

To the Point Quick Reads

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MANAGEMENT

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Personal Effectiveness

PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS

[2021]

To the Point. Quick Reads

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1 POSITIVE FRAME OF MIND

1.1 Standing on the shoulders...



This booklet comprises a selection of curated and edited blogs that were originally written and published on the Be...Learning and Development website. The blog page covered various topics inspired by different ideas and by events which were current at the time of writing and now updated. The blogs were widely read by users across the world and this body of work has now been organised into a small collection of linked articles which are shared with the aim to help reduce anxiety and increase personal effectiveness.

One of the first blogs to be published to the website was inspired by the metaphor of standing on the shoulders of others. This blog was well received and recognised that it was the support and role of others who had played a part in contributing to my progress throughout life.

I hope you enjoy the reflections, ideas and tips/hacks to be found in this booklet and that they are useful as you make your way through your day, whether at a personal level or in an organisational setting.

Jacqueline

'If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants'

Isaac Newton

When Newton used this phrase, he was referring to the intellect and knowledge of the great thinkers that had come before him. He was acknowledging that his own scientific progress had been built upon their work. We may not share the same stellar constellation as Newton but most likely all of us can look back upon a person or people who modelled the way. Alternatively, there may be someone who has given us a psychological lift, a hand-up, a chance to try something new or do something different. Equally we may have been encouraged to find answers or to persevere when our life path has been challenging or difficult.

By reflecting on the qualities and attributes of such positive people, wisdom grows, and we can use their example as we in turn support others.

With regards to the professional strand of my life, I have been fortunate to stand upon the shoulders of some special people who have had a direct impact on my own career path. In different ways each has enriched my journey with their positive energy. **Think about who has inspired you and how.** While in the meantime, I would like to say

Thank you to:

- Malcolm P. For giving me my first career opportunity and giving me the freedom to try things out while at the same time being a **great Mentor.**

- Christine S. For being an energetic, **positive and inspirational** Trainer.

- Chris L. **For taking a chance** and letting me develop and run what proved to be a longstanding and successful programme.

- James M. For demonstrating **how to think and act 'outside the box'**.

- Daniel T. For his intelligence, humour in the learning environment and being **an exemplar of presentation/teaching/training skills.**

- Billy C. For his **wisdom**, help and support.

- Sandra M. For her **insight** and experience.

- Malcolm Y. For his professionalism, **guidance, understanding and kindness.**

- Lisa B. For her **fun and energy** in the delivery of L&D.

- Jan M. For her **intelligence and encouragement** in her role as Vice Chair.

- Chris D. For his **trusted guidance and advice.**

Thank you as well to so many others - too many to list here - those who I studied with and alongside, those who I have worked with in the field of learning and those who I have met during service delivery and have shaped my career and the person I am today.

1 POSITIVE FRAME OF MIND

1.2 Appreciating the here and now



In 2015 it was reported that two people had stowed away in the freezing wheel carriage of a plane flying from South Africa to Heathrow. As the plane had come in to land one person fell and was found on the roof of a building in London, the other stowaway had survived but was taken in a critical condition to hospital (subsequently suffering life changing injuries). These two individuals clung onto the underside of a plane for 11 hours during a journey of 8,000 miles. They would seem to have been so desperate that they were not only clinging onto a plane but metaphorically speaking would appear to have been clinging onto hope.

It can be easy to take for granted our own circumstances, the incident described was a shocking reminder about **gratitude and appreciating the here and now** in the understanding that we only pass this way once and there are many people who are worse off or suffering with only hope to sustain them. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has, I am sure, reminded many of us how precious life is. I have a particular example in that many years ago I was fortunate to work in an exciting and enjoyable environment but whenever I have met former colleagues the same thing has come up, that **we did not realise at the time how lucky we all were.**

Therefore, the question is how you can make yourself feel good each day in the workplace (or other environments) and appreciate the present?

