


PA ENTERPRISE

DeskDemon's Magazine for Executive PAs, Office Managers and Secretaries

May 2010

- 
- ▶ Getting the best out of business meetings
 - ▶ Dress codes for the office
 - ▶ Five European must visit destinations
 - ▶ Preparing for a telephone interview
 - ▶ Improve your writing skills

A publication of
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EVENT UK launches 2010 show features

Planning for Event UK is well underway with new show elements and a fresh new advertising campaign soon to be launched.

From 21 – 22 September, Event UK returns to the NEC Birmingham showcasing the full spectrum of the UK's meeting and events industry. For 2 days visitors will experience a show that brings a fresh, energetic and quality business experience at the start of what is looking like a promising quarter for the industry. Event UK has introduced a series of new features on top of returning favourites that continue to keep its broadened exhibitor and visitor base engaged. These include The Forum, Pimp My Pad, Mini Festival, PA System, Willow Tree and The Next Big Thing. And, in continuing to support regional development throughout the UK, Event UK will be delivering a 2012 conference which will focus on the opportunities for the regions around the Games.

Duncan Reid, Portfolio Director says "In the midst of the recession, Event UK 2009 set new records with an increase in visitor attendance. This year we are looking to take the next step and deliver on our promise of creating an event that inspires and excites the visitor and exhibitor with new features, the latest industry developments and educational content."

In addition to the new features for 2010, this year's show will see the return of the ever popular Lilly's Pad bar, Advice Centre and Confex Knowledge.

Event UK takes place 21-22 September at the NEC Birmingham attracting 300 exhibitors and over 3,000 visitors. The new website opens 1 May.

For more information visit
www.event-uk.com

Help for businesses affected by the volcanic ash cloud

Business people affected by the Icelandic volcanic ash cloud can visit the Business Link website for guidance: **www.businesslink.gov.uk/volcanicash**.

The eruption, which began in Iceland on 20th March, has caused severe travel disruption across Europe as a result of a volcanic ash cloud grounding flights. Business Link has set up a page on its website dedicated to helping businesses mitigate the effect that it may have on them.

This includes information and links to further sources of advice on:

What to do if staff are stranded overseas

The implications of import and export suspensions

The potential health implications to staff

What to do if you can't attend offshore trade shows, events and meetings

Business continuity planning

Managing risk

For more information and guidance go to **www.businesslink.gov.uk/volcanicash**



Amazing claims for super fruit

Talk about the acai berry seems never ending. With the numerous benefits which the acai berry can offer, many people are just fascinated at how one fruit can do so much good to the body.

With new acai berry products surfacing everyday either in the local market scene or online, there is really no stopping this super fruit. Since the acai berry has no other side effect besides weight loss (which is actually a positive effect, according to lots of people), **www.acaiberryfruits.net** mentions that the fruit continues to stir talk in the health community.



Primarily found in South America, the acai berry is valued for its healing properties. It can lower cholesterol levels, regulate blood sugar levels, improve eyesight, promote sound sleep and it can enhance sex drive. However, the fruits popularity is more for its weight loss and anti-aging properties.

Visitors of the site even talk about how the acai berry can improve the heart, increase blood circulation and

reduce inflammation. This means, the fruit can be very beneficial to people with diabetes and hypertension. There are also studies which indicate that the fruit can reduce the risk of heart disease and improve one's mental functions and mood at the same time.

With its antioxidants and vital nutrients, the fruit is known to decrease the risk of certain cancers. To a lot of women, the most loved benefit of the acai berry is its detoxifying properties. It can rid the body of stored junk that is derived from pollution, alcohol, processed foods and lots of other environmental toxins. When the body is detoxified, the immune system is also enhanced.

A product called Colon Cleanse, when used with the acai berry, can offer more detoxification and cleansing properties. As the colon is cleansed, people won't only lose weight, they can also get rid of chronic gas, old feces and bloating among others. The skin also improves. More information about the acai berry and other related products are also available at **www.acaiberryfruits.net**

Top ten money-saving and money-spinning websites

By Owe Carter www.confused.com

The internet is a wonderful creation and if you look closely you'll find a handful of really useful sites to be found that can save you money. Or, better yet, make you some! So here's a list of ten sites for either reducing your outgoings, or enhancing your incomings:

Save money on your groceries

Fancy getting lots of groceries dirt cheap? Then you might want to check out www.approvedfood.co.uk – sellers of clearance food and drink extraordinaire. Their range is constantly changing, so it's well worth checking back regularly. If you're the type of

person who turns your nose up at tins and jars, this site isn't for you. But if you want to pick up a tray of dry roasted peanuts at 10p a bag, or a case of 12 tubs of custard for 99p, then you'll love it!

Approved Food are very upfront about some of their products having exceeded their Best Before dates. They don't sell products past their Use By date, as that would pose a genuine health risk. And if you're not keen on buying products past their Best Before date, the site has the option of hiding these products when you search.

Sell your stuff!

Obviously, you've got your eBays and your Amazons for selling an array of items you're not using. Look at www.PriceMinister.co.uk for selling on your books, DVDs, games, clothes and so on...

Buy new stuff!

Check out www.HotUKDeals.co.uk. This is basically a forum where readers can post brilliant deals they find, and other users give 'heat' if they agree that it's a top deal. This site is arguably only a money saver if you use it to buy stuff you need, however... It's a little bit too easy to get carried away and snap up loads of good stuff!

Get free stuff!

As everyone knows, the best price for scoring any item is FREE. Which is where www.uk.freecycle.org comes in. It's basically a global community of people making available things they don't want or need, but others might. This is then divided into local groups which you can join, and hence be kept abreast of what goodies people are giving away in your neighbourhood. And it's pretty handy if you're due a clear-out yourself too.

Don't be a voucher sloucher

Everyone loves money off. Which is why we reckon you'll love www.Vouchercloud.com – which is choc-full of vouchers which can be printed off, sent to your phone or redeemed online with a code. Plus the site looks really nice and is super-easy to use.

Rent out spare space

Have you got a spare room in your house that you occasionally dust but seldom use? Or possibly a garage or parking space you don't really take full advantage of? Then you could consider letting it out. Listing on www.Spareground.co.uk is free, and a flexible alternative to standard letting. Perhaps you have a piano in one of your rooms – you could hire it out by the hour as a practice room. Maybe you're not using your greenhouse – you could let it to someone who wants to grow their own fruit and veg. Or maybe you just have a large loft that you could hire out for storage.

Take in a lodger

Remember that spare room we were just talking about? Well, another way of making money off it is by taking in a lodger. In fact, the government's Rent A Room (www.direct.gov.uk) scheme allows you up to £4,250 a year tax free when you let a furnished room – provided that the house in question hasn't been divided into separate flats. Plus, you don't even have to be a homeowner. It's ok to take on an extra lodger in a rented house provided you get the landlord's permission.

Once you've decided that you want a lodger, the next question is – where do you find one? Well, with over 1.3 million registered users, www.Spareroom.co.uk is a great place to start.

Dress for less

<http://shopittome.co.uk> is excellent for picking up nicely-priced clothing, shoes and handbags. This site lets you pick your favourite brands, and then it alerts you when they come on sale! Amazing!

