Teaching From Experience

Susie Stublely, Managing Director of Castalia Coaching gives her views on what it takes to become a successful PA

Plus

Relaying Your Message with Watermarks
Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace
Travel Tips and Advice
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Congratulations to the following monthly winners - as voted by DeskDemon users. Each has picked up a cool £250 and now have the opportunity to win a Fantastic £10,000! Thanks also to their nominators who each take home £100

December 2007 Winner
Caroline Melville
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Nominator:
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November 2007 Winner
Iona Robertson
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Nominator:
Wendy Sloane

October 2007 Winner
Carolyn Truscott
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Nominator:
Wendy Sloane

September 2007 Winner
Mei Suen
of The Diamond trading Company
Nominator:
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Have you voted for your favourite candidate to win January’s heat?

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In association with Holiday Inn HOTELS - RESORTS
Goal Setting: To Achieve Your Goals Know Your Personality Profile
How knowing yourself can help you set and achieve your goals.

Microsoft Office Word 2007: Relaying Your Message With Watermarks
Stamping your identity on documents.

Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace: Advice For Employers
An expert's insight into workplace harassment.

The Five Steps of My To-Do Lists Revolution
One author's journey towards greater organisation.

Travel Tips and Advice
How to stay safe and plan for the perfect trip.

Winter Warmer
A mouth-watering feast suitable for vegetarians and meat-eaters alike.

Top Ten Things to Do to Be Prepared for Redundancy
How redundancy, or its threat, could change your life for the best.

Who Said It?
Test your knowledge of famous quotes from famous people.

Past Articles on DeskDemon?
Think you might have missed something? Find out what articles we’ve had recently at DeskDemon.
Welcome to this first PA Enterprise of 2008. 2007 was a wonderful year for DeskDemon, as we continued growing our website and launched the Management Support Fellowship Award, the key award for the modern administrative professional. We aim to ensure that the DeskDemon community goes from strength to strength in 2008. Just as it’s good at this time of year to look back and assess the past year, so it’s important to look forward and plan for the future. Our cover article, Teaching From Experience, is an interview with Susie Stubley, an ex-PA and Managing Director of Castalia Coaching. She generously shares some of her experience with us and offers tips on what it takes to be a successful executive PA and take control of your future.

Talking of looking forward, the New Year is the time when we traditionally make resolutions. Many people understandably view this process slightly ambivalently, as the finest laid plans and most noble resolutions so often seem to go by the wayside – sometimes alarmingly soon! In order to combat this problem and aid the resolution and goal setting process, we present the article Goal Setting: To Achieve Your Goals Know Your Personality Profile. This article explains the reasons why we fail to achieve our goals and how a little self-knowledge can go a long way in enabling us to turn this around and become happier in the process! Complementary to this, The Five Steps of My To-Do Lists Revolution has some wonderful advice (learnt through experience) on self-organisation – something, too, that gives us a head start on achieving those goals.

Bullying is as prevalent in the workplace as it is in the schoolyard. That’s why Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace: Advice For Employers is so useful. Read this to bring yourself up-to-date on this powerful issue. Then Top Ten Things to Do to Be Prepared for Redundancy shows how it’s possible to take a negative and turn it into a resounding positive. And as we all get a bit desperate for a holiday at this time of the year, Travel Tips and Advice gives an expert’s thoughts on how to give your break away every chance of being memorable for all the right reasons.

That’s it for this January issue of PA Enterprise. All of us in the DeskDemon team would like to wish you a happy and fulfilling 2008.

Susan Silva
Managing Editor
susan@deskdemon.com
Smiles brighten up the day!

Mirth, amusement, pleasure: smiles spread happiness all around. And so DeskDemon would like to catch your smiley face to publish on the site.

Illuminate everyone’s day by sending us a photograph or video of your smile and we’ll choose the ultimate smile: the most contagious, happiest and fun of them all.

Laughter is never far away...especially if your smile wins.

Each month we will be giving away a heavenly spoil-yourself session for you and friend: Yes, your smile could win a relaxing spa day, where you and your friend can relax, enjoy a back, neck and shoulder massage, facial, manicure or pedicure, use of the sauna, steam and pool and lunch too! Ooh what bliss!

So, e-mail us your smile today:
smilesuk@deskDemon.com
It’s now commonly known that those who set goals will be more successful than those who don’t. But did you realise that your personality affects the type of goals you’re most likely to succeed with? Read on to learn how to set the most appropriate goals for your personality type. But before looking into the relevance of profiling in goal setting, first a little background on the profiling method.

**Introduction**

People are different, but they are predictably different. Being able to predict how you will react in a given situation can improve your success, wellbeing and, hence, value in any environment. In his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Dr Stephen Covey said, “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” In 1926 Dr William Marston, an expert in behavioural understanding and the inventor of the polygraph (lie-detector), devised a system to understand people’s personality styles. In his book *The Emotions of Normal People*, he grouped people according to their active or passive tendencies, dependent upon their view of the environment. The main styles identified are:

- **D** – Drive – “My way” (3% of the population)
- **I** – Influence – “The fun way” (12% of the population)
- **C** – Compliance – “The right way” (16% of the population)
- **S** – Steadiness – “The safe way” (69% of the population)

Of course there aren’t just four styles, as everyone exhibits different levels of each of the four, resulting in an almost infinite number of combinations of the main styles. In fact a profile that showed someone as all one style would be extremely suspect. Your style, for instance, may be a combination of “High D”, “Medium I”, “Fairly C” and “Low S”. No style is inherently “good” or “bad”. The aim of profiling is to identify and play to people’s strengths, while utilising the self-awareness of possible weaknesses.

The personality profile derived from the combination of the different levels of each style gives an amazingly accurate profile of the subject in:

- How they think of themselves
- How others see them
- How they act under stress
- Their communication preference
- Their greatest fears
- Their greatest motivators

Knowing your own preferred style, and that of others, can go a long way towards creating an environment in which Dr Covey’s recommendation to "Think win/win" can flourish.