This is just a short piece, but I would suggest there are two particular approaches and theories that can be drawn upon to go some way to answering the question, both of which share some common themes: The **'mindfulness-based' approach** to personal development and its applications at an organisational level that have proliferated during recent years and the **theories** and research concerning the attributes of **'Superteams'**. Here is a list of key points for application at an individual level and for work teams and groups of people:

- **Find purpose, meaning and direction.**
- **Observe and uphold the principles, standards and frameworks** that guide your workplace.
- **Be conscientious.**
- Experience and **exude energy, joy, and enthusiasm** and when appropriate enjoy fun and laughter. (Even if you don't feel it (See the *'Act As If Principle'*).

- **Value other people.**
- Be **agreeable and friendly.**
- **Cooperate** and work with, instead of against each other.
- **Work to the benefit of others.**
- Have the capacity to take measured, **reasonable risks.**
- Remain **optimistic in the face of setbacks.**

I was lucky enough to enjoy working with a vibrant and supportive group of people but in some environments life can be difficult and it is all too easy to get bogged down in the minutiae, in 'office' politics and the negative dynamics of organisational life. However, if you can admire the broad horizon and find pride and pleasure in whatever you are doing you will experience the reward of satisfaction, accomplishment and a sense of fulfilment which is something to feel good about and definitely worth having in the here and now.



2 PERSONAL TIME MANAGEMENT

2.1 Filling time or living time?

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a period during which, for many people previous routines and approach to life has been altered. In some cases, life has either slowed down or gathered pace and the notion of time and what is important has been reassessed. Our approach to time can determine our level of productivity and may impact upon our wellbeing.

I have my some of my own examples (pre-COVID-19) which highlight different aspects of time:

1. Set Goals and Establish Priorities

During a CPD (Continuous Personal Development (aka. CPL: Continuous Personal Learning) event I was asked what I would be doing with the year ahead?

This is where goal setting and establishing priorities takes centre stage. The benefits are that annually, monthly, weekly, daily we can break down objectives (either work or personal objectives) and we can decide, set, plan, and **focus on those things that are important** rather than approaching life in a haphazard way and being captive to the chaos of constantly dealing with crises and 'fire-fighting', busyness, trivia or reacting to the demands of others. In turn, planning provides us with the opportunity to effectively build in and maintain the important things in life like relationships and investing in our own well-being and self-development.

2. Having Personal Control

While returning home after working for a customer I got caught behind a serious accident on the motorway subsequently arriving home in the early hours of the morning after a journey of 8.5 hours which should have taken 2.5!

When it comes to things like traffic jams, it is a fact that in life 'stuff happens' buses don't arrive on time, trains are delayed, change happens around us, planes are rescheduled, people don't turn up on time, shops have queues etc.



The occasions when time is disrupted and normal activity or progress is suspended are when our thoughts, our behaviour, attitude, and emotional approach are important. **We have a choice** about how we treat such events, with stoicism or with anger and exasperation. Sometimes such occasions are an opportunity for us to count our blessings (a few minutes earlier and I could have been part of the motorway crash) and may even give us a chance to be productive (for example, by being able to catch up with some reading or clear some e-mails etc).

When faced with circumstances over which we have little actual direct control it is how we exercise personal control that has a big impact on our own positive wellbeing and that of the people around us.

3. Being in the Moment

I had a meeting for morning coffee with someone who I had not seen for some years and we enjoyed talking so much our get together carried on into lunchtime.

I had a lovely time meeting up with my old friend. When time flies it is often because we have reached a state of 'being in flow'. We become so absorbed that we lose track of time, often this is because we are doing something because we want to do it. Perhaps, then the final point to be made here is to **carefully assess values and reflect on what is important in life**, to use our personal control, consider the choices we make and plan how we spend our time every day and in the future.





The best time to repair
a roof is when the sun
is shining.
President John F.
Kennedy



2 PERSONAL TIME MANAGEMENT

2.2 Reducing Anxiety: Habits and the benefits of being organized

This blog was originally prompted because works had been carried out on my home which precipitated a major 'spring-cleaning' session. 'Spring-cleaning' became not only about thoroughly cleansing but turned into a time to re-organize, to take control by de-cluttering and let go of many possessions which no longer served a meaningful purpose.