And then there's www.Swishing.com, which is a bit like where gorgeous clothing and Freecycle meet.





London's best kept secret - summer barbecues and al fresco dining at the Montague on the Gardens

The Montague on the Gardens, the luxury four-star boutique hotel in Bloomsbury, will officially launch summer on Tuesday 11th May, when they serve the season's first barbecue lunch on their gorgeous Wood Deck.

Overlooking the private gardens of the Bedford estate, with their mature trees, sculptures and manicured lawns, the Wood Deck and Terrace provide a little oasis of calm and tranquillity. The Wood Deck is so secluded and peaceful it's hard to believe that you are surrounded by one of the world's busiest cities.

Between 12:30pm and 10:30pm every day, until 12th September, guests and visitors can enjoy spectacular al fresco barbecue lunches and dinners. Afternoon Tea lovers can also enjoy their scones and sandwiches on the Terrace, basking in the sun.

At £19.50 for two courses and £24.50 for three courses, Chef will be serving everything from hearty burgers and chunky chips to BBQ spare ribs with grilled pak choi and sesame dressing, and half a lobster grilled with garlic and parsley butter to suprêmes of salmon with braised fennel and pesto sauce.

The Wood Deck and the Terrace also make a perfect venue for private parties and events, accommodating up to 200 guests for an informal barbecue reception. Priced from £35.00 per person, guests can enjoy grilled tuna steak, beef and mushroom kebabs, marinated haloumi cheese skewers, and pasta salad with chorizo to fresh English strawberries and cream, or even spit roasted whole hog roast or rosemary and garlic suckling pig.

Situated in the heart of Bloomsbury, The Montague on the Gardens is an elegant Georgian townhouse hotel overlooking a secluded private garden square. The 100 rooms and suites are elegantly understated, furnished with luxurious fabrics capturing the timeless elegance of Bloomsbury and its literary heritage. The Montague on the Gardens is part of Red Carnation - a luxury collection of five and four-star family-run boutique hotels.

www.montaguehotel.com

Palm Court at The Langham 'is best place to take afternoon tea'

The Palm Court at The Langham received the accolade of Top London Afternoon Tea 2010 from the Tea Guild, which said that the variety of beverages, service, decor, ambiance and presentation were all near perfect.

"Taking tea at Palm Court at The Langham is nothing short of a delight, with a beautiful, luxurious and very tranquil environment, combined with a very high quality of tea, food and service," said Irene Gorman, head of the Tea Guild.



She added that for anyone caught up in the hustle and bustle of the West End, the establishment can be "calm" and a place of "tranquillity"

Tom Aikens to open two restaurants at Somerset House

Compass Group have joined forces with Michelin-starred chef Tom Aikens to relaunch the dining operation at Somerset House this month as Tom's Kitchen and Tom's Terrace.

The chef, who currently operates Tom's Kitchen, will oversee the dining operation at Somerset House with the launch of a second Tom's Kitchen and Tom's Terrace, the venue's summer-only terrace restaurant.



Sarah Miller, business director for leisure at Compass, wanted to offer a point of difference to the areas existing dining offer.

"Competition is fierce and we have to give our guests something fantastic if we want them to eat with us rather than at the dozens

of other restaurants in the area," she said. "With Tom's Kitchen, which has been a huge success in Chelsea, we have that added ingredient.

"Tom is one of the best chefs working in London and we are confident that his food, coupled with the wonderful setting, will be a big hit with diners in the West End."

Tom's Kitchen, which replaces the Admiralty restaurant, will feature the same menu as its namesake branch in Chelsea. Tom's Terrace, which will replace the River Terrace Café overlooking the Thames, will serve a separate seasonal menu consisting of sharing plates.

Aikens said: "Somerset House is a fantastic venue for this new look restaurant. I am looking forward to offering patrons a fresh and relaxed dining experience in outstanding surroundings."

www.somersetthouse.org.uk



Meeting Magic launches Virtual Meetings Service

Meeting facilitation company, Meeting Magic (www.meetingmagic.co.uk) has decided to bring forward the launch of its' Virtual Meetings Service by 4 weeks. After trialling the service for a number of months, founder of the business, Katherine Woods, decided to launch this week with the tag line; 'don't let a volcano spoil your meeting'.

Katherine explains, "as soon as the working week began, I saw the negative impact the flight restrictions were having on our clients' ability to progress with face-to-face meetings. Rather than sit by and watch our clients cancel international meetings, we are re-scheduling these as virtual meetings, using our new service. A world leading software company, due to meet in Paris this week, are going to be the first client to use our fully launched service."

The Meeting Magic Virtual Meetings Service offers clients three levels of support:

1. To help prepare for a virtual meeting
2. To prepare and facilitate a virtual meeting
3. To provide training on virtual meeting facilitation

The Virtual Meetings Service is a combination of Meeting Magic's expertise in meeting design coupled with its skilled use of specialist graphics software. These two capabilities enable Meeting Magic to offer graphic facilitation in a virtual environment.

THE WORLD WILL BE WATCHING. WHERE WILL YOU BE?

Head to Stamford Bridge to watch the best of the summer's football from South Africa. Escape the crowded local and long queues and watch the football in comfort. With numbers strictly limited, soak up the atmosphere with friends and watch the action live on our big screens and televisions within our hospitality suites. With no over crowding you can enjoy easy access to the bar and a clear view of all the action!

Screenings are now available to purchase for all three of England's group games. For £15 per person, your ticket includes entry two hours prior to kick off, one free drink and hot dog.

www.chelseafc.com



Chocolate lovers 'are more depressive', say experts

People who regularly eat chocolate are more depressive, experts have found. Research in Archives of Internal Medicine shows those who eat at least a bar every week are more glum than those who only eat chocolate now and again.

Many believe chocolate has the power to lift mood, and the US team say this may be true, although scientific proof for this is lacking. But they say they cannot rule out that chocolate may be a cause rather than the cure for being depressed.

In the study, which included nearly 1,000 adults, the more chocolate the men and women consumed the lower their mood. Those who ate the most - more than six regular 28g size bars a month - scored the highest on depression, using a recognised scale.

Big bargains thanks to codes and vouchers for new fashions

Shoppers who need new clothing for the summer and springtime this year are able to save on top names and brands thanks to the website www.DiscountVouchers.co.uk. The site hosts deals for more than 300 famous retailers online.

The new batch of deals features top name styles such as Marks & Spencer, Joules Clothing, La Redoute, Karen Millen, Oasis, Dorothy Perkins and Miss Selfridge.

Simon Terry, managing director of DiscountVouchers.co.uk, said, "With the spring and summer almost here people want to get hold of top name goodies at bargain prices if possible, and our latest range of deals is perfect for helping people to find top styles on a budget."



 **DiscountVouchers.co.uk**

DiscountVouchers.co.uk offers a regularly updated range of vouchers and codes for savings at stores such as Boots, Currys, John Lewis, Sainsbury's, Lastminute.com, Dorothy Perkins, New Look and more. The website is searchable by retailer name, latest deal and most popular deal, making it easier for customers to find the best value deals in the shortest time.

To see all the latest discount deals visit www.discountvouchers.co.uk.

