

PA ENTERPRISE

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

January 2013



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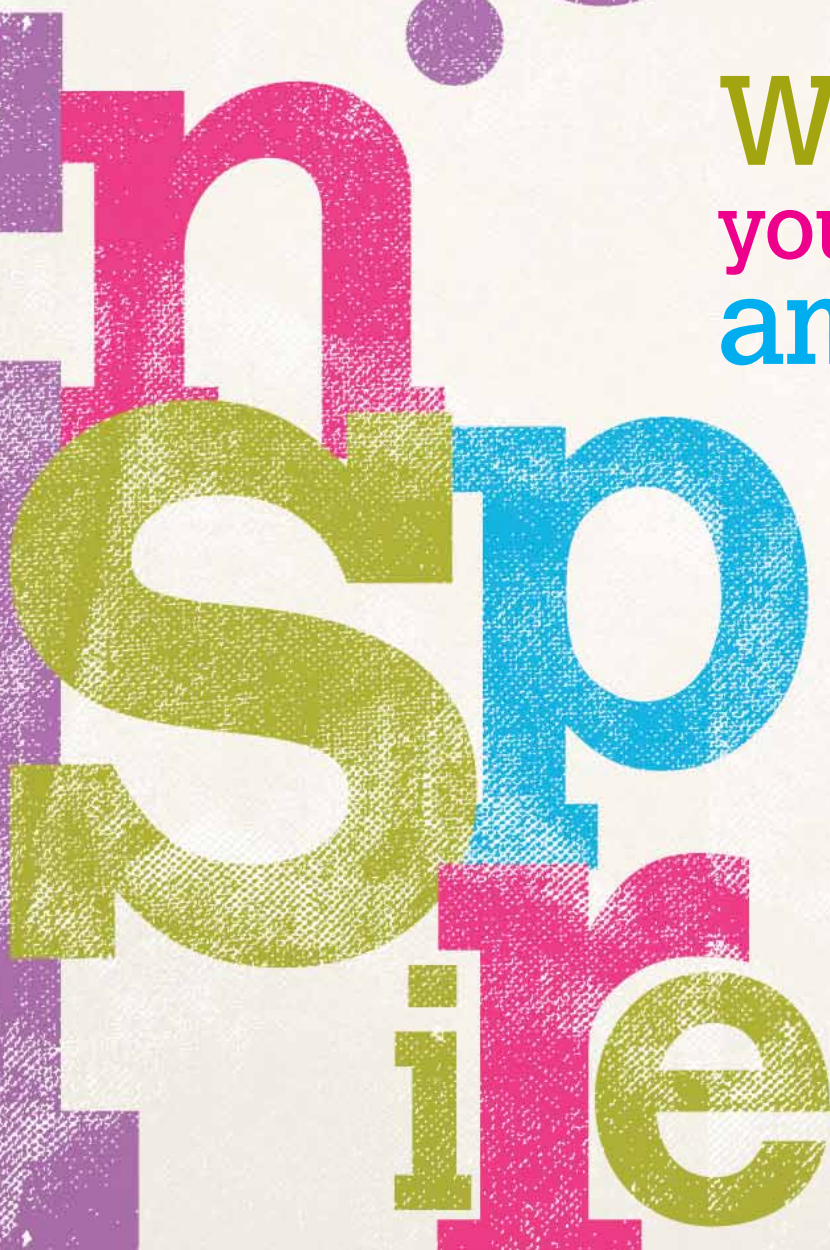
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PA Enterprise is sent to DeskDemon UK e-newsletter, audited by ABCe (5th/6th July 2007) with a net distribution of 70,581 email addresses.

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PA ENTERPRISE MAGAZINE

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Premier Inn reveals majority of Brits suffer from sleepless nights

Premier Inn has revealed Britain is gripped by an insomnia epidemic, with a staggering 91% of people suffering from sleepless nights. The vast majority of Brits are unable to sleep soundly through the night, with more than a third of adults (35%) saying they wake up three times or more.

Research commissioned by Premier Inn, questioned 2,000 adults and discovered that a quarter of the nation admits that fatigue and tiredness affects their productivity, concentration and ability to do their job. With one in three people citing worrying as the biggest cause of their restlessness.

The survey, which looked into the main causes of sleeplessness, found that a quarter of adults (26%) across the country are regularly woken by a partner's snoring. Other causes for sleepless nights identified are pets waking their owners up in the night (8%), a bad dream (20%) and almost one in ten (9%) claiming it's their own snoring keeping them up.

Breaking it down regionally, Coventry is home to Britain's biggest snorers with 40% of adults woken in the night by their partner. Liverpool is the noisy neighbour hotspot with 17% complaining that rowdy residents wake them. But the sleepless capital of Britain is Chelmsford, with a staggering 96% of residents plagued by a constant lack of sleep and a third of the town (31%) saying tiredness leaves them grumpy the next day.



Fast and versatile: the new generation Fujitsu scanner

The new ScanSnap iX500 offers quick and easy professional document capturing for all devices in the corporate or home office.

- Scan documents easily, directly to tablets and smartphones
- Built-in powerful GI processor for enhanced productivity, high quality images and fast operation
- "Scan-to-Everywhere": integrate third-party applications into the Quick Menu
- Runs with Windows, Mac OS, iOS and Android

ScanSnap iX500 innovations include:

It comes equipped with a fast GI processor providing automated in-scanner image optimisation that delivers clear, high-quality images at high scanning speed of 25 A4 pages per minute, capturing both sides simultaneously (duplex).

It supports direct Wi-Fi connection to mobile devices.

The CardMinder business card software for PC or Mac generates contact data directly for address books or CRM systems.

The scanner automatically recognises business cards and recommends the appropriate application in the Quick Menu.

The Quick Menu can be configured to display all or just the most commonly used applications.



Get the New Year off to a healthy start: Wild Juicery launches in Neal's Yard

Wild Juicery is a high-vibe "living food" tonic centre, offering cold-pressed juices, nutrient rich smoothies and snacks.