COVID-19 has been an opportunity for some people to do all those tasks around the home that had been put off for years. However, under normal circumstances it can often be the case that we get into a set of habits and then only decide to make changes either during or after the 'storm' (see the quote by John F. Kennedy shown opposite). Unfortunately, it is at precisely these times **when our energy is likely to be depleted**, and exhaustion means that **we may not really have the physical energy or mental strength** to take on anything else or revise habits that weren't good for us. Therefore, working on those things over which we have control on a continuous basis and creating good habits is to our advantage. **Getting into the habit of looking after your living space, working space and possessions is an aspect of personal effectiveness that can be carried out before waiting for things to become overwhelming and can have many benefits.**

The benefits of being organized:

- When things are organized time is saved in the longer term: There is no wasted time running around in a panic trying to find things that have been 'lost'
- Daily tasks can better be streamlined which in turn means that more time can be spent on those things that are important
- Stress is reduced as being organized can generate a sense of being in control and relaxation.

A note about habits:

- The amount of time that it can take to establish a habit has been reported to vary widely
- Creating a new habit can be hard work, commitment is for the long-haul. Ideally, behaviours are repeated daily in order to develop into a routine
- Don't stress if occasionally you are unable to meet your goals for creating a habit (life can have other ideas) – remember you can always get back on track when the time is right

2.3 Reducing Anxiety: Travel tips



Travel is an aspect of life that can be stressful and have the potential to trigger anxiety as it is an aspect of life which can hold many areas of unpredictability. For myself, concerns about driving on roads to which I am unaccustomed and locating car parks, venues etc. in a city or place which is unfamiliar can sometimes be tricky. This, particularly while wanting to arrive fresh and ready to facilitate/deliver a session. Therefore, here are some of my tips for creating a smooth travelling experience.

“

Life is a journey, not a destination.
Ralph Waldo Emerson,
Author

”

Packing

- Create a tick list/check list of everything that you need to do and need to pack before travelling and then actively use it
- Before starting to use your tick list/check list, make sufficient copies for future use (so saving even more time)
- Keep a toiletry bag packed and ready to go and then quickly replenish after each journey ready for next time
- Pack crease resistant clothing
- Plan in and allow sufficient time before travelling to get well prepared

The Journey

- When working out your route/journey, plan backwards with respect to the time needed and build in time for the unexpected, such as being held up by road traffic jams, accidents etc.
- If driving, plan a comfort break during your journey, even just for a leg stretch. (We've all seen the message at the side of motorways that Tiredness Kills!)
- When driving, sometimes the unexpected can happen and delays can occur. Therefore, at a minimum keep a warm blanket in the car
- Keep some soft drinks and snacks in the car
- Perhaps have a favorite selection of music to play during the journey which keeps you calm and happy

