singular and take singular verbs despite referring to lots of people or organisations. So we write, “the committee is very concerned”, and not “the committee are very concerned”.

How Does it Look?

Finally, take a good look at it. Does it look good? Adding some white space in sensible places (such as an extra line of space after sections) can make a report look more inviting. Editing any document, but especially when you are report writing, is an important part of the production process, not an optional extra to be done if you have nothing better to do with your time.

With any writing, especially a lengthy report, there will still be some errors – no matter how careful you are. Careful and methodical editing can find most of them. It is far better for you to find them and correct them than for your readers to notice them and wince. Report writing is not necessarily easy, but it can be rewarding and a good report can build your reputation. A bad one can too!
LIFESTYLE

PA Enterprise January Menu

Here is the first DeskDemon menu for the new year. And as the excesses of Christmas have only just retreated into the past it’s perhaps a good time to think about food that, though still perfect for winter, is pared back and wholesome. The tomato and okra stew is a great winter warmer, and the spaghetti with tuna sauce means you get some healthy fish into your diet. And the blueberry tart? Well, there’s no point being too severe just yet!

Tomato & Okra Stew

Serves 4

Ingredients:
- 15ml/1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 tomatoes, chopped
- 2-3 tsp tomato paste
- 350ml/1½ cup chicken stock
- 275g okra
- 2 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped
- Salt and black pepper

1. Heat the oil in a saucepan and cook the onion for about 5 minutes. Add in the tomatoes and paste and leave to cook for a further 5 minutes stirring continuously. Pour in the stock, cut the tops off the okra with a knife and add to the pan, season with salt and pepper.

2. Bring the stew to the boil, then lower the heat, cover the lid and simmer for 30 minutes until the okra is tender and the sauce has thickened. Stir in the chopped parsley and serve immediately.

Blueberry Tart

Serves 6-8

Ingredients:
- 2 tbsp icing sugar
- Few drops of vanilla essence
- 500g/4 cups of fresh blueberries
- 90 ml/6 tbsp redcurrent jelly
- 30ml/2 tbsp orange juice
- 225g/2 cups plain flour
- 75g/¾ cup icing sugar
- 150g/½ cup butter
- 1 egg yolk
- Pinch of salt
- 350g/1½ cups mascarpone
- 2 tbsp icing sugar
- Few drops of vanilla essence
- 500g/4 cups of fresh blueberries
- 90 ml/6 tbsp redcurrent jelly
- 30ml/2 tbsp orange juice

1. Sift the flour in a bowl, add the salt and sugar. Dice the butter and add in until the mixture looks like coarse breadcrumbs. Mix in the egg yolk and 10ml/2 tsp of cold water. Gather the dough together, knead lightly and chill for approximately one hour in the fridge.

2. Preheat the oven to 190ºC/Gas 5. Roll out the pastry and use to line a 25cm fluted flan tin. Prick the base with a fork and chill for about 15 minutes in the fridge.

3. Line the pastry case with greaseproof paper and baking beans, then bake for 15 minutes. Remove the beans and paper and bake for a further 15 minutes, until golden and crisp. Leave in the tin to cool down.

4. Beat together the mascarpone, sugar, and vanilla in a mixing bowl until smooth. Remove the pastry case from the tin, then spoon in the filling mixture and pile the blueberries on top. Heat the redcurrent jelly along with the orange juice until the jelly is runny, sieve, then brush over the blueberries to form a glaze.

Spaghetti with Tuna Sauce

Serves 4

Ingredients:
- 225g spaghetti
- 15ml/1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 Garlic Clove, chopped
- Salt and black pepper
- 400g can of chopped tomatoes
- 425g canned tuna

Cook the spaghetti, drain well and keep hot. Heat the oil and cook the garlic for 2-3 minutes. Add in the tomatoes and simmer for 5 minutes. Add in the tuna and the spaghetti. Stir well, heat and season with salt and pepper.
This “fruit for thought” article is for all people who somehow find themselves in the role of breadwinner and striving to improve their living standards. The heading of this article could just as well have been “How to position yourself for promotion”, “How to position yourself for career advancement”, “How to climb the success ladder” or something similar.