**Profiling’s Relevance to Goal Setting**

The dominant style of the subject tends to influence their goal setting. Each type will set different types of goals, each with both advantages and pitfalls. For instance, a High D, being very...
determined and driven, will know what they want to achieve, tending to set huge goals with great determination and high expectations. This is great, as they’ll usually be high achievers and very committed. It’s not the end of the world if they don’t achieve all they set out to achieve; they may “Shoot for the moon, and just clear the trees”, but that’s still progress. If they’re disappointed they’ll easily bounce back.

Possible pitfalls of this approach are that the High D may take on too much, or, having no concept of failure, may fail to make adequate plans. They may also be so taken up with their own view of the world that they neglect to consider the plans and input of others.

People with a High I style are those who enjoy interacting with others; they’ll enjoy life and be highly optimistic, working on “the big picture”. This can lead them to set lots of goals, which may change regularly, but they’ll have set ones that they’ll enjoy working towards and, by the law of averages, they’re sure to achieve some of them.

However, many High Is suffer from lack of focus as they’re easily distracted by a good time. Goal setting that incorporates networking and rewards will have the best chance of success for these outgoing and sociable people.

On the contrary, people with a High S style are more reserved, steady, supportive and preferring of the status quo. They will work best with incremental, step-by-step, safe goals – and they’ll tend to have a high success rate. The danger of setting safe goals is that they’ll miss opportunities, by not stretching themselves. It’s interesting that 69% of the population fall into this category.

Finally, those with a High C style are cautious, calculating and competent. They prefer detailed, well-planned goals with plenty of data and analysis to support any actions. Because of their detailed plans they’re highly likely to achieve their aims – so long as they don’t spend so long planning and preparing that they never quite get round to the “doing” part. “Paralysis by analysis” is something to avoid.

Tailoring the goal-setting process to a person’s personality profile can be a vital part of achieving success, or supporting someone in his or her aims.

Know Your Style?
Have you guessed what your style is? I guessed mine, before completing a personality questionnaire, and I was completely wrong. But I have to confess that, as I read the report, I could see that I was deceiving myself, and in fact the analysis knew me better than I did. I wanted badly to be a High D – direct, dominant and demanding – instead I was a High C – compliant, contemplative and careful.

At first I was disappointed, but the point of personality profiling is to highlight strengths. The more of the report I read, the more I realised that characteristics I was lukewarm about in myself are actually strengths I can use to move forward in a way that won’t make me feel threatened and I now know (and recognise from the past) the pitfalls I need to avoid.

Joy Healey is a qualified life-coach. To learn more about personality profiling, download a free sample report and an eBook giving more information on the benefits and applications of personality profiles visit www.life-coaching-london.co.uk/personality.html.
Susie Stubley began her career studying to be a PA at Miss Sprule’s Secretarial College in Winchester, attending a yearlong programme that launched her into the secretarial profession. Susie was able to quickly move up the ranks and, with some fortunate breaks, she obtained a series of interesting PA roles to global leaders and high profile individuals, including the executive chairman of a global coaching company. It is here she developed an interest in coaching.

Susie left this job and moved on to a more complex PA position. At this point she started to look around for further career training to help her move on up, but despite a lot of research was unable to find anything that would fit her specific needs. This is where the idea for her own company came into being: Susie decided to re-train as an executive coach and start her own company to provide the support and training that she would have liked to have had in her own career as an executive PA.

As a coach Susie has seen what it takes to become a top PA. But what skills are needed? According to Susie, the job of an executive PA has evolved into an exciting and complex role. Today’s PAs actually participate in the successful leadership and management team. Top PAs hold a business-critical role. Executives would not be able to perform the job as well without their support.

Susie believes that executive PAs must take their role seriously and be able to communicate to others throughout the organisation that their role is an essential and highly skilled one. Executive PAs must switch perceptions from being in a subordinate, reactive role to that of being a business partner with leaders of the organisation.

**Teaching From Experience**

By Susan Silva

Susie Stubley, Managing Director of Castalia Coaching, interviewed by DeskDemon

A Managing Director and ex-PA gives her views on what it takes to become a successful PA

**Taking it to the Top**

To excel in a top-level role, Susie suggests that executive PAs ask themselves four critical questions:

1. Who are the key people I work with and what is their importance?
2. What is the executive PA’s importance to these key people?
3. How does the executive PA’s role support the organisation’s business objectives?
4. What are the key business benefits in the executive PA’s role?

If a PA doesn’t know the answers it can be difficult to understand the critical nature of the PA’s role in the organisation. Executives are busy in their own area of expertise, running multi-billion pound projects and companies, but very often they don’t know how to manage their PA. PAs need to be very self sufficient and secure about their own role.

Executive PAs also need to have strong communications and influencing skills. These skills are important for working with the individuals they support and also give these bosses credibility with key contacts internally and externally. The ability to upwardly manage a CEO, managing director or VP can be a very daunting task. The business
relationship needs to be based on a strong partnership where communications skills are fast, efficient and accurate.

Self-awareness is the next crucial skill for an executive PA. An executive PA should be able to answer these questions: What are your professional ambitions as a PA? What are your work ethics? What are your current boundaries and authorities? What are your current strengths and motivators?

PAs also need “completeness” and assertiveness. Many PAs Susie has worked with are expected to operate at an executive level, with none of the advantages the executives have in this arena in the terms of background training. Executive PAs need to understand they are an integral part of the management team and to have the confidence to contribute to their team. Assertiveness here (that’s not aggressiveness) is key. Effective time management is relevant to this – the ability to say no to the small jobs many people often ask them to do when it is not their responsibility. They must have the confidence to negotiate and not be railroaded.

