OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS SOFTLY
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Plus
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Top Ten Core Competencies of an Exceptional Employee
How to take the struggle out of work and make the most of your career.

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Workplace No-Nos
Know what not to do, not just what to do.

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On making the most of external consultants.

Tasty Toasties, Sumptuous Stew and Ravishing Rolls
A trio of recipes not to be missed!

The Mind Map as a Creative Thinking Tool
How to tap your hidden creativity.

Spot The Difference
Find ten differences between these two christmas themes.
Welcome to the final 2007 issue of PA Enterprise. This issue is very much themed around personal development: how to think and act in order to get the most of your working day – and career. Our cover article, Opportunity Knocks Softly, is an inspiring interview with Anabela Pinto of Bear, Stearns International Limited. Anabela originally worked as a dealer assistant in the banking industry. It was only chance that led her into what was planned as a temporary position as a PA to a departmental head. Of course she was hooked and so is now firmly established as a PA. Anabela believes in learning through reading (especially PA Enterprise!) as well as speaking with fellow PAs and administrative professionals to share expertise and skills. When opportunity does call, you’ll be all the more prepared to grasp it. It’s a sentiment we firmly hold too!

The article Top Ten Core Competencies of an Exceptional Employee explains in some detail the skills and proficiencies required of the modern administrative professional. And just as this article explains what to do, Workplace No-Nos gives a rundown of what not to do. This, of course, is just as important! In fact, the two go hand in hand: experience, a sure understanding of workplace protocol and good communication skills will mean you can cope with whatever is thrown your way and tread that best path through your career.

This, in many respects, is what DeskDemon’s chief marketing officer Dave West advocates in his column Respect Your Own Expertise. Whilst external consultants often have a role to play in helping an organisation progress, the PA and administrative professional usually has the most comprehensive understanding of their organisation of all – and this understanding should not be dismissed lightly!

We also have a number of other incisive articles. The Mind Map as a Creative Thinking Tool sheds light on the creative process and the use of mind maps to come up with those eureka ideas. Then there’s Beating Procrastination, How to Calm Yourself in Stressful Situations and a worksmart article on Microsoft Office Excel 2007. Plus, don’t forget to check out this issue’s mouth-watering menu and our festive Spot the Difference, Berries and Baubles.

It now just leaves us all at DeskDemon to wish you a wonderful Christmas and New Year. We hope you have a well-deserved break and recharge those batteries. We look forward to bringing PA Enterprise to you in 2008.
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November 2007 Winner
Iona Robertson
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Nominator:
Julie Phillips

October 2007 Winner
Carolyn Truscott
of IPC Media
Nominator:
Wendy Sloane

September 2007 Winner
Mei Suen
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Nominator:
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Top Ten Core Competencies of an Exceptional Employee

By Brenda Cody

How to take the struggle out of work and make the most of your career

While there are hundreds of skills to be aware of in the workplace, the following summarises the top ten for all employees, whether you are flipping hamburgers or are on the fast track to partner in your law firm. See if there’s one on this list that you need to work on!

1. Understand the Contract(s)
   It’s imperative to understand that there are formal and informal contracts between you and your employer, even though some are unwritten. The formal contract is that you agree to show up as per your schedule and perform your assigned work. In turn, your employer agrees to provide you a safe environment in which to perform your work and then to pay you the agreed to rate on a specified schedule.

   The informal contract consists of the rules that govern which people are successful in an organisation. Think about where you work now: is there an unwritten rule about working 60–70 hours per week in order to get promoted/noticed? Is there a rule about not disagreeing with the boss in order to be considered a “team player”? The rules of the informal contract are not written in an employee handbook, nor are they (generally) ever talked about.

   Being aware of the informal contract is helpful in figuring out what is valued in your organisation and understanding the rules of the game.

2. Be Flexible
   Products, environments, people, customers, job duties, management all change. When you are unable or unwilling to adapt to change, you immediately reduce your effectiveness and worth to your organisation.

3. Accept Ambiguity
   Be able to endure, adjust to and accept lots of ambiguity. The truth is, things are rarely black and white. You need to be able to go with the flow, make your own decisions and understand that you will rarely have all the facts. For most positions in most organisations, training is very informal and you are expected to “fill in the blanks”.

   There will be large amounts of information not communicated during training and beyond. You must be capable of finding your own solutions, based on the minimal information you are given, and, most importantly, not blame the organisation and your colleagues for not telling you everything.

4. Stay Engaged
   This is not about “looking busy”. If you stay engaged and don’t let yourself get bored, you will be the most productive employee – and, be assured, the right people will notice. It’s about reputation and being trustworthy.

5. Be Curious
   Being curious is how you learn, it’s how you understand someone else’s position and it’s how you come to understand the “why”. Remember to always question for your own understanding, not to show someone they are wrong. Curiosity is a very useful way of asking questions, getting information and, most of all, learning! Being genuinely curious is one of the best ways to show you care about your job, your department and your organisation. People love to talk about themselves and what they do, so, after you have expressed your curiosity, listen to what they have to say!
6. Become the Expert
Become the expert in your group, department, division, organisation, company… or worldwide! Employers and colleagues go to and rely on experts. Most importantly, “experts” are usually promoted and are not laid off or fired! Be the “go to” person and you become the most valued and recognised employee in your organisation.

