H ave NO REGRETS...

Carmen MacDougall, virtual assistant coach and trainer, interviewed by DeskDemon

Conduct a Successful Performance
Identifying and Selling Your Soft Skills
Manage Messages by Using Rules
Do you know a PA, Secretary or Administrator who has what it takes to win DeskDemon’s Management Support Fellowship Award 2007?

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Please include:
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- Your telephone number
- Nominee’s Name
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- A short paragraph on the accomplishments and why the nominee should be chosen

http://www.deskemon.com/pages/uk/awards2007/index

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February 2008 Winner
Lynne Hawkins
of Wessex Water
Nominator: Victoria Budd

January 2008 Winner
Carolann McGarity
of Connect Communications
Nominator: Alan Ramsay

December 2007 Winner
Caroline Melville
of Virtually Sorted
Nominator: Lyndsey McKendry

November 2007 Winner
Iona Robertson
of IPAS Cymru
Nominator: Wendy Scione

Have you voted for your favourite candidate to win March’s heat?
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Have No Regrets…

Leading virtual assistant trainer and coach Carmen MacDougall offers her views on getting ahead in the burgeoning world of the VA.
Happily Easter and welcome to this packed March issue of PA Enterprise. Our cover feature, Have No Regrets… is an interview with virtual assistant coach and trainer (and al round VA advocate) Carmen MacDougall. Founder and managing director of both cma coaching and training (CMA) and The Virtual Assistant Coaching and Training Company (VACT), Carmen passes on, amongst other things, the skills she acquired from over ten years as a PA in the City of London. Carmen has some inspiring thoughts on goals – “the biggest risk is in never taking opportunities in life” – hence the title of the article.

We also bring you the articles Identifying and Selling Your Soft Skills, on giving yourself the edge in the workplace, How to Conduct a Successful Performance Appraisal, Building Fitness and Weight-Loss Targets Into Your Life – which both do just what they say – and A Powerful Conversational Trick to Get People Involved, a piece on how tag questions can increase the force of your words, by drawing people in to empathise with you.

Then there’s our worksmart article, Microsoft Office Outlook 2007. Manage Messages By Using Rules. Rules are a powerful tool that can be utilised to transform the way you manage your inbox, automatically sorting emails into different folders (for example, mailing list emails into one, personal emails into another) depending on the rules you set, so that you don’t have to think about it.

We also bring you The Working Week: Are We Getting It Wrong? which looks into the problem of the daily grind. As the article states, “in the UK, absenteeism from work due to overworked, stressed out employees costs the UK £3.6bn a year, according to the CBI (Confederation of British Industry).” This is a pretty serious problem (as I’m sure everyone is aware, from personal experience) and the author believes that a more flexible approach to the hours that we work, as well as increased opportunities to work from home, could dramatically increase workers’ sense of wellbeing and happiness. With this area currently being explored in an independent review commissioned by the government, the issue couldn’t be more relevant. Whilst the business secretary John Hutton professes to supporting flexible working he has also expressed caution about extending the rights further: “We want to avoid a situation where employers are so overwhelmed with requests for newly eligible groups that they feel they have to say no to everyone.” Definitely an emotive issue. What does seem positive is that a survey published by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform in December found more than 90 percent of workplaces offered flexible working in some form.

With a super (supper) menu and Easter spot the difference too, there’s even more reason to enjoy PA Enterprise this month. We hope that you enjoy this Easter issue of the magazine!

Susan Silva
Managing Editor
susan@deskdemon.com
Identifying and Selling Your Soft Skills
By Kath Finney

Giving yourself the edge in the workplace

Has your professional training kept you up to date with the skills you need as you progress through your career? You may have undertaken lots of training and be at the forefront of issues and developments within your area of expertise, but highly successful professionals must also possess certain “soft” skills that are becoming increasingly sought after within most professions.

If you are failing to recognise the growing importance of soft skills you could be missing out on excellent opportunities, so identify which skills you have by considering what you do well and how you approach certain situations and problems.

But what attributes are regarded as “soft” skills? Soft skills can often seem so basic they are overlooked, but employers are increasingly searching for more than a qualification.

Interpersonal Skills
These include the ability to lead, motivate and delegate. They are important at every level of organisational responsibility and should always be evident. Being the best in a particular area is not always enough to succeed unless you can combine this with the ability to convince others that what you are doing is important.

Consider a time when you utilised your interpersonal skills to effectively communicate your ideas to others and obtained their agreement, or when you developed a relationship with a co-worker that you disliked in order to succeed for your company.

Team Working
There are two issues a team must consider as a group. Firstly, and most commonly addressed, is the task at hand and problems that might be involved in completing it. The second and most overlooked consideration is the process of the teamwork itself and what procedures will ensure the group works cohesively. By acknowledging both of these issues you will be able to clarify group objectives and enhance your team working capabilities.

Lack of evidence that you can work effectively as part of a team is a sure-fire way to eliminate yourself from the recruitment process. You can demonstrate your team-working skills by recalling, for example, a successful project that you were a part of, what your role within it was and why the project was a success.

Communication Skills
The ability to communicate ideas to others effectively is an absolutely essential requirement for many hiring managers. Speaking clearly and coherently will allow effective verbal communication with others. Bear in mind that how you speak is more influential to the person that you
are communicating with than what you actually say, so think about your body language and tone of voice when you are talking. The ability to present comprehensive written ideas will enable you to put forward professional documentation of your thoughts and is a highly regarded skill.

Communication is a two-way process so listening is therefore an essential aspect. Listening is more than just hearing what is being said. Effective listening encourages others to listen to you and respond to what you say. If communication skills are an area that you feel you could improve on, set about identifying ways in which you could develop them.