**Work Ethic: Become a Linking Pin**

Solid career building depends on excellent work performance, combined with good work ethics. The answer on how to cultivate a good work ethic is simple. Make yourself one of the linking pins in your organisation. A linking pin is someone to whom everybody turns to, to get information and advice from. It is also someone who can link persons, sections and departments for better co-operation. But most important of all, it is someone who can exert influence upwards, downwards and sideways in the organisational structure. In other words you must be able to influence people around you to carry out the wishes, policies and strategies of top management, by earning respect through your display of expertise and thoroughness. You must also be able to represent the valid wishes and needs of lower levels to top management. You can become a linking pin by striving to attain the following traits.

**11 Career Builder Steps**

**Step 1: Build Expert Knowledge**

If you are an electrician, do not only be satisfied with your qualification. Try to gain more in depth expertise in this technical field of yours, to distinguish yourself from other electricians. If you are an accountant, avail yourself of in depth knowledge about bookkeeping practices by studying or reading up on subjects pertinent for your field of technical expertise.

You can bluff your way during interviews but once you have been appointed people expect from you to perform. This is where the cookie crumbles or you succeed. The point is you must not only perform at an average level, you must display exceptional or above average expertise so that others can start to rely on your opinions and advice.

**Step 2: Produce Accurate Work**

Cultivate the habit of carrying out your work correctly with a minimum of mistakes. Sloppiness or tardiness must definitely not be present in your attitude, personal appearance or any of your work outputs, be it notes, memos, letters, spreadsheets, conversations or anything related to your work. Imagine what will happen if debits and credits are being processed the wrong way around in a financial department. It will have disastrous consequences. Strive for professionalism in what you do.

**Step 3: Be Quicker Than Most**

This is one of the best ways to demonstrate your superiority and efficiency. By executing duties and tasks speedily, you are being more productive and can entice more important tasks your way and thereby not only increase your merit ratings, but also your ultimate job rating. If you can perform your duties speedily, do not wait and stay idle, but present yourself to your superior for more work. Find a balance to be both quick and accurate.

**Step 4: Display Awareness of Productivity**

This must start with your own self-evaluation. Ask yourself constantly if you are giving more back to the organisation in value than what you are being paid every month. Although not easy to calculate, just thinking about it may have enough of an impact. Just imagine for a moment if your organisation were to be solely dependant for profit on the output of human beings only. In other words nothing to sell or produce but labour output. If you can do more, it reflects directly on profit. Luckily a lot of organisations have machines that make up in productivity for what is lost by unproductive employees. But being more productive in what you do as a human being can contribute significantly to the profits of any organisation. As salaries are one of the highest cost elements in any organisation, this is
one of the first cost elements that come under scrutiny during times of cost reduction efforts. You have to show your worth in order not to be included in downsizing of the labour force. But, more positively, you have to show your worth to be counted in for consideration for promotion.

Get Rid of Time Wasters

Arriving late for work, stretched tea and lunch breaks and elongated private conversations on the phone are not only wasting your valuable time but are a reflection of your poor awareness of productivity. Private conversations on the telephone are one of the most abused methods of stealth stealing from your employer. If you cannot be trusted on the use of the telephone, what else can you be trusted with? Are you earning respect for your ethical conduct in eradicating time wasters or are you just one of the crowd?

If you discipline yourself and others around you on the economical use of time, you are on your way to earn a respected leadership role. Others must detect a sense of urgency in your execution of duties to begin to respect and follow your example. Do you want to be a follower or a leader? Do you want to stay obscured in the crowd for the rest of your life or do you want to be recognised? There is such a thing as telephone ethics, you know. If you are prepared to pay for your use of the employer telephone, you are not abusing it. Do you really know what you are costing your employer for using the phone? You are not supposed to use it for private purposes in the first place. It is a privileged instrument entrusted to you to help you in your work and not to cause financial loss to you employer.

Step 5: Get Rid of Time Wasters

Whenever changes are announced, be positive and display a leadership role in executing the new policies and strategies. If you participated in the planning of the changes, then you were forewarned. But even if you experience unexpected changes, be first to look out for positive reasons for such changes and to influence others around you to accept it with positive attitudes. Defending superiors and higher management will increase your leadership status and trustworthiness. In a political sense it will display your role as siding with management against the disgruntled crowd.

