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DUCKETTS
 TRUSTED ADVISORS

October 2003 Newsletter

Stressed special. Can anybody give me a definition of stress?

Work or Life?

I found this definition of work in the Daily Telegraph, of all places: "Work is about the search for a daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor. In short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday to Friday sort of dying." Allegedly said by anthropologist Studs Terkel. Surely, a made up name? I'm not sure how this fits in with the findings that a cat-borne parasite can change your personality. Apparently, the effect is that men become aggressive, scruffy, antisocial and less attractive (alley cat), whereas women become less trustworthy, more desirable, fun loving and promiscuous (sex kitten). Inevitably, 90% of the French population is infected – nearly twice the level found in this country. Meow?



No more red tape?

One of our more creative clients has come up with the idea of moving his company's registered office to Baghdad. He reckons that this will ensure that he gets no more visits from PAYE/VAT et al. Furthermore, as nobody is going to inspect his records, he doesn't need to keep any and can therefore concentrate on making even more money. I am struggling to get a volunteer to head up our Baghdad operation, despite the relaxed compliance regime. I wonder if I can get Ms Whiplash out of retirement? She'd certainly enjoy the job, but I'd have to pity the poor Iraqis.



Book review

As you know, I get through more than my fair share of books, although I'm always flattered (well, inordinately pleased) when somebody takes the time to read a recommendation. My favorite US online business magazine, FastCompany, is taking this a step further by not only recommending a particular book, but also engaging in discussion about the ideas contained in the book. This is hardly a new idea, but technology makes it easier and FastCompany has the clout to get the authors involved. The first book is "Authentic Leadership" by Bill George. If anybody gives it a go, please let me know how you get on.
www.fastcompany.com/bookclub/

How to flatter your boss (and get promoted?)

Try imitation/martyrdom/backstabbing colleagues/mindless agreement/sex.
www.fastcompany.com/magazine/75/officelandhandbook.html

Something new?

With the signs that the global economy is improving, academics have gone into overdrive to work out what the emerging successful businesses will look like and how they will behave. Not surprisingly, they have identified four old fashioned things that make companies successful:

- Flawless execution
 - Company culture based on aiming high
 - A structure that is flexible and responsive
 - A strategy that is clear and focused
- Technology doesn't get a mention. Doesn't seem very hard?

Think Mary Poppins (practically perfect in every way)?

Stress is big business these days, so much so, that the Government is trying to tax it. Well, it's a change from syntax (the old jokes are the best)? Stress tends to build up over time and is therefore difficult to notice, at least in yourself.

Classic emotional symptoms are:

- Difficulty in concentrating
- Feeling of guilt when relaxing
- Impatient & irritable & anxious
- Inability to switch off

The cure(?) is pretty simple (if not easy):
 exercise/relax/diet/attitude.

And, of course, there is a stress test =>
www.personalhealthmanager.co.uk
 By all means, let me know your score.

Embracing the conflict continuum

The minute you take on more than one person, there's a real possibility that they will annoy one another and then you've got a problem. Exactly how big the issue becomes depends very much on how you handle it. Notionally, there are 4 phases:

- Denial – personal antagonism. Lack of positive, proactive behaviour.
- Defensiveness – expansion of issues and breakdown in communication leading to lack of team spirit and failure to take responsibility
- Sniping – spiraling mistrust leading to a blame culture
- War – open conflict leading to increased staff turnover and employment tribunals

And then you get the employment lawyers joining in. But it can be avoided
www.successoutofconflict.co.uk

New agony aunt

Insolvency practitioners have never been famous for their sense of humour, but at least their newsletter includes an agony section by Professor Shortfall, Emeritus Professor of Impecunious Studies at the Free Institute of Distance Learning and Escapology. Must be funded by Welsh Office money? But nothing like as fearsome as Whiplash or winsome as Sparkle.

The point I'm trying to get to is that the Office of Fair Trading has published new guidance on the behaviour of debt collectors. Specifically, the creditor is responsible for the debt collector's behaviour. So, just watch out the next time you send the boys round to collect an old debt.