Keep it confidential

According to a recent survey by InvisiView Media, although 98% of employees believe it is vital to protect confidential information, more than half don't take any security measures at all when sending data out externally. Allegedly we live in a security-conscious world, or at least one that understands the potential risks of data interception or intellectual property getting into the wrong hands, despite this it seems that business are still taking unnecessary risks when it comes to protecting their information.

PDFs are secure

Converting documents into PDF format and believing that this is adequate enough to protect the information. PDF documents can be tampered with by the end-user and it is not too complicated to modify them, as there are many downloadable options easily accessible from the Internet explaining the process for doing so. Signatures, figures and confidential data can be changed and as a consequence security risks to your data could be inevitable.

Email complacency

Sending the information in an email attachment. Today we are so email-centric that we have an over-reliance of using email as a trusted way of sending out information. Realistically most businesses should be well aware that an email attachment alone offers no protection for sensitive documents but there is a tendency to feel over-comfortable that this is a safe environment. In fact many people send email attachments without a second thought and this is where the real problem lies – in human complacency.

Relying on human intervention

Asking the recipient to delete the information once it has been viewed. This is one of the most common mistakes businesses make, but it is one of the most vulnerable methods. Even if the recipient does remember to delete your email (and there is a good chance that they won't), they are even less likely to delete the item from their 'deleted items' box straight away, which means

the information is sat in their deleted folder and is easily accessible. Whenever you rely on human intervention there is always an increased risk of it backfiring so it is worth being very wary of this risks associated with this and wherever possible, avoid sending confidential information using this tactic

Assumption that data has arrived

Can you be sure the data you sent was received by your the intended recipient? A common scenario is assuming the data was received, reviewed or amended by colleagues and clients, when it never actually arrived in the first place, as there is no formal way of confirming this, other than vocally.

Using inappropriate and easily intercepted methods

Using methods such as fax or post increases the risk further of data falling into the wrong hands. Since most fax machines (if used at all nowadays) tend to be positioned in open spaces in offices, they offer little in the way of privacy or protection. This risk is magnified in larger serviced offices where there may be other businesses sharing the same space as you. Equally using the good old fashioned postal service may be more than sufficient in some cases, but also poses its own risks of interception.

In summary, if you need to send confidential information, it is worth using a method that allows you to send the information in any format and in an isolated fashion. Ensuring that the detail can be viewed as required but in a controlled way that allows you to choose exactly who sees it, what they can do with it and how long they can see it for is the safest route to take. Having control over the possibility of an external party editing, altering, printing or downloading your information will also give you increase peace of mind as well as reduce the risk of your data being manipulated.

InvisiView is a cost-effective piece of technology that allows the sender of information to display

confidential or sensitive data (whether, text, video, image or sound) in a secure format and then send it via a web link to the recipient for viewing. Viewing information securely via the InvisiView technology minimises the possibility of the recipient editing, altering, printing, downloading or saving the information. The software is easy to use and also allows the sender to place time restraints on viewing the information to ensure that the viewer can only see the information once, for example. The sender activates the viewing process via invite codes which are created automatically and is in complete control of the data they have sent. For further information go to www.invisiviewmedia.com



How collaboration tools assist HR, PA and office managers in the workplace

Google Apps HR staff, office managers and PAs are often ahead of the curve when it comes to embracing the cloud computing trend, which involves a company storing information and email online through a hosted service such as Google Apps. One of the main advantages to cloud services is that staff can access documents and spreadsheets from wherever they have an internet connection, working on them together at the same time, viewing one another's updates as they are made. Google Apps has so far been adopted by over 2 million businesses worldwide and has been particularly well-received by HR and administrative staff including PAs, for a number of reasons:

Web-based shared calendars allow them to quickly and painlessly schedule staff meetings, automatically identifying slots when multiple employees are free without trawling through individual diaries.

They can easily canvas staff opinion on anything from lunch preferences to proposed company initiatives through creating online forms which collate the data effectively without multiple emails

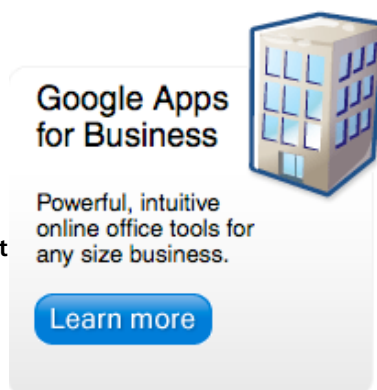
Updating a spreadsheet with financial data or staff timetables can be done collaboratively, with the finance and HR team, for instance, seeing each other's updates in real time

International teams can be managed more simply through automatic translation to the recipient's natural language

Mobile working is made easier with extra communication services such as instant messaging, which allows for quick responses which do not merit a phone conversation

Google Apps Premier Edition is available to businesses for £33 per user per year and includes: Google Mail, Google Docs and Google Sites


For more information visit: www.google.com/apps/intl/en/business/



SARAH IVENS

A Modern Girl's Guide to Networking

How to win friends and influence people – from the office to the party, from the boardroom to the bedroom



his fun, info-packed guide is the perfect book for those seeking personal or career success and improved communication skills. Sarah Ivens, bestselling author of *A Modern Girl's Guide to Etiquette*, tells you how to network with integrity, how to win friends, work a room at social occasions and get ahead in business. Ideas to improve your confidence along with case studies of successful networkers will help you become the successful woman you want to be. The topics covered include: basic etiquette and body language; conversation starters; the art of communication; social situations; hosting an event; friendships and dating; and, in the office.

Nokia launches first open source Symbian phone

The first handset to use the Symbian operating system since it became open source has been announced by Nokia. The N8 phone has a 12 megapixel camera and allows people to record and edit High Definition video clips, as well as watch web TV services.

Analysts said the phone was a "pivotal device" in efforts "to make Nokia's high end phones credible again".

It is also a chance for Symbian to prove itself alongside Google's Android operating system and Apple's iPhone. It is the first version of the software since the Symbian foundation announced that it had made its code open source in February.

The Foundation - which includes Nokia, Motorola and Samsung amongst others - gave away the code to developers for free in the hope that it would help speed up the pace of improvements. Any organisation or individual can now use and modify it.

The device will be Nokia's flagship smartphone. It can be plugged into home theatres and supports surround sound as well as high-quality video.

Social networks, such as Twitter and Facebook, can be displayed on the home screen in a single application.

<http://events.nokia.com/NokiaN8>



Workplace issues



How to resolve conflict with a colleague

<http://career-advice.monster.co.uk>

In any working environment there is always going to be some tension and occasional flashpoints, but it's important never to let feelings boil over.

It is wise to recognise the conflict and the underlying cause. This way you can attempt to sort it out and take appropriate action to try and resolve it.

Be positive

Don't sit back if you are involved in a conflict with somebody – even if you don't think it is your fault. You'll waste valuable time and emotional energy with the conflicting person.

Evading is not an option, so addressing the underlying cause of the conflict sooner rather than later is vital. Furthermore, simply trying to win a conflict doesn't resolve the issue – and it can re-emerge in different ways.

Look for change

Sometimes conflict can actually be helpful and necessary if it leads to positive change. That said, the first step is to try and handle the conflict constructively. Meaning you need to be looking for change. Conflicts that go on for years with no give or take are a result of no party willing to give way.