7. It’s Not What You Say, It’s How You Say It
It’s well known that our words convey only seven percent of our message and that the other ninety-three percent is conveyed through body language, tone and inflection. Slight shifts in tone make a huge difference in how you are received by the other person and the bottom line is that it is you and you alone who are responsible for how your message is received by the person you are talking to.

8. People Are Doing the Best They Can
While many of us find this hard to believe at work, coming to accept this as a framework and paradigm can radically shift your attitude at work. It is false to assume that colleagues and/or management are being malicious unless you have solid proof. Most people are doing what they think is right. Typically we jump to the conclusion that people are purposefully conducting themselves in a manner that we do not agree with or that we find offensive.

However, the truth is we almost never really know “why” someone has done something or made a decision unless we ask them. Do this enough times and you will see the wisdom in always giving people the benefit of the doubt.

9. Attitude
While this seems an obvious one, how many people do you work with who have lousy attitudes? Have you been guilty too? When all other areas are equal – intelligence, experience, education – wouldn’t you rather deal with someone who has a positive attitude? Most employers and colleagues would rather hire and work with someone with a positive attitude since other factors can be taught/learned. Generally, it is believed that an employee’s disposition is harder to change than their job-related skill level. Have you ever noticed that when you get your own attitude in check the good in other people that you were not able to see before shows up?

And maybe most importantly…

10. Lighten up!
The goal with this proficiency is to not take yourself so seriously! We have all “marinated” in the fact that someone at work has said “something”, or looked at us “that certain way”, only to find out later that the reason a comment was made or a look given actually had nothing to do with us.

Typically, our inability to lighten up is rooted in fear, pride or feelings of inadequacy. It’s amazing that when we stop taking ourselves so seriously our negative characteristics are released and our humour and fun returns!

The bottom line is this: you do not need to struggle at work, unless you’re working at it! Notice the twist in this. Most of us falsely believe that to work means to struggle. The truth is, if you are struggling at work then you are working at it. What would it mean to you to get up in the morning and know you were not going to struggle with your workday, workplace environment or your colleagues? It is possible by using these competencies!

Brenda Cody is the president and founder of The Work Solutions Group, a coaching and consulting organisation that helps companies and individuals through work and career transitions. More information on The Work Solutions Group can be found at www.WorkSolutionsGroup.com
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Mirth, amusement, pleasure: smiles spread happiness all around. And so DeskDemon would like to catch your smiley face to publish on the site.

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Opportunity Knocks Softly
By Susan Silva

Anabela Pinto, of Bear, Stearns International Limited, interviewed by Marci Heit.
One person’s story of entering and excelling in the PA world

Marci: Hi Anabela, thank you for talking with us today. Why don’t you tell us a little bit about your background and current role at Bear Sterns and how you got to where you are?

Anabela: I have been in the banking industry since 1995. I was working in South Africa, trading equities as a dealer assistant. When I moved to Australia in 1999 I started to expand my knowledge and work with the equities and warrants derivative market. Then I moved to London in 2003, it was only supposed to be a temporary thing, but I’ve not really gone back to Australia since. My current role at Bear Sterns is as Personal Assistant to the head of the Risk Department. There are about 28 people working in the department and I report mainly to the head of the department, sitting just outside his office. Our Risk Department team has about three or four departments within it and we all seem to work pretty well together.

Marci: That’s important.

Anabela: It is pretty important to work well together; I have to make sure the executive I work for manages to communicate as much as possible with the different areas. Since he is the head of the department he has to oversee that everything runs smoothly and when he can’t help or attend certain meetings he has direct reports who can fill in for him. That’s where I come in. If he can’t make a meeting, we delegate the next person in the team or department. I think that is where communication is very important.
important between the executive and myself.

It is by chance that I took the position, because I had always worked as a dealer assistant on the trading floor. When it came to moving to London, I thought it would be only a temporary thing, and I didn’t really want to be a Personal Assistant to be honest. However, I am glad I took it up because I wouldn’t go back and not be a Personal Assistant – and I have a good team and the executive is really good.

So, over the time, I have had to pick up a lot by communicating with other Personal Assistants and reading up on magazines and books, just to see how to make things function as smoothly as possible. There have been a few obstacles but every single one I’ve come across I have had to learn from – and I think that has been a good way of learning.

Marci: Can you give us one example of an obstacle you have had to overcome?

Anabela: One real basic obstacle that I am sure a lot of people would be familiar with is Microsoft Outlook. It’s software that everyone uses, but the key is making it work for you and for everyone else. It is really about putting in a lot of information whenever you do a meeting plan. For example, when you send an email, send as much information as possible, because if you don’t then people will get confused – meaning delays and email after email.

It just a matter of communicating and how to handle conversation and problems – it’s something we all work on over time and by speaking to others and how they work.

Marci: You have to immediately react to how others are behaving.

Anabela: Definitely – react to how other people would respond and just be proactive in everything you do. I think also another way to make sure things don’t go wrong is by putting yourself in the other person’s shoes and seeing how they be to able to understand.

