

Have you ever
thought about...

...better listening?

LISTENING IS A SKILL. There's really no magic involved — just a willingness to receive what another person is saying.

As we all know this is harder than it may sound! But once you are able to receive you open yourself up for lots more than simply words — you have insight into the way another person perceives the world.

Wait, and then wait some more

Listening isn't waiting for the person to stop talking so you can chime in. Wait twice as long as you feel is comfortable for them to speak and give them ample space to think.

Resist telling your story

You risk upstaging them. Wait until they ask for your input before offering your story, and even then, be brief. Keep the emphasis on them, don't hijack the conversation: "That reminds me of the time I..."

Ask them

Ask them lots of questions about the small (rather than big) picture. Ask for all the details. People like to be very specific when prompted. It shows you're engaged and brings clarity to their situation.

Be honest

Tell them if you're lost or don't understand. They'll appreciate the interruption instead of losing you.

Put yourself in their shoes

Don't criticise or give advice, just see it all from their point of view. Resist trying to fix things.

Under-react

Don't get picky, instead be tolerant, be patient. Don't correct or judge. Don't act like you've heard it all before. Even if you have, their story is unique and has something to teach you.

Use promoting phrases

Use short promoting phrases to let them know you're there. "Um," "a-ha," "yes," "I know what you mean" — all short but very sweet. Choose them wisely, insert them carefully and don't just repeat them over and over. What you're really saying is: "I'm listening, carry on."

Use humour and laugh

Lighten the tone with a humorous reflection. Don't be scared to laugh at them or the situation.

Reflect

Periodically summarize what they've said. This will clarify, keep you both on track and let them know you've understood. They'll also be able to hear what they've said and take it deeper.

Decide to give

Make the choice that this conversation is about them talking and you listening. Don't expect to get your point across or to teach them something; that will come with time.

SOURCENOTE: Submitted by Alex Fitzpatrick, MA, who can be reached at Alex@4CornersCoaching.com

ALERT!

"Practical Advice That Works" Vol 5 No 3



Selling a business should never be based on any kind of 'snap decision'

SHOULD YOU BE THINKING of selling your business, it is vital that you "look before you leap" and review your business and personal situation before making a final decision.

This should include a legal, tax, accountancy and, if appropriate, a pension review to ensure that any potential problems can be dealt with in advance.

From a legal point of view, make sure that your Solicitors are capable of handling your business sale competently; that they have the capability of working to agreed timescales and within an agreed budget.

There are both advantages and disadvantages with a "Share Sale" or an "Asset Sale" (including tax issues) so make sure you know which one is appropriate for you.

Other legal issues such as potential environmental or health & safety problems need to be resolved as they could well be picked up in the purchaser's "due diligence" exercise, which if not resolved, will only prolong the sale, reduce the offer price or cause a collapse of the deal altogether.

Changes to the tax rules always seem to be



a constant reality so it is vital to ensure that the deal is structured tax efficiently by taking specialist advice.

Capital Gains Tax, Taper Relief and the setting up of Trust Funds are always under review, so it is important to check out the trends and cross-check with your advisers, before deciding which route to follow.

An accountancy review of the business is equally important. The value of the business can be maximised if the accounts show steady and sustainable profits and growth.

Businesses likely to lose money in the year of a sale are not easy to sell, particularly as an initial offer can be reduced or totally withdrawn if unexpected trading losses are found.

Potential purchasers will need to see not only copies of the Statutory Accounts but will want to see up-to-date Management Accounts, fixed assets registers etc so make sure any accountancy problems are resolved well in advance.

If you are selling a business in order to retire, then it makes sense to discuss this with your pension adviser before the deal is structured.

As with tax, pension rules change and decisions to be made may often depend on your own personal situation.

Take advice and 'look before you leap'. **BAI**

SOURCENOTE: Sterling Business Solutions 2004

Hacking

"It will never happen to me..."

by Paran
Chandrasekaran

WHILE HACKING HAS traditionally been the domain of 'Internet geeks' and pranksters, the 'skill' has now entered the mainstream and is increasingly being used as a day-to-day weapon to gain competitive edge.

Hacking is now so widespread that there are thousands of people working in businesses today with the knowledge to break into the

email systems and secret files of both their own companies and their competitors.

The result for many businesses is millions in lost revenue, research and development secrets, and corporate strategy. And, with e-Crime laws so weak, the chance of convictions is slim — only seven hackers were charged over the last two years — making this one of the most dangerous threats to corporate health.

continued on page 2

Tips on giving up trying to control other people

REMEMBER that "being in control" or "having control" is an illusion.