Londoners will now be able to get more than their five a day as well as a healthy dose of immunity boosting vitamins and minerals from the newly opened Wild Juicery, a new project from Wild Food Cafe & Neal's Yard Remedies.

The Juicery menu, which is available for Eat In and Takeaway, is divided into three sections– **JUICY**, which features organic cold pressed juices, such as Electrified (a mix of apple, celery, cucumber, kale, fresh coconut water, lime, fresh aloe vera and Wild Juicery green powder), **SMOOTH**, which features smoothies such as White Zen (a blend of raw almond milk, dates, cold brewed coffee, fresh coconut, fresh Irish moss, vanilla and cardamom) **POTENT**, a synergy of pressed juices, tonics teas & NYR herbal tinctures, like the Focused (a mix of apple & wild blueberry, Rosehip & Nettle Tea with Hawthorn Tincture & Wild-crafted Raw Honey) and **HOT**, which features hot drinks such as Superfood Hot Chocolate, Reishi & Chaga Mushroom Tea and coffee from Monmouth Coffee.

Prices vary from £3.20 for a small Vibrant juice (which contains apple, celery, cucumber, spinach, parsley, lemon and ginger) to £6.80 for a large Green Incredible smoothie (which contains apple, celery, lemon, banana, kale, fresh coconut, fresh aloe vera, fresh Irish moss and Wild Juicery green powder).

Londoners resolve to prioritise socialising over saving in 2013

A survey by CitySocialising.com, the UK's leading online to offline social network, has revealed that Londoners are set to put their financial woes on the back burner as they resolve to make the most of their spare time in 2013.

For the first time since conducting the same survey back in 2010 it seems getting finances in order and saving money have dropped down on Londoners' priorities - creeping to the bottom of the list with just 16% and 31% respectively.

When asked to name their top resolutions for this coming year, learning, and relationship-oriented goals took precedence over financial ones, with respondents resolving to learn something new (64%), find love (46%) and meet new people (36%) at the top of the list for 2013.

Conflict coaching – helping UK businesses to reduce the burden of conflict

The cost of conflict runs at an estimated annual £33 billion to UK business, according to the Confederation of British Industry, taking up 20% of leadership time and resulting in 370 million days lost.

The UK's leading provider of workplace dispute resolution services, The TCM Group, has launched a conflict coaching service to help managers and leaders perform better at times of conflict and change. TCM's FAIR Framework™ is designed to be a solution-focused process which promotes empowerment, reflection and a focus on the future.

Conflict coaching is a highly effective tool for:

- Preventing and resolving workplace and team disputes
- Addressing difficult or problem behaviours in the workplace
- Managing change and responding to the aftermath from change or transformation processes
- Developing resilience and confidence in managers and leaders where they are required to handle difficult situations at work

How does conflict coaching work?

Conflict coaching is a collaborative relationship between the coach and coachee. It tends to involve a series of one hour meetings over a period of several weeks. It can always be adapted to meet

local needs and circumstances. The coach works with their coachee to reflect on how they act, interact and react at times of conflict or change. The coach helps the coachee to explore behaviours which will enable them to change or manage how they engage with others.

Who benefits from conflict coaching?

- **Managers and leaders who are required to handle conflicts and change**
- **Disputing parties – as an alternative to mediation where parties are resistant to mediate**
- **Employees who have been affected by conflict or change in the workplace**
- **Employees who wish to adapt how they react and engage with others**
- **Human Resources employees**



To launch the new service TCM hosted a Christmas event for customers and partners at the UK Mediation Academy in central London. The event featured a demonstration of how conflict coaching works and used the festive example of Cinderella to show its transformative process. The demonstration was powerful and had an incredible impact on all attendees.

Experienced coach and mediator, Irene Grindell, who led the demonstration commented, 'The beauty of conflict coaching

is that it can be used before mediation, during, after or in place of it. Conflict coaching is highly empowering for those being coached as well as allowing sustainable changes in attitudes and behaviour. These changes have a positive knock-on effect on colleagues and teams. Conflict coaching offers a significant benefit to the individuals concerned and the business – it's a win-win outcome.'

To find out more about The UK Conflict Coaching Service, call 0800 294 9787 or email info@thetcmgroup.com.

Visit the TCM website <http://www.thetcmgroup.com/services/coaching-and-mentoring> for more information.

Looking good for the New Year

All of those mince pies are bound to have taken their toll, so make sure that you put a spring into your step with these products. They will trim inches from your waistline, banish your bingo wings, and more!

Spin Gym

(available at www.JMLdirect.com for £29.99)

If you want to banish your bingo wings and tone your arms, shoulders, chest and back then you might like to try the Spin Gym. It's the latest fitness gadget to come from the US and means you can carry out 28 different exercises. Rather like a horizontal yo-yo, the weight spins as you pull the strings. And it's small and can be easily stored away.



Belvia Shapewear

(available from Boots from £14.99)

These have been carefully designed so that you can eat as many mince pies as possible. They can be used by women of all shapes and sizes and trim inches instantly. It makes your body look slimmer and feel firmer, whatever your age. Available in a body suit, top and bottom.



JML Iron Gym

(available from Amazon at £16.96)

Hanging this exercise bar above your doorway means you can tone up. It can also be used for floor exercises. It takes seconds to install and uses leverage to hold against the doorframe. It means you don't have to use screws or damage your doorway. It lets you perform pull-ups and chin-ups, with three grip positions for working the inner and outer back. It can support up to twenty stone.



Walk Maxx

(available from www.JMLdirect.com for £39.99)

It's the training shoe that won't give your wallet a work-out. Walk Maxx trainers are designed with four layers which mimic the actions of walking barefoot. This results in a comfortable shoe that reduces pressure on critical joints and helps tone and strengthen legs and bums. It increases muscle activity by up to 30%.