3 MODELLING THE WAY

3.1 Business Planning: Taking a positive approach



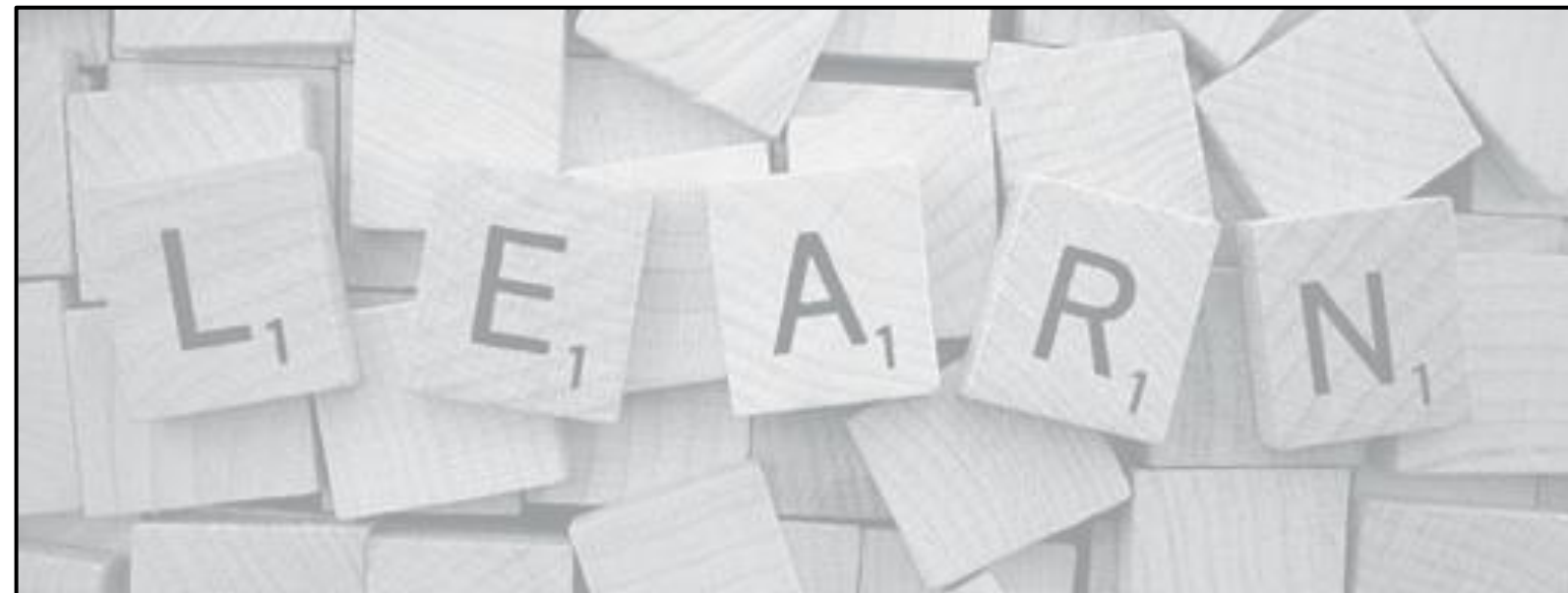
Running a 5k through a country park I was struck by the spectacular display of autumnal trees in the afternoon sunshine. I began to think about how many of the metaphors used in the workplace are analogous with the cycle of nature and trees. For example, phrases like: 'Bear fruit', 'Branch out', 'Put down roots', 'Low hanging fruit', 'Get rid of dead wood' and 'Root and branch review'. Some months later, while buying a Christmas present, I was also minded to think that as business borrows metaphors from nature it also emulates the natural world in so far as many of the business processes, such as workforce planning follow a sequence much like the cycle of the seasons. For example: The Business Planning Cycle, the Financial Year, the Management Cycle, the Performance Management Cycle, the Appraisal Cycle, the Learning/Training Cycle and the Project Management Cycle.

The cycles of the year are often met with pleasure, with individuals expressing delight at having a favourite season. Many people enjoy planning ahead for Christmas, summer holidays and the events that punctuate the year. On the other hand, my experience working at both a strategic and managerial level has been that the cycles of business can be met by some with little enthusiasm and to a certain extent a degree of resentment that associated activities such as planning and

reviewing interfere with 'the real work'. Individuals regard themselves as being 'on a treadmill' as 'here we go again'.

Perhaps then, reminding ourselves of the rhythm of life might help to take a positive approach and see the benefits and advantages of cycles used in business and organisational life. The seasons measure the progress of the calendar year. They **allow us to put one period behind us; they can sometimes be an opportunity to wipe the slate clean and start again.** The rolling seasons, like the elements of business processes mean that we are **able to make comparisons.** For example, how many times do we hear news and weather reporters comparing the temperature, snow and rainfall of previous years with our current experience. While reports might be better or worse than expected there are also occasions when we experience the unexpected and so **anomalies can be a great source of learning.**

Life is about change but shouldn't be about absolute uncertainty. Research suggests that a **degree of routine and predictability are essential to our wellbeing.** Seasons provide a measure of predictability as nature unfolds but they also **prevent us from falling into the rut of an undeviating existence.** Equally, **planning cycles and processes mean that we can undertake the business of the organisation with a sense of knowing that there is an order to things** which with the use of activities such as maintenance, pruning and nurturing yield better results for the following year. Like the seasons **we can observe our efforts** burgeon into life and grow. And as one year draws we can **enjoy a sense of completion** but it is in the knowledge that the process will begin again and like the cycles of business and management, opportunities for renewal and new growth will flourish once more and we can observe as 'they bear fruit'.