**How Do I Identify My Soft Skills?**

Think about which soft skills you use in your current job – what would your manager say were your strengths? These personal traits make you unique. Maybe you never miss a deadline or perhaps you have a great attitude. Ask friends, family or colleagues to write down your good and not-so-good traits and have a look at consistencies in their responses.

Look into the skills and experiences that would be required in the type of job you are seeking. You can do this by contacting a recruitment consultancy that places people in the particular role you are interested in and asking what the fundamental requirements of this role are.

**Transferable Skills**

If you are looking to apply for jobs that are a bit different from your previous roles, you may be put off because you feel you have no previous relevant experience. While in the strictest sense it could be true you have no exact experience, there may be aspects of the role you have done in the past, but in a different context. Skills you have learnt and developed in one situation that could be used in a different situation are referred to as “transferable skills”. Having identified these skills, you can see which would apply to the job you are considering – transferable skills can demonstrate more experience than you might think.

**Providing Evidence of Your Skills**

The demonstration of your key skills should be something that you do initially through your CV, then follow on throughout the interviewing process and then should be ongoing through your working career.

Demonstrate your strengths by finding an example of when you used a certain skill. Think about the whats, whens, whys and hows of every situation and this should help to communicate your selling points and enhance your credibility.

**Developing New Skills**

Having identified certain skills that you need to improve and develop to match job criteria, you should then develop a plan, identifying your goal and the steps needed to achieve it. Keep the steps small and manageable and put them in a timeframe, defining how you will know when you have reached your goal to measure your success.

Finally, continue to challenge new soft skill sets. Research tells us that continual learning keeps our brains active and therefore our minds healthy. Few jobs exist that do not require learning new skills regularly and everyone can improve certain areas of their soft skills capabilities.

Kath Finney works for NES, a leading global technical recruitment business providing professionally qualified contract staff to blue chip clients across the world in the oil and gas, infrastructure, rail, power and IT sectors. Their website is www.nes.co.uk.
Carmen is the founder and managing director of CMA Coaching and Training (CMA) and The Virtual Assistant Coaching and Training Company (VACT). The role of virtual assistant is currently going through a renaissance, as communications technology has made it a truly viable option for business. Carmen is right there at the forefront, ensuring that VAs are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to provide companies and organisations with the outstanding support they need.

DeskDemon: For DeskDemon readers who don’t know what a virtual assistant is, can you explain the difference between the traditional nine-to-five PA/EA and the VA?

Carmen: VAs provide a range of assistant, administrative and secretarial services to their clients and they do it all virtually – usually from their own home but sometimes from an office. The best bit about being a VA is the fact that you can work for the clients you choose, doing the hours that suit you, from your chosen location, all to fit in with your life.

DeskDemon: How and why did you become a VA, and what drove you to become a coach?

Carmen: I became a VA after being made redundant from the role of PA and office manager in the investment banking and legal sectors in the City of London I’d held for over 11 years. Within three months I had set up my VA business and had clients.

I decided to become a coach because I was so inspired by my own coach and those that were my clients, in terms of how they could motivate and support me and others, that I really wanted to be able to do that too. I have always loved helping people, and by becoming a VA coach and trainer I could help and support others in starting their own businesses, whilst using the knowledge and experience I had gained as a PA.

DeskDemon: In your experience of coaching and of virtual assisting, do you think anyone can do these roles, or do they take special knowledge or abilities?

Carmen: Coaching takes several key qualities, including the desire to assist and support others. It is also essential, in my view, that as a coach you are properly qualified. Coaching is a particular skill but can be confused with advising or counselling. It is in fact neither; it is a supportive and motivational process that gets the person being coached to make the discoveries themselves—which actually makes those discoveries more important and have more of an impact than if they are handed to them on a plate.

Training is also a key skill, and when combined with coaching it can be an extremely effective tool. Again it is essential that you are properly qualified and/or experienced as a trainer and in the subject matter you are working with. It is not enough, for example, to work in a hairdresser’s for a few months and then decide you want to teach others to cut hair.

It is the same with training and coaching VAs: being a VA for a few months does necessarily mean that you can train or coach – especially if you have no real experience or qualifications in either area.

“Takes more than a computer, internet connection and desk”

Many potential VAs make the crucial mistake of thinking that to be a VA all you need is a computer, a desk and an internet connection. Wrong! It’s not about simply using your PA or administrative experience to provide VA services to a range of clients. You will need to be a business owner too and that requires another set of skills entirely. The ability to actually run your business will be key to your success.

DeskDemon: If someone is considering becoming a VA, do you have any advice on which questions they should ask themselves before jumping in?

Carmen: Here’s an extract from my ebook, What it Takes to Become a Remarkable VA:

Have you considered your reasons for wanting to become self-employed? Some common answers are...
- “I want to be my own boss,” “I have the potential of earning more money than I do working for someone else,” “Now is a good time in life to do so,” “This is the best way for me to fit work around family commitments,” and “It’s been an ambition of mine for a while.”

**Things to Consider:**

Working from home you will need to be:

- Self motivated
- Disciplined
- Able to work on your own

You will also need a network of people to call on but you will need to be strict with friends and family where your time is concerned.

Some common questions I get ask include:

**Why become a VA?**

By becoming a virtual assistant you can use your PA, secretarial or administrative skills to work for the clients you choose, at hours to suit you and from your chosen location. The financial rewards will be all yours too!