Top ten UK food trends for 2013

My Secret Kitchen is the UK's first food and drink tasting company. The team has spent many years travelling the world and presenting food trends to major food manufactures. They now spend their time launching unusual and trend setting foods through home tasting events throughout the UK.

Here they give their fascinating insight into the up and coming food and drink trends for the year ahead.

1. Not just Chilli

Increased heat has been happening over the last few years in the UK but increasing curiosity on the differences between types of chilli will mean more named varieties coming into fashion. It's already happening with chipotle but look out for more dishes naming the chillies such as Pasilla, Poblano, Guajillo and Ancho.



2. Popcorn to explode

More companies are experimenting with some wonderful variations of flavours to move popcorn



into a real gourmet treat. Blue cheese and Walnut, Strawberry cheesecake and Madras are already out there and will be more mainstream through the year. And they're good! How about getting that popcorn maker out from the back of the cupboard and do some seasoning sprinkling yourself?

3. Free (from)

Awareness of allergies has been ever increasing but the quality of the foods now being offered as "free from" is right up there. We expect to see these foods moving to the mainstream aisles rather than the specialist niche area they currently hold and improving even further.

4. Creative cocktails

The big new trends in bars across the pond are incredibly creative cocktails using some quite bizarre ingredients such as smoked ice cubes, cardamom syrups and yuzu bitters. We don't think these will be coming into the UK home too soon yet but the idea of blending certain alcohols with new and varied syrups is not in the too distant future.

5. Fair game

We predicted an increase in foraged ingredients for 2012 and we were right on this. The next step is an increase in popularity in local meats; so you rabbits, pheasants and deer reading this – start running...

6. Be Brazilliant

We will be awash with all things Brazil as we gear up for the world cup and the Olympics over the next few years, and why not? Brazil has a wealth of wonderful dishes such as Feijoada and Moqueca and is the home of the Caipirinha cocktail. Watch these influences infiltrate our plates this year.

7. Naturally Novel

Here in the UK we're still looking for the more unusual ingredients we can get from nature and we're looking for something good for you as well. We're going to stick our necks out and go for two



that may well be hitting our stores this year - purple tea is high in anthocyanin and an excellent source of antioxidant whilst bee pollen is known as "the fountain of youth" and is high in protein.

8. Pickling

Many of you I'm sure were watching Masterchef the professionals before Christmas and the amount of pickling going on was very interesting to see. Will this see a rise in another way of getting a new flavour from some common ingredients? (As long as Sauerkraut is bypassed we're happy.)

9. Sweet 'n' Savoury

So common to see in the USA and becoming more popular here too, unusual combinations challenging your taste buds – we're still not sure about chocolate and bacon but brie and fig, salted caramel, pretzels and chocolate – bring it on!

10. Hot but not

Heat comes from chilis right? But there's more out there that will give you a tasty burn – Varieties of pepper like Telecherry, an increase in the use of Szechuan (a delightful numbing sensation!) will become more prevalent in 2013.





Top 10 New Year's Resolutions for 2013

By Jacob Tyree

Quit Smoking

Yes, every year this is on the list, and everybody is in the same boat on this one. We try the nicotine gum, the nicotine patch, or one of these cool new electric cigarettes that you can smoke inside and when everyone thinks it's real they look at you as if you are criminal. But every year, again and again, we fail. Why? Maybe the cigarette box pictures aren't disturbing enough - actually, no, they are actually horrible. But maybe next year, will be the last time, and you will quit. And if you succeed, and it is a big "IF"... you will find yourself with a lot of free time and actually a lot more money!

Quit Drinking

You must have seen this one coming, especially after you stacked up for the Christmas party! But remember when you were a kid, when you tried this "grown up's" drink for the first time and hated it? But then you started to get into it, and now, even though alcohol does make your friends better looking, your liver hates you. That should really be enough to make you quit, because your liver has a good point. You don't necessarily need to stop all alcohol intake, but limiting it at

least to something that you can handle is a good start. Plus, now is the best time to start - since they are putting a 40 pence per unit price increase.

Finally Get Organised

Now if you don't have a phobia of change then this one is rather easy. Sorting out the boot of your car could be a start. When you finally start, you may realise that it really can be like doing a treasure hunt - you never know what you could find - possibly even a 10 pound note.

Learn Something New

We do need to use our brain more. Did you know that brain is 75% water, weighing a total of around 3lbs and 60% of it is fat. So you really do need to take it for a run once in a while or it will become obese and lazy. See how easy it is? You already learned something new, so let's move on.

Get Out Of Debt

By the way things are looking at the moment, this might take a while. We pay it off every month, but at the end the sum somehow gets bigger? This must be one of the world's unsolved mysteries. But we all know that the sooner we pay it off the

smaller we have to pay. So start now - don't put it off any longer

Get A New Job

If you earn 6-digits then you are an exception. But actually, are you? It has always been about money, but really it's all about 'time' or rather the lack of it. If you are stuck in your job more hours than you can count then you might need to slow down and looking at your options, no matter what your income might be - you can't buy time, not yet. Having a balance between work and family/free time will definitely make you happier. And actually times have changed and it is very normal to change jobs once in a while. A life career is very rare. Get the best job for 2013, and then a better one for 2014.

Start A New Hobby

Apart from what we think, believe it or not, but actually laying on a sofa and watching TV is not a hobby. So do something beneficial that you can enjoy. This doesn't necessarily have to be anything very challenging or physical, but it must be keeping you busy with something that you actually enjoy. And this would be great if you could get your family members or friends involved.



Start A Business

At heart, we are all born businessmen/women. And those who followed the heart sure earn more than the rest, and have more free time. So what are you waiting for? Got a story? Write a book. Got an Idea? Make a product. Have internet? Start business online, you could even just sell all your rubbish on eBay. It could be something that is just running along-side your day-to-day job. I don't think anyone would dismiss extra income; you could even have a chance to make it big, and before you know it you could be on a Caribbean islands watching "Pirates of the Caribbean" while sipping some freshly made juice!