From Reactive to Proactive

Actively leading and developing the relationship with your executive is another critical skill – being proactive rather than reactive. This is where the role of a PA has changed – today it is much more proactive. A PA needs to be confident and assertive, and seek clarity, offer ideas and have structured communications with his or her boss.

Executive PAs are business partners with their boss rather than subordinates to them. Leadership and management skills are critical. Anyone can acquire these skills. It is fundamentally not just about technical skills, though technical skills are important. Each role obviously has its specific systems to use. All PAs need to be efficient on email systems and able to use the internet, project management software, Excel and PowerPoint efficiently. But what differentiates a good PA from an outstanding PA is leadership and communication influencing skills and the ability to use insight and influencing in their working lives.

Keeping Up in a Changing World

Susie also has some helpful insights about how PAs can keep up-to-date on the changing role of a PA. Susie is a great believer in personal and executive assistants joining specialised networks for PAs. The current top two in the UK are the European Management System – which Susie currently is a member of – and the IQPS. These are organisations run by PAs for PAs. They have regular networking events and run their own training programmes. They provide their members with a really strong network of PAs, whom they can contact if they have an issue or need some information right away.

Stepping Up

DeskDemon knows there are many PAs who want to move up and advance to the next level. Susie says that there are some crucial skills PAs need to develop to move up the ladder. Being aware of your communications skills is absolutely critical. Think of the statistic that tells us that the actual words we say are only 7–15% of the communications we give to other people. 55% of our communications is body language and 38% is the tone of voice. If a person is saying all the right things but is feeling a lack of confidence then it is likely that body language and tone of voice will contradict the words: it is the body language and tone of voice will contradict the words: it is the body language and tone of voice what will be remembered. State ideas and views with a clear intent and have figures to back up any messages. Avoid room for individual interpretation, so state the obvious in your communications. Keep shoulders back, maintain eye contact, be friendly, smile and nod.

On the flip side of that, when listening to someone else think about all the elements – watch for their non-verbal signals, whether they are distracted, bored, irritated, exited or angry. Let them know that they have been heard. Concentrate on their verbal message and block out distractions. Demonstrate interest and suspend judgement until the whole message has been heard.
Ask for clarification if necessary and listen for intent and action. Assumption is a really dangerous thing. Clarity is your friend!

**Break Things Down**
Susie offers this exercise for PAs – to try it in relation to one individual you work with. Ask yourself these questions:

1. What is working well?
2. What isn’t working so well?
3. What would you change about this relationship?
4. What is the first step to making this change?

If you break things down, it can be much easier to work forward.

**Becoming an Influencer**
Being able to influence others is another important skill needed to move up. Influencing is not about manipulating. Influencing is collaborative; it is about pursing joint goals. It is about having open, fluent conversations. There is a formula to influencing:

1. Prepare.
2. Plan the structure you want to have.
3. Propose your objective with examples, oppositions, and alternatives, and be very clear and specific about what you are proposing.
4. Inform why are you proposing the idea. What are the benefits to the boss and to the business? Give examples and think what the objections may be. It is about collaboration, putting the idea on the table and listening and coming up with the best solution.

One more thing a PA should think about if desiring to move up… Be very visible. A PA needs to ask the right questions of the right people. Standing out and being proactive instead of reactive. Reactive can be seen as submissive, of waiting for direction and of needing to be given tasks: a person has very little authority or input here. This is how PAs were perceived in the past. The modern PA is proactive – which is assertive. Executive PAs are actively contributing to the business partnership. They understand and support the business strategy and the person they are supporting. They meet and set expectations and deadlines.

So, to conclude, Susie believes that for a PA to build a successful partnership with his or her boss, effective communications, assertiveness and influencing skills, and flexibility and insight, are all key. She believes that it’s always good to think about where one can take on more responsibility and add value and expand the current value of one’s role.

For more information on Executive PA Performance Coaching, visit www.castalia-coaching.co.uk

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@deskedemon.com
Microsoft Office Word 2007: Relaying Your Message With Watermarks

Microsoft Word 2007 and its easy-to-use Microsoft Office Fluent user interface makes creating watermarks a snap. A watermark is a word, phrase or image placed in the background of a document. Printed with a light shade effect so that it doesn’t interfere with the legibility of the text, you can use a watermark to relay a message about the document or your organisation: stamp your corporate identity on a document with your company logo watermark; spice it up with an interesting graphic; or use a watermark as slick visual shorthand to inform your reader that the document is in draft form or confidential.

With a few steps you can produce a professional-looking document that has a watermark embedded in it, relaying your chosen message to the reader.

Adding a Text Watermark to a Document

Watermarks can be viewed only in Print Layout and Full Screen Reading views within Word, and on the printed page. You can insert a pre-designed watermark from a gallery of watermark text, or you can insert a watermark with custom text.

1. On the Page Layout tab, in the Page Background group, click Watermark.

2. Do one of the following:
   • Click on a pre-designed watermark, such as Confidential or Urgent, in the gallery of watermarks.
   • Click Custom Watermark, click Text watermark and then select or type the text that you want. You can also format the text.
3. To view a watermark as it will appear on the printed page, use Print Layout view.

Turning a Picture into a Background or Watermark

You can turn a picture, clip art or photo into a watermark to brand or decorate a document.

1. On the Page Layout tab, in the Page Background group, click Watermark.
2. Click Printed Watermark.
3. Click Picture Watermark, and then click Select Picture.
4. Select the picture that you want, and then click Insert.
5. Select a percentage under Scale to insert the picture at a particular size.
6. Select the Washout check box to lighten the picture so that it doesn’t interfere with text.

The picture that you selected is applied as a watermark to the entire document.

Tip: If you want to use an object – such as a shape – as a watermark, you can manually paste or insert it into the document. You cannot use the Printed Watermark dialog box to control settings for these objects.