- Flexible working hours
- No rush-hour commute
- High earning potential
- Opportunity to expand your skill set
- Rapidly growing industry

**DeskDemon:** If there are so many VAs out there, how will I find enough work?

**Carmen:** Because VAs tend to specialise in particular niche markets rather than attempt to be a “jack of all trades”, not everyone is offering exactly the same service. Therefore, there are plenty of opportunities for each VA. It is, however, important to network and focus on a sound marketing strategy that suits your niche market in order to attract clients.

**DeskDemon:** What obstacles can new VAs expect?

**Carmen:** If you need to have a regular income coming in then you may have to continue with your current role whilst you set up your new VA business. This can mean long hours and sacrifices such as lowering your standards of living for a short while until you get established.

You should ask yourself if you have:

- The right space to work from home – you need a space that is dedicated to your work
- The necessary equipment
- The Support of family and friends
- Good planning skills
- The ability to make your own decisions

**DeskDemon:** In your view, how well known is the virtual assistant profession? Is it known by most people or does the working world still need to learn what a VA is and how a VA can help?

**Carmen:** The VA industry is growing rapidly and whilst the concept of outsourcing is an accepted one, many businesses still have trouble “letting go” and this is part of the education that the industry is still going through to a certain extent.

However, once a business owner or other type of client understands and actually experiences the benefits of using a VA then they are sold!

As the co-founder and editor of The VA Times (an online publication for the VA industry), the president and founder of the National VA Conference & Awards, and in my capacity as a speaker and presenter, I am continually promoting the VA industry and it is becoming better known all the time.

There are several industry associations that all work to increase awareness of the VA profession, including the Association of International Virtual Assistants (www.lava.org.uk), the UK Association of Virtual Assistants (www.ukava.co.uk) and The Society of Virtual Assistants (www.societyofvirtualassistants.co.uk).

**DeskDemon:** How do you see the VA profession evolving in the future?

**Carmen:** My hope for the VA industry is that we will start to see more and more businesses benefiting from the flexibility and professionalism of VAs and that the term VA will be associated with a successful business.

Regarding people setting up and running their own VA businesses, the industry will continue to grow and provide an enormous range of support and resources. It will also mean that more and more women (and men) can take control of their own lives, work when they want to and enjoy a greater quality of life.

**DeskDemon:** Do you have any additional comments?

**Carmen:** The biggest risk is in never taking opportunities in life. Imagine that the years have flown by and you are now an old lady (or man) talking to the young members of your family. Do you hear yourself talking with regret about the opportunities you let slip by? Or do hear yourself proudly telling people about the life you experienced because you never let any opportunity pass you by? And even though you may have made some mistakes along the way, the important thing is that you learned from those mistakes and that learning helped you to become the successful person you wanted to be? Which story will it be?

What is holding you back from achieving what you want? The list could be endless: procrastination, negative thoughts, lack of confidence, justifications as to why you can’t or won’t succeed, self-criticism, and so on and so on... Oh, those mental dramas, holding you back before you have even set off on the journey!

**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@deskdemo.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.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/career/dayinthe_life_of_2008
Microsoft Office Outlook 2007: Manage Messages By Using Rules

How Rules Help You Manage Messages

A rule is an action that Microsoft Office Outlook takes automatically on an arriving or sent message that meets the conditions that you specify in the rule. You can choose many conditions and actions by using the Rules and Alerts Wizard. Rules do not operate on messages that have been read, only on those that are unread.

Rules fall into one of two general categories: organisation and notification. The Rules and Alerts Wizard contains templates for the most commonly used rules.

• **Stay organised:** These are rules that help you to file and follow up on messages. For example, you can create a rule for messages from a specific sender, such as Bobby Moore, with the word “sales” in the Subject line: To be flagged for follow-up, categorised as Sales, and moved to a folder called Bobby’s Sales.

• **Stay up-to-date:** These are rules that notify you in some way when you receive a particular message. For example, you can create a rule that automatically sends an alert to your mobile when you receive a message from a family member.

• **Start from a blank rule:** These are rules that you create from scratch.

Create a Rule From a Template

• In the Navigation Pane (the Navigation Pane is the column on the left side of the Outlook window that includes panes such as Shortcuts or Mail and the shortcuts or folders within each pane. Click a folder to show the items in the folder), click Mail.

• On the Tools menu, click Rules and Alerts.

• If you have more than one email account, in the Apply changes to this folder list, select the inbox that you want.

• Click New Rule.

• Under Step 1: Select a template, select the template that you want from the Stay Organized or Stay Up to Date collection of templates.

• Under Step 2: Edit the rule description, click an underlined value. For example, if you click the people or distribution list link, the Address Book opens.

• Under Step 1: Select condition(s), select the conditions that you want the messages to meet for the rule to apply.

• Under Step 2: Edit the rule description, click an underlined value if you have not done so already, and then click Next.

• Under Step 1: Select action(s), select the action that you want the rule to take when the specified conditions are met.

• Under Step 2: Edit the rule description, click an underlined value if you have not done so already, and then click Next.

• Under Step 1: Select exception(s), select any exceptions to the rule, and then click Next.

1. To finish creating the rule, enter a name for the rule, and then select any other options that you want.

2. If you want to run this rule on messages that already are in one of your folders, select the Run this rule now on messages already in “folder name” check box.

3. To apply this rule to all your email accounts and the Inbox associated with each account, select the Create this rule on all accounts check box.