Get Healthier

We are always disappointed with our shape - especially with that beer or mince pie belly we grew over Christmas. And the media is not letting us rest one bit with all this dangerous cholesterol and fats; every hour they tell us yet another thing that causes cancer, and yet we still eat that innocent chocolate, and drink some refreshing energy drink. But maybe this year we should really start taking more care of ourselves, at least until next Christmas where we can spoil ourselves yet again.

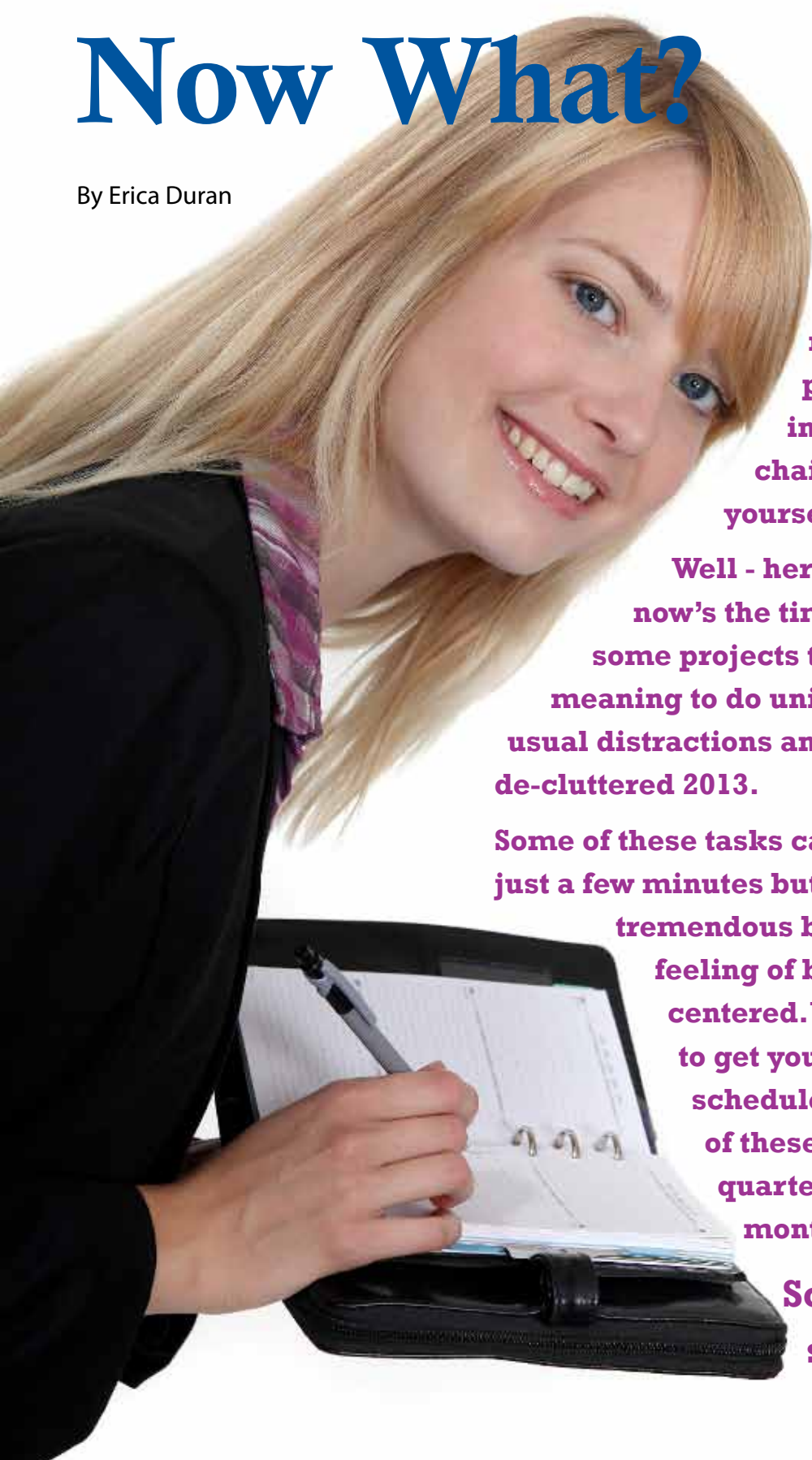
Spend More Time With Family

Now it's getting serious. We all know that family is priceless. Well, it is definitely one of the things you should always be proud of and, obviously, Investing time in your family is gold. So why is it that we choose work and friends over them? Maybe we don't appreciate their true value, or maybe we like to be independent, or maybe we just need someone to make a New Years resolution list and put Family at Number 1. So now you have no excuse. Make this year your best year yet.

Article Source: http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Jacob_Tyree

New Year! Now What?

By Erica Duran



After all the cheer, hustle, and bustle is over you may find yourself pausing, sinking into your favourite chair, and asking yourself “Now what?”

Well - here’s the answer: now’s the time to tackle some projects that you’ve been meaning to do uninterrupted by the usual distractions and get ready for a de-cluttered 2013.

Some of these tasks can be tackled in just a few minutes but will give you a tremendous boost of energy and feeling of being in control and centered. You may even want to get yourself on a regular schedule of doing some of these projects every quarter or every six months.

So let’s get started!



Update All of Your Online Profiles

Make sure your contact information is correct and the profile still “fits” your personality and what you want to project about yourself. You may even want to create a list of all the sites, user names and passwords to make this task easier to do next time. While you are there updating your profile, you may want to turn off emails coming from your social media sites. What a distraction! Do you really need to know every time someone starts following you on Twitter?

Delete, Delete, Delete!