The only thing we can really control is our response to a situation, not the situation itself, especially when we are dealing with others.

Decide to give up trying to control. Even though we may have a need to control because we think we can do it better, letting it go may surprise us when people do "rise to the occasion" and do an equally good or better job at it than we do.

Know that not being in control is better for you. When we let go of the stress/burden of having to do everything ourselves because we're better/smarter/more experienced, we begin to lighten up and enjoy situations and people more.

Allow others their own learning curve. We all have our own talents and ways of doing things, and none is better or worse — it's just different.

Set the parameters and then let each person do it his/her own way.

As long as goals are reached within a given timeline and results are the same, blow it off.

Nothing in life is a life-and-death crisis except for life and death. When we step back from what we perceive as a crisis, we begin to realize that everything does NOT require our direct attention and intervention.

Giving others a chance to step up to the challenge of the situation tells them volumes about your belief in them.

Fact: you don't know it all. No matter how experienced or knowledgeable we are, there is always something to be learned from someone else.

Letting go allows you to learn something you didn't know before.

People don't like a control freak. It's difficult to be around people who need to control us and everything we do. Control freaks are not very people-friendly, just results oriented.

Control does not inspire trust. Because control freaks are more interested in results than people, they are not perceived as warm and fuzzy. Control creates distance from people, not closeness. We respond to the controlling behaviour out of a sense of duty rather than a sense of connection with the controller. **BAI**

SOURCE NOTE: Submitted by Carmen Stine, who can be reached at coach@welcometoyourlife.com



Stuart McMillan

The way I see it...

Are you lonely at the top?

THE ROLE OF MANAGING DIRECTOR can be a lonely one. It is all too easy to be surrounded by a good team of people but still feel there is no one with whom to share your fears and concerns, or brainstorm new ideas and strategies.

People from outside a firm can often ask seemingly simple questions that illuminate an issue or prompt change. Initiatives from other industries can help spark ideas and generate new business models.

For any new and growing company, securing the right external advice and support is fundamental to success.

Too often, senior personnel keep problems close to their chest so as to avoid worrying staff unduly. However, this approach can cause additional stress and make a small problem seem larger than it really is.

It is also easy to become entrenched in a situation where it is not possible to see the wood for the trees and it becomes difficult to think of solutions or innovative ideas.

Getting the right advice

There are five simple steps that can influence the quality of the advice you receive:

Find the right accountant – The mere fact that someone is completing your VAT returns does not mean you are getting the best out of your accountant.

A fast-growing enterprise needs a financial advisor who can plan ahead and proactively suggest ways to make strategies financially possible.

Select the most appropriate professional for individual tasks – A common mistake is to appoint a lawyer or accountant to handle all legal or financial

matters. It is wiser to pick and choose specialists for different functions.

For example, payroll differs from corporate finance, while drawing up employee contracts does not require the same skills as protecting intellectual property.

Assess your banking needs – A conventional retail bank can provide an excellent business service but if your growth plans are more aggressive, then it would be beneficial to enlist the skills of a corporate banking advisor.

The key to success is in finding a service that supports the company you want to become, rather than the one you are now.

Work with people you like – In business, it is often necessary to cooperate with individuals whom you may not like or respect.

However, when seeking advice on the future of your firm it needs to come from someone you trust. It is worth spending time to find professionals you 'click' with and who complement your company.

Ask yourself whether they understand and have an affinity for what you are trying to achieve.

Don't be too proud to ask for help – Never see it as a failure to ask for guidance. No one is infallible, and having people to support you can make the journey to success so much smoother.

Nowadays, there is a proliferation of mentoring schemes, where experienced specialists are on hand to offer guidance and information on a range of topics.

It is important to remember though that a mentor is not the same as an advisor; their role is to question and motivate rather than to offer instant solutions.

Even if suggestions are never acted upon, their value is in helping to shape an alternative strategy. **BAI**

HACKING — continued from page 1

The reason so few hackers are being convicted is because currently their offences are viewed as mere acts of vandalism – construed as a nuisance that is ultimately harmless.

According to the British CBI two thirds of its members have suffered serious cybercrime attacks.

Like the proverbial Dutch boy with his finger in the dike to prevent the flood, the guardians of Internet security are vastly unprepared to meet the challenges of defaced Web sites, network intrusions and email viruses.

Somehow, I think Canal Plus or The New York Times or eBay, for example, would agree.

All have been victims of uninvented intruders. Canal Plus for example, is suing NDS for \$1 billion dollars for corporate "netspionage".