4. Click Finish.

Create a Rule From Scratch

To create a rule by choosing your own conditions, actions and exceptions, do the following: ►

Exceptions

You can add exceptions to your rules for special circumstances, such as when a message is flagged for follow-up action or marked with high importance. A rule is not applied to a message if just one of the exceptions that you specify is met.
1. In the Navigation Pane, click Mail.
3. If you have more than one email account, in the Apply changes to this folder list, select the Inbox that you want.
5. Under Start from a blank rule, select either Check messages when they arrive or Check messages after sending, and then click Next.
6. Under Step 1: Select condition(s), select the conditions that you want the messages to meet for the rule to apply.
7. Under Step 2: Edit the rule description, click an underlined value if you have not done so already, and then click Next.
8. Under Step 1: Select action(s), select the action that you want the rule to take when the specified conditions are met.
9. Under Step 2: Edit the rule description, click an underlined value if you have not done so already, and then click Next.
10. Under Step 1: Select exception(s), select any exceptions to the rule, and then click Next.
11. To finish creating the rule, enter a name for the rule, and then select any other options that you want.
   • If you want to run this rule on messages that already are in one of your folders, select the Run this rule now on messages already in “folder name” check box.
   • To apply this rule to all your email accounts and the Inbox associated with each account, select the Create this rule on all accounts check box.
11. Click Finish.

Create a Rule From a Message
You can create a rule directly from a message. For example, you can create a rule to move messages from someone to a specific folder.

1. Right-click the message that you want to base the rule on, and then click Create Rule on the shortcut menu.
2. In the Create Rule dialog box, select the check boxes for the options that are already filled in with information from your selected message.
3. Select the Move the item to folder check box.
4. Click an existing folder or click New to create a new folder to store the messages.
5. To add more conditions, actions or exceptions to the rule, click Advanced Options, and then follow the rest of the instructions in the Rules and Alerts Wizard.

Tip: To run the rule as soon as you create it, select the Run this rule now on the messages already in [folder name] check box on the last page of the Rules and Alerts Wizard. All the messages in your Inbox, or any folder that you choose, that meet the conditions and exceptions associated with the rule are moved to the specified folder. To test your new rule, open your new folder. Were the correct messages moved?

Run a Rule Periodically But Not all the Time
If you want to run a rule periodically but not all the time, do the following:

2. In the Rules and Alerts dialog box, turn the rule off by clearing the check box next to the rule.
3. Click Run Rules Now.
4. In the Run Rules Now dialog box, under Select rules to run, select the check box next to the rule that you want to run.
5. Select the folder that you want to apply the rule to.
6. Select the category of messages that you want to apply the rule to. For example, you can apply the rule only to unread messages in a folder.
7. Click Run Now.

Delivery Receipts, Voting Responses and Out-of-Office Notices
Delivery receipts, read receipts, voting responses and out-of-office notices are treated as messages. For example, when you create a rule that moves items (items include email messages, appointments, contacts, tasks, journal entries, notes, posted items and documents) with the word “meeting” in the Subject box to a specific folder, all delivery receipts, voting responses and out-of-office messages that meet this condition are moved as well.

Note: If a voting response is moved out of the Inbox, the response is not automatically tracked in the original message.

Meeting Requests, Task Requests and Documents
Meeting requests, task requests and documents are treated as messages. For example, when you create a rule that moves items with the word “meeting” in the Subject box to a specific folder, any task request or meeting request that meets that condition is moved as well. However, keep in mind the following limitations when you create rules that affect these types of items:

An item moved to a non-mail folder might not work as you expect after it is moved. For example, if a message is moved to the Calendar folder, a new appointment is not created. If a meeting or task response is moved to the Deleted Items folder by using a rule, the response is not tracked by the original item.

• If a meeting request is automatically moved to the Deleted Items folder, the meeting is not added to the Calendar.
• Rules that affect messages that you send are not applied to task requests and meeting requests.
A round 6pm on a Sunday evening, while you are relaxing on your sofa watching the 90th re-run of an episode of The Simpsons, do you start to sense a pressing feeling of anxiety? Is your mind all of a sudden reeling with lists of unfinished tasks, emails and pending teleconferences? If so, you are among 89 percent of workers who suffer from Sunday Evening Work Anxiety.

Apparently, though, it’s not just Sunday Evening Work Anxiety we suffer from; there’s Monday Morning Blues, the Mid-Week Lull, the Post-Lunch energy Low, The 5 o’clock Concentration Stall and the End of Week Brain Fatigue. With all these excuses, it’s no wonder that UK and US businesses are losing out on up to 520 hours of productivity per employee every year – something I’m sure your MD would be interested to hear about!

Management experts state that this is because business leaders are failing to effectively manage the energy levels of their staff, a key driver of business performance. This is one of the findings of a new study by Lucozade Energy and the Centre for Business Performance at Cranfield School of Management. The report found the current infrastructure of UK business ill-equipped to harness energetic qualities like creativity and passion and that as a result business performance is at risk.

Organisational Energy
According to Cranfield’s new research, “organisational energy” is the key source of motivation in the workplace and is the spark for successful team work and creativity. It is greater than the sum of individual energy, and is only created by effective team and social interactions in the workplace.

So what can be done to raise motivation levels and what is it that UK and US employers are doing so wrong? Let’s take a look at how other countries work...

The French work with very long lunches and a maximum of 35 hours a week by law (as opposed to the UK’s 48 hour weekly maximum). They also have 11 bank holidays compared to the UK’s 8!

The Spanish work with a two-hour, mid-afternoon siesta, which doctors say helps to keep stress and heart disease at bay. Workers in Dubai never get the Monday blues because they start their week on a Sunday and end it on a Thursday. Some businesses (mostly shops) take a Spanish-style siesta in the afternoon for 3–4 hours (mainly because of the heat) and open again in the evening until 10pm.