Arrange and Organise Your Paperwork

A good filing system allows you to retrieve required documents and information fast for own use or for use by other parties. It is a reflection of your efficiency and your ability for sound logical thinking. If you surround yourself with paperwork to impress on others how busy you are, you are making the mistake of your life. It can be interpreted in many different ways, like you cannot cope with the workload, you cannot delegate, you spend too much on time wasters, you are too slow and worst of all you cannot manage yourself or others. If you cannot get rid of papers, you will not find the time to attend to the needs and development of your subordinates. You will also not find the time to liaison with colleagues or to discipline your section or department. You will be a walk over and
ripe for being misused by subordinates not respecting you. Rather be a reliable source of information with the time for training your subordinates and others. Clean up your desk to make time for others.

Read up on the Principles of Supervision and Management

Familiarise yourself with the knowledge on how to be a good supervisor or manager. If you can display management capabilities, you will sooner be identified for promotion. It is better to be promoted for your managerial capabilities than for your technical proficiency. It will allow you to perform your managerial duties better. Apart from being technically proficient, prepare yourself in advance for possible promotion. Make yourself ready and available for your employer and the future needs of your organisation.

Confidential Information

Your treatment of confidential information is going to be a good gauge of your character. You only have to make one mistake in this area, not to be trusted ever again. If you have a problem in this area, rectify it quickly. Your superiors and employer have to trust and rely on your discretion with confidential information. Some information must be kept confidential or secret until it is time for disclosure. You must proof your ability for discretion with this type of information, so that they know they can trust and rely on you. Let them know and understand that you are part and parcel of management.

Show Initiative

Make suggestions to improve methods of work and systems. See problems as opportunities for improvement. Do not just report problems, but analyse them wisely and make recommendations for improvement. Recognise opportunities for improvement and development and utilise it.

Be Honest, Open and Direct

Harbouring a secretive attitude of slyness with hidden agendas will not remain a secret for long. Other persons will eventually detect it and despise you for it. You can just as well fire yourself, because that is where you will end up. Nobody will trust you after you have been exposed. Be open and direct in your communications and handling of conflict situations. Do not be afraid to air your opinions, as long as they are genuine and true. Truthful mistakes can always be remedied later on.

Life is Short

Life is ever so short that nobody can really afford to remain average in the obscured crowd of nobodies. Make yourself stand out as someone with strong principles and work ethics, so that others can rely on your strengths. Qualifications alone, without work ethics, are totally worthless.

Make the following words part of your life and your philosophy on your outlook of work:

- Tenacity: Keep on trying.
- Conscientious: Keep on thinking about ways to finalise and improve your work.
- Humorous: Make life bearable and enjoyable.
- Urgency: You must finalise your work with speed and accuracy.
- Trustworthiness: Prove yourself to be a reliable and dependable person.
- Openness and honesty: Be a person of honour and proud of yourself.

Fostering of these principles will guarantee career success in your career building efforts.

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Speakers: Making & Breaking Meetings

Choosing the right speaker for your meeting is difficult, but get it right and the meeting will be one to remember

A well-chosen speaker at a meeting or event can make it one to remember. That’s why good speakers are so sought after. Some people just have a knack of talking and captivating their audience. They hold everyone spellbound, or induce a mood of thoughtfulness, or of humour, or of conviviality. But, of course, being a great speaker isn’t enough; they need to be relevant and deliver the kind of message you, as an organisation, want. The ex-drug dealer Howard Marks may be renowned as a speaker, but may not be the best choice of for a police benefit event!

The right speaker, talking on subject at the right point in the event, can somehow tie everything together and bring the big picture into view. And that’s why speakers can have such power. But, at worst, a speaker can inadvertently undo all the good work already done in a meeting, confusing the whole point of the event and baffling the audience with their message.

Therefore, it’s not surprising that how the “headlining” speaker is judged is very often how the entire event is judged. But how do you find the right speaker for the job? How do you ensure that your event is remembered for all the right reasons?

The Right Person for the Job

Finding the right speaker may be a difficult task, but there are numerous places for you to look:

- **Professional speaker associations**: Look for experienced speakers with good references.
- **Speaker agencies**: Look first at ones recommended by friends or colleagues.
- **Conferences**: By their very nature, there are always a number of speakers at conferences – perhaps one or two really impressed you?
- **Journals and magazines**: Whatever your area of business there are bound to be specialists happy to speak in front of an audience. Periodicals can be a great way of finding those essential experts.
- **Colleagues**: Colleagues can often give you the best objective feedback on speakers.
- **Educational institutions**: Universities are full of experts who speak all the time in front of audiences – they may also prove relatively inexpensive.