NDS allegedly cracked its smartcard PIN and published it on the Internet, giving thousands free access to the channel.

The New York Times suffered an even more delicate breach of security when a so-called "ethical" hacker exposed a gaping hole in its network which allowed social security details of its writers and contributors to be read.

eBay had customers locked out of their accounts when a greedy hacker changed passwords and proceeded to make transactions on other people's behalf.

You see, hacking isn't just a thrill-seeking activity. There is serious money to be made from the theft of proprietary information, such as blueprints for computer programs and fraud as well as the competitive advantage of service downtime.

And — what's more — it's easy money. Most companies have the most basic of security, a firewall here, badly-configured and the odd bit of anti-virus software there, often not installed properly.

To a hacker it's like fitting a door with no lock. Anyone with the most basic knowledge on reconfiguring servers, taught to all IT engineers at college, has the potential to hack.

The password policies in some companies are a joke, that is if a policy exists at all. Most people can't be bothered or are simply unable to remember different passwords for their various online accounts such as an Amazon account, an online bank or e-mail.

Add to this your work PC, home Internet and mobile devices and it's enough to make the most zealous person a little lax. People will tend to keep it simple and, unfortunately, more often than not, totally obvious.

The New York Times proxy server, for example, was cracked in under 2 minutes by infamous ethical hacker Adrian Lamo.

So why does hacking go unprosecuted?

concluded on page 3



Communication tips for a healthy workplace

MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND COMMUNICATION problems remain one of the most common sources of workplace strife.

While conflict is inevitable, it need not ruin your workday or cause unbearable stress.

Try these conflict resolution tips to make your work environment a less stressful, more productive place.

Be specific in formulating your complaints. "I'm never invited to meetings" is not as effective as "I wish I had been invited to last Thursday's marketing meeting."

Resist the temptation to involve yourself in conflicts that do not directly involve you or your responsibilities. Even if someone has clearly been wronged, allow him or her to resolve the situation as he/she chooses.

Try to depersonalize conflicts. Instead of a "me versus you" mentality, visualize an "us versus the problem" scenario. This is not only a more professional attitude, but it will also improve productivity and is in the best interests of the company.

In a dispute or discussion where conflicts arise, try an exercise in listening. Before explaining your own position, try to paraphrase and condense what the other is saying into one or two sentences. Start with, "so you're saying that..." and see how much you really understand about your rival's position. You may find that you're on the same wavelength but having problems communicating your ideas.

Don't always involve your superiors in conflict resolution. You'll quickly make the impression that you are unable to resolve the smallest difficulties.

If an extended discussion is necessary, agree first on a time and place to talk. Confronting a coworker who's with a client or working on a deadline is unfair and unprofessional. Pick a time when you're both free to concentrate on the problem and its resolution.

Take it outside — of the group of inquisitive coworkers if they're not involved in the problem. Don't try to hold negotiations when the office gossip can hear every word.

Limit your complaints to those directly involved in the workplace conflict. Character assassination is unwarranted. Remember, you need to preserve a working relationship rather than a personal one, and your opinion of a coworker's character is generally irrelevant. "He missed last week's deadline" is OK; "he's a total idiot" is not. **BAI**

SOURCENOTE: Melissa C. Stoppler

Problem-solving

Use your intuitive mind

If you're puzzled about how to deal with a difficult employee or troubled family member, attorney and author Richard Contino suggests giving the problem to your intuitive mind.

HE ADVOCATES USING an intuitive bridge, "something that helps you relax and shift your focus inward and away from your life preoccupations and other intuitive distractions."

Here is an example:

(Approach this activity playfully. There is no right or wrong way to do it, just relax and experiment, with no expectations. Think of it as a brief vacation — a jaunt for the mind. And don't judge anything — yourself, your thoughts, your abilities, or the inner suggestions that you receive.)

Use a "small bowl of water, 6 to 10 inches in diameter. Pick a simple bowl that you find aesthetically appealing. Fill it with clear, cold water, and place it on a table in front of where you are sitting ... about two feet away from your body."

Keep your eyes gently focused on the water in the bowl, and keep your gaze there as you let go of your concerns. Relax with deep breaths.

Ask yourself, "I wonder what [the person's name] is

doing at the moment?" Do nothing more. Just sit and gaze casually at the water and let events flow in your mind.

Picture what the person might be doing right now, then ask that person a question, any question that comes to your mind. Wait for an answer.

Carry on a conversation about anything that you feel like discussing.

Notice in your mind's eye if the person is doing or wearing anything noteworthy, and notice the surroundings. Your intuition often conveys information symbolically.