Marci: Anabela, what is a typical day like for you?

Anabela: I have recently been on a coaching class, and this has been one of the best things I could have done because it made a plan or map of how my day should be. So, now, when I get to the office I look at the diary and the first meeting of the day. I am already aware the night before of the meeting details. In the morning I come in and check the emails, make sure nothing has been cancelled, print out anything that is needed and go through my inbox. Then I note down in the diary any other meetings that have come in over the night, because New York carries on trading after we have all gone home. Usually, by the time we get to work in the morning, there are other meetings planned. I just make sure everything fits into the diary and that everything looks easy to control. It would obviously be difficult if the executive has to be in two meetings at the same time. We try and make sure that is sorted.

Every day I religiously try and have a five or ten minute chat with the executive and go through exactly what is in the diary and make sure he can attend
the meetings. If he is not going to attend them then we discuss who in the direct reports team should go instead. This seems to have worked for us. I then contact the person and say, “Hey the executive can’t make it. Can you make sure you are at this meeting? This is what you need.” Also, when I am finished my prep for the day, I ask him if there is anything he wants me to do. That is when he gives me tasks to carry on with. I can come back with questions later. I think it is really good to have these short chats. Because in the past we always got interrupted, I actually asked if we could ensure we’re not – and this is something he has respected and it helps a lot.

Marci: So once it again it comes back to organisation and communication.

Anabela: Definitely, without a doubt.

Marci: Can you describe an atypical day for us – one that was far from typical (where everything that could go wrong did go wrong) but that you managed to get through?

I must say I am pretty fortunate; even if there is a day when, for example, the executive calls in to tell me that he’s not in good enough health to come to the office, I know immediately either to inform the meeting or ask the person he’d instruct to go in his place. Again, that is about taking the initiative, communicating and being clear on what action should be taken.

If you don’t know what to do then you should approach the next direct report and say, “Hey I don’t know what to do. Can you give me some advice on how I should tackle this?” It is a matter of not being shy and of asking questions no matter how silly you think you are being. There is no room for assumptions; you have to be clear on everything. So I don’t really have any major obstacles. We manage to work everything out as a team.

Marci: You have a well-oiled machine.

Anabela: Definitely. I try my best.

Marci: What skills have you acquired and what have been most valuable?

Anabela: Well, because I haven’t always been a Personal Assistant and have come from a banking environment, it does help that I understand how the banking field works and how the markets function. When it comes to terminology at the office, I understand what is going on, which is a nice thing. The second thing is just keeping your ear to the ground. I think it is mainly about communicating openly and understanding where you are and clarifying a lot of questions. This hasn’t been a skill I have been good at from the beginning – these are things I have learned to pick up and work on over the years.

I am in the Women in Banking and Finance Industry, in the banking area. We have this group called WIFB. I do Toastmasters, where you go and practice public speaking. I pick up how other people communicate and how they use their body language, and how they break their conversations up and define where they are going through their conversations. I have learnt to communicate quite clearly. I would highly recommend anything to develop your own personal skills. Reading magazines like PA Enterprise or AdminAdvantage – reading about techniques to improve your personal skills – will have a positive effect on your role. This comes with time – it isn’t something you can pick up over night. Keep your options open and take anything you come across as an opportunity to learn. There is always something you are going to pick up.

Marci: If you had to give a PA starting out just one piece of advice, what would it be?

Anabela: It would be something I am reading from a Castalia coaching performance brochure, a quote I found striking: “Learn to listen, opportunity sometimes knocks very softly.” I think this is true. You have to open up your energies, and opportunities and things just might happen. I’m glad I took up the opportunity to become a Personal Assistant and hopefully other things will come out of it in the future, whatever they may be. At the moment I wouldn’t change a thing.

Editor’s note: If your organisation has set up something similar to support the secretarial community, we’d love to hear about it.

E-mail editoruk@deskdemon.com
“A Request for Your “Day In The Life Of...”

Our “Day in the Life of...” series has been very popular with DeskDemon’s users and we would like to extend it! So, we would like to hear, about you and your job and, as a thank you, we’ll give you a £25 Marks & Spencer voucher, on publication.

We know from our forum boards at the Hub that networking and support is important to you all. Hearing about each other’s work and offering advice and a helping hand can be invaluable. But not only that, it’s interesting to hear about the experience of others. It puts things in perspective and offers us the chance to see how others got to where they are, overcoming challenges, and what they think of their role. And that’s why our “Day in the Life of...” series is so fascinating.

We’re looking for PAs, secretaries and Administrators from a wide range of sectors and from the smallest to the largest organisations, so get in touch if you would like to share your thoughts with us all.

If you would like to be featured on DeskDemon’s “Day in the Life of...” series, please visit: www.deskdemo.com/pages/uk/career/dayinthelifeof2007
Microsoft Office Excel 2007: What Chart Type is Best for Your Data?

Microsoft Office Excel 2007 is a powerful tool you can use to create and format spreadsheets and analyse and share information. Excel 2007 makes creating tables for your presentations, reports and documents fun and easy. Through Microsoft Office Excel’s new fluent user interface it is easy to scroll through the charting options and preview your chart and find the perfect chart format for your data. It is best to choose a chart type that conveys the message in the simplest possible way, but what chart is best for your and your organisation’s data? Here is an explanation of the various types of charts available in Microsoft Office Excel 2007, so your charts will visually present the right message to the reader.