There are so many things you can delete to make your planner, phone, computer, cupboards and cabinets less cluttered. Here are a few suggestions:

- Old apps you no longer use
- Old contacts you will never call again or that you can find the info elsewhere
- Junk on your computer desktop
- Old browser bookmarks
- Old songs or podcasts you never listen to
- Paper and electronic files
- Hundreds (maybe thousands) of unimportant or duplicate photos

- Magazine, trade journal, newsletter subscriptions
- The useless stuff in your junk drawer
- Clothing that doesn’t fit the “you” right now (physically and emotionally)
- And, the biggest one of all emails! You may even want to create a new email address and only give it to those who you really want to hear from. Let your old email address go to your assistant or virtual assistant to monitor for important straggler emails.

Evaluate Your Marketing

Look at everything you did for your sales and marketing last

year. You will probably find that 80% of your sales came from 20% of your marketing efforts. Be ruthless! Delete all activity that isn't bringing in the cash and focus more on the marketing activities that take less effort and bring in the most revenue.

Evaluate How You Are Spending Your Time

Take a look at your social and networking meetings of the past. Decide if there was enough return on investment to continue devoting time to these meetings next year. Or, look for new gatherings that match your target market or lifestyle a little closer. Are some so-called friends or colleagues draining your energy? Make a conscious plan on how you are going to eliminate them or how you can avoid them next year.

Make All Your Routine Appointments For the Entire Year

Why write "make hair appointment" twelve times in your planner when you can make one phone call at the beginning of the year and make them all. You know you need to go every 4-6 weeks to look professional and not stress about your roots showing! You can use this same strategy for any reoccurring appointment such as routine home maintenance, doctor and dentist visits, hair, nails, massage, housecleaning, etc.

Automate, Delegate or Delete Tasks

What tasks on those lists could have been deleted? Was it really necessary to file all your utility bills even though they are all online? Did you spend a lot of time on a website when one page could have done the job?

What tasks could have been done by someone else? Errands, shopping, cleaning, appointment setting, research, shipping, etc. You will be surprised how much time these tasks actually take - start keeping track. These tasks do not require your "gift" or "genius" work - someone else can do them for a very small investment in compared to the time it takes away from what is important to you. And, the best part is you are giving someone else a job they need!

What tasks can be automated? Take an hour or so now to set up a system so this year you can alleviate these from your schedule. Examples could be tasks like social media posts, bill paying, email auto-responders, shopping, password management, and sending out cards to clients.

Evaluate Your Accounts

The end of the year is a great time to review all of your accounts. Do your investments need rebalancing? Can you get lower insurance rates now that you work from home and don't commute? Is your will and/or trust up to date? Some financial

agents and advisors are not very busy this time of year so you'll be at the top of their to-do list and get elevated service.

Order Planners and/or Refills

If you feel like you are always busy and not getting ahead it may be time for you to get some coaching on using your planner to the fullest extent.

If you don't get some coaching on how to use your planner and other productivity tools, they often become clutter themselves!

Ask yourself "How are things ever going to get better?"

Stop being such an over-achiever for just a few days! Take your dog to the park, watch old movies, cook something from scratch, finally read that trashy novel everyone is talking about, the possibilities are endless.

Have a great and well organised year!

Erica Duran is a Productivity Expert and Certified Professional Organizer (CPO®). At Erica Duran International, she provides both virtual and in-person coaching around the globe through her programs, courses, and products. Erica mostly attracts women entrepreneurs and small business owners who want results fast! She helps them to clear the clutter in their lives at ALL levels, gets them out of just being "busy" and "overwhelmed" and into a calm, flowing, profitable and balanced lifestyle.

Say Hello to a PA...

Meet Razia Wilson



Tell us about the company you work for - company: size, sector, location.	I currently work for NHS North of England (what was once known as Strategic Health Authority) for Yorkshire and the Humber Region.
What is your role and who do you work for?	I work as an administrator for the Strategic Workforce Planning Team providing support to the Manager, the team and I also support the Strategic HR Advisor
How did you get this position?	I applied for the post through NHS jobs – a fixed term contract until March 2013.
Has the recession had an impact on your role/your company?	Yes absolutely. The NHS as we all know it is undergoing changes with huge spending cuts and recruitment has been frozen, all contracts issued have been temporary
What is the best thing about your job?	Variation, being the point of contact, being part of a world class health care provider.
What do you think makes a good boss?	Approachable, a good listener and willing to develop his / her team.

<p>What are the three most important skills you use at work?</p>	<p>Communication – being able to communicate with different people at different levels, with a professional manner.</p> <p>Computer skills – having a good knowledge of software. In my current role we use Microsoft-Software and other computer systems unique to the NHS.</p> <p>Being friendly and professional – having good working relationship with my team, my peers and all those I work with.</p>
<p>What does a 'typical' day look like for you?</p>	<p>Responding to emails which then lead to various other tasks; organising my line manager's schedule a week in advance and checking daily for any last minute changes. Coordinating meetings, taking minutes.</p> <p>Each day normally brings its own issues, so being able to think on my feet helps.</p>
<p>What was the biggest challenge you have faced and how did you tackle it?</p>	<p>Coordinating a conference for over 200 people for the very first time, 5 years ago. I read event management books every night, devised a check list and used it. It was the most stimulating and demanding task I had taken on, and that was just the beginning, I had 11 more to organise for the duration of the project.</p> <p>I am quite comfortable in organising events and enjoy it.</p>
<p>How have you got to where you are today in your career?</p>	<p>Through perseverance and determination, being able to learn from every role I have taken, listening and adapting to my environment.</p>
<p>Do you have any career plans for the future and what are they?</p>	<p>Hopefully to secure a permanent role and train in Project Management.</p>
<p>What are you doing to make sure they happen? What new skills will you need to learn?</p>	<p>I am constantly on the lookout for permanent roles, continuously update my skills, and attend workshops, conferences for PAs keeping my skills up to date and networking with fellow professionals.</p> <p>Quite a few options with PM training, I am hoping my employers will invest in me and pay for a Prince II course.</p>