Office Word 2007 helps administrative professionals create watermarks and professional-looking content more quickly than ever before. With a host of new tools, you can quickly construct documents from predefined parts and styles, as well as compose and publish blogs directly from within Word. Advanced integration with Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 and new XML-based file formats make Office Word 2007 the ideal choice for building integrated document management solutions.

This is just one of many new features that 2007 Microsoft Office system can offer you. To find more about how it can help streamline the way you and your colleagues do business visit: www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/microsoft/demos
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.deskdemon.com/community/forums
Would you hit a colleague? Shout at someone who’d made a mistake? Would you refuse to work with someone who was black, female or pregnant? Jokingly call someone names? Withhold information? Join in gossip or office banter? You may answer “no”, but think back over the last six months: is your conscience crystal clear? One in ten employees think they have been bullied in the last six months. Nationally, that’s over 2.5 million people. Someone out there is harassing staff at work and it could be happening at yours.

Last year, British Employment Tribunals dealt with over twenty-eight thousand discrimination claims, but not everyone takes their case to an ET; some go on long-term sick leave. Over seventy-two percent of targets of bullying say they suffered stress and a survey by a long-term disability insurer found that claims for compensation arising from mental health problems had increased by ninety percent in the last five years. Doing nothing, in your business, is not an option.

What is Harassment?

Harassment can be thought of as any unwanted behaviour that a person finds intimidating, upsetting, embarrassing, humiliating or offensive. The focus of all related legislation, the Sex Discrimination, Race Relations, Disability Discrimination and Protection from Harassment Acts and Regulations, lies in the impact of the behaviour on the recipient.

A survey in 2000 reported that withholding information, which affected a person’s performance, had been experienced by nearly half of all employees. Other “negative” behaviours that can be cited as harassment involved having opinions and views ignored, being given tasks with unreasonable targets/deadlines, and being exposed to unman blame on to the organisation itself.

Is the Organisation’s Culture to Blame?

Harassment can be inherent in the way an organisation does business. Rewarding “tough” managers with promotion or performance bonuses is something often bemoaned by their abused staff. Most employees can work with tough deadlines now and again, but their perception of how they are set, how much control they have over their work and the kind of rewards that are in place can make the difference between feeling harassed and willingly making an effort.

In a UNISON survey, ninety percent of people said that the fact that bullies can get away with it was a major factor in the prevalence of bullying behaviour, and people were scared to report it. This may be a widely held belief based on little evidence but seen as “fact” by staff, so it’s difficult to counteract unless an organisation is publicly seen to be doing something.

What Effect Does Harassment Have?

The laws on harassment focus on how a person feels about the behaviour that took place. The effects can be many. Symptoms include anger, anxiety, depression, withdrawal and concentration problems. Targets often report a lack of confidence and complain of stomach upsets or seemingly minor illnesses.

However, there may actually be a lower rate of absenteeism because they are afraid of giving their persecutor more ammunition with which to harass them. They can become anxious about being branded “not up to
the job” and having their standing within the organisation undermined.

Charlotte Rayner’s research in 1998 found that a quarter of those subjected to bullying at work left their employment, as did one in five of those who had witnessed it. Some stay on to fight for an apology or even vengeance, but many put up and shut up, often destroying their personal lives in the process. Rayner found that the longer bullying went on the less likely that there would be a satisfactory outcome. In fact, eighty-four percent of those questioned said that the bully had done it before, and three quarters said management knew this. If this is true, managers are failing in their duty of care towards their employees. Doing nothing is collusion and makes you liable.

Who Are the Harassers?
It’s hard to generalise about the types of people who bully or harass at work. It’s reported that about three-quarters are managers; some feel threatened by their subordinate’s knowledge or creativity and so on, but some do it because they can or because they are inflexible, opinionated or stressed themselves.

What Are the Signs?
Ignore the signs at your peril – people leaving, grapevine gossip, drops in productivity, sickness, people asking to be moved, all hint at an underlying problem. Find out what it is. Do exit interviews, back to work interviews, monitor performance and sickness, talk to people informally, but treat it seriously, take appropriate action and monitor.

I investigated a case last year where two people had made allegations of bullying against their senior manager. An informal chat was set up with the manager, but nothing else done. They both later went off sick with stress as the manager found more covert ways of undermining them. The investigation cost thousands of pounds and much heartache, which could have been averted by monitoring the situation. Both complainants resigned and their years of experience and knowledge were lost to the organisation, which had to recruit and train newcomers and were lucky not to be sued for constructive dismissal and compensation.

What Can You Do About It?
Targets who stand up to their harassers straightaway are likely to nip the problem in the bud. Research has shown that telling the harasser their behaviour is unacceptable within two weeks of it first happening is most likely to stop it. Leave it longer than that and the target’s self-confidence is quickly eroded and they may need help. Managers and personnel people must deal with harassment promptly to avoid the permanent breakdown of working relationships.

Whatever the size of your company, you can reduce the incidence of unacceptable behaviour by having a widely broadcast statement, explicitly stating that harassment will not be tolerated, giving examples of bad behaviour and its consequences, and emphasising that everyone is responsible for their own acts. It is crucial to have a process for dealing with it, which is explained to staff and is enforced and monitored.

In my years as an investigator, I have seen so many cases that could have
seen so many cases that could have been avoided if action had been taken early, if targets or managers had had that difficult conversation to say, “What you just did was unacceptable”.

A lot of harassers don’t intend to hurt people and would be mortified to think that they had; a quiet word and an apology might avoid escalation. Some harassers do intend to hurt and undermine, and an early warning that their behaviour has been spotted and of the consequences should they continue is enough to stop them in their tracks. What is important is that everyone, not just managers and personnel, takes action when behaviour is unacceptable.