**Column Charts**

Data that is arranged in columns or rows on a worksheet can be plotted in a column chart. Column charts are useful for showing data changes over a period of time or for illustrating comparisons among items.

In column charts, categories are typically organised along the horizontal axis and values along the vertical axis.

**Line Charts**

Data that is arranged in columns or rows on a worksheet can be plotted in a line chart. Line charts can display continuous data over time, set against a common scale, and are therefore ideal for showing trends in data at equal intervals. In a line chart, category data is distributed evenly along the horizontal axis, and all value data is distributed evenly along the vertical axis.

**Pie Charts**

Data that is arranged in one column or row only on a worksheet can be plotted in a pie chart. Pie charts show the size of items in one date series, proportional to the sum of the items.

You should use a line chart if your category labels are text, and are representing evenly spaced values such as months, quarters, or fiscal years. This is especially true if there are multiple series; for one series, you should consider using a category chart. You should also use a line chart if you have a few evenly spaced numerical labels, especially years. If you have more than ten numerical labels, use a scatter chart instead.

Consider using a pie chart when
- You only have one data series that you want to plot.
- None of the values that you want to plot are negative.
- Almost none of the values that you want to plot are zero values.
- You don’t have more than seven categories.
- The categories represent parts of the whole pie.

**Bar Charts**

Data that is arranged in columns or rows on a worksheet can be plotted in a bar chart. Bar charts illustrate comparisons among individual items.

Consider using a bar chart when
- The axis labels are long.
- The values that are shown are durations.

**Area Charts**

Data that is arranged in columns or rows on a worksheet can be plotted in an area chart. Area charts emphasise the magnitude of change over time, and can be used to draw attention to the total value across a trend. For example, data that represents profit over time can be plotted in an area chart to emphasize the total profit.

By displaying the sum of the plotted values, an area chart also shows the relationship of parts to a whole.

**XY (Scatter) Charts**

Data that is arranged in columns and rows on a worksheet can be plotted in an xy (scatter) chart. Scatter charts show the relationships among the numeric values in several data series, or plots two groups of numbers as one series of xy coordinates.

A scatter chart has two value axes, showing one set of numerical data along the horizontal axis (x-axis) and another along the vertical axis (y-axis). It combines these values into single data points and displays them in uneven intervals, or clusters. Scatter charts are commonly used for displaying and comparing numeric values, such as scientific, statistical and engineering data.

Consider using a scatter chart when
- You want to change the scale of the horizontal axis.
- You want to make that axis a logarithmic scale.
- Values for horizontal axis are not evenly spaced.
- There are many data points on the horizontal axis.
- You want to effectively display worksheet data that includes pairs or grouped sets of values and adjust the independent scales of a scatter chart to reveal more information about the grouped values.
- You want to show similarities between large sets of data instead of differences between data points.
- You want to compare large numbers of data points without regard to time – the more data that you include in a scatter chart, the better the comparisons that you can make.

To arrange data on a worksheet for a scatter chart, you should place the x values in one row or column, and then enter the corresponding y values in the adjacent rows or columns.

**Stock Charts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Close</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-Jan</td>
<td>27.20</td>
<td>23.49</td>
<td>25.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-Jan</td>
<td>25.03</td>
<td>19.55</td>
<td>23.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-Jan</td>
<td>24.46</td>
<td>20.03</td>
<td>22.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-Jan</td>
<td>23.97</td>
<td>20.07</td>
<td>21.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-Jan</td>
<td>23.65</td>
<td>19.50</td>
<td>21.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data that is arranged in columns or rows in a specific order on a worksheet can be plotted in a stock chart. As its name implies, a stock chart is most often used to illustrate the fluctuation of stock prices. However, this chart may also be used for scientific data. For example, you could use a stock chart to indicate the fluctuation of daily or annual temperatures. You must organise your data in the correct order to create stock charts.

The way stock chart data is organised in your worksheet is very important. For example, to create a simple high-low-close stock chart, you should arrange your data with High, Low, and Close entered as column headings, in that order.

**Surface Charts**

Data that is arranged in columns or rows on a worksheet can be plotted in a surface chart. A surface chart is useful when you want to find optimum combinations between two sets of data. As in a topographic map, colours and patterns indicate areas that are in the same range of values.

You can use a surface chart when both categories and data series are numeric values.

**Doughnut Charts**

Data that is arranged in columns or rows only on a worksheet can be plotted in a doughnut chart. Like a pie chart, a doughnut chart shows the relationship of parts to a whole, but it can contain more than one data series.

Doughnut charts are not easy to read. You may want to use a stacked column or stacked bar chart instead.

**Bubble Charts**

Data that is arranged in columns on a worksheet so that x values are listed in the first column and corresponding y values and bubble size values are listed in adjacent columns, can be plotted in a bubble chart.

For example, you would organise your data as shown in the following example.