<p>What one piece of advice would you give to someone beginning their PA career?</p>	<p>Get the basic skills such as typing, minute- taking and soft skills, these go a long way and sets you apart from the rest. A number of PA courses are available these days and they cover most skills required.</p> <p>My other advice is be an all-rounder able to take on tasks handed over be it finances, editing and avoid sulking when asked to do menial tasks such as making tea / coffee for a meeting, taking on a photocopy task, something I have come across quite often when a young PA / Admin Assistant is asked to do and they moan or huff about; in my opinion and experience, these are all learning curves and an evaluation of your abilities. And what's the harm in making tea for someone else!</p>
<p>If you were giving career advice to students how would you sell being a PA?</p>	<p>Being a PA is fantastic in the sense that you are the "right-hand" of an important busy person making their life less stressful and easier by organising their diary well in advance, having documents ready for meetings, sometimes finding out what their actions from previous meetings were and making sure they were addressed before the next meeting. Anticipating tasks, situations etc., as a PA you have to be well organised and knowledgeable, you have to think well in advance and have a good grasp of managing time for yourself and that of your boss.</p> <p>You get to know a lot about an Organisation, being the pivot and first point of contact for the person you work for, managing their diary, organising events etc., attending meetings etc.. Depending on the field you get into, you get the perks, say for example if working for a celebrity you get to travel with them, probably wine and dine, get exclusive tickets...</p> <p>All the glitz and glamour bring its own responsibilities some of the fundamentals are being trust-worthy, honest and adaptable.</p>
<p>What would you look for in a PA?</p>	<p>Someone with basic secretarial skills, no use having a PA who would want training on how to use Word or Excel, or one who types slower than me! Someone with a good personality, easy to get along with and adaptable.</p>

One PA was asked to clean out her boss's fish tank when he was on holiday! Tell us about a humorous event/moment at work - maybe you've been asked to do a strange task?	The strangest for me has been to collect laundry from the Dry Cleaners, pick up and serve lunch but nothing out of the ordinary for me really - luckily!
One thing you would change if you were Prime Minister?	Get in touch with all the world leaders and tackle Poverty. I would also declare a national Administrator's Day.
What is your best holiday memory?	Years back in my twenties! Camping with friends in the Masai Mara, for a week with basic camping gear, setting up bon-fire, sharing stories and listening to the wildlife at night and getting woken up by elephants roar in the wee hours of the morning and watching a sun rise with a hot cup of tea, the most amazing experience.
If you could spend a year on a remote island with any four people (living or not) who would they be and why?	Barrack Obama – he is an inspiration Charlie Chaplin – for his sense of humour Anastasia – for her amazing voice and an icon Edward Michael "Bear Grylls" for his survival skills and let's face it, he is a hunk so is Obama!
If you were invisible for the day - where would you go and what would you do?	I would ride a bicycle down a busy street and watch people's reaction!
Who is the person who has influenced you most in your life and why?	My mum – she always brought us up to work hard, and never give up. She encouraged us to educate ourselves as much as we could –especially when girls were not necessarily encouraged to gain more than basic education.
What is your proudest moment?	Being a mum – nothing beats that.

**If you would like to take part
in this feature, please email
editor@deskdemo.com - we
look forward to hearing from you.**

20 Ways to GROW your business in 2013

Stephen Archer, Business Analyst and Director of Spring Partnerships a business consultancy specialising in leadership development shares his tips on how to grow business in 2013



Ignore all accepted wisdoms and assumptions about your business, the market, competitors and customers. Accepting the status quo, the paradigms and 'the way things are done around here' is the start of the rot that kills mature companies. Don't be a casualty. Don't be like Woolworths.

Talk to every customer you can; find out what they would like from you in service and products.

Only a deep understanding of their needs and expectations will allow you to provide true value and traction with customers. Don't assume that you know – there will always be a significant surprise.

Dig into service levels of your business and add 25% to the quality and standards given.

That's always assuming that you are measuring standards today of course. If not start now, define the levels now and the aspired to levels with firm metrics. Change and growth will follow.

Be your own customer – 'mystery shop' yourself to understand how the customer is treated and how that can be improved.

Inwardness is generally lethal for a business but this type of inwardness is vital. To find out how you actually respond to customers will be an eye opener – unless you don't care ...I guarantee that you will make changes as a result of doing this.

Understand at how customers want to trade with you. Frequently? By phone? Online?

In today's world this is a shifting picture, more and more want to go online for their supplies – in the business and consumer world. But be careful of going headlong down this path because online can mean 'dead – line' to the customer who feels disembodied and disconnected by the internet. Make other forms of contact, (mail and phone) easy to access.

Increase the value of what you offer by adding zero cost elements to the service given.

Yes, they DO exist. Adding value will come quite naturally from better understanding the customers' needs. But innovation in service can be quite inexpensive or free. It's about how you do things as much as what you do.

Look at how you can increase online business. Online can be a great way to service smaller customers who are more expensive to serve through conventional channels and service methods. In turn this can allow you to serve customers who would not approach you because they see themselves as small buyers. Medium to large companies are growing by

adding small customer service models – make this the mainstay of your business if you are an SME.

Join LinkedIn. This is free but gives you great connections in your industry and puts you in a peer community – this in turn helps you attract talent and communicate innovation to those looking into the industry from the outside.

Put yourself on Facebook and maybe even Tweet! This is not as odd as it may sound. These media are growing fast for business and allowing new audiences to access the stories from even quite small businesses. These media allow businesses to punch above their weight and communicate brand values in an instant manner.

Maximise the team's customer focus – top to bottom of the organisation, inside out.

Most businesses suffer from a degree of customer myopia, or are blinkered to customers and painfully few businesses even have marketing people visiting customers. How can such behaviour have become the norm. Bring customers into your business and take your people out to meet them. It's amazing

what a difference it will make.