**Quick Guide to Action**

**Target:**
1. Decide what outcome you really want.
2. Stand up to the harasser and address their behaviour promptly and assertively if you are able.
3. Tell a manager or personnel officer.
4. You can always leave – it may be better for your mental health in the long run to completely remove yourself from harm’s way than to either grin and bear it or fight for an apology.

**Organisation:**
1. Take harassment seriously.
2. Have a clear policy.
3. Tell people about it regularly.
4. Demonstrably implement the policy – be seen to take action.
5. Monitor the policy and the organisation as a whole to spot trouble before it escalates.
6. Audit the process.
7. Act on feedback.

**Individual responsibilities:**
1. You are responsible for your behaviour in any given situation.
2. Notice the effect you have on others.
3. Apologise if you upset someone, even if you didn’t mean to.
4. Change your behaviour – be flexible in the way you deal with different people and different situations.
5. If you are accused of harassment, take note of what is said, go away and review your behaviour, and calmly think through your responsibilities in order to respond.

Nicola Walker has been involved in training communication skills, management skills and diversity issues to UK organisations for over seventeen years. She has a degree in psychology, an HND in business and finance and is an NLP master practitioner. She investigates complaints of harassment and bullying in British workplaces and also to aid emotional and behavioural change in both bullies and targets of bullying. You can find her at www.nicwalker.com or www.intro2nlp.com.
I’ve been using to-do lists both at work and at home for the past few years now. While I couldn’t complain about my overall performance, there was always something not right about the way I’d used them, yet I couldn’t tell what exactly it was.

Just a few weeks ago I finally realised what had been troubling me for so long: my to-do lists! What you’re about to read may seem obvious and simple enough, but trust me: I really wish someone had explained this reason of my daily frustration to me a long time ago! So here it is: my own to-do lists revolution!

My Original To-Do Lists Setup
Mr original to-do lists consisted of hand-written lists for each day in my A4 year planner. I would usually prepare such lists at the end of a previous day. Having finished all the work, I would take five minutes of my time before leaving my workplace to summarise the day’s achievements and move the stuff I hadn’t managed to work on to the following day’s to-do list. I would also cross off all the completed tasks to make sure I could see my progress.

I originally used the page-a-day approach. So no matter how few or many tasks I’d have for the day, they all would be on only one page for this day. But I quickly learnt that such an approach is one of the worst possible, simply because it doesn’t work unless you manage to finish every single task you had planned for your day.

It all became obvious after I failed to complete the whole list of planned tasks for a day, and had to somehow keep track of them so that they got my attention at some later stage. And this is where I saw just how ineffective it was to try and support this approach. No matter what you do, you’re going to lose time transferring list items to the new day’s list, and it has a habit of getting longer and longer. I couldn’t let this happen any more, and so that’s how my to-do lists revolution began. Below are the five steps I’ve gone through to come up with the most effective way of dealing with my daily tasks so far. Having improved my process so much, I’m absolutely certain there is room for you to make even more improvement to it too.

The Five Steps of My To-Do Lists Revolution

By Gleb Reys

One author’s journey towards greater organisation

Reviewing the Past Few Days’ To-Do Lists

The first thing I did was to review the past few days’ lists in my daily routine. This worked reasonably well while I had a backlog of few days, but it became a nightmare as soon as the backlog grew to more than two weeks. Having more and more tasks on my new to-do lists and trying to follow up with the really important tasks, I had less and less time to spend looking back and reviewing old stuff. Now and then I’d discover something that was left out and didn’t seem to be important when it was a week old but which had become quite urgent now, a few weeks later. So after struggling for a while, I gave this method up.

Keeping Track of all the Incomplete Tasks

Then I decided to start moving all the incomplete tasks to the following day’s plan. I made it a rule to never start adding items to the current day’s to-do list unless I’m positive all the previously forgotten or never dealt-with tasks are at the top of this list. Again, it worked for a while, but as the list of tasks grew, I’d realised my daily to-do list routine was slowly turning into nothing but a stupid rewriting of my previous days’ to-do lists. I would actually waste my precious time by making yet another list of something I couldn’t find time to do.
Basic Scheduling – Marking Task Start and End Dates

So the next thing I figured was that I needed to incorporate scheduling into my routine. It makes perfect sense, to mark dates when adding something to your to-do list. You need it for historical purposes. Trying to improve the previous paragraph’s idea, I started not only rewriting all the incomplete tasks of mine, but also putting the date of each tasks’ origination alongside. This helped a lot. This made it obvious that some tasks had been left unattended for far too long. This improved the decision-making because it was clearly seen again how bad a backlog of things I had. It saved my time of thinking back and trying to remember when I was actually going to do a given task, and the date of its supposed start provided a really useful urgency reminder. Still, it was not enough, so I tried to see what else would really help me optimise my process.

Throwing Away Your To-Do Lists

At this stage I was now much more efficient in comparison to when I started. Having got here, I was motivated to continue improving my process, but also started thinking of changing the most basic parts of it. I realised that one of the things noticeably slowing me down was the fact that I used to-do lists and no other way of keeping track of my tasks.

Even simply reviewing my to-do list for the day took a long time. When I completed task or two, I’d tick them off or even colour-mark them, but this would still leave these tasks on my page. And no matter how hard you try to skip these tasks knowing that they’re completed, you still lose some time quickly glancing through them. Time lost on glancing once a day is not so harmful when you think about it. But if you have to get back to your list more than a few times during your day, you’ll start noticing how this very glancing through the to-do list slows you down. And that’s how I decided to get rid of to-do lists completely. Instead, I’ve got myself a five-section A4 organiser, and started using the smallest post-it notes I could find to manage my tasks for the day. So one section of this organiser would be used for all the tasks for the current day. Another section would be the one for the tasks for the whole current week. There’s also one for the month (where I temporarily put everything that doesn’t belong to this week’s plan), and there’s the completed tasks section.