Shortlisting and Evaluating

If money is no object when trying to secure a speaker then it may be worth getting a celebrity speaker. But, remember, keep an open mind – don’t dismiss that perfect speaker just because they’re not a household name! It is a good idea to pick three speakers or so you think could be suitable. Now put them in order of preference and contact the one at the top. In order to evaluate the speaker you can use the following points before you make a decision:

- How willing are they to accommodate themselves to your needs?
- How speedily do they answer your questions?
- Do they have good references?
- How easy do they seem to work with (personal conversation is a good tool to judge this)?

Also, ask them:

- How long they’ve been speaking;
- What their credentials and experience is;
- Whether it’ll be possible to see them live beforehand;
- Whether they have any videos or audio of their speaking;
- To what degree they’ll adapt their material to your needs;
- What research they’ll do beforehand;
- Whether they’ll bring audience material, such as handouts;
- Whether they’ll be available to the audience after the presentation.

If they just don’t feel right, then go to your next one on the list.
What the speaker may want pre-talk:

- You and attendees to complete a questionnaire;
- To speak to certain attendees;
- Material and detailed information about the company.

It is important to treat the speaker as part of your team. Let him or her know when the agenda changes and make sure you offer to include their bio etc. in your promotional material. Listen to them about their meeting needs. And when he or she is actually talking, make sure you lead the audience in laughing and nodding at the right places!

Payment

Before the speaker gave the talk you should have finalised all of the costings and the contract – who pays for their accommodation, what is included in the price etc. Many speakers ask to be paid on the day they give their presentation, and so make sure you’ve had a cheque already cut for this.

The Best Laid Plans...

There inevitably comes that occasion when the speaker can’t make it. Do you have a backup plan? Can a member of your organisation step in, or another speaker give an extended talk? It’s important to have a contingency plan.

Preparation

Okay, you’ve now chosen your speaker. But that’s not it. If the speaker turns up to speak without having been primed then it could be a disaster or, at best, a dull and irrelevant talk.

What your speaker needs to know:

- Who the audience is: size, age range, company positions, ratio of males to females, and names of high-profile people attending;
- What your company does;
- Current challenges and issues facing the company;
- The topic and length of the talk;
- Meeting format including any time allotted for audience questions;
- Names of speakers sharing the platform (if any) plus their topics;
- Additional media events (i.e. pre and post-meeting interviews);
- Dress code;
- Rehearsal times, if any;
- Preparation/dressing-room location and opening hours;
- Subjects off limits;
- Whether the talk can be personalised with names.
I am finding it really hard to focus today! There are so many things to do, and I have been flitting from one to another without really getting down to anything in particular. I have certainly achieved quite a few things and have been able to tick off some items on my to-do list; however the most important item of the day, the writing of this article, has been left and left, although I have been thinking about how I should (that dreadful word!) be doing it all day! I know I will get it written before the end of the day, but this is really unlike me. I like to have things done at the earliest opportunity, not the last minute – so what is going on here?

Part of my problem is that I haven’t been following my own advice and that the optimum time for sleeping is between 10pm and 6am, but somehow my timings have slipped by at least a couple of hours! Time to focus on sorting this out and getting some great sleep!

Finding your focus can be easy, but you must go to the heart of the problem.

So, what do you need to focus on? Are you missing opportunities because your attention is too thinly spread? Are the little, easy things getting done, but the tasks that really need to be addressed getting pushed to the bottom of your list? What is actually behind this? Is it because, like me, you are so tired that you can't really concentrate, or is there some other reason you can't focus? Find the cause and deal with it, and it will make it so much easier for you to move forward, and so doing

“Concentrate all your thoughts upon the work at hand. The sun’s rays do not burn until brought to a focus.”

Alexander Graham
the things that not only bring you great satisfaction, but also will stop hanging over you through lack of focus.

Focus on what you need to do next. If you are not clear what the first/next step is, spend your energy on finding the answer. If necessary take another look at what it is you are trying to achieve and start reversing. What are the steps between where you want to be and where you are now?

What is really going on here? What is behind the avoidance of this particular task? It’s time to really focus on the reasons that you have been putting things off. Is it because you are unprepared or feel that you don’t have the necessary skills? Or is it because the task is something that you really dislike doing? What makes you dislike it? Or it could be that you are worried that you’ll fail in the task, that it is all too much. Think of ways that you can address these feelings and finally get going.