Pension credits

Miss Sparkle has got sufficiently excited to produce the following briefing on the subject. I'm impressed that she managed to get the word "sex" in somehow. Must be the effect of reading about Catherine M:

The sexagenarians(?) among us will receive a communication from the government any time soon inviting claims under the new rules.

The new credits will be payable from October 2003.

There are two parts: pension credits and savings credits. They guarantee a minimum income of £102.10 per week for single people and £155.80 for couples.

More information is available at
www.thepensionservice.gov.uk



Wild blue yonder

Sue, the Boyscout and I went to Wales to attend a seminar funded by an obscure Quango, mainly because there were some top notch speakers. This was partly a networking event and it was a joy to see the Boyscout work the hall, oozing enthusiasm and chatting endlessly to some seriously boring suits. I got fed up after 10 minutes.

But, back to the speakers.

Ken Lewis is a guy who has run a sheet metal bashing firm for 30 years. In the late 80s he realised that something had to change and he started experimenting with team working, initially as a way to hold down his overtime costs. What he found, was that by putting a production team in direct contact with its customers, quality went up, lead times came down and the share of that particular customers business (share of wallet) increased. But, best of all, he keeps on experimenting, keeps on moving the goalposts to stay ahead of cheap foreign labour. He's written a book, but the website is a good place to start: www.kenlewis.co.uk

The other speaker of note was the Chief Economist of HSBC. He actually explained what is meant by an "unbalanced economy" – as we now have. [Too much consumer/government spending; not enough exports and investment]. The conclusion is that interest rates will not rise above 4% for the foreseeable future (or as long as inflation stays under control) and there is nothing that the government can do with our economy except pray that the US economy picks up quickly and saves the day for us. His solution to the Japanese problem (they won't spend anything) is to parachute in 1,000 British housewives, all armed with credit cards, to show them how it should be done.

Tom Peters (yet again)

He is probably the most irritating of the US management gurus and certainly the antithesis of Jim Collins. Most famous for saying "if you're not upsetting people, you're not doing anything". [near enough]. Anyway, his next book is due out shortly (Re-imagine! Business excellence in a disruptive age) and apparently contains the following pearls of wisdom:

- Destroy to create
All companies are doomed to failure. Better to burn out than it is to rust?
- Women roar
They make the decisions and spend the money. Collaborate rather than control.
- It's a cross-functional world
Network, team build, communicate etc
- Power dreaming
You need to be able to provide a scintillating experience. Competent is not enough.
- Think weird
Innovation comes from the fringe, not the mainstream
- Design, the ultimate edge
The only real differentiating factor?

For 300 pages?

Book of the month

"The survivor personality" by Al Siebert. This is a bit further into self-help territory than I normally stray. How can some people survive huge trauma, whilst others crack up when asked to work till 5.05 one evening? [Which, of course, also makes a nonsense of the stress at work rules.] Siebert reckons that you can work on the attitudes and outlooks that make you more resilient. The problem tends to be that we are bought up to be "nice" people and therefore fail to appreciate strengths outside this definition. Going off at a tangent, I like his definition of the 3 inner strengths:

- Self esteem
If you don't like yourself, nobody else will
- Self confidence
How well you expect to do when tackling a new situation
- Self concept
Your idea of who and what you are

Beware folk with high self confidence and low self esteem.

www.thrivenet.com

Microsoft gets IBM

The various virus attacks of the last few months may have caused lots of grief to small businesses, but they have also dented Microsoft's reputation in the big business market. So much so, that MS is even talking about getting the software right before it's released onto the unsuspecting punters. MS has always prided itself on being the opposite of IBM – nimble and creative without being bogged down by layers of control. The cost of this approach has been the bug-ridden software for which MS is now infamous. The recently launched Exchange 2003 has 6 million lines of code and, shortly before shipping, 500 bugs a month were being fixed. Despite that, a patch was released just 16 days after the product hit the market. Significantly, the release of Office 2003 has been delayed by 3 months as MS chooses to finish testing the software. Came out last week?

Disclaimer

There's no remedy. But beer assists. Allegedly said by a monk in the Middle Ages; thereby proving that nothing changes.





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