Finding the root

Very often, conflict is caused not by what was done or said, but by what was left unsaid or undone: ranging from an unfulfilled promise or a lack of tact on someone's part.

Your decision to confront a conflict positively – and even prepare to sacrifice your position can be the sign that the

other party is looking for to meet you half-way. In this case, the simplest way forward is to ask the other person for their viewpoint on the matter which is causing the conflict.

You may feel you are making all the moves and putting yourself on the line – but this doesn't mean you are the weaker party. Once you begin the dialogue – the unsaid becomes less threatening to both sides.

Take an honest look

Be prepared to accept that it may actually be something you are doing or not doing that is the reason for conflict.

Admitting this can help a conflict disappear in many cases and you may even find that preparing to admit you are wrong on some issues will

see a similar reaction in the other person.

Handling long term conflicts

The long term conflict is one which has simply not been addressed. Certain individuals are avoided and attempting reconciliation will accordingly need more time and effort.

A quick decision on your part to pin down the other person and have a swift chat to sort it out will not work. You need to make an unhurried and calm approach, preferably when both sides are not under pressure at work, and even give some notice of your intentions.

Your conversation needs to be polite and rational while focussing on the situation and facts, avoiding gossip and personal attacks. Remain assertive but not triumphant or aggressive. You're attempting to get to the heart of the matter and not look for a winning position.

Independent thinking

In cases where the conflict is unreasonable – you have tried all of the above but the problem remains, you may wish to seek an independent viewpoint. After all, when companies and unions conflict, they seek arbitration – perhaps you can do the same.

Involve an understanding boss or someone from HR as they may be able to offer some way forward for both parties. Above all, your problem will be shared with someone who has no emotional energy tied up in the conflict. That alone can help alleviate your grievances and make your working life more acceptable even if you have to continue working with someone you simply are not compatible with.



What does flexible working really mean?

<http://career-advice.monster.co.uk>

Most people think they understand all about flexible working but the term is still subject to much confusion. Flexible working simply refers to any working schedule that is outside of a normal working pattern.

This means that the working hours, instead of being repetitive and fixed, can involve changes and variations. It can mean the employee has variables such as when they are required to work or even their place of work.

Almost anyone who has a variation in their working pattern is flexible working.

Here are some of the most common examples:

- **Flexitime** – This arrangement requires an employee to be at work during a specified core period, but lets them otherwise arrange their hours to suit themselves.
- **Compressed hours** – Here, employees work the same hours over fewer days.
- **Annual hours** – Employees agree they

will work a given number of hours during the year, but the pattern of work can vary from week to week.

- **Staggered hours** – This lets employees start and finish work at different times. Employees may also take time off in lieu or take career breaks.
- **Job Sharing** – Job sharing is another form of flexible working and it is where a job is shared between two or more people. They may wish to work alternate days, half weeks, or alternate weeks. It can even be one person working in the morning and one in the afternoon.

All of the above are forms of flexible working and involve variations to the normal pattern of working hours. It may even involve working from home and not the office.

Employers and flexible working

In many cases a job description will clearly state whether it is a flexible working opportunity. However, there is no reason why you cannot ask your employer for flexible working once you are already in a job

Arrangements can be made if the need for studying or other circumstances arise. Furthermore, in difficult times, the employer may encourage flexible working to bring down their salary bill and keep their company solvent.

However, if you are in a highly sensitive or competitive environment – or you are being geared towards managerial roles, it is unlikely that a request for flexible working will be successful. At this stage of your career, commitment is all.

Once you have reached a certain position, the rules can change and a whole world of flexible working opportunities open up.

Changing to flexible working

If your request for flexible working is approved by your current employment there may be some legal changes associated with this move.

For example, you may want to agree a trial period to ensure it is working and this will have to be contractually agreed to protect your interests. It could even involve changes to the number of hours worked and your contract will need to state the new pay and holiday entitlement.

If you have agreed to job sharing, the work needs to be allocated fairly with both parties being aware of their responsibilities.

Remember, flexible working means keeping clear records of work and timings. While a lot is based on trust, clear goals should be laid out by the employer to be measured.

Flexible working today

Apart from ensuring a satisfactory work/life balance. Working from home, without commuting should save time, which can valuably be spent training or taking up other interests.

Working flexible hours may even make you more productive as we all know that office time can often be taken up with non-work related issues.

In the UK, the Government has announced plans to give millions of people the right to request flexible working. With statistics showing 91% of employers who received requests for flexible working in the last year approved them. So if you want to work flexibly, the first step is simply to work out a mutually beneficial way forward for you and your employer – and then just ask.

How to hold a successful meeting

Pre Meeting

Purpose of the meeting

Every meeting needs to have a specific purpose. Before you arrange a meeting you need to think about what it is you want to achieve, discuss or find out, as everything else about how the meeting is run will be affected by its purpose.

Before you call a meeting make sure that you know what type of meeting it is. For instance you could be:

- Brainstorming new ideas
- Developing an idea or plan
- Having a progress update or management meeting
- Considering options and making a decision
- Selling something to a potential buyer
- Building a relationship with somebody

Each of these types of meetings will have different objectives and desired outcomes, which need to be considered before the meeting is put into the diary and formalised. There may be a mixture of objectives and desired outcomes for the meeting, but make sure that you identify the ones that are most important and prioritise those before the others.