Guess what unusual objects, actions, or feelings within you may mean.

Do you have any sudden knowing about the person or a recent event?

Let your thoughts float where they please.

"The point of this exercise is not to fulfil any expectation, but to allow your imagination to actively engage," Contino says.

"Do the exercise as often as you can, focusing in on different people or situations.

"The more you practise, the easier it will be to connect with your intuitive source on demand — without the use of an intuition bridge — anytime you have a question about something or someone." **BAI**

SOURCENOTE: Richard Contino, TRUST YOUR GUT! PRACTICAL WAYS TO DEVELOP AND USE YOUR INTUITION FOR BUSINESS SUCCESS,

HACKING — concluded from page 2

The reason is that most companies that have experienced a hacking incident do not inform authorities. Like a form of school bullying — it's as if there is a feeling of shame associated with admitting you've been a victim and a concern that customers will lose faith in your business or services.

It's ludicrous. I can understand the fear of bad publicity that could result from coming out and yes, the damage to reputations and potential increase in corporate insurance premiums would deter many businesses from reporting such crimes, but the long-term picture looks even grimmer if these incidents are brushed under the carpet.

So how can Government justify changes in the law to catch the real cyber criminals if the figures show that it isn't really such a big problem?

Corporations owe it to their shareholders, their customers and their business partners to be brave and pick up the gauntlet thrown down by these cowardly thieves. There is much more than a company's bottom line at stake.

While laws such as RIP (Regulatory Investigatory Powers) Bill in England can be used to prosecute those who attempt to tap into local access points, I believe a lack of knowledge about security coupled with an unwillingness to be open about suspected attacks will let many hackers, including those involved in industrial espionage, off the hook.

We've seen from the examples that electronic industrial espionage/theft, whatever you want to call it, does go on, but lack of proof is entirely down to companies' unwillingness to go public.

To secure a successful prosecution you are being asked to admit that at some point your network was insecure. So instead the best industry has been able to do, is play catch-up after the fact.

Many companies go through life thinking, "it will never happen to me", but it does.

Astonishingly, businesses aren't even putting the technology and processes in place to even know when they are getting hacked a lot of the time.

Consultants KPMG say that each security breach is costing UK businesses an average of £77,000 per month, and this figure only reflects the reported cases.

My advice to business leaders is to take the time to understand the very community that spawns these attacks: hackers, and then compare the initial outlay of properly securing a corporate network against the potential cost associated to a hacking incident.

It is a great pity, but while businesses are running scared, I can only see the turning point coming when there has been a multi-million pound hack which turns off the refrigeration at a leading supermarket's central warehouse on a holiday weekend. **BAI**

SOURCENOTE: Paran Chandrasekaran is CEO of Internet security specialist, Indicii Salus.

Lit cigars and other observations

Here are some memorable quotes from author Donald Walker's book on leadership:

- "Orthodontal strategies are the most desirable and healing — turn the wire gradually. You can't jerk organisations, or the people in them, around."
- "If you don't think one person can make a difference, light a cigar on an airliner."
- "Remedy small annoyances... 'More trees are killed by bugs than by lightning.'"
- "Expecting the universe to treat you with courtesy and concern because you are a nice person is like expecting the bull not to gore you because you are a vegetarian."

Top tips for focusing and setting your goals

WE HAVE ALL solicited help from someone that will help us to focus and set our goals.

But setting goals is just one step to accomplishing them. Along with taking action towards our goals, we must also develop some skill at managing them so that they do not overwhelm us and become just another source of frustration and we give up.

Here are some tips for managing your goals:

Write down everything you want. Set aside a block of time where you can sit alone and think through the threads of your life. Don't edit, just write. What changes do you want to make? What people do you want to meet? How much weight do you want to lose/gain? Knowing WHAT you want will define the actions you take. Add to the list as thoughts come up.

Link "like" goals from your list together. Linking goals into categories will give you a better view of where common key areas of desired change lie.

For example, if you want to be in sales and also learn how to public speak, you will want to group these two goals together as "like" goals since you will require a fair degree of speaking ability to sell. Create separate categories of goals for physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and recreational goals.

Create a visual map of action steps. A visual map is a guide of the things you want to accomplish and the action steps needed to get you there. For example: if you want to lose 50 lbs, break it into 10 lb blocks and attach the necessary action steps to each piece.