The Kapauku people of Papua (Indonesia) think it is bad luck to work two consecutive days in the week! Sounds like my kind of place. The Kung Bushmen (of Southern Africa) work just two-and-a-half days per week and rarely work more than six hours per day. Bliss.

Grind Britain
In the UK, absenteeism from work due to overworked, stressed out employees costs the UK £3.6bn a year, according to the CBI (Confederation of British Industry). The incidence of stress has been shown to increase with work intensification. Research commissioned by the Health & Safety Executive has indicated that about half a million people in the UK experience.
work-related stress at a level they believe is making them ill and up to 5 million people feel “very” or “extremely” stressed by their work.

So What Is the Solution?
Do as the French do: Work a set number of hours per week. Remember it is against the law for employers to overwork their employees, so ensure that you keep overtime to a minimum by leaving at a set time each evening.

Strengthen team bonds: By strengthening the relationships within your team, you can build respect for one another and begin to understand the true potential of each team member and how they work.

Unfortunately, team building days tend to be considered by most employees as clichéd and tiresome. However, there are some really cool ideas out there to help create new team bonds or strengthen existing ones (and we don’t mean a day orienteering/getting lost in the nearest forest). If time or budget is an issue, simply arrange regular team nights out at city bars, clubs or restaurants or you could arrange a Friday afternoon picnic complete with a rounders tournament in a local park.

Work from home one day a week: 69 percent of UK workers, according to a recent poll from Cornhill Direct, would choose to work from home if they had the choice. We’re not saying that working from home 100 percent of the time is the key to a happier working life, but working in a relaxed environment away from the often pressurised and distracting conditions at the office for at least one day a week may improve your productivity.

Learn how to say no: In the grand scheme of things, your health, family and social life are far more important than the menial work tasks that often take up precious hours in the evening. If it isn’t a life or death situation, say “No” and do it tomorrow during normal working hours.

Do flexi-hours: Despite initiatives such as congestion charges and toll charges, rush hour traffic (on the roads and on the rails) continues to be a problem. But if employers allowed staff to come in or leave at different times – if adopted by enough companies – it would “stagger” the rush hour, spreading it out and making it less intense, reducing road congestion and overcrowding on public transport, reducing travel time and making it a less stressful part of the day for everyone. As long as you work your set number of hours per week, it should be fine for you to work 10 am to 6 pm or 11 am to 7 pm.

Incentives and rewards: Hard work, dedication and excellent performances should always be rewarded. Gestures as small as a thank you email or as large as a 10 percent pay rise all boost morale and let the employees know that they are appreciated.

Maryse Mignotte is a communications executive and features writer for www.ExclusiveLondon.co.uk, a luxury London entertainment and lifestyle booking guide.
How many times have you felt tired and totally stressed out from work and by the time you get home you cannot be bothered, for example, to play with your children? Even though they have been really pleased to see you, and wanted you to spend time playing with them, your normal response is likely to be to tell them that you will play with them in an hour or so, after you have had a chance to get yourself organised.

However, instead of disappointing your children, why not say, “Yes” to them after all! You will most likely be very surprised by the amount of energy that you will have after that thirty minutes of activity.

By exercising at a moderate pace for only thirty minutes you will feel a lot better mentally as well as physically. It has been shown that this activity improves the appetite and sharpens up your ability to problem solve. As well as that, you will find that it is much easier to sleep at night if you do moderate exercises, even if for just this short period every day.

The Many Benefits of Exercise
There are so many benefits of regular exercise! It helps to promote self-discipline, and has a positive impact how you perceive life in general. If you feel good physically, you are much more likely to feel good about life in general. Exercise also helps lift your spirits and get you out of any depression.

For those of you starting out for the first time, do remember that it is best to limit your exercise routine to fifteen minutes a day for two to three days a week. You can increase the time you spend exercising once your body has become accustomed to it. Do not ever push yourself too far, and if you do strain yourself then stop immediately. Take a break from exercising for...
a few days if you do, and then start over again, but you do need to begin the process as if you were starting out again from day one.

**Some Exercise Ideas**

Here are some suggestions for moderate exercises that you can do and enjoy.

Make use of your surroundings by walking as often as you possibly can. You can walk with your dog, your partner or, better still, your children. Encourage your family to walk daily, and you will find yourself burning up the calories. At the same time you will be enjoying the surroundings, and getting sunlight and fresh air, which is also very good for your general good health.

Why not set out to discover the wonders of yoga. Yoga is one of the more effective exercise programs, and energises not only your body but also your soul. You may want to learn just the basic yoga positions; these aren’t too complicated but are very effective nevertheless. A five-minute yoga exercise can perk you up and recharge your body with the energy you have lost during the whole day. With yoga you relax, and at the same time stretch yourself.

Make a point of taking up different sports, time permitting. Play football, volleyball, tennis or badminton. Most doctors recommended sport as an effective way to stay fit and healthy, but unless you are super fit, or a trained athlete, sporting activities should be undertaken in moderation.

See if you can join any exercise programmes taking place at your work. If there aren’t any then why not see if you can start one? Suggest this to your boss, and start it up with your colleagues. Great for losing calories and bonding with your colleagues. You could do three sessions of thirty minutes a week, for instance, perhaps even during your lunch break.

Exercise while you are doing household chores – such as gardening, raking leaves, mowing the lawn, doing the laundry, vacuuming, and washing the car. All of these are moderate but effective exercises that you can easily do at home. Instead of using machines and gadgets to perform these chores, why not do them with your hands – working up a sweat and burning up some calories!