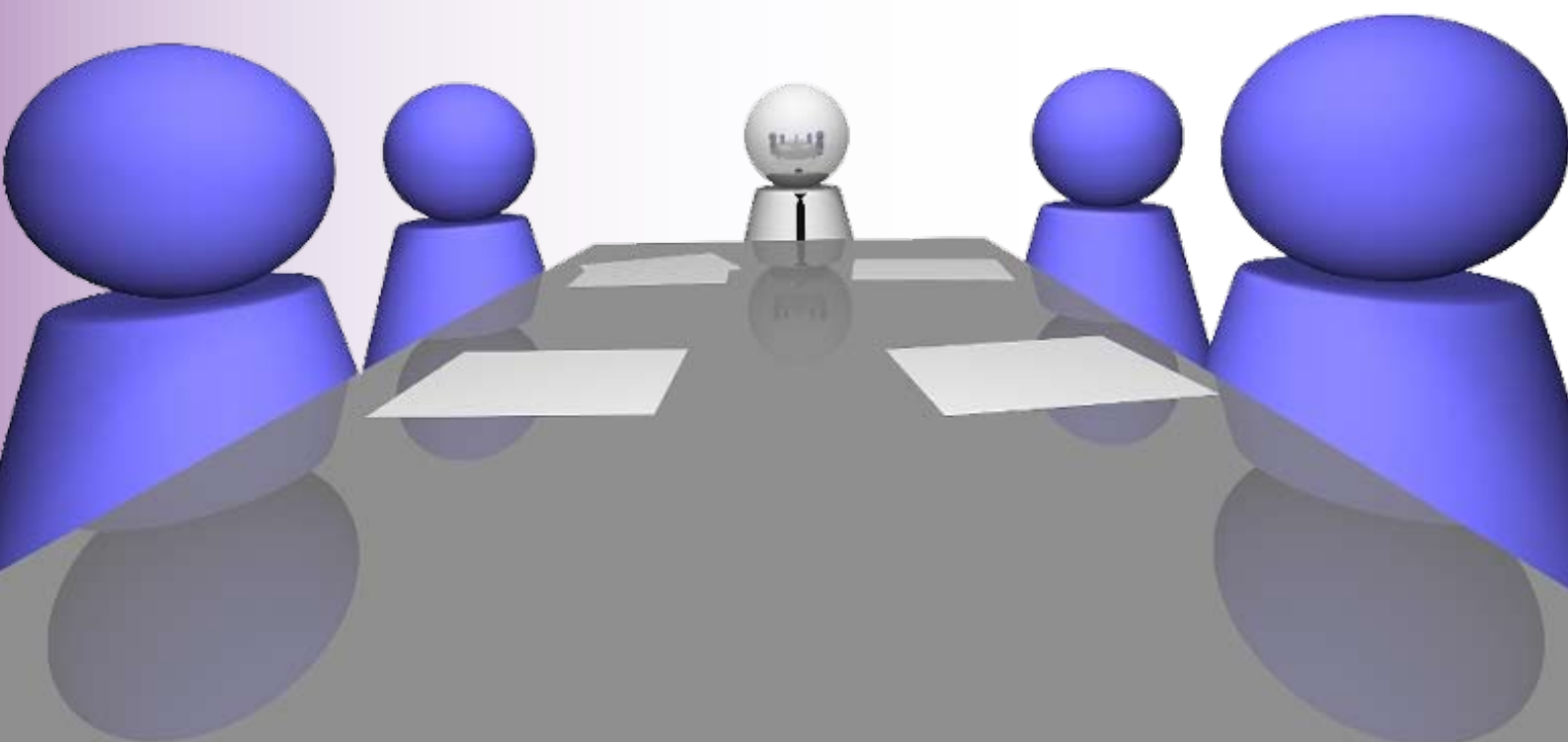
Participants

Once you know the purpose of the meeting, you can then think about who needs to attend. Some meetings, such as ones where decisions need to be made, may need to be open only to very specific members of staff. Brainstorms, on the other hand, can often benefit from having more people attending in order to stimulate different ideas, while sales meetings will usually involve external participants.

It is important to plan the number of participants carefully. It can be true that too many cooks spoil the broth, especially if you are trying to make a decision based on specific information and within a tight timeframe; but equally, inviting external attendees or members of staff who have not been involved from the beginning of a project may give fresh breath to stale discussions.

You should also consider any character clashes when thinking about who to invite to meetings. You need to be sure that the people who attend will contribute positively as undue negativity or personality clashes will limit everybody's productivity. Where clashes are likely to occur, you need to think in advance about how you will deal with them.

Finally, think about any political issues that will affect who should or should not be invited. Sometimes



it is important to invite people even if you know they cannot attend, as they may be able to contribute ideas or thoughts via email or telephone in advance of the meeting itself – these can often be useful discussion points for the members who do attend. There may also be issues of status within your organisation. Attending meetings can be seen by some as a reflection of their status, so think carefully before you exclude people. It might be worth talking to people you have not asked to attend and explaining to them why you did not think it was beneficial to them – this will help to prevent future problems and can stop people's feelings being hurt.

Timing & Refreshments

With any meeting you need to ask yourself when the best time to hold it is, from which day of the week to what time of day. Some people work best in the morning, so you could hold a meeting first thing when people arrive in the office, or even propose a breakfast meeting before work would normally start. However, other people need a little while to get into the swing of things before they become most creative and decisive, so it might be best to hold the meeting in the afternoon. This decision will depend not only on who you are inviting but also on the purpose of the meeting.

The timing of the meeting may also help you decide whether refreshments are needed or would be beneficial. If the meeting is being held at a mealtime – whether breakfast, lunch or dinner – and is going to go on for a while, then it is important to provide food for all the participants. Lack of food will often lead to lessened productivity, concentration and even bad moods.

The refreshments you provide can also change the atmosphere of the meeting: hot drinks can help people feel that they have the time available to think through issues in details, whilst having

sweets available immediately helps people to see the meeting as fun. People often feel more relaxed when they are debating ideas over a working lunch, which can work especially well for meetings such as brainstorming. However, many people often find that their productivity slumps immediately after eating so if the meeting will be long then providing lunch might not work. Equally, if there are time constraints and decisions need to be made then it might be sensible not to offer any refreshments beyond a glass of water, as this will encourage people to focus on the matter at hand.

Location, Room Decoration & Layout

Many people immediately assume that a meeting will be held in one of the organisation's normal offices, but while this may work for some meetings, especially short ones, it is worth considering alternative venues. Look around for the best venue, whether at a hotel, in another office block or in a public space such as a nearby academy or college. Taking people away from their usual working environment can help them to focus on the matter at hand without being distracted by their ongoing work.

The way that a meeting room is decorated has a huge effect on people's mood and productivity, even though they will rarely be conscious of this. It is important to think about the colours on the walls of the rooms that you use: calm colours such as pale greens and blues can help people to feel relaxed and peaceful, whereas vibrant colours such as reds and oranges can stimulate people's creative juices and invigorate their thoughts.

It might be worth putting up some relevant images on the walls or words of inspiration. Thinking back to the desired objectives of the meeting, consider what pieces of advice might help people to obtain these objectives, and then think

about having these in the room for people to see during the meeting. If the purpose of the meeting is to generate ideas then rooms with a whiteboard or flipchart will often work best as they give you a space to write up people's thoughts, however, for some meetings a lack of any possible distraction might be best.

Think about how the room will be organised, where people will sit and whether you want to have a boardroom-style table, which can help to make it clear who is running the meeting, a circular table, which helps everybody to feel on the same level as each other, or possibly no table at all. Try to seat people in a way which encourages eye contact, and helps everybody to feel included.

General Preparation

Unplanned meetings rarely achieve anything, so once you have thought through the points above, there are a few final points to consider:

Firstly you need to make sure that you have chosen somebody to run the meeting, otherwise it will be chaos from the start! Whether you call this person the chairman of the meeting, and sit them in a prominent position, or simply allocate another member of the team to get discussions started and help the meeting to run according to the objectives, somebody needs to be in charge. You should also allocate somebody to record the minutes of the meeting.

Secondly, you need to be confident that you have briefed all the people attending the meeting properly. They need to not only know the timing, but also the purpose and objectives of the meeting. This will allow them to start thinking about the main points and issues in advance and prevent unnecessary briefing at the start of the meeting.

Lastly, you need to make sure that there is a clear agenda which has been communicated to all attendees. For meetings such as brainstorming the agenda may

be short and informal, as the objective is to allow thoughts to flow and ideas to be formulated without unnecessary interruptions. However, agendas help to eliminate irrelevant discussion as well as making clear the main points that need to be discussed. They also help the person running the meeting to correctly prioritise discussion points.

During the Meeting

Getting Started

The first thing that needs to happen in any meeting is to make sure that all the attendees know each other, as people are often reluctant to voice opinions and thoughts in front of people they do not know. This is also a chance for the person running the meeting to make it clear that they are in charge as they will know everybody present and can make the introductions. They will also then need to run through the objectives for the meeting and make sure that everybody has a copy of the agenda.