**Radar Charts**

Data that is arranged in columns or rows on a worksheet can be plotted in a radar chart. Radar charts compare the aggregate values of a number of data series.

As you can see, there are numerous ways for you and your organisation to present your data. Microsoft Office Excel 2007 offers you the ability to choose exactly the right chart for your data.
Workplace No-Nos

By Lucy Ayers

Know what not to do, not just what to do

While it’s easy to realise that hard work, motivation and enthusiasm may help get you ahead in the workplace, it’s often harder to identify the many “workplace no-nos” that can severely hinder career progression. Read on to find out about some of the more common things not to do at work!

We all know that positive workplace behaviours and attributes – hard work, motivation, enthusiasm and a willingness to contribute to company development above and beyond your responsibilities – can lead to positive career outcomes such as promotions and pay rises.

But what many of us don’t seem to understand is that there are a host of office no-nos that can have just as big an impact on our careers. Inappropriate behaviour in the workplace can lead to stunted career progression; it can stop you getting that all-important pay rise or that much-anticipated promotion! Below is a list of some of the top potentially career-damaging workplace no-nos to avoid.

1. Don’t use profane or offensive language
Bad language in the workplace is not only potentially offensive to those around you, it may also make you appear unprofessional, immature and downright rude.

2. Don’t steal
As minor as it might seem to occasionally lighten the office stationary supply of the odd pen or two, stealing (anything at all) from your workplace is one of the quickest ways to get yourself fired and should never be risked, no matter how small the item.

3. Don’t talk negatively about your employer, managers or colleagues
If you have a gripe about your company or somebody in it, take it through the appropriate channels; talk to your manager or human resources department, and if you don’t want to act on it then keep it to yourself. It’s a good idea to avoid venting to colleagues via email also – there’s always the risk you’ll unwittingly commit the ultimate faux pas and send the email to the wrong recipient!

4. Don’t gossip or spread rumours
While it is often tempting to share juicy snippets about colleagues, gossiping can be one of the quickest ways to ruin relationships and create a tense and awkward workplace atmosphere.

5. Don’t make sexually suggestive, racist, or inappropriate comments or jokes
Inappropriate jokes or comments are not only potentially offensive, they will certainly not impress management, and could quickly get you labelled as immature and unprofessional.

6. Don’t be seen to be wasting company time
While pretty much every worker is guilty of sending the odd personal email or perhaps having a sneaky browse of the internet from time to time, it should be remembered that many companies monitor internet and email use, and will catch out time-wasting!
employees. Keep personal emails (and phone calls) to a minimum and try to limit personal use of the internet to your lunch break.

7. Don’t get drunk at office parties
As tempting as it might be to let your hair down and partake in a few drinks – especially when it’s paid for by the company – it can be one of the quickest ways to lose face with senior management. While it’s fine to have one or two drinks, workers who have one too many quickly lose the respect of their colleagues and could end up as a laughing stock. Wherever possible, try to maintain a distinct line between your social and professional life.

8. Don’t send angry emails
If something or someone at work has upset you, give yourself time to reflect and calm down before responding with an email. You’ll probably end up writing something you wish you hadn’t if you respond to a situation when you are angry or upset. A better approach might be to step out of the office for a minute or two and call a loved one and talk your problem out with them first. Then, if you’re still upset, you can hopefully construct a more considered email or talk calmly face-to-face with a manager.

9. Don’t dress inappropriately
Whether or not we admit it, we’re all guilty of judging people on their appearance. People who look well groomed and dress professionally will be taken more seriously, and potentially deemed more competent, than those who don’t. Avoid ill-fitting clothes – particularly clothes that are too small, tight or revealing.

10. Never fall asleep on the job
Not only could this be seriously dangerous (depending on your line of work) it also reflects very badly on your work ethic, making you appear lazy or unprofessional. If you find yourself struggling to stay awake then grab yourself a strong coffee, do some stretches or have a quick walk around the office.

11. Clean up your act
Try to keep your desk and work space tidy and clean; a cluttered, dirty desk can make you appear unprofessional or unproductive. Don’t allow mugs and plates, papers or books to build up. And definitely get rid of yesterday’s half eaten spag bol!

Lucy Ayers is the editorial content coordinator for GradCareers. The GradCareers website helps graduates and final-year university students find the right career and graduate programme for them. Visit the site at www.gradcareers.com.au for more information.
A Demanding Role Deserves Attention

The role of the executive PA is complex and demanding, requiring great skill and dexterity at many levels. The modern PA manages relationships, information and communication flows between executive board members; troubleshoots a multitude of requests via email, telephone and paper; and manages projects, priorities and logistical details – all of this while underpinning and supporting the organisation’s business strategy at the highest and most influential level.

An apt analogy for the executive PA is the swan that appears graceful and elegant above the surface whilst its legs paddle away furiously under the surface to keep things moving forward.

In such a fast-paced and prominent role it is often difficult to find the time, space and support to stand back and evaluate and plan how best to move forward and grow your role. That’s why executive PA performance coaching can transform how you develop and influence your own career as a professional and ambitious assistant.

Castalia Coaching Ltd is the premier provider of specialist executive PA performance coaching. Its bespoke programmes address the complexities facing senior level assistants and focus on the growth of the individual in all aspects of their role, from managing global relationships to influencing strategic direction.