If you set out to make exercises like these part of your everyday daily routine, you will be surprised at how many calories you can actually lose. Would you believe, for example, that moderate exercises like this can burn between 150 calories and 1,000 calories per day?

I also think that by taking a balanced and consistent approach, as outlined above, you can achieve both your fitness and weight loss objectives, and yet still maintain normality in your everyday life.

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If I promised to show you one of the easiest ways to get people going along with your thinking, you’d be curious, wouldn’t you?

And if I said you don’t have to learn anything new because the technique is already part of your language, you’d be even more interested. Right?

And even further, if I told you that you can use this trick at any time – at meetings, during sales presentations, in your small talk – then you’d pretty much insist I told you, yes?

And that, as you may have guessed, is exactly what this article is about – those little tag questions we all drop onto the ends of our sentences occasionally, like:

“...don’t you?” “...can’t you?” “...isn’t it?” “...doesn’t it?” “...okay?” “...right?” “...aren’t they?” “...mightn’t you?”

In fact, I’m sure you use these from time to time yourself, don’t you?

The Magic of Tag Questions

Most people think of tag questions as meaningless appendages. But they are amazingly powerful. They encourage a person to participate in your thinking by eliciting an unconscious response. Once people start making an unconscious response, no matter how small, they are, in effect, committing themselves to take your words on board – whether they agree with them or not.

In fact, with tag questions you can actually lead another person’s thinking. Let me give you an example. Contrast these two sentences. Take a few seconds to really “listen” to them in your mind as though someone has spoken them to you, and “feel” how you would naturally respond:

a) I’m sure you can understand this.
b) I’m sure you can understand this, can’t you?

Notice how the second version seems to make you want to mentally participate, whether or not you make an actual reply. Now think how you can make just about any kind of sentence more effective by using a tag question to compel another person to participate:

“I’m sure you can understand the benefits of this product, can’t you?” “Maybe we should go over this proposal in a little more detail, shouldn’t we?” “I guess you can see how this would improve the department’s productivity, can’t you?”

Why Tag Questions Are so Powerful

Let’s examine this little device in more detail. First, let me start by saying that the unconscious mind is an absolute sucker for questions. It cannot help but answer them.

Even though the other person might consciously regard the tag question as insignificant, you’re actually compelling their unconscious mind to participate.

Let’s take a sentence like, “You’re really getting to appreciate the importance of this, aren’t you?” When the other person hears the tag question, their unconscious mind will have to scan through its mental database. If they find any evidence at all that they appreciate what you’re proposing, even just a little, then they’re going to assimilate that into their on-going mental dynamics.

Of course, they can always say no. But even then they’ll still have to take on board any supporting evidence. More often than not, though, in a case like this, the question will keep niggling away under the surface. And they may well go home and find themselves watching television or something, when a thought, seemingly of its own accord, will enter into their mind…

“Well, maybe it is more important than I thought.”

Such is the power of questions. The unconscious mind cannot help but entertain them. So, right away,
and with such a simple device, you’ve set off a sequence of events that effectively invites another person into your thinking.

**Getting Agreement a Step at a Time**

Let’s take this a little further and see how we can gradually corral the other person into agreement.

Think about this. When you put a tag question at the end of a sentence, you’re really giving the other person an “invitation” to either agree or disagree. If the sentence isn’t contentious, and if the tag question is relatively “innocent”, then most people will go along with what you say. They’ll regard the tag question as an idiosyncrasy of speech rather than an actual question, and because they have “decided” not to disagree, they’ve implied agreement.

Now, if you follow this up and create a sequence of linked sentences and tag questions, you’re virtually locking the person into a larger agreement by getting cumulative “little” agreements. Let me give you an example to demonstrate:

“OK. You’ve read this chapter so far, and it’s starting to make sense, right? And if you think about the number of times you use tag questions without thinking about them, you’d agree they’re an ordinary part of language, yes? And now that you’re paying more attention to them, you’re probably starting to understand them a bit more, okay? So now you’re probably coming to realise that you have another tool you can use, aren’t you?”

Now imagine you’d said that to someone. Each time they didn’t disagree with a tag question it would mean they were effectively accepting what you had said up to that point. If they did eventually want to disagree, they’d have to backtrack to the start and effectively “undo” all their previous agreements.

Plus, for a lot of people, there’s an ego barrier they’d have to overcome. Once they’d implied agreement a couple of times, it would be costly to their esteem to be seen to back down. Now let’s try the same thing with, say, a customer in a used car showroom:

“You’ve looked at all the cars in the showroom, haven’t you? And you may even be thinking how much you’d like to trade up from your existing car, right? And I’m sure you could easily imagine how good it would feel to drive a real quality car like this, can’t you? And I suspect you’d like to make that decision right now, yes? And we could easily get the paperwork done so you could drive this away today, okay?”

The secret? Take it a step at a time, and use your tag questions judiciously and sparingly.

**UsingTag Questions to Defuse Resistance**

There’s another important advantage to tag questions, and this is where they really get interesting. You see, because they also imply a negative or “opposite” version of your sentence, they help “defuse” any part of the other person’s mind that might be wanting to resist.

Let’s compare two sentences again. And, like the last time, allow yourself to hear them as though someone is saying them to you.

“It makes sense.”

“It makes sense, doesn’t it?” (Meaning “does it not?”)

Now, doesn’t that second sentence make you feel there’s a part of you that’s agreeing, while another part of you is agreeing not to agree? So you might say something to our used car buyer like, “Trading up to a better car can make you feel really good, can’t it.” Now his “agreeing” part can think “yes” – if he does actually agree. But here’s the point, so can his “disagreeing” part, because you’ve given him the opposite viewpoint in the form of a “rhetorical” question.

