



April 2011 Newsletter

Royal Wedding special. Must be more inspiring than the Budget. And more horsepower. Or, as Beowulf put it, merriment, joy and fornication till the end of time.



Book of the month

Positivity by Barbara Fredrickson

It would appear that there is a scientific basis for what we've all taken for granted over the years – people with a positive attitude do better than those with a negative one (for lots of small but cumulative reasons).

However, what the book really does bring out is that you can actually improve your positivity bias if you want to, with knock on benefit to all sorts of good things (rich, famous & laid?).

There is a useful link, but it's a bit challenging

<http://www.viacharacter.org/Surveys/SurveyCenter.aspx>

The Sage of Bishopswood explains the key points rather well

<http://www.thestrengthsfoundation.org/the-strengths-companion-f-is-for-barbara-fredrickson-2>

Institute inspection

As you may have gathered by now, we survived our inspection. If we hadn't, the newsletter would be no more. You may struggle to get very excited about most of the things that were picked up – the Boyscout was distinctly bemused. On the bright side, the Inspector did describe the website as "irreverent". That must count as real praise in Institute-speak?

Census or bust

The requirement of the recent Census to disclose who was staying in your house on a particular night has caused a certain amount of consternation in the office when a

member of the team requested a continuation page. Or was that just a malicious/envious rumour? And can anybody guess who I'm talking about?

Laser focus

In the course of our work, we frequently come across businesses that claim to offer higher quality (whatever) than their competitors, but at a lower price. This makes no sense at all and suggests that the marketplace views the business rather differently. So, how do you find out what your customers think of you? The answer, of course, is to ask them. We're not big fans of customer questionnaires (why would you bother to fill them in?), but we do believe in holding Focus Groups. For a start, if the business struggles to get anybody to turn up to a focus group, then the customers are really not that impressed. Once you've got people to turn up, they're usually more than happy to open up, particularly if there is a majority of females. Thereafter, what you discover depends on the ability of the group facilitator to follow lines of discussion. Naturally, the Boyscout is a particularly

gifted facilitator and he would be delighted to run a focus group for you if required.



Whiplash briefing (unedited, subject to punctuation)

Real time PAYE to start in April 2013

This is nastier than we thought. It's not just like CIS with monthly returns. Basically, the employer notifies HMRC of the gross pay and at the appropriate point the net pay is plucked from the employer's account and paid to the employee and the PAYE paid to HMRC. [The Boyscout has already notified me that he insists on being paid in cash/gold bullion – whichever is easier.]

HMRC will be able to hold up refunds and collect underpayments via this system. The potential for it to go wrong is huge. If HMRC are still as crap then as they are now, employees won't be able to speak to HMRC about it and could end up with no net pay in worst case scenarios. The advice is to lobby one's MP to get it stopped.

New penalties for late Tax Returns:

£100 -1 day late regardless of whether tax paid

3 months late - £10 per day up to £900

6 months late - the greater of 5% of tax or £300

12 months late as above

ie Tax Return 6 months late => penalty of £1,300

Solicitor wars

The big news is that Keith Shawcross is retiring in July (gradually?) with Harrison Clark from Worcester taking over and opening a new office in Hereford. Lanyon Bowdler, a large firm from Shrewsbury, has also opened an office in Hereford, so we've got more legal firepower in town than ever before. It remains to be seen whether or not solicitors have figured out what client service actually means. Our Chinese aviation correspondent sums it up best:

"A solicitor will tell you what the Law says for free.

To find out what it means, you have to pay him."



Bribery Act

This was another piece of legislation that came through with nobody knowing what it actually meant. The scaremongers were convinced that it would completely outlaw corporate entertaining. Accepting an invitation to watch the rugby in someone's sponsorship box would inevitably lead straight to jail. This could be considered a penalty worth paying to watch England beat France, but probably not for a Gloucester game. Current thinking is that corporate entertaining is OK, but for how long? Does this include the Royal Wedding, a feel-good bribe on a national scale?

A girl called Bob

The new member of the Business Development team did indeed arrive for work and, 3 weeks later, she's still turning up every day. Good start. Shoe envy may be a problem.

Failure special

You know things are looking dodgy when Harvard Business Review runs a whole issue on the theme of failure ("How to understand it, learn from it and recover from it.")

The article "Can you handle failure?" is the best fun as it starts off from the standpoint that 70% of the (US) population (11 personality types) try to escape by:

- Blaming others (psychotic?)
- Blaming themselves (neurotic?)
- Denying everything (including the fact that there's a problem at all)

It's not totally clear to me what the remaining 30% do. In this office, we don't have a culture of blame. Whatever goes wrong, it must be something to do with the Boyscout, so everybody else is blameless.



Manage your manager

If the definition of risk is "working for an idiot", then managing upwards is clearly something you need to get the hang of. It may also explain why most bosses are unemployable.

According to the Institute, there are 5 dangerous managerial styles:

- Micromanager – give you a job and then try to do it for you
- Out of their depth – no idea how to do the job
- Me me me – all about advancing the career of the manager concerned
- Timebomb – always angry and expects employees to be clairvoyant
- Remote – get on with it and tell me when you've finished

Anybody struggling to manage one of the above should either

- Go on the Sharon Kidson course, or
- Resign immediately

Old but good (cribbed from a past edition)

Alpha males in trouble again

They seem to take this alpha male stuff very seriously in the States. Research identifies 4 basic types:

- Commanders - These are intense and magnetic. They push people hard to reach their goals but can end up bulldozing people, are free and loose with the rules and create an atmosphere of fear.
- Visionaries - Creative, curious, inspiring, they can see the future. On the downside, they ignore reality, are closed to input and spin the truth.
- Strategists - Quick, analytical and objective, they find opportunities others miss. But they can also be smug, opinionated know-alls, lacking in team spirit and unable to admit mistakes.
- Executors - Tireless doers with an eye for detail, they are excellent

problem-solvers who get the job done. But they can be unreasonable micromangers who burn out employees and are overcritical.

[I can't decide which one to use as my role model.] Alpha males may end up playing several roles, and vary from "sweeties who everyone wants to work for to absolute bullies". But even at the nicer end of the scale, alpha males can hide deep-seated faults that are brought out by stress.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/toxicrelations/message/1053>

Data security

After the rash of security breaches last year that resulted in the loss of confidential data (by government departments), large penalties were introduced. Zurich was the first big name to get clobbered and the IT industry has gone into security-obsessed overdrive. So, I've upgraded my server and I've now got encrypted disks. I trust you're impressed. Encrypted disks require keys, so we've not yet got to James Bond-style bio-

security. This is a real shame as I've got visions of some under-clad bird with a daft name (Domino?) seducing the Boyscout with chat about the Screwfix catalogue and then stealing his eyeballs.

<http://www.zybert.co.uk/gem-s.html>

More prosaically, it appears that memory sticks containing payroll data are the real risk. Sue, watch out.

<https://www.ironkey.com/basic>

Disclaimer

We always hold hands. If I let go, she shops.



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