With the support of your executive coach you will have a unique opportunity to completely focus on how to develop your role and your business relationship with the executive you support. You will be able to set ambitious goals and explore strategies and ways in which to implement the actions needed for success. The results are exciting and cathartic, bringing about positive, permanent improvement in effectiveness, influence and relationships.

The programme enables you to:

- Clarify your key relationships and the critical elements of your role within the organisation
- Define the specific details of each of the elements and how you influence outcomes
- Focus on how to develop your role and business relationship with the executive you support
- Integrate tools and strategies to develop yourself and your role
- Maintain confidence in implementing success strategies for your business priorities

Executive PA performance coaching is a powerful way to develop yourself and your role and to move beyond the expected boundaries of what it means to be a top-flight executive PA. If you would like further information on any of Castalia Coaching’s programmes there is always someone on hand to discuss your individual and organisational requirements. Please contact enquiries@castalia-coaching.com.
Has something stressful or upsetting taken place in your life recently? Maybe it was a fender bender car accident, a “home truths” conversation with a friend, a rocky time with your partner or a big presentation you had to give.

Even when you are pursuing the things that light you up, not every moment of every day will be filled with ease, joy and pleasure. Each of us has moments, situations and experiences that stress and upset us.

What can you do to help yourself during those times? How can you calm yourself until you gain more perspective to effectively deal with the situation?

Use Your Personal 999!

What is a personal 999? We call 999 when we have an emergency and need help fast. We don’t have to figure out what kind of help is needed or which number to call – we just know that 999 should be dialled if there’s an emergency. The 999 operator sends the police, fire brigade or ambulance; the right help is quickly on its way – it’s an easy and effective emergency system.

What about when you have a more personal “emergency?” You can’t call the community 999 service just because you’re stressed, upset, anxious, angry or afraid and want some relief and help quickly. But you can call on your own personal 999.

Your personal 999 is a sentence, phrase or word you say to yourself during trying times, something designed to ease and calm you. Your 999 is simple and easy so you can use it anytime and anywhere.

You choose it in advance and use it as your first and immediate response when you are stressed and upset. No need to think about it; as soon as you realise you need personal emergency help you just start saying it. Your 999 will provide some quick relief, reducing your stress and calming you. Once you’re calmer, you can then take whatever additional actions are needed to help yourself and to deal with the situation.

What Works for You?

I just used a personal 999 myself. I was meeting a friend for breakfast and I had something difficult to discuss. Anticipating the conversation stirred me up; I was agitated and anxious, my mind was racing. To calm myself, I used one of my personal 999s: “I choose peace.” I kept saying this to myself over and over and over again. I was able to shift some of my attention from the thoughts that were upsetting me to more soothing ones.

Did it make my problem disappear? No, but I was able to become much calmer than I had been. This felt better plus it allowed me to have a more effective conversation with my friend than I would have had if I’d been completely agitated.

Here are a few examples of personal 999s others and I have used:

“I choose peace.”
“I choose love.”
“I choose serenity.”
“I choose joy.”
“I choose love over fear.”
“Everything is perfect.”
“All is well.”
“Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

How to Calm Yourself in Stressful Situations
By Bonnie McFarland

Find your personal 999
While you’re saying the words, you could also do a grounding technique such as pressing your feet firmly on the floor, rubbing your palms together or breathing deeply. Many people also add a homeopathic aid.

In Your Life
If you’d like to experiment with this the next time you’re stressed or upset, here are some suggestions.

1. Choose your 999 now.
You’ve probably heard people say, “I can hardly think straight!” Science has now shown that, in fact, we can’t think clearly under certain conditions. When you are flooded with feelings and physiological stress responses you’ll have a very hard time figuring out how to help yourself.

2. Choose something that will work for you.
There is not a universal personal 999 that works for everybody. Your most effective 999 will speak strongly to you. It will be powerful and meaningful enough for you that it will calm you, shift your attention and switch your perspective. It may be one of the examples above or it may be something completely different.

3. Use it!
When you’re feeling stressed or upset, use your 999. Repeat it over and over, like a mantra. If you start with the little things, the stuff that’s mildly upsetting, you can build your ability to use this in tougher situations as well.

Your personal 999 is a simple tool to add to your life toolkit. You can quickly and easily call on it when you’re in situations that challenge you. Using your personal 999 will reduce your stress, calm you and allow you to more effectively respond to the situation. Good luck!

Bonnie McFarland works with women at midlife who are bored, stuck or restless and wondering what to do with the rest of their lives. Visit www.labellavia.com for her free e-book and ezine to create more pleasure, passion and purpose in your life.
RESPECT YOUR OWN EXPERTISE

Although administrative assistants should encourage their boss to listen to those external experts and consultants hired to give advice on special projects, they should also remind them of areas in which they would do well to trust their own judgment – and still make the best use of the outside information.

If a consultant does not listen to the client while claiming superior knowledge in all things, it is better not to deal with him or her. One should remember that the letters in the word “listen” reorganise into the word “silent”. That’s no coincidence. To listen you really have to be silent. Hence, if your external consultant does not listen well then it’s a red flag that maybe you’ve got the wrong person for the job.