So, by using a tag question, you’re effectively “pacing” both sides of a person’s personality.

**Using Tag Questions to Elicit a Non-Verbal Response**

Finally, as if that wasn’t enough for such an innocent little device, tag questions will virtually force the other person to respond non-verbally. They’re a great way of “taking the temperature”.

Simply use a tag question and watch the expression on the other person’s face. If you get the slightest nod of the head, or the minutest upturning of the corners of the mouth, you’ve scored a hit. But if there’s the tiniest furrowing of the brow or down turning of the corners of the mouth, you’ve struck a snag. Just go back and try again with a slightly different approach.

**A Little Practice Goes a Long Way**

Try sprinkling a few tag questions into your conversations and see how well they work in drawing people in. You can also listen to other people’s conversations and notice how unobtrusive they are.

Don’t overlook their power. For something so apparently insignificant, they can be incredibly useful.

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Super Supper

In this fabulous feast of heart-warming fare, sweetcorn soup leads up to traditional baked glazed ham and is rounded off by perfect pancakes in tangy lemon butter. It’s the reason food was invented.
Ingredients:

- 4 Sweetcorn cobs
- 1 tbsp sunflower oil
- 1 Small onion, finely chopped
- 1 Garlic clove, finely diced
- 75g potato, cut into small cubes
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 300ml vegetable stock
- 50ml double cream
- 2 Eggs, lightly beaten
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Sweetcorn Soup

Serves 6

1. Remove the corn kernels by running a sharp knife down the sides of each cob.

2. Heat the sunflower oil in a medium saucepan, sauté the onion, garlic and potato for 5 minutes. Stir in the corn and olive oil and cook for a further 2-3 minutes.

3. Add in the stock and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 35-40 minutes or until the corn is tender. During cooking you may need to skim the surface occasionally.

4. Stir in the cream and season, to taste, with salt and black pepper, then pour into a food processor and blend until smooth. Serve in warm bowls.
Ingredients:

- Unsmoked English Gammon Joint, about 4kg
- 6 black peppercorns
- 15g pack fresh thyme
- 1 fresh bay leaf
- 1 medium onion, quartered
- 500ml bottled stout (i.e. Guinness)
- 12 whole cloves
- 3 tbsp Dijon wholegrain mustard
- 3 tbsp clear honey
- 2 tbsp dark muscovado sugar

1. Place a saucer upside down in a large pan. Place the gammon, with the string that holds the joint together during cooking, on the saucer. This will stop the gammon from touching the hot base of the pan. Add the peppercorns, thyme, bay leaf, onions, three quarters of the stout and enough cold water to cover the gammon. Place the lid on the pan and bring slowly to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 1½ hours, adding more boiling water from the kettle, as necessary. Turn off the heat and allow the ham to cool in the cooking liquor for an hour.

2. Transfer the ham to a board and pat dry with kitchen paper. Using a small, sharp knife, cut off the string, then carefully peel away and discard the skin, leaving a layer of fat exposed. Cut a thin slice from the base of the ham, so that the joint can stand without toppling over and then score the fat into a diamond pattern. Transfer to a roasting tin and insert the cloves into the points of the diamond pattern.

3. Preheat the oven to 200°C/gas 6. Mix together the mustard, honey and sugar, then stir in the remaining stout to thin the paste down to a pouring consistency.

4. Pour the glaze over the ham, allowing it to run down into the tin. Spoon it over until the ham is thoroughly coated. Roast in the oven for 30-40 minutes, or until evenly browned, basting every 10 minutes by spooning the glaze over the sides. Cover and allow to cool down. Carve into slices and serve.
Ingredients:

- 100g plain flour
- salt
- 2 medium eggs
- 300ml milk
- 3 tbsp melted unsalted butter
- 100g softened unsalted butter
- 125g icing sugar
- Grated zest and juice of ½ unwaxed lemon
- Maple syrup to serve

1. Sift the flour and a pinch of salt into a large bowl making a well in the centre. Crack the eggs into the well and whisk the mixture together. Gradually whisk in the milk until you have a smooth batter. Cover and set aside.

2. Stir 2 tbsp of melted butter into the pancake batter. Heat a remaining melted butter in a 20cm non-stick frying pan. Add a small ladeful of batter and swirl around to coat the pan. Cook over a medium heat for 1-2 minutes, until the pancake is lightly golden underneath, then flip over and cook for another minute. Transfer to a plate and keep warm. Repeat with the remaining batter to make 8 pancakes.

3. To make the lemon butter, beat the softened butter, icing sugar and lemon zest together until light and fluffy.

4. To serve, melt a small amount of the lemon butter in the pan with a little of the lemon juice and toss a pancake in the foaming butter. Repeat until all the pancakes, butter and lemon juice have been used. Serve on warmed plates with maple syrup.
Most organisations review the performance of their employees on a regular basis, usually annually. The term appraisal, however, is disliked by many, conjuring up images of a superior passing judgement in a high-handed fashion. Instead of this, the performance appraisal should be used to establish good relationships between manager and employee.

Every manager has to appraise subordinates and the mechanics of it vary from ticking little boxes to marking on five-point scales to writing an open-ended report. This article, however, is mainly concerned with relationships, and how to ensure the appraisal builds them, not damages them.