Keeping on track

Whoever is running the meeting will need to make sure that everything runs to time. While it is important to allow people to develop thoughts and encourage them to be creative and discuss points fully, it is also crucial that the meeting doesn't descend into tangents or irrelevant discussion. Discussions should always be brought back to the original objectives of the meeting.

Make sure that everybody is able to contribute to the discussions, and be careful that people do not have their points cut off or rubbished by others. People need to know that they are important and valued participants, and everybody's point of view must be considered and documented.

Whoever is running the meeting will need to use their judgement



about when to move discussions on to the next topic, always referring back to the purpose of the meeting. For meetings where there is a lot to get through and there are time constraints, it may be important to encourage people to be more focused in their discussions. Eventually it might even be necessary to stop a discussion and move on to the next point on the agenda.

Closing the meeting

When the meeting finishes will again depend on the purpose, objectives and time constraints, however once it is clear that the meeting is coming to an end the person in charge will need to summarise any decisions that have been made verbally, and quickly run through any immediate action points. This is so that people are clear what has been achieved even before the minutes of the meeting are distributed.

Post Meeting

Documentation & Follow-up

Whoever was allocated to record the details of the meeting will need to write everything up as soon as possible after the meeting so that important details are not forgotten. The form that this write-up takes will depend on what type of meeting it was: for instance

brainstorm notes will often have been jotted down during the meeting in random orders and these will need to be collated and possibly send round as a simple list. However, meetings that were designed to make a decision will need clear minutes about what was discussed, the decisions that were made, and who is responsible for taking things forward.

Most meetings will have resulted in action points for some participants, and it is crucial that people know what they are responsible for doing, and when it needs to be done by. The minutes and action points may not need to be distributed to everybody who attended, so think carefully about who gets sent what – again political factors may come into play here.

Lastly, have a debrief to consider how successful the meeting was and what you can learn for next time. This may simply mean taking 10 minutes yourself to jot down a few thoughts, or may involve arranging a brief meeting with other key participants to discuss in more detail what was achieved and what could have been done better. This is also a good time to think about whether it is necessary to have a follow-up meeting for all or some of the participants, and to start planning this.

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Office Dress Codes

Getting dressed for the office doesn't mean leaving your personal style behind. Find out which looks give you a polished, professional look and which fashions can be a career killer.

By Cynthia Nellis

Polished, not fashion victim

Your goal to getting dressed for work is to project a professional, competent image, regardless of your employment level or career path.

The styles, colours, lengths and fit of your fashion choices will speak volumes about your ability to do your job.

In general, the more distracting a piece of clothing or jewellery is, the less appropriate it is for office wear.

Guidelines to looking polished:

- Colour plays a big part in professional image. Traditional career colours include red (aggressive), navy (trustworthy), grey (conservative) and black (chic). Most of these colours work well in trouser suits, skirts and shoes and mix back with softer feminine colours that are appropriate like ice blue, lilac, soft pink and ivory. Loud colours like hot pink and wild prints are much riskier in the office, but some creative types can still pull them off.
- Jewellery that jangles (chandelier earrings, stacks of bangles) is distracting. Opt for stud earrings or single bracelets.
- Slouchy handbags look sloppy. Choose structured styles that project an organised image.
- Most of what constitutes a polished image is in the details: manicured nails, un-laddered tights, scuff-free shoes, neat hair.
- Fit is everything when you are talking about tailored work clothes. Trousers should be fitted, but free of visible panty lines. Skirts, especially straight styles like pencil skirts, should be loose enough to sit down in comfortably. Jackets should be able to be buttoned. And blouses shouldn't gap between buttonholes.

- Designer labels are great, but heavily logoed clothing and accessories look cluttered and frivolous in the work place. A small designer bag is fine; a logo trench coat looks ridiculous.

Dress like your (female) boss

Don't know where to start working on your career image? You're not alone because most companies don't have specific guidelines about what to wear to work.

One of the best clues to company dress codes is what your boss wears. Just think about the styles that the highest-level woman in your organisation wears and use them in your wardrobe. Does she wear mostly skirt suits? Or does she rely on trouser suits? Does she wear tights or bare legs? Open-toed shoes or pumps?

Looks to avoid in the workplace:

- Too sexy: see-through lace, miniskirts, spaghetti straps, sheer sundresses, strappy stiletto sandals.
- Too casual: jeans, shorts, T-shirts, hats, sneakers.
- Too sloppy: wrinkled clothing, too many layers, baggy-fit clothing.

Business Dress Codes

Formal Business Attire

For women this constitutes business suits (a matched skirt and jackets) and, in most workplaces, pantsuits (matched pants and blazer). Closed-toe shoes (no sandals), blouses, hose and conservative hair, jewellery and makeup are expected.

Corporate Casual

Working women have interpreted this to mean everything from shorts to sundresses, but in its most literal sense it means "smart business." Dressy pants and a blouse, sleek jersey knits and skirts and tops are all examples of corporate casual.

Denim, T-shirts and flip-flops -- all '90s phenoms -- are only acceptable in the most casual of work environments.

Casual Friday

Depending on the business, this can mean anything from corporate casual instead of formal looks or "Wear your company logo polo and jeans." If in doubt, ask a superior.



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5 European Cities you should visit

By Martin Jeszke



Paris

When you're in Paris you simply have to see the city from onboard a boat cruising on the Seine River. You literally cruise through the heart of the city and are able to see the very soul and many of its most wonderful sites such as the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, Grand Palais, The Pantheon and Sorbonne. Make a point also of seeing The Louvre, Arc de Triomphe, Champs Elysee and Palace of Versailles, Disneyland Resort, Chateau de Vincennes and Chateau de Fontainebleau while you are in Paris.

Experience the romance of Paris by touring on the river, taking a bike ride, eating and drinking at many of its wonderful restaurants and cafes. This way of touring the French capital will give you a real flavour and feel for the Parisian lifestyle. The nightlife in Paris is really amazing. There are so many interesting places to visit.

Barcelona

One of the world's most diverse cities with over 2,000 years of history has both a New and Old part to the city, containing both Catalan and Gothic architecture. There are a number of buildings, which are unique world heritage sites, which attract people from far and wide to view them.

Barcelona is situated in the heart of Catalonia on the east coast of Spain. Barcelona was previously an Olympic city as well having hosted the 1992 Summer Olympics. It is a vibrant city that has excellent nightlife, splendid markets and lovely beaches. The climate is a Mediterranean temperate climate. This is a bilingual city as well - Catalan and Spanish.

One of the very best soccer teams in the world has their home here. Barcelona is a unique team that has a special set-up and is founded on principles and a culture that cannot be replicated anywhere else in the



world. The profound secret to the city and the team lies hidden here somewhere....

Munich

Situated in the heart of Bavaria in the south of Germany. This is not a

should definitely visit

city dominated by skyscrapers but it is a unique city that is very different to other German and indeed European cities. It is a delightfully lovely city, with special charm and culture. Munich was previously a Summer Olympics city in 1972 and may well be selected to be a Winter Olympics city for the 2018 games.

Munich has many great attractions such as the Palaces of

Schleissheim and Neuschwanstein, Bavarian State Opera, Bavarian Film Studios, Olympic Park, Cathedral Church of Our Lady, English Garden (largest park), BMW Museum, Allianz Arena (futuristic Stadium) and Lake Konigssee. There are several other wonderful Palaces and Parks that are also a must see.