One’s own thorough understanding, based on years of experience in a given industry or employment sector, makes it imperative not to let your external agency or consultant invalidate your thoughts concerning your company’s sales, marketing or strategic planning needs or issues. Don’t defer to their expertise or relax and let them persuade you not to worry and leave it all to them.

Internal Experience + External Expertise
No amount of expertise substitutes for an intimate personal knowledge of a company’s real situation. The agency representative or consultant may indeed have gathered detailed knowledge of your company’s situation, but they do not share its living history. The ideal hired gun or agency representative eagerly seeks and absorbs, rather than rejects, any insights your group can and may provide. The key activity in the process is to gather objective intelligence. This does not mean that they should accept everything revealed at face value, but that they listen and consider each observation carefully before presenting new designs or recommendations.

It’s been my experience that the client generally knows the problems or challenges their company faces but just may not be able to fully articulate or acknowledge them. They may lack the desire to honestly tackle the problems, making solutions hard to reach. But the skilled agency or freelance consultant – by questioning and probing – helps bring what is already known to the surface so it can be recognised, acknowledged and addressed by the project, marketing or sales campaign, while recognising, incorporating and acknowledging the true expertise of the client company’s staff and personnel.

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Do you ever have a problem and wish you could get objective advice from your peers?

Ask on The Hub

Join in on topics from your peers around the world. DeskDemon’s The Hub is a forum for networking with your peers. Share your thoughts, experiences, and advice worldwide.

Post a question or a thought or join in to comment or help others.

The Hub has a section for everyone. Sound Off, Admins4Admins, Cafe Admin, Topical Climates, and The Humor Zone

Take a minute to visit The Hub at DeskDemon: http://www.desk demon.com/community/forums
A trio of recipes not to be missed!

**Tasty Toasties, Sumptuous Stew and Ravishing Rolls**

We hope you enjoy these delicious recipes. Crusty grilled toasties decked with beef tomatoes, oozing melted Parmesan and drizzled with olive oil, followed by a steaming lamb and vegetable stew and rounded off with freshly baked fig rolls make for a memorable mouth-watering meal!

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**Parmesan and Tomato Toasties**

**Serves 2**

Ingredients:

- 2 slices of crusty bread, sliced thickly
- 4 tbsp Parmesan cheese, grated
- 1 beef tomato
- 1 red onion
- 15ml/1 tbsp olive oil
- Salt and black pepper

1. Toast the two bread slices until golden brown on both sides. Leave to cool.

2. Sprinkle the Parmesan on top of the bread. Using a sharp knife, cut the tomato and onion crossways into thin slices.

3. Arrange the tomato and onion slices to overlap on top of the bread and season with salt and pepper. Transfer Place under a hot grill. Drizzle with olive oil and serve hot.
Lamb Stew with Vegetables

Serves 6

Ingredients:

- 120ml/8 tbsp sunflower oil
- 1.5kg lamb shoulder trimmed and cut into 5cm pieces
- 120ml/½ cup water
- 3-4 tbsp plain white flour
- 1 litre/4 cups lamb stock
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- 3 ripe tomatoes, skinned, seeded and chopped
- 5ml/1 tsp tomato purée
- 500g small potatoes, peeled
- 12 baby carrots
- 115g green beans, cut into 5cm pieces
- 25g/2 tbsp butter
- 6 medium turnips, cut into quarters
- 1 small onion, chopped roughly
- 1 tbsp granulated sugar
- Salt and black pepper
- 3 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped

1. Heat the oil in a large frying pan. Brown the lamb in several batches and place in a large, flameproof casserole. Add 45ml/3 tbsp of the water to the same frying pan and boil for one minute, stirring and scraping the base of the pan, then pour the liquid on top of the lamb into the casserole.

2. Sprinkle the flour over the cooked meat in the casserole dish and set it over a medium heat. Cook for 3-5 minutes until it becomes brown in colour. Add in the stock, garlic, tomatoes, tomato purée along with the salt and pepper.

3. Bring to the boil over a high heat. Skim the surface; reduce the heat and simmer, stirring occasionally, for about one hour until the meat is tender. Cool the stew to room temperature and chill overnight. About 2 hours before serving, take the casserole out of the refrigerator and remove all the solid fat. Put the casserole on a medium heat and bring to a simmer.

4. Cook the potatoes in a saucepan of boiling salted water for 20-25 minutes, drain well and transfer to a bowl. Boil the carrots for 4-5 minutes, drain and add to the same bowl. Cook the green beans for 3-4 minutes, draining well and adding them to the same bowl along with the other vegetables.

5. Melt the butter in a large frying pan and add the turnips and onions with 45ml/3 tbsp water. Cover and cook for 8-10 minutes on a moderate heat until the turnips are tender. Stir in the sugar and cook until the vegetables are caramelised. Transfer them to the bowl of vegetables. Add the remaining water to the pan. Boil for one minute and add to the lamb.