The primary purpose of an appraisal is to help the subordinate. Here are some reasons for an appraisal:

- To provide feedback on individual performance
- To plan for future promotions and successions
- To assess training and development needs
- To provide information for salary planning and special awards
- To contribute to corporate career planning

**Sharing Information**
Secrecy breeds suspicion. Suspicion destroys a counselling relationship. Two specific areas in which communication is often poor relate to poor performance and potential promotion. In the first the secrecy reflects the manager’s own anxiety: telling someone they are doing badly is not easy. The second, promotion, is difficult because telling the subordinate of potential promotion is very likely to be interpreted as definite, with keen disappointment if it does not happen.

If there is something a manager feels they cannot communicate to a subordinate then that is probably a good enough reason to exclude...
it from the appraisal report. But if it just feels difficult to talk about then the manager should tackle it with tact and diplomacy. The appraisal report should also be finalised in the subordinate’s presence to ensure that everything seems fair and above board.

**The Subordinate’s Contribution**

It is important to analyse rather than criticise. Self-appraisal is particularly effective in two areas. Firstly, in the area of weak performance, most individuals will be surprisingly open and honest about themselves if the appraisal or counselling is a supportive relationship.

Secondly, in the area of career progression, managers tend to see a subordinate’s future in terms of the other people in the department and particularly how the manager’s own progression developed. Giving the subordinate the chance to talk may reveal totally different aspirations.

**Emotion**

There is always an element of emotion in appraisal interviewing. Both manager and subordinate each have positive and negative feelings and appreciating what they are can help understanding.

The manager’s positive feelings involve wanting to be helpful and understanding. However, they may be inclined to offer advice too closely related to their own experience. They need to remember the subordinate is an individual in their own right. Managers also generally want to be kind and tolerant and liked by their staff. However, they must be prepared to point out the realities of any situation.

In terms of negative feelings, they may be fearful of the interview itself and whether they’ll carry themselves well. These fears diminish with practice. They may fear the interview becoming emotional and perhaps of creating hostility in the subordinate. This is overcome by developing relationships where expression of feelings is normal. They may have feelings of envy, for example of the subordinate’s youth, health, qualifications or career opportunities. It is essential to control these feelings.

The subordinate’s positive feelings may revolve around wanting to be liked by the boss. However they must not allow this to make them dependent and subservient. They will probably want to be helped to improve. Their most likely negative feeling is probably fear of criticism of their work or their behaviour.

**A Relationship of Trust and Understanding**

Until the manager allays this fear, the interview will be meaningless and achieve nothing. The manager can do this by establishing a counselling relationship in which they are shown to be fair and to be trusted. It is possible that a member of staff will perform at an acceptable level without motivation, but in many, indeed most, cases their results will not reflect their true potential.

**Building Motivation**

A good manager is always conscious of the need to motivate whenever an opportunity occurs. The assessment interview, properly planned, can be the most potent force for improvement. Attitudes must be understood before motivation can take place. We all have attitudes: towards work, politics, religion, fluoridation of water and so on. It is those regarding work that are key here. If the manager knows their own attitudes and those of their staff, then they are better equipped to manage them.

People think in settled, standard ways, dictated by their attitudes, which form, as it were, the filter of their receptiveness. This can even determine what actually comes to their notice.

Some attitudes and beliefs are so deeply held that they cannot be changed, whilst others can fairly easily be changed provided open-mindedness is a strong attitude. A person’s standards will be directly related to their attitudes. If the standard is unacceptable to the manager then it must be changed.

**Unique Attitudes**

In a group of sales people who have undergone the same selection process to meet the same job description, there will be a considerable overlap of attitudes, but it must not be assumed that each set is identical. People will have their own unique set of attitudes. We must not fall into the trap of judging others by our own attitudes.

It’s worth considering: What would I do if I were them? What would they do if they were me?

The manager needs to understand the attitudes of members of staff in relation to:

- The job
- The company’s products
- Colleagues
- The company
- The manager
- The customers
- Training

Attitudes to these subjects can be ascertained through paying attention to what members of staff say, how they say it, how they express themselves, what they do and how they set about it.

The manager must be constantly on the alert, looking for inconsistencies which will help improve their understanding or provide new information. Chance remarks when off guard often give away the genuine attitude.

Questioning in the formal situation related to attitudes may be unsuccessful, as the person will be on their guard and will tend to ‘feed’ what they think the manager wants to know. Where emotions are stimulated attitudes are more clearly displayed. The manager’s task is to strengthen desirable attitudes and minimise or eliminate the undesirable ones.
Results Oriented

It must be remembered that people can succeed despite some undesirable attitudes because other stronger attitudes are dominant. After all it is results that count!

In summary, the steps to take to have a successful performance appraisal are:

1. Review the case history in advance.
2. Listen to the evidence.
3. Discuss diagnosis.
4. Don’t concentrate on character traits.
5. Discuss things that can be improved.
6. Face up to problem areas.
7. Agree a plan of action.
8. Write up a report of the interview.
9. Progress that report.
10. Never discuss a salary review at the appraisal interview.

Jonathan Farrington is the managing partner of The jfa Group. To find out more about Jonathan, read his articles or subscribe to his newsletter, visit www.jonathanfarrington.com or www.thejfagroup.com.
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http://www.deskdemon.com/pages/uk/services/messydesk

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We’ve all heard the term carbon footprint. But what is it? And how can we reduce it? This article offers some helpful insights and tips on how to decrease your carbon footprint for a more stable environment.
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3. The Five Habits of Effective Executives
To be an effective executive you need to form strong habits. Discover how you can develop the five habits that will make you a dependable, efficient and effective executive.
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4. The History of Mentoring
Mentoring is not a new concept; the first mentor was a character in Homer’s epic poem, The Odyssey. More and more business people - including CEOs and managing directors - are seeing the value having a mentor. A mentor can help you achieve your short and long-term goals.
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