The world's most famous beer hall - The Hofbrauhaus is very popular for both tourists and locals. You must visit and experience Oktoberfest.

While in Munich I recommend you also see The Ludwig Castles especially Neuschwanstein Castle. They are really spectacular.

Geneva

The most French of Swiss Cities. Situated at the southern end of Lake Geneva, which has mountains on 2 sides of the Lake. This is a wonderful city dating back to 3,000 BC. Geneva has a magnificent location. Home to the European Headquarters, world headquarters of the Red Cross, the Center to world peacemaking organisations and world headquarters to anything concerning luxury.

The city has so many magnificent buildings including St Peter's Cathedral, Palais of Nations the second largest United Nations building), Museums of Art and History, Promenade Des Bastions, tenenchanting castles, outstanding lakes and parks and the Jet d'Eau Fountain.



There is a stunning Russian Orthodox church with a Gold dome that is well worth a visit. You must also take a tour of the delightful Lake Geneva. The scenery is breathtaking.

Rome

Rome is quite simply sensational when it comes to ancient ruins and history. There are very few cities in the world to compare to Rome. It is impossible to move more than a few metres before coming across another stunning historical building or statue. Since the Millennium the city was given a massive facelift after extensive cleaning took place of practically all the ancient buildings, statues, monuments etc. Rome will leave you in awe.

You have to see Rome by walking generally and then seeing the 7 hills by car or bus. Naturally use the Underground train system as well. You literally do not want to

miss anything. Only by walking will you hope to capture every solitary metre of ground practically all of which is so precious! Your eyes explode at all the many wonderful ancient and historical ruins.

Sites to see: The 7 hills of Rome, The Coliseum, The Pantheon, St Peter's Square, The Tivoli Fountain and so much more. Rome has many excellent restaurants, cafes and bars. The city has superb nightlife and is equally a magnificent city to see by night.

When you have limited time and you're on a budget it's important to take time before deciding where to travel. So do your 'due diligence' and check out the above 5 European cities which all have many great things to see and experience for a lifetime of rich memories.

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Preparing for a Telephone Interview

By Steve J Page

Companies often prefer to conduct telephone interviews before inviting candidates to their offices for a face-to-face interview.

This applies particularly:

- When candidates will have to travel a long way
- When there are large numbers of candidates
- When screening by CV is difficult (when for example, personality is more important than experience or qualification)
- When a large part of the job will involve talking to people on the telephone.

If this telephone interview has been arranged through an agency/recruitment consultant you should know exactly when to call the hiring manager, or when they will call you. In other circumstances, you may have to be prepared to receive a call 'out of the blue'.

From the telephone interview, your objectives should be:

- To obtain enough information to decide if you would like to proceed with the interview process
- To give just enough information to answer the hiring manager's questions and persuade them that you are indeed worth interviewing face-to-face
- To 'close' the interview effectively and agree a time, date and place for your face-to-face interview

Preparation

Preparation for a telephone interview is as important as preparation before any other form of interview or meeting. The impression you create in the opening moments, and the manner with which you present yourself will determine whether or not you will be successful.

Find out as much as you can about the company and the job description. If your telephone interview has been arranged by a third party, you should receive much of this information from them. But in any case, do your own researches - company websites are one of the best sources of information. Find out about the size and structure of the company, its products and its markets.

Make a note of any questions you would like to ask. Ask about things if they are important to you, especially if your decision whether to proceed depends upon the answers (for example: will I have to relocate? (if that is something you don't want to do!). Otherwise, ask broad questions such as 'What training will be given?', 'What opportunities are there for advancement?'. Have these questions written down.

Have a notepad and pen ready, along with your diary.

Have your CV at hand. In all probability the hiring manager will have a copy of it too, so you probably won't be asked to

describe your background in detail.

Prepare mentally, or better still in writing, a very brief 'potted history' to answer the demand 'Tell me about yourself.' Managers ask this not because they want the information (they already have your CV!), but because they want to listen to you, to find out how communicative you are, and how you sound.

Example: I left college and decided to get into sales within the scientific field, but I needed a job straight away, so I took a stop-gap job as a clerk in the local tax office. I hadn't intended to stay so long, but there weren't many opportunities in my area for the sort of job I was looking for. After about six months however, I got a chance to join X-Company as a telephone sales person, selling scientific supplies, and I'm still there now. I wouldn't be looking for a new job except that there are no opportunities in my company to progress into field sales. This is why I'm particularly interested in joining your company Mr Brown.

The Call

If you have been asked to call at a specific time, call at precisely the correct time. Too early shows over-keenness and may damage your negotiating position later on, or your chances of getting to the next stage. Too late shows lack of interest - excuses won't be tolerated. If you can't get through (manager busy), leave a message

with the secretary/receptionist to show that you called at the right time. Ask when the manager is expected to be free, and try again then. Repeat the same procedure until you make contact. If you have been told that the hiring manager will call you - do not expect the same rules to apply! They will call you when they want to! (They're the one with the job after all!)

Tone of voice

This is the most important aspect of this form of interview. The detail is of very little importance - the manager has your CV, so they know exactly what you've done, and in all probability wouldn't be talking to you if they weren't essentially interested.

The main rules are:

- Think about how you normally answer the phone at home. When you answer the phone, do so by announcing your name, in an enthusiastic style: 'John Pickles, Good Morning!' If this is not your natural style, change it!
- Sound interesting/interested, energetic and enthusiastic
- Be succinct (don't waffle)
- Ask open-ended questions (beginning with who, what, when, why, where, how: these all ask for information, and keep the ball in the other person's court). Be prepared that they will do exactly the same!
- Don't use jargon
- Don't swear or use colloquialisms
- Be polite: speak to Ms (not Miss or Mrs. - even if you know their marital status), or Mr. Jones. If you are invited to use their first name, then use it. Use their title if you know they are for example, a doctor.
- Use the other person's name regularly throughout the conversation (but not all the time). Also, use the company name a few times.



Prepare to answer these questions

You can't prepare for every possible question, but there are a few which frequently come up:

- Tell me about yourself! (see above)
- What do you know about our company? (see above)
- What are you looking for? (More tricky. Be wary about saying things which the manager might not want to hear: 'I want to get into marketing' unless you know for sure that this possibility

exists. Keep your answer general: 'I'm looking for a chance to join a progressive company which gives hard workers a chance to shine. What opportunities exist at X-Co. Mr. Brown?')

- What would you like to know about us? (A good opportunity to ask your prepared questions. Don't be afraid to ask the tough questions. If there's something about the job which doesn't suit your purpose (or vice-versa) there's little point in proceeding.)

- What are your strengths? (Again, be careful. If you know for sure what the manager is looking for, you can tell him ('I'm strong in ion-chromatography') but if you don't know this, you're better off saying you have general, positive characteristics ('I've been told I have energy, enthusiasm and 100% commitment to the job I'm working on'). Don't over-egg it though - the manager may want you to substantiate your claims!
- What are your weaknesses? This may be disguised - 'What areas will you need support and training in?' If you know you've got a weakness in respect of this particular job, you might as well admit it. There's no point in getting a job under false pretences - you'll only be found out. But there's no harming in saying 'Well, I can't claim to be an expert in ion-chromatography Mr Brown, but I'm very keen to learn, and I'm quite prepared to study in my own time to improve. Tell me, what training does your company provide?')
- What else would you like to know? (An ideal opportunity to 'close' - see below)

Be prepared to answer 'objections'

If the manager says something negative, try to overcome the objection.