3 MODELLING THE WAY

3.2 Attending Network Meetings



While driving to a large business network meeting I thought about how in some ways it had similarities with going to a new school. On arrival I was reminded of the first day of walking into a new schoolroom where initially many of the people are unknown. Of course, as we grow older, we also become conscious that people are continually judging others on the basis of things such as appearance, where they are from, what they say and how they say it etc. Therefore, during the course of the evening my thoughts were further heightened when I was asked during conversation by someone who seemed a little out of sorts (even angry) 'Do you like doing this!?!'

With this in mind I thought I would share some ideas to make the experience while attending networking meetings a little easier, for it is an important and often a necessary part of business and professional life.

Before you arrive

- **Do a little bit of research:** If there is a list of attendees you might be able to identify someone that you will know.
- Learn a little bit about the location where the meeting is being held or about the type of network as **this will give you something to use during conversation.**
- **Credibility:** Think about and perhaps even **rehearse a few key points about what you want to say** about your own profession, business etc. Remember the adage - you don't get a second chance to make a first impression.

Arrive Early

If you can, arrive early. This has several benefits:

- **You can orientate yourself** and therefore have information that you can convey to those who arrive a little later. **This gives you a starting point for introductions and conversation.**
- If you are met by the network organiser(s) it means that you might enjoy being introduced to others rather than have the apprehension of approaching a group of strangers.
- Research indicates that even after a short time the formation of a group of people quickly establishes a sub-conscious sense of people being either in or out. **Arriving early means that groups may not yet have become formed making it easier to approach individuals.**

During the networking meeting

- When in conversation, some people might seem a little shy, stiff or uncomfortable - **don't assume that people are being unfriendly.** A fair number of people are likely to be feeling ill at ease and one or two may not really want to be at the meeting at all. However, if you encounter someone who while you are talking is looking into the distance or scanning the room for other people over your shoulder do not take it personally. Truly successful people have a growth mind-set and are usually gracious,

polite and thoughtful. Move on and find the people who are friendly.

- Be curious, attentive and interested:
- Ask questions and actively listen to replies. **(Listening helps you to build rapport as you can find things that you have in common).**
- Smile
- Show empathy
- Keep small talk light - never stray into the trinity of sex, religion and politics.

So in answer to the question 'Do you like doing this!?!'

Yes, I do, for like starting a new school the network event holds the possibilities of new horizons: The bonds of longstanding friendships can be forged and collaborative relationships can be created & knowledge and understanding is increased. With these points in mind, I hope you too will enjoy your next networking event!

3 MODELLING THE WAY

3.3 Managing difficult decisions and giving bad news



Regards networking (see previous page, Attending Network Meetings), sometime ago I participated in a Business Networking Meeting that was hosted by a local hospice. I was impressed by the staff that I spoke to, for they are dealing with an actuality that is often avoided, yet in describing their role presented an atmosphere of consideration, care and warmth while taking a sensitive but pragmatic approach.

There are many roles that require people to deal with sensitive and difficult matters which evoke heightened emotions: **Leaders often**

have the difficult task of taking and communicating tough and unpopular choices. Line **managers** working in a world of budget cuts, job-restructuring and change **need to deal with uncomfortable decisions** and situations. At a general level you may have to refuse a request or tell someone something they do not want to hear.

The visit to the hospice provided a prompt for some key points when managing difficult decisions and circumstances.