Train everyone in commercial excellence – maximum sales/quality/profit delivery. This is about doing the right thing for the customers and the business at the same time. So many view the two as mutually exclusive – madness! Being commercially proficient and profitable is all about getting everything right for all stakeholders – internal and external.

Examine very closely what your competitors do to perform well. Sounds obvious but remember the Chinese proverb about be close to your friends but closer to your enemies...Learn from your competitors and you can stay ahead of the game.

Examine why competitors fail – there are as many lessons in failure as there are in success.

Most rejoice in the slips of competitors but the lessons to be learned are far more important. It's possible that their failure is a foretaste of a risk relating to your business. Whatever the truth – make sure that the lessons are learned and applied – fast.

Steal ideas from other industries. The world is full of gold nuggets of ideas and most are ignored because people do not see the relevance to their

own business, they think that what Starbucks/Mars/Carphone Warehouse do is not relevant. It is and it's instructive and free education too. Open your eyes and broaden your horizon.

Examine how to retain existing customers better. What is the churn rate? Why is the rate as it is? Is it a market norm if so what can be done to change this? What would make customers more willing to be loyal? Keeping customers is always cheaper than finding new ones.

Look at lapsed customers and how to recover them. Look at lapsed customers and how to recover them. There is always a customer churn rate but don't accept that customers cannot be brought back. They can and the cost of sales to make this happen can be very low.

Create an internal demand for innovation ideas. The growing company is a restless one. Create a culture of pushing each other to perform, to evolve and develop. Everyone in a company should see themselves as supplier and customer to others. If done without blame then this is a really healthy dynamic and will create innovation.

Give your team the freedom to create a winning culture To lead is to empower. It's the whole team that will make it happen. Let them use their expertise and insight to the full and let them create and drive improvements. Only the free culture with supportive leadership will enable change and growth.

Lead with a culture of accountability. People have roles, job descriptions and even a place in an organisation where they feel at home. They also have responsibility but with accountability there will never be the full delivery and ownership of every step that is needed to grow a business. There is some courage needed – but nothing unnatural.

Go to point 1 and go round again and again...



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PA Hotel Review

The Park Plaza Victoria

239 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EQ
www.parkplaza.com
Reservations: 0844 415 6752

Reviewed By:
Alison Boler, PA Legal
& Business Affairs ITV
Network

After a hectic week at work, I took the short bus ride from my Southbank office on a Friday evening to the Park Plaza Hotel at Victoria. The hotel is situated in a great position; only two minutes walk to Victoria Station with easy access to the Gatwick Express, overland trains, the tube and a constant stream of eager black cabs outside the hotel.

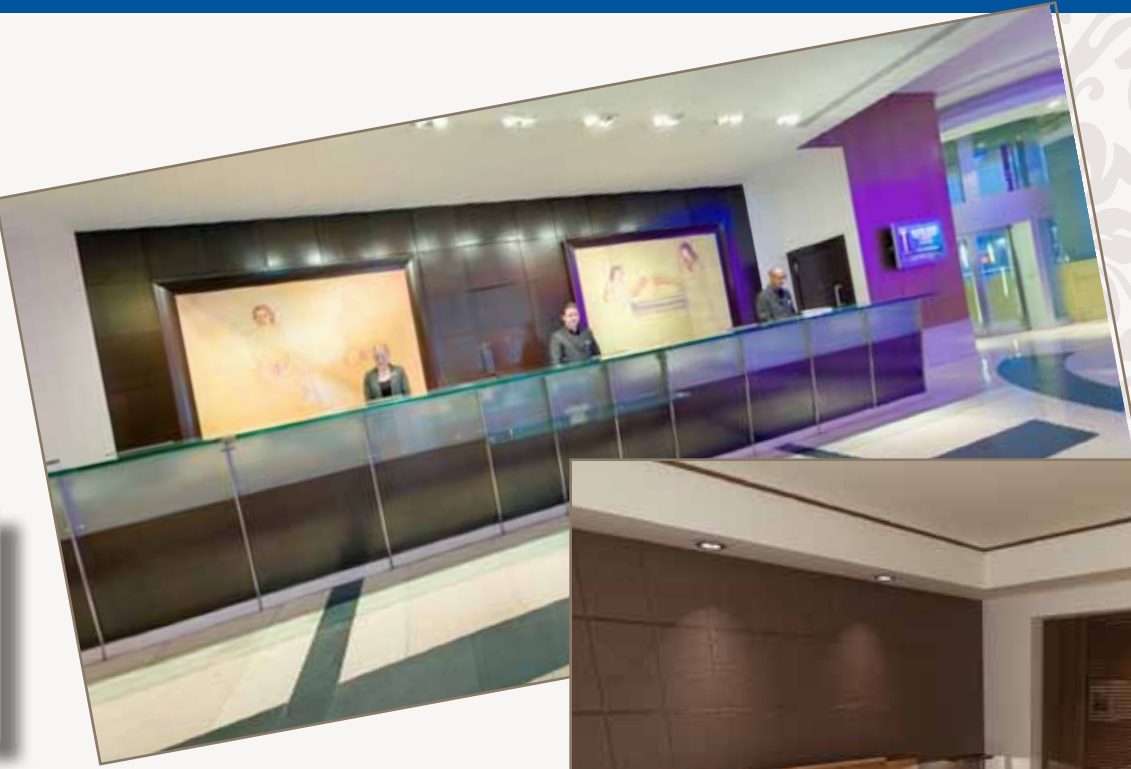
I checked in at the large open plan reception area at around 5.30pm and was greeted immediately by a very friendly staff member who explained the layout of the hotel and where I could find the restaurant, bar and fitness centre. My first impression was that the Park Plaza is a classic conference hotel; with light, clean and modern décor and a constant buzz of various suited business people hovering around the reception area with only one or two lone tourists wandering through.