Example: 'I don't think you'll be suitable because you have no ion-chromatography experience!'

Answer: 'This is true Mr. Brown, but I'm very familiar with other forms of chromatography, and I'm a very quick learner. I didn't know anything about gas-

chromatography when I started with my current company, and now I'm regarded as an expert. If I was prepared to use my own time to study, would you be prepared to train me?'

If it's crucial that Mr Brown has to hire a ready-made expert, you probably aren't going to get the job. But you could try to keep the door open by saying 'Well, if you don't find what you're looking for Mr Brown, please call me as I'd be really keen to join your company'.

Having tried your best to overcome the objections, always ask a question, in order to throw the ball back in the other person's court.

Closing the telephone interview

Part of the purpose of the telephone interview (from the hiring manager's perspective) is to find out how keen you are, and (especially in the case of sales jobs) whether you have natural closing ability.

As soon as it seems appropriate during the conversation, ask for a date to meet for a face-to-face interview. Say something like 'Well, this certainly sounds like just the job I'm looking for Mr. Brown. I'm sure I can contribute a lot to your company. I'd really like to visit you to show you what I can do for you. When can you meet me?'

You may have to be content with the response 'I'll call you', but at least you can ask 'When am I likely to hear from you?'. If the manager hedges, decide upon a reasonable time scale, and suggest 'Well, I'm very keen to know if I've got a chance with you Mr. Brown, so if I haven't heard from you by next Friday, would you mind if I call you then to find out?'

This approach is particularly important if you are applying to sales jobs, as you are expected to demonstrate your natural salesmanship. But even in the case of other jobs, most people will appreciate your keenness and enthusiasm. If they don't, and you lose the job on account of being 'too pushy' (most unlikely) well, is it the sort of job you wanted anyway?

If you are invited for a face-to-face interview, thank the manager, and ask for details:

- When?
- Where?
- With whom?
- What should you take to the interview?
- What will the procedure be?
- Will they be able to make a decision after the next interview? If not, what will happen after that?
- How many people are you up against?
- What is the most important thing the company is looking for?

Don't worry if you don't feel able to ask all these questions. The first three questions are the most important obviously.

If your telephone interview has been arranged by an agent/recruitment consultant, telephone them immediately to let them know the outcome. They should be able to find out the answers to the other questions, on your behalf.

Remember, the most important things that all employers are looking for, in any circumstance is energy, enthusiasm and 100% commitment to the job.





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Ten Tips to improve your **Writing Skills**

by Jim Schakenbach

Today it seems like everyone is writing something - emails, blogs, tweets, you name it. Unfortunately, the Internet encourages no thought to go unpublished and so while the amount of content has increased exponentially, the quality of it has not.

As a result, our ability to communicate effectively has been dramatically affected. Never in history has so much been written and so little actually said. Social media certainly hasn't helped. Twitter, for example, deliberately handicaps our ability to communicate well by limiting messages to just 140 characters. Texting is helping create a nation of illiterates who only know how to "write" in a curious shorthand devoid of vowels.

If you write (and these days who doesn't?), here are ten tips that can immediately help you improve your writing so you can communicate with clarity, influence your peers (and hopefully your boss), and reduce your stress when it's time to put words on digital paper:

1 Use simple sentences

Run-on sentences and random thoughts strung together quickly



Good writing is like golf - many people claim to be good at it, few really are

handicap your writing and can create confusion resulting in inaction. Here's an example of two emails saying the same thing:

"In response to today's budgetary meeting outlining goals and actionable items relevant to our marketing strategy draft proposal pursuant to management's strategic business program, please review and assess your department's 1Q budgetary requirements going forward and provide me with your bottomline request ASAP today, before COBD."

"I need your first quarter marketing budget by 5pm today." Which one of these messages do you think will get a faster response?

2 Pay attention to punctuation

Email and texting have helped foster a general disregard for punctuation these days and as a consequence people use it poorly or not at all, which can cause unintended confusion. Don't believe me? Here's the same sentence with two very different meanings:

"My partner arrived dead, last to the meeting."

"My partner arrived dead last to the meeting."

Punctuation is your friend. Use it well.

3 Use plain language

Think in terms of "could my mother understand this?" when you sit down to write something. This will work wonders on a business plan, a marketing strategy report, even everyday e-mails. Purge your writing of the trendy and the corporate and use, as my old journalism professor used to say, a nickel word instead of a twenty-five-center. Those of you who have been in and around the corporate world for any length of time know exactly what I am

talking about. Fuzzy, convoluted industry weardspeak like "authoring solutions-based metrics". Avoid confusing industry buzzwords whenever possible. If your writing causes your readers to lunge for a glossary, think hard about a better way to say it. And if you've used words such as "implementation", "impacting", and "facilitate" within the last thirty days I have two words for you: STOP IT.

4 Use an active voice

This simple tip is a great way to quickly punch up your writing. Instead of using the dreary passive voice, use the livelier active voice. Notice the difference in this example:

Passive: The car was driven by me.

Active: I drove the car.

5 Tell the whole story

Everything you write should have a beginning and an end with everything else following logically between. It sounds simple, but you'd be amazed at how many people violate this simple rule. We've all received those disjointed emails where it seems as if you're missing a chunk of the message, leaving you saying "huh?" Everything you write should be able to stand alone. Don't take for granted that the reader knows what you're talking about. Start at the beginning and end at the end.

6 Put everything in context

If you're writing a proposal, a report, a white paper, a piece of sales literature, or just a simple request for something, put it in context. Show why it's important, what it means to the reader, what the result will be. Context adds value to what you write.

7 Be conversational

Does your writing often sound stilted or forced? That's probably

because you're trying too hard. Relax. Write the way you speak. That doesn't mean be sloppy or slangy, it simply means you should be more concerned with saying it clearly than saying it "properly."

8 Write first, edit later

Don't try to make your writing perfect from the start. If you agonize over every word, you'll never finish. You can always go back later and change things. Get your ideas down first, then go back and edit. You'll be amazed at how much quicker and easier that is, once the actual writing is out of the way. And you may be surprised at how little you change because you weren't second-guessing yourself while you were writing.

9 Proof-read. Then proof-read again

We all make mistakes. But proofreading gives you a chance to fix them before they see the light of day. Never trust computer spellchecking - it's amazing how many weighs their are two spell things.

10 Re-read

Communications travel at the speed of light these days. So many people hit "send" without rereading what they've written. Resist the urge. Go get a cup of coffee, then come back and read what you've just written. A breath of fresh air may give you fresh insight into what you were trying to say. Perhaps the perfect phrase that was eluding you will pop up. Maybe a better, simpler way to present the idea will come to you. A tiny bit of procrastination can be a good thing.

If you use these ten simple tips, you'll be well on your way to clear, concise, and compelling writing.