Tips and hints

- Invest time in learning about human behaviour, what motivates people, what causes pleasure or pain. Learn about values and beliefs. For **what drives one person may be entirely different to another. What can worry or disturb some people may be a matter of irrelevance and create indifference in others.**
- **Ensure that decision making processes have been properly carried out** with sufficient time given to consider checks and balances and to examine risks and alternatives. (In some circumstances, you may help to alleviate your own personal stress if the decision is a joint conclusion that has been agreed and shared with others).
- There can be a temptation to underplay bad news or try to be overly optimistic for the future. **When conveying difficult news, present information such that it deals with the truth and reality of the situation.** This signals to the person(s) receiving your communication that they are being shown respect and provides them with the basis for working with the facts.
- Demonstrate support to the person(s) receiving the information by acknowledging and showing your **acceptance and understanding of their fears, anxieties, suspicions and concerns.** The

emotions felt by the receiver(s) may manifest as distress through to anger and hostility.

Acceptance does not mean that you agree, it is an acknowledgement that others have the right to feelings, perceptions, opinions different to your own.

- **Remain calm and in control of your own feelings.** Recognise that sometimes our own anxieties can cause us to become fearful, defensive or exaggerate a state of affairs. On no account should you react to the receiver's attitude to hearing/learning of your decision/news. If circumstances require, take time and make a considered and thoughtful response.

In conclusion, life presents difficult realities for all of us. The staff at the hospice were dealing with a time of life and situation when people are especially vulnerable and help to remind us that **there are many roles other than our own that present different challenges.** By applying the principles shown above you will not only support and serve others but will maintain your own long-term reputation, trust and credibility. Furthermore, **a careful approach will benefit your own self-esteem and personal wellbeing,** leaving you in a position to be well equipped should you need to deliver difficult decisions and explain bad news in the future.

3 MODELLING THE WAY

3.4 Giving feedback. Being a positive influence



Some years ago I was part of a team working at the University of Nottingham with a very large cohort of Undergraduate and Post Graduate international students from Shanghai, China in the delivery of a management development programme. It was later reported on the local TV news that international students had rated their experience at the University of Nottingham as Outstanding and that the university was only one of five universities in the country to have received the higher designation. I felt really pleased to hear the news about the rating and the feedback provided. In the same year I was co-author to an e-book to be used by staff at a consortium of colleges. My section of the e-book focussed on one-to-one continuous assessment and feedback.

Two key aspects of feedback

Feedback is in essence information, gathered, supplied, carried out and presented in a vast number of ways, from immediate observations through to publishing comprehensive organisational annual reviews. Regardless of the level and type of feedback, the examples described above illustrate two fundamental elements of feedback:

1. Feedback about the way in which something is carried out/achieved, the manner of performance,

the process, the way something is done or accomplished etc. in other words **the means**.

2. Feedback with respect to the impact/effects/throughputs/outcomes/outputs/results/quantity etc. in other words **the ends**.

Self-Generated Feedback

Aside from formal mechanisms, feedback takes place every day. For example, paying someone a compliment.

However, for us as individuals, feedback can also be self-generated. In turn, we adjust our actions in light of our own self-perception or results achieved. On occasion **some people can become their own worst critic** while **others become highly delusional and develop an exaggerated sense of self-belief**.

Engaging in one-to-one feedback

Engaging in one-to-one feedback may be under pleasant circumstances or during difficult periods such as disciplinary procedures. Given the vast array of circumstances and reasons for feedback here are just a few quick general tips to consider if you are involved in providing one-to-one feedback:

- Recognise that feedback can be difficult, requiring high levels of self-awareness and wisdom.

- Be alert to the emotional atmosphere. For example, social cues and body language.
- In the words of Stephen Covey, 'begin with the end in mind' - make sure that what is being measured (the means/the ends) is clear. Feedback against agreed measurable objectives, policy, or criteria.
- Recognise and minimise personal biases.
- Ensure feedback is based on facts and not personal opinion or supposition.
- Be sensitive, specific, and constructive.
- Do not go on with feedback for too long.
- Check that your feedback has been understood.
- Use reflective questions such as: What has gone well? What did they find difficult? What could be done differently?