Get detailed with each action step. If you want to lose 10 lbs over 3 months, what exactly do you need to do to get there? If it's exercise, how much exercise will you commit to on a daily basis? If it's reducing caloric intake, how many calories will you commit to decreasing each day? If it's walking or swimming, how many miles or laps will you do daily? Details keep you focused and make you accountable to yourself.

Set a start date. Every goal has to have an action behind it and every action has to have a date. Set a start date and then do it! **BAI**

SOURCENOTE: Submitted by Carmen Stine, PhD(c), who can be reached at coach@welcometoyourlife.com

Selling

3-step selling technique from Dr. Seuss

Most people have read the Dr. Seuss tale "Green Eggs & Ham", either as kids or to their children. What is interesting is the relevance this story has to selling. Learn the secrets of Dr. Seuss's selling technique and build your sales.

"I AM. SAM I AM. Do you like green eggs and ham? Would you like them here or there? Would you like them in a box, would you like them with a fox?"

1. Sam is selling a product and although his prospect is not initially interested, Sam doesn't let that deter him from asking.

2. Sam consistently offers the prospect a choice when trying to close the sale.

3. He refuses to give up. No matter how many times his prospect says 'no', Sam keeps offering alternatives. He offers fourteen options before finally closing the sale.

Don't pester

I am not suggesting that you pester your customers but most people give up too early in the sales process.

We hear a few 'nos' and decide to turn our attention elsewhere.

It is your responsibility as a business owner to ask the customer to make a decision — you cannot expect a customer to do the work for you.

If you have been effective in learning about their specific needs and presented the appropriate solution to your prospect then you have earned the right to ask them for the sale.

Here are a few selling techniques that will help you reach this point:

Tell Me More: Avoid launching into a lengthy discussion of what you can do for your client until you thoroughly understand what business challenges they face.

Use open questioning to gather this information and avoid jumping to conclusions too quickly.

Listen and clarify

Listen carefully to what they say and clarify anything that is not clear. Ask them to elaborate by using prompts such as "uh-huh," "tell me more," and "what else?"

Many Options: When it comes time to present your product or service, try not to limit the prospect to one option.

Provide a choice of solutions that meet their specific concerns.

Explain the benefits of each option, and when necessary, discuss the drawbacks of each alternative. Do not present so many options that the decision becomes overwhelming. Be prepared to tell your prospect which option best suits their needs if they ask.

Speak Easy: Speak in terms they can understand, avoiding the use of terminology they may not recognize. Case in point: as I developed my web site, I found myself talking to people who were extremely knowledgeable but they used terminology that sounded like a foreign language to me.

I found myself getting frustrated, and in some cases feeling a bit dumb, because I had to keep asking them what they meant.

Minimise jargon

Be very cautious how much jargon you use in your presentations and make sure your customer understands what you are saying.

Objections Are Common: Recognize that objections are a natural component of the sales process.

It's common for a customer to express several objections before they make the decision to commit to the purchase.

Don't take these objections personally and do not assume that it means the other person is not interested.

Understand that your prospect will likely have specific concerns about making a decision.

Dig Deep: Clarify their objections to uncover the true hesitation — do not hesitate to probe deeper to explore the real issues preventing them from making a decision.

In most cases, your prospect will give you the information you need providing you keep your approach non-confrontational and neutral.

Don't argue

Learn to handle objections in a non-argumentative manner.

When you uncover their true objection keep your response brief and to the point.

Talking too much will seem that you are trying to justify your product or price.

Plus, you can sometimes talk yourself out of a sale if you aren't careful.

Ask: Ask for the sale. As long as you do not pressure them into making a decision, they won't be offended by your request.

Develop the confidence to ask for the sale in a variety of ways and begin asking every qualified person for their commitment.

Recognize that many people want to be given permission to make a decision and look to the salesperson for that permission.

Use Polite Persistence: Take a lesson from Sam and learn the importance of polite persistence.

The most successful sales people ask for the sale seven or eight times and don't give up at the first sign of resistance.

Research has shown that these individuals consistently earn more than their coworkers and peers.

Use these selling techniques and you are sure to win like Sam I Am. **BAI**

SOURCENOTE: Kelley Robertson

The Institute for Independent Business was founded in 1984 and is now one of the world's leading international networks of business advice providers, currently active in 16 countries. All recipients of BUSINESS ALERT are included on our free subscription private database to ensure continuity of ongoing editions. This being a private list, their names are not and will not be used for any other purpose or in any other way. Please advise me if you wish to be delisted and no further copies of BUSINESS ALERT will be provided to you.

Copyright © 2004 The Centre for Business Development. Printed and distributed under license.

For more information, please call Stuart McMillan on 0118 971 3470