The main reason for switching to post-its is that I can accomplish all the things I did with to-do lists (like tracking tasks, marking the start dates and marking tasks as deferred or completed ones), plus I can instantaneously get completed tasks out of the plan for today. If it sounds too simple for the best to-do list optimisation trick, try it yourself!

I can’t emphasise enough about the sheer pleasure and feeling of satisfaction you have when you mark a task as completed, and then immediately detach it from the current day’s list and physically move it into the completed section. As soon as something’s done, you get rid of it – and therefore you can simply see the current state of things by glancing at a page quickly. Many post-its means many tasks left, few post-its means few tasks. It’s that simple!
Completion Dates for all the Tasks
Now that I had made major progress in my daily planning, I felt like tweaking the process just a bit to make it even better. So one of the things I finally decided to start doing was to put completion dates for all the tasks.

Combined with the start dates I add to my tasks, completion dates gave me the last bit of comfort I needed to make sure I’m doing the best I can. If start dates were there to ensure I know exactly when I’d put the task on my list and to help me realise the urgency and growing importance of some tasks, the completion dates helped me analyse whether I was coping with the load okay, or whether some particular kinds of tasks were constantly forgotten about, or whether some tasks took much longer that I originally expected. All I need now is to have a half-an-hour a week spent solely on such analysis, because any tweaks I make to my planning based on such analysis results have the potential to bring my performance to an even higher level.

What Happens Now?
That’s all I’ve done so far. My to-do lists revolution isn’t fully over, but it starts to look and – more importantly – feel like a revolution to me now. There’s no major part left to change in the process, as I’m very happy with the results. I’m spending less time planning and managing my daily tasks, and with the revolution I’ve gone through I’m not afraid of any tasks – no matter how big or complex. I’m still working on other possible ways to improve my daily planning approach. So, who knows, maybe once day I’ll have another revolution to write about. Till then, good luck!

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Travel Tips and Advice

By By Darren Cronian

How to stay safe and plan for the perfect trip

**Notify Family, Friends and Relatives**
Before leaving on holiday, make sure that you give all travel information to your family and close friends. If anything should happen while travelling, multiple people will know where you are and so have a better chance of getting hold of you. Prepare photocopies of your passport, airline tickets and accommodation booking form. It might also help if you leave telephone numbers of where you are stopping just in case anyone needs to get in touch with you urgently.

**Do You Have a Valid Visa and/or Passport?**
Always check your passport and ensure that you renew your visa or apply for one before departing. Make sure your passport does not expire within six months of your date of travel. A large majority of countries insist that your passport be valid for at least that time period or even a year. Make a copy; if you lose it while on vacation, you can send the copy to your Embassy.

**E111 Medical Form**
Still thousands of UK holidaymakers go on holiday without getting a signed E111 form from their local medical practitioner. This form is free and means that whilst you are in a member country of the European community you will receive free or subsidised medical treatment. Be warned, though, this does not mean you are covered for return flights, transfers from destination to hospital and pharmacy costs.

**Travel Insurance**
Millions of holidaymakers worldwide go on holiday without travel insurance. It’s not a great idea. By completing a quick web form you can be covered for any event whilst on holiday. It is so important that people get back in to the habit of buying travel insurance. The decline in holidaymakers taking out insurance is due to the increase in independent travelling – many UK travel agents insisted that you took out travel insurance as part of your booking.

**Confirm Your Reservations**
Be sure your airline tickets and holiday property booking is confirmed, otherwise you may have an unpleasant experience if the owners of the property are out of the country and haven’t left the keys. Visit the airport website or, if you are in the UK, look on Ceefax or Teletext for the latest flight departures and arrivals from UK airports to find if your plane is on time; then back that up with a telephone conversation with the airline.

**Location of the Holiday Property**
When making your booking, you may want to find out if the property is located near a hospital, chemist, police station and so on. These services are great in an emergency, and it’s always good to know your way around before you arrive. You will find that most owners will have some literature about local doctors, chemists and so on.
Buy a Destination Guide and Language Dictionary

Get yourself some travel books to know all the best spots, cheapest restaurants, best food and insights about your destination. To cut down on weight, you may want to write down some notes from the travel book relevant to the area you are visiting rather than take the entire book with you. Most importantly, get a language translation dictionary and carry it with you. Learn a few essential terms in the native language. People will appreciate it and be a lot more helpful if you at least make an effort; it can also help you in an emergency.

Airport Transfers

Don’t forget to try and arrange your transfer to the holiday property before you set off. It’s not fun if it’s 11pm and there are no buses and you have to pay a fortune for an hour drive to your accommodation. Most owners will have a contact for airport transfers, or their own management company will pick you up. There’s a charge, but it’s certainly cheaper and safer than making use of local taxi companies.

Cash Safety

Think of this scenario. You’ve just got to your hotel and you see a nice bar over the road. You go to your pocket to get all of your foreign currency and it’s not there! You’re in a strange country with a language you can’t speak and it’s the first day of a holiday you’ve been paying for all year. To avoid this, please remember travellers’ cheques. Order them before you go and you will not be in this scenario!

I write this article not to scare you but to help you focus on the important issues when organising your next holiday. Have fun and be safe.

Darren Cronian is the writer and editor at www.travel-rants.com and owner of UK-based Worldwide Holiday Homes.
See www.holiday-rentals.uk.com.
VEGETARIAN CHILLI

SERVES 6-8

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp sunflower oil
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1-2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1-2 tsp chilli powder
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- ½ green pepper, diced
- ½ red pepper, diced
- ½ yellow pepper, diced
- 2 carrots, peeled and chopped
- 2 x 400g cans chopped tomatoes
- 2 tbsp tomato purée
- 250ml vegetable stock
- ½ cup sliced mushrooms
- 1 courgette, chopped
- 1 can black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 can white beans (cannellini), rinsed and drained
- 1 can kidney beans, rinsed and drained
- salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 6-8 tsp sour cream (for garnish)

1. In a large saucepan, heat the sunflower oil and olive oil and fry the onion and garlic together with the chilli and cumin until golden in colour. Add the peppers and carrots and cook until softened whilst stirring all the time for approximately five more minutes.