Feedback can provide progress against objectives, information for improvement and can celebrate achievements. So, it was congratulations to the University of Nottingham. As for my own feedback, I thoroughly enjoyed meeting the international students, the energy and enthusiasm displayed during lectures and practical activity was infectious. I hope I played a small part in the rating and that the students have gone on to achieve great success.

3 MODELLING THE WAY

3.5 Appreciation (Management by Walking About)



This booklet opened with an article about thanks (See Section 1 Standing on the Shoulders...) and closes with another feature with a similar theme.

One Christmas I was working for an organisation which employed several hundred people when a surprise visit was made by a senior member of the leadership team. He walked the building to personally say thank you to all the members of staff for the work that had been done that year. The achievements of that year were not exceptional but what was out of the ordinary were the simple actions taken that day. There was no exchange of gifts and rewards but what was exchanged was a real spirit of friendliness and people talked of feeling appreciated.

Christmas was used as an opportunity to take part in the ritual of seasons greetings and show appreciation. And of course, in any environment, sometimes there is a need for someone to take the lead – to model the way.

“
People will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou,
Poet, Writer

”

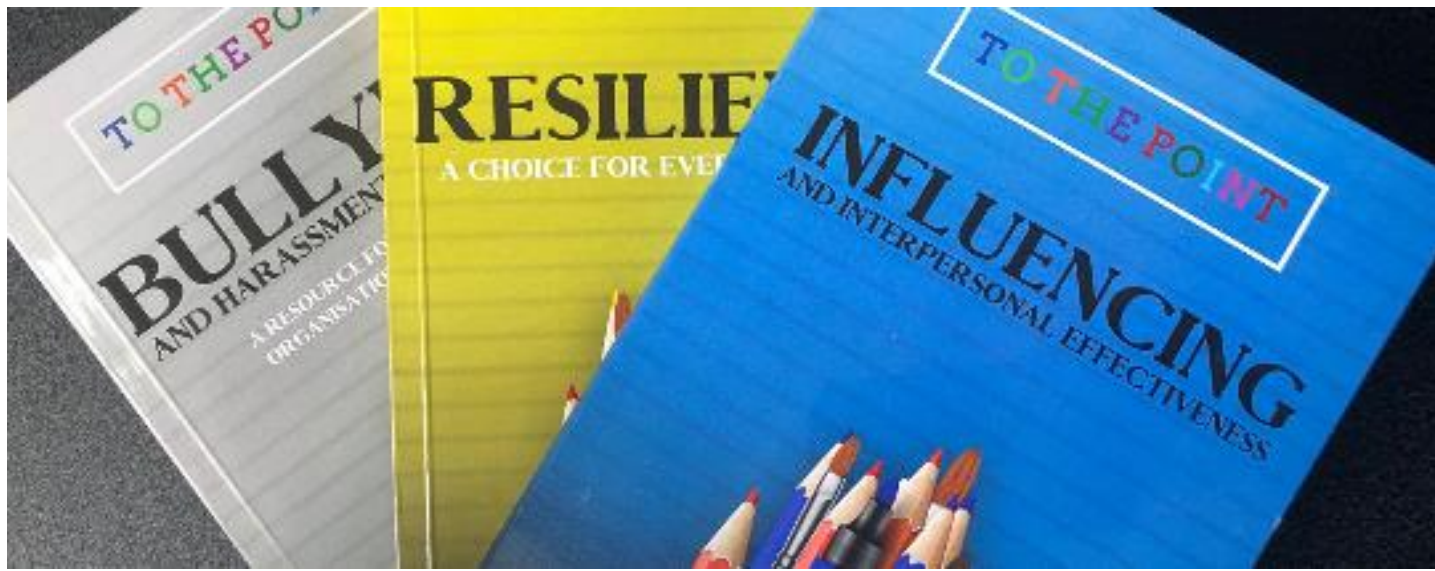
In any walk of life there are considerable benefits of sincerely engaging with others and showing regard for their efforts

- Illustrates some degree of consideration, courtesy and politeness
- Simple communications be it greetings or taking an interest and listening to another person can demonstrate a form of generosity and giving
- Managers and leaders may be seen as personable and confident role models
- Individuals are likely to feel supported and valued
- Showing a genuine interest and appreciating others has a positive and enlivening impact

The senior figure described here made quite an impact that year and was talked about and held with affection and high regard for many years afterwards. He had shared a little time and effort; staff were disrupted for a while. None the less, his impact on goodwill, cooperation and the achievement of outcomes was considerably enhanced by his leadership.