6. When both the lamb and gravy are hot, add the cooked vegetables to the stew and stir gently. Stir in most of the parsley. Serve the stew into small warmed serving dishes, scattering the remaining parsley on top and serve at once.
**Fig Squares**

Ingredients:

- 350g/1½ cups dried figs
- 100g/1 cup walnuts, finely chopped
- ½ tsp ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp ground cloves
- ¼ tsp grated nutmeg
- ¼ tsp salt
- 75g/¾ cup plain white flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 3 eggs
- 175g/¾ cup caster sugar

1. Preheat the oven to 160ºC/Gas 3. Line a 30x20x3 cm baking tin with greaseproof paper and grease the paper well.

2. Chop the figs roughly and place in a bowl. Add in the walnuts, cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and salt. Sift the flour and baking powder and add to the same bowl and set aside. In another bowl, whisk the eggs and sugar until well blended. Fold the contents of the first bowl into the egg mixture in several batches.

3. Scrape the mixture into the baking tin and bake until the top is brown and firm for about 40-45 minutes. Making sure that it stays soft in the middle.

4. Leave to cool in the tin for 10 minutes, then cut into squares and serve.
The mind map is perfectly suited to innovative thinking as it consists of all the skills commonly found with creativity, such as imagination, association and flexibility.

The nearly identical nature of creative thinking and mnemonic (memory) principles confirms the mind map as the essential and natural tool for both kinds of thought. Applying the creative-thinking mind mapping technique correctly can facilitate individual mind mappers to create more innovative ideas than a traditional large brainstorming group in the same period of time. Tony Buzan (the father of mind mapping) states there are five stages in the creative thinking process. These are as follows.

1. The Quick-Fire Mind Map Burst
Begin by drawing a stimulating central image that represents the general topic of interest. Your image should be placed in the centre of a large blank page, and from it should radiate every idea that comes into your mind on that subject. For about twenty minutes you should let the ideas flow as fast as possible. Having to work at speed unchains your brain from habitual thinking patterns and encourages new ideas.

Many of these new ideas may seem absurd at first. However, do not disregard them as they often hold the key to new perspectives and the breaking of old habits.

2. First Reconstruction and Revision
Have a short break, allowing your brain to rest and begin to integrate the ideas generated so far. Then make a new mind map, in which you identify the major branches: categorising, building up hierarchies and finding new associations between your preliminary ideas.

It may become noticeable that similar or identical concepts are present in several different places of your mind map. These should not be dismissed as unnecessary repetitions: they are fundamentally “different” in that they

The Mind Map as a Creative Thinking Tool
By Rose Angell
How to tap your hidden creativity
are attached to different branches. These peripheral repetitions reflect the underlying importance of ideas buried deep with your store of knowledge but which actually influence every aspect of your thinking.

Following your brain’s flow, the mind map explores your current thought in this new centre to replace the old. In due course this new centre will itself be replaced by a new and even more advanced concept. The mind map therefore aids and reflects intellectual exploration and growth.

3. Incubation
Sudden creative realisations often come when the brain is relaxed – sleeping, daydreaming, running and so on.

4. Second Reconstruction and Revision
After incubation your brain will have a fresh perception of your first and second mind maps, so it will be useful to do another quick-fire mind map burst. During this reconstruction stage you will need to consider all the information gathered and integrated in stages one, two and three in order to make a comprehensive final mind map.

5. The Final Stage
You now need to search for the solution, decision or realisation that was your original creative goal. This often involves linking elements in your mind map, leading to major new insights and breakthroughs.

With the introduction of computer-based mind mapping, mind mapping has become even easier. Mind mapping software utilises the true principles of mind mapping and duplicates the non-linear thinking processes of the brain, creating an explosion in creativity, innovation and knowledge sharing. Computer based mind mapping can be just as effective as traditional mind mapping as a creative thinking tool, if not more!

The benefits of mind mapping for creative thinking:
- Mind maps automatically utilise all the creative thinking skills.
- Mind maps generate ever-increasing mental energy as the user/creator moves towards his/her goal.
- Mind maps allow the mind mapper to view a great many elements all at once, thus increasing the probability of creative association and integration.
- Mind maps enable people’s brains to discover and explore ideas normally lying in obscurity on the edge of their thinking.
- Mind maps encourage playfulness, humour and innovation, thus increasing the probability that the mind mapper strays far from the norm and produces a truly creative idea.

Rose Angell recently joined the Buzan Online team after graduating in psychology. Buzan Online recently launched the first official mind mapping software iMindMap, the only software to fully utilise the principles of mind mapping and to duplicate the brain’s non-linear thinking process. See http://www.imindmap.com for more information.
Baubles and Berries

Christmas is coming, the goose is getting fat…Here is a final spot the difference of the year. There are ten differences between these two yuletide pictures…from the baubles to the berries, see if you can discover the hidden discrepancies.
It’s not only the big boys who qualify for discount hotel rates.

You don’t need to be sending your staff off to the four corners of the globe to get great hotel deals. Accor’s Away on Business guarantees you the best rates online, however infrequent your travel – and also offers 5% off unrestricted rates and access to our promotional deals. This online programme is available at 58 hotels in the UK and over 1,350 worldwide. With free registration and easy online booking, Away on Business provides you with ultimate flexibility when travelling on business.

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