I was shown where the lift lobby



was and then left to my own devices to find my room on the third floor. I sometimes prefer not to be escorted to my room when staying in a hotel, for me part of the fun is the ritual of trying to find your room in

a maze of corridors and the welcome relief when you finally find your room number and open the door. Turning on the lights revealed a spacious Superior King room tastefully decorated in muted relaxing tones with an



expansive king-size bed and a separate sitting room area with sofa, armchairs and a writing desk. Opening the Narnia-sized double wardrobes revealed ample hanging space and enough drawers for two people's belongings as well as a safe, hairdryer, full size ironing board/iron and extra blankets.



Waiting for me in the sitting room was a personal welcome note from the reservations manager, some complimentary bottled water, a bottle of wine and a glass tray filled with chocolates. Most impressive was my own personal Nespresso machine with an enticing black box full of various coffee pods, all I was missing was George Clooney! The bathroom was clean and modern with large glass sink and a very useful extendable vanity mirror. The large walk-in shower unfortunately didn't work when I went to use it the next morning, but at least the spacious bath had a working shower unit. Hanging

from the wall were two white freshly laundered bathrobes and new packaged slippers and also a great selection of 'Dead Sea' toiletries to use.

Back in the sitting room a vast flat screen TV took pride of place on the wall, as well as in the bedroom. I found that I could easily connect my iphone to the hotel's free WI-FI with little trouble and the TV's also allowed for on-screen internet browsing and email connection along with the sitting room writing desk which had a USB socket so that you could connect your laptop to the internet.

When I had arrived, the hotel duty manager Tim Litche had offered me a tour of the hotel's conference facilities so we met up back at the front desk before dinner. Tim showed me down the sweeping staircase from the Reception area to the first basement level that houses the largest of the conference rooms, the Victoria Suite. It is a completely flexible space able to seat a conference of up to 550 people, a standing reception of 750 people or a seated dinner of 450 people. The hotel has a technology partner in AVC Productions so all your technology needs



are catered for, whether it's a simple power point projection or large-scale TV/video screen display. We carried on down to the lower basement level where the majority of the smaller conference rooms and suites are. There is a decent sized Board Room, which can comfortably seat 10/12 people, again with pc/screen/presentation equipment. All of the smaller rooms have collapsible walls so that you can create a space to exactly suit your needs. There are also flexible breakout rooms across both floors with lifts taking you direct to the hotel bedrooms, so by-passing the busy reception area. The pricing levels are based on the number of people attending and which subsequent catering package you go for so a quick phone call to the reservations team would give you a competitive quote for the type of event you are hosting. I was given a comprehensive pack of all of the different conference

catering menus (drinks, snacks, canapés etc) all of which can be served throughout your event/conference and seemed to be of a very high standard. The one and only negative about the conference facilities was the vast patterned red and cream carpets, which were rather out dated and overwhelming on the eye.

An hour of free time before dinner meant I could have a wander around the hotel, seeing the fitness centre and having a quick drink in the bar adjacent to JB's Restaurant. Sitting down for dinner, there was only two other tables of diners, a result no doubt of the hotel's excellent location in Victoria / Pimlico which hosts a great collection of local restaurants (Dim T, Giraffe, Wagamamma, Zizzi) so that people may not always choose to eat at the hotel. The menu had a varied selection of European dishes such as Bannockburn steak, seared scallops and fillet of sea bass and at least two

vegetarian dishes per course to choose from. I went for the starter of a warm red onion tart with gorgonzola, followed by pumpkin ravioli and a selection of sorbets for dessert. The portions were impressively generous, but the ravioli arrived swimming in soup-like slick of oil and butter, which the waiter explained was the traditional way it should be served, but unfortunately I spent half an hour trying to scrape off as much of the oil as I could to be able to eat it. I found that the waiting staff were charming and extremely attentive, friendly and welcoming and seemed to take a genuine interest in the people that they were serving.

At least I had the rest of the evening to enjoy the complimentary chocolates and Nespresso machine fun back in my room. A long bubble bath drifted into a lazy night reclined on a pile of cushions on the king sized bed in my bathrobe and



slippers watching one of the monster-sized flat-screen TVs.

The bed was firm and comfortable with soft and warm bedding and plenty of pillows and cushions. I turned my light off just after midnight and that was when the problems started: straight away I could hear the people in the room next door. I imagine they'd attended a conference in the hotel and had all piled into one room to carry on the night's jollities (drinking, screeching and roaring laughter). As 2am and 3am trudged by with the noise levels rising, I eventually had to phone down to Reception to try to get them to stop the noise. Finding that the phone by the bed didn't work I had to stumble across the room to use the desk phone in the sitting room. I spoke to the front desk staff member who apologised profusely and within three minutes a security guard was knocking on the room next-door and suggesting

that if they don't stop the noise then they'd be removed from the hotel. I eventually gave up trying to sleep at about 5.30am. I cannot fault the hotel for the speed and professionalism they showed in dealing with the noisy neighbours, but it still meant that I hadn't had any sleep after a particularly busy week at work.

A decent breakfast would no doubt cheer my mood. It was buffet style with the choice of either English or Continental Breakfast. The breakfast was acceptable, having all of the usual favourites of fried eggs, hash browns, bacon and mushrooms however the price of £18 for an English breakfast would tempt any guest to just step out of the hotel, cross the street and eat in either Giraffe, Pain Quotidian or Patisserie Valarie. Rather disappointingly I found that my plate wasn't cleared nor was I offered a top-up of coffee when there was only one other table of guests and plenty of waiting staff

on hand.

As I checked out of the hotel later than morning, the duty manager came out and personally apologised once again for the issues with the noisy neighbours which went some way to appease my tiredness.

As a central London conference hotel, in a good location near to transport links, restaurants and the theatre, the Park Plaza is a safe choice. If I was sending one of my boss's there I would feel confident that the conference facilities are of a good technical and business standard to support all of their business needs. The hotel rooms are clean and more than comfortable but I would certainly recommend to people to eat out in one of the many nearby cafés and restaurants rather than eat in the hotel.

**Overall I would
rate the hotel
3/5**