2. Add the tomatoes, tomato purée and stock, bring to the boil and simmer for about 30 minutes. Add in the mushrooms and courgette and simmer for another 5 minutes.

3. Stir in the beans, season with salt and black pepper, simmer for another 5-10 minutes until the chilli is thick. Serve hot with a spoonful of sour cream as garnish.
Barbequed Pork Ribs

Ingredients:

- 1.5kg pork spareribs cut into serving size pieces
- 75g/6 tbsp butter
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- ½ cup water
- ¼ cup distilled white vinegar
- ½ cup ketchup
- ½ cup hickory smoke flavoured barbeque sauce
- ½ lemon, juiced
- salt and black pepper

Serves 6

1. Place the ribs in a large roasting pan. Cover with lightly salted water, and bring to the boil. Reduce heat to low, and simmer for 60-90 minutes or until the meat is tender, but not quite falling off the bone. Remove from the heat, and drain.

2. Melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Cook the onion and garlic in the butter until the onion is tender; remove from heat. Using a food processor, combine the water, vinegar, ketchup, barbeque sauce, and lemon juice. Pour in the melted butter mixture, and puree for one minute. Pour into a saucepan and season with salt and pepper. Bring to the boil and then remove from the heat.

3. Put the boiled ribs in a roasting pan, and cover with sauce. Cover with foil paper, and leave to marinate in the fridge overnight.

4. Preheat the grill on a medium-high heat. Grill the ribs for 15-20 minutes, or until well browned, basting with sauce and turning frequently.
STRAWBERRY TART

Ingredients:
- 100g butter cut into small pieces
- 75g granulated sugar
- pinch of salt
- 1 medium egg
- 225g plain flour
- 3 tbsp of redcurrant jelly
- 675g strawberries, halved

1. In a bowl put the butter and sugar, add a pinch of salt and with a wooden spatula work together until creamy. Break in the egg and keep stirring until smooth. Sift the flour and beat together rapidly.

2. Empty the mixture onto a floured board and work with the palm of your hand until a ball forms. Cut the pastry into several pieces, pile one on top of the other and push them down firmly together again. Repeat three times and leave to rest for one hour.

3. Heat the oven to 200°C/Gas 6. Butter and flour the tart tin and set aside. Roll out the pastry and place in the tin carefully. The pastry may crumble but you can correct this by pressing the cracks together with your fingers. Trim off the excess pastry leaving a rather thick edge. Work this up a little between the fingers and thumb so that it stands up about a quarter of an inch above the rim of the tin, keeping it as thick as possible.

4. Prick the base with a fork and then bake for about 20 minutes until it turns into a medium biscuit colour. Cool for 2-3 minutes; remove from the tin and leave to cool down completely.

5. Put the redcurrant jelly in a saucepan and gently melt without boiling. Brush the base of the pastry with the warm redcurrant jelly. Fill with strawberries and pour the rest of the jelly over the strawberries. Serve warm or cold.
Top Ten Things to Do to Be Prepared for Redundancy

By Salvatore Mcdonagh

How redundancy, or its threat, could change your life for the best

1. Stay Positive
If ten percent of the workforce is to be laid off, then you have a ninety percent chance of keeping your job. If you are made redundant, the redundancy package may be generous enough to finance your own start up, doing exactly the project that you have been trying to get management to buy into for years.

Or you may now be able to finally go after the dream career you have always wanted. Perhaps you have been reluctant to take the risk in the past, or your significant other has been wary of your dream being able to support your lifestyles. Well, redundancy will take the choice away from the two of you, and now you are free to follow the career you really want, rather than stay stuck in a career you chose (or didn’t choose) years ago.

2. Make a Realistic Plan
Look at where you would ideally like to be in six months, in terms of place, job, income, spare time and possibly even employer. Will you be there if you are made redundant? What do you need to do to ensure your success? Map it out and start doing it, irrespective of whether you are laid off or not.

3. Get Out of Debt – and Be Frugal
Only debts that will earn you more than they cost are worth having – like a mortgage on the house you are living in now. If at all possible, get out of debt and stay out of debt. That means living within your means: do not purchase things you do not need. Make certain that you are not using your credit card to finance any purchases at all.

If you really cannot clear all your debts before the redundancy is due to land then, as a last resort, consolidate all your loans into one, and put it into your house mortgage. This is usually the cheapest loan you can have, and the last that the bank is likely to foreclose on. Talk to the bank in advance of any problem with your mortgage repayment and agree on an arrangement that will work for you – do not wait till you cannot make a payment. Do not rely on the redundancy package to clear your debts for you. You may need it for living expenses, job-hunting travel, to fund your business start up or to retrain for a new career.

4. Know Your Statutory Rights
Be sure that you are aware of what you are legally entitled to receive as severance pay (your employer’s legal obligations in your redundancy package): the number of years you have been employed by the employer, your salary, age, plus any other factors that might be taken into consideration. If you are a migrant worker, be sure that you are fully aware of your entitlements and also of your own obligations in the terms of your work visa. Will you be entitled to remain in the country and seek employment? For how long? Is your employer obliged to pay for your repatriation?

5. Know What Your Employment Contract States
Dig out your work contract of employment and re-read it (assuming you read it when you signed it!). If there is anything that is
unclear, ambiguous or that you do not understand, get clarification from your employer. Get advice from the local unemployment or social welfare office if you are not completely satisfied that you understand and agree with all the terms of the contract – and particularly the terms of severance or termination of contract. Be aware that you cannot sign away your statutory rights in your employment contract. Both you and your employer are still obliged to obey the laws of the country in which you are employed.