Are you paying attention to yourself and your own needs? I know from experience that if you let this slide then everything else suffers and you won’t be able to function properly. What do you need the most? More sleep? More activity? A way of eating and drinking that nurtures your body? Someone to talk to? Some time to relax and unwind? What can you do for yourself today that will make a difference?

Exercise

Are you getting enough exercise? The focus required here is on finding activities that you really enjoy doing that you can incorporate into your daily routine. The more varied and interesting those activities are, the more likely you are to keep at them. If you like the company of others, there are many kinds of team sports, exercise classes or dancing. If you prefer to be on your own there is swimming, walking, working out in the gym or even dancing to your own choice of music in your own home! You choose – but whatever you prefer make it part of your life.

Are you paying attention to yourself and your own needs? I know from experience that if you let this slide then everything else suffers and you won’t be able to function properly. What do you need the most? More sleep? More activity? A way of eating and drinking that nurtures your body? Someone to talk to? Some time to relax and unwind? What can you do for yourself today that will make a difference?

A Tip

Here is a tip for nothing. If you feel that you’ve lost focus, find yourself somewhere to sit and be still. Concentrate on your breath and how it feels entering and leaving your body. Allow your mind to become quiet. Gradually, allow the thoughts back in. If they are not relevant to the thing you need to focus on, discard them and concentrate once more on your breathing. Some ideas will creep in. Examine them. Are they of any use or not? If they are, develop them some more. If not, return to your breathing. After a while you’ll be able to refocus your attention where it needs to be. Finding the focus can sometimes be a simple thing if only we actually bother to look for it!

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Is it your attitude that is holding you back? How do you mentally look at the world around you? Do you feel that you are being made to do things, or do you think to yourself, “This might not be my most favourite task; however, I am determined to do the best I can at it.” Instead of dwelling on the negative aspects of what you need to do, you can shift your focus by making it a personal challenge. “I will get this done as quickly and efficiently as I possibly can, so that I can move on to doing something I enjoy more.”

New Experiences

Are you open to new experiences, new opportunities or are you focusing too much on what has gone before or what might happen? Are you ready to open yourself up to whatever life has to offer?

Usually I suggest various forms of creativity. This time I am going to focus on writing. When you write things down, even if they appear random ideas at first glance, you start to release many of the thoughts that are packed into your head. Very few of us, if any, can write one thing and be thinking about another at the same time. So get yourself into a quiet corner with paper and pen and start emptying your head. You may be surprised at what you read!
Jog your working memory with this office puzzle

2006 has gone, and 2007 is here. But do you still know your paperclip from your printer and your stapler from your shorthand? This office puzzle will help to ease you gently into the new year. Search for the hidden office-related words.

Solution:

- boss
- briefcase
- communicating
- computer
- copier
- coworker
- decisions
- desk
- diary
- email
- events
- keyboard
- laptop
- meetings
- monitor
- mouse
- office
- paper
- paperclips
- pens
- printer
- projects
- shorthand
- solutions
- stapler
- typing
- watercooler

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JANUARY 2007
1. Be a Better Communicator
A large part of improving your communication environment at work is improving your own ability to communicate. Find out how to strike that right balance to move away from the impersonal and into the interpersonal.
http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/career/better-communication

2. Dealing with Difficult People
Discover 27 simple tips for how to deal with difficult people - those gossips, whiners and know-it-alls. Whether it's dealing with a difficult boss, a colleague or a spouse, applying these tips can help take stress out of the relationship.
http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/career/difficult-people

3. Tips to Boost Your Professional Reputation
Your professional reputation depends on many character traits. This article outlines the various attributes, such as dependability, actions, and accepting responsibility, that give you that all-important respect in the workplace.
http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/career/boost-reputation

4. The Best Way to Resign
Sometimes it takes great courage to leave the safety net of your current employer. This article explores some of the things you should and shouldn't do when your time to resign comes.
http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/career/resigning

5. How to Deal with a Disrespectful Boss
The disrespectful, rude or insulting boss is a common problem. But how do you tackle the issue? This article looks at the three choices you have when confronted by a dilemma such as this.
http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/career/disrespectful-bosses

6. Resolve to Leave the Office Earlier
Where do we draw the line when it comes to the work/life balance? Here are some great strategies to help you draw the line and leave work on time.
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Papers that make business sense