In this case, the rituals of Christmas served as a reminder of simple actions that can get lost when we are meeting deadlines, frustrated, tired or overwhelmed. None the less positive communication and appreciation are important at any time of the year. With that I would like to thank you for reading this booklet and wish you well for the future.

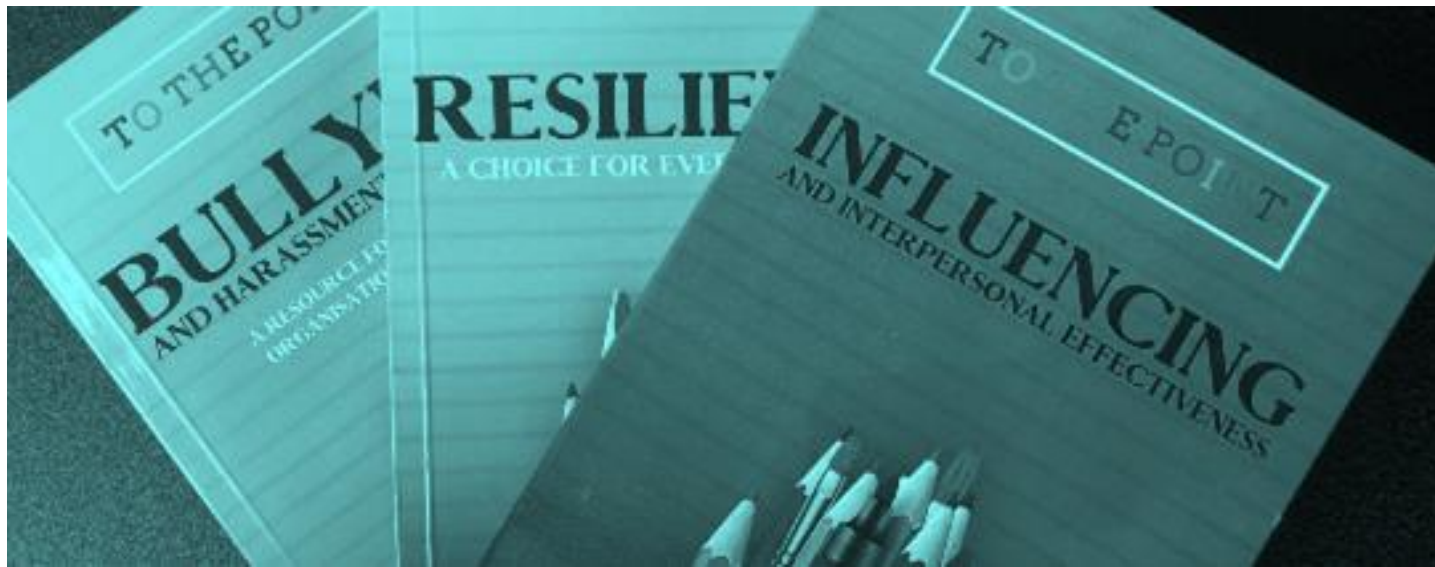
Jacqueline



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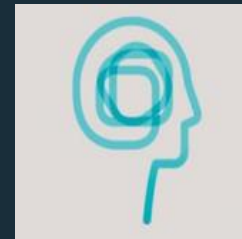
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About the Author

Jacqueline Mansell is a Chartered Psychologist and Business founder/Owner who has worked in a career dedicated to learning and development. She is now bringing her knowledge and expertise to a wider audience through her To the Point Handbooks.

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