6. Check Your Unemployment Insurance
Make sure that you have unemployment insurance, and that you understand exactly what you will receive, starting when, and for how long.

7. Talk to Your Family and Friends
Make them aware of your concerns, and get them to help and support you with your new frugal lifestyle, debt elimination, job hunting and potential career change.

8. Get Your CV Up to Date
Your CV is an important tool in your job-hunting arsenal. Rewrite it from scratch and make sure it reflects your enthusiasm for the career you want to have. Make sure it is not a list of job titles and job descriptions that will not differentiate you from the billions of other CVs already posted on the internet and filed away in never-to-be-searched archives.

9. Think About Alternative Jobs/Careers
If this industry is in decline, or you are not doing what you care about, then this is your golden opportunity to change career. No more excuses about how secure your job is and how risky it would be to make a career change. You are now well aware of the fallacy of job security.

10. Know That It Is Not the End of the World
It is very important to be realistic in assessing the likelihood that you will be made redundant. Do not get into a panic. Do not burn yourself out trying to make yourself indispensable or to make up for past inadequacies (real or imaginary!) in your work. Having survived two rounds of redundancies, and then being laid off in the third, I can assure you that your own performance will probably have little or no influence on the management decision-making process (or what passes for such). The projects you are working on may be considered strategic, but may be “overstaffed”. It may be based on “last in, first out”, years of experience, favouritism, department, or all or none of the above.

Things you should do are:
1. Maintain (at least the appearance of) your normal work.
2. Avoid contributing to gossip and rumours.
3. Make useful suggestions for improving morale, profitability, efficiency and so on.

These may have some positive effect on you avoiding the axe, and at the very least it might mean you get away with a good reference and possibly postpone the doom of your workmates who stay employed.

What to Do if the Axe Falls
In the immortal words of Monty Python, “Always look on the bright side of life” (from “The Life of Brian” – one of the best reflections on humanity ever stored on celluloid). The trick is to find a positive perspective. A lot worse things could happen to you than losing your job. Yes, it is terribly scary, makes you feel worthless, resentful, angry, depressed, lonely and a whole lot more. But try to put yourself in the shoes of the person who has to lay you off. Unless you have an absolutely nasty horrible vindictive evil manager (in which case redundancy ought to be a relief!) then you have to feel some empathy for her or him.

When I was made redundant, my manager had already had to lay off two people that morning, face to face, and then wait several hours for me to call in. She was devastated, and I felt really terrible for her. For me the months of stressful waiting were finally over, and, although I was not thrilled to be unemployed, I had to admit that the future was not all dark. I was looking forward to my wedding in a few months, which I felt was a positive thing, but she seemed to feel even worse for. That is the funny thing about your point of view – good news can seem bad, or vice versa, depending on where you are sitting. Storm clouds can fill you with dread, or alternatively offer you your best hope of survival.

Redundancy is the best opportunity you will ever have to start again. Choose the right career, work in the job that fits you like a glove, live the life you deserve, be the person you were always meant to be. Alternatively, take a little break and blow the redundancy check, live on the dole/unemployment benefit for a while, just sit and think, or just sit. You are now in control of your time. You always have been actually, but you possibly didn’t realise it until now.

Salvatore Mcdonagh runs the website www.midlife-career-change.com.
WHO SAID IT?

Test your knowledge of famous quotes from famous people
See if you can match the quote with the famous person whose lips it passed

1. A penny saved is a penny earned.  
   a. Vincent Van Gogh

2. Art washes away the dust of everyday life.  
   b. Alexander Graham Bell

3. Before anything else, preparation is the key to success.  
   c. Walt Disney

4. A fanatic is one who can’t change his mind and won’t change the subject.  
   d. Aristotle

5. A family is a place where minds come in contact with one another. If these minds love one another the home will be as beautiful as a flower garden. But if these minds get out of harmony with one another it is like a storm that plays havoc with the garden.  
   e. Benjamin Franklin

6. Adapt or perish, now as ever, is nature’s inexorable imperative.  
   f. Pablo Picasso

7. A flatterer is a friend who is your inferior, or pretends to be so.  
   g. Buddha

8. Art is something greater and higher than our own skill or knowledge or learning. That art is something which, though produced by human hands, is now wrought by hands alone, but wells up from a deeper source, from a man’s soul.  
   h. H. G. Wells

9. A room without books is like a body without a soul.  
   i. Sir Winston Churchill

10. All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them.  
   j. Cicero

Answers:
1. e; 2. f; 3. b; 4. i; 5. g; 6. h; 7. d; 8. a; 9. f; 10. c
1. How to Track an E-mail Address
E-mail is a vital ingredient of modern life, but with it comes the spammers and scammers, seeking to defraud you. Read this article for a tip on how to discover where those dishonest e-mails are coming from.
http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/worksmart/trackemail

2. Reduce Your Carbon Footprint With These Easy Steps
Small changes in the way we live our lives can have a huge effect on the amount of CO2 emissions we are responsible for. Here are some practical steps you can take to live green.
http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/services/gogreen

3. Top Seven Tips to Get a Job Promotion
How come that career promotion never arrives? This article explains where you might be going wrong and seven simple ways to give yourself the best chances possible.
http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/career/jobpromotion

4. Seven Tips for Effective Reading
Managers, leaders and administrative professionals have mountains of paperwork to read. So how can you more effective when you need to get through a stack of work?
http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/training/reading

5. Top Ten Meeting Icebreakers
Using an icebreaker to get people introduced, relaxed and positive can pay huge dividends in a meeting, facilitating the forging of strong relationships and good ideas.
http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/venues/icebreakers

6. Hawaii Travel Tips: Visiting a Tropical Paradise
Hawaii is an incredibly popular tourist destination, and it’s not hard to see why. But there are a few things you can do to ensure your trip is memorable for all of the right reasons.
http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/travel/hawaii