

Free



Stories To Learn From

**25 short, real-life stories that
anyone in business can learn from
(especially the self-employed)**

Ian Rowland

Stories To Learn From

by
Ian Rowland



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www.ianrowland.com

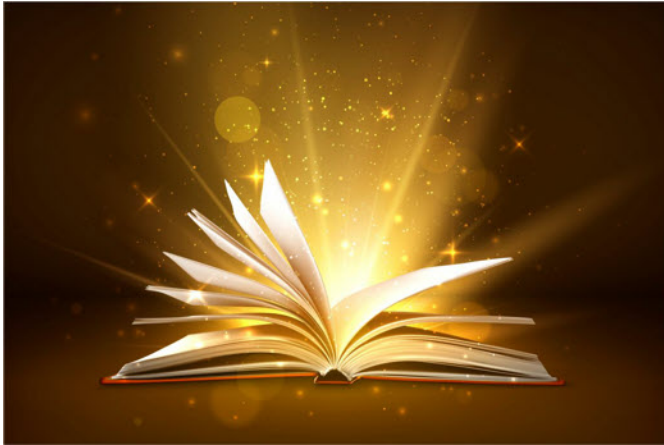
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— Ian



Publication

Stories To Learn From

by Ian Rowland

Published by Ian Rowland Limited.

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A Quick Note About Me

I do three things so I have three websites.

www.ianrowland.com

This is about my work as a professional writer. In simple terms, I offer a complete 'start-to-finish' writing and publishing service. Technical writing, business, sales, marketing, creative... you name it, I've done it! I offer 35+ years experience across all media. In my career, I've helped more companies to sell a greater range of goods and services than anyone else you're likely to meet. I'm also a 'ghostwriter'! If you've got a book inside you, I can write it for you or guide you through the self-publishing process.

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www.coldreadingsuccess.com

My website devoted to the art, science and joy of cold reading and what I call 'cold reading for business'. As well as providing free information and downloads, the site tells you about my three books on cold reading and the training I offer.

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www.ianrowlandtraining.com

All about my talks and training for conferences, corporate groups and private clients. Main subjects include:

- The Practical Persuasion Method.
- Creative Problem-Solving.
- Leadership, Presence And Charisma.
- Unlock Your Mind.
- Be A Genius!
- Cold Reading For Business.

I also offer bespoke training packages to suit *your* needs. Clients to date include the FBI, Google, Coca-Cola, Unilever, the Ministry Of Defence, the British Olympics Team, the Crown Estate and many more. Full details on the site.

A Quick Note About My Books

I've written quite a few full-length books that I sell from my websites (as listed opposite) and via Amazon. Mostly, I write about:

- Business success and the joys (?) of working for yourself.
- Cold reading (how to talk to people as if you're psychic) and what I call 'cold reading for business'.
- Overcoming various forms of addiction.

In addition, just to defy easy classification, I've written one book of original romantic poetry, which I'm very proud of!

I've also produced quite a number of smaller booklets, like this one, that are available as *free, instant* downloads from my various websites.

If you want to support me, please tell your friends about my work, even if you only steer them to the free stuff. It's all good for awareness and promotion. I would also be very grateful for any friendly mentions and recommendations on social media.

Want to get in touch with me? Great! I'd *love* to hear from you. You can find me on Facebook and other social media or just send me an email: ian@ianrowland.com.

About This Booklet

Some time ago, I began collecting real-life business stories that illustrate important points — what you might call ‘business parables’. They came in handy for talks, training events and so on. Eventually, I felt I had enough of these stories for a small booklet I could offer free of charge from ianrowland.com. This is the result.

People have always enjoyed sharing stories and fables that wrap a small slice of life experience in handy, share-able form. In this collection, the lessons are most likely to help anyone who works for themselves or aspires to.

As this book began to take shape, I invited self-employed friends from all over the world to contribute stories they felt might be appropriate. I was delighted by the response. Even those who didn’t have a story to share expressed their enthusiasm for the project and said they’d love to see the result.

To the best of my knowledge, all these stories are true. Where they are based on my own personal experience, I have changed some names and details to avoid embarrassment or for other practical reasons. However, they are all true tales from real life. That said, I’m not sure if it *matters* whether all the stories are true. For example, I can’t personally vouch for the ‘Selling A Synth’ story. I heard it from someone in the music trade. True or not, it’s still a neat story that illustrates a good point.

I hope that one day I’ll put together a second collection of stories like this one. Have you got a story you’d be willing to share with me? It needs to be about 400 words and fit the format you see here: story / lesson / commentary. Maybe your story will end up in my next collection! I’d love to hear from you.

— Ian Rowland

ian@ianrowland.com

London, 2020



Happy To Help

My friend Drew McAdam used to earn a living writing short stories. He wasn't just good at *writing* stories — he was also good at selling them and making money. In fact, he became so good at this that other writers, hoping to emulate his success, started asking him for help.

By nature, Drew happens to be a very kind, helpful sort of person. This being the case, he tried his best to help everyone who contacted him. Before long, Drew realised that helping all these people was taking up quite a lot of his time. Every week, he was spending many long hours trying to address all their concerns and questions. He felt stuck. On the one hand, he didn't want to let anyone down or seem unhelpful. On the other hand, it wasn't practical for him to be spending so much time dealing with all these questions. What to do?

Having thought it over, Drew adopted a new policy. Whenever anyone contacted him for a bit of help, this is what he said: "I am perfectly willing to help you. I will happily pass on everything I know about writing stories and selling them. I will work with you and share everything I've learned. All I ask is that, first of all, you just write me a story. It doesn't even have to be a good one. Just write me a story."

Result? In 99% of cases, he never heard from them again.

Lesson: Give your time and help to people who show they deserve it.

Commentary: Asking for advice is easy and takes no time. Giving advice is difficult and can up a *lot* of time. Whenever helping people is going to take up a significant amount of your time, ask them to make some effort before you get involved. Most will vanish into thin air. The ones that *do* get back to you have shown they are serious and are worth giving your time to. It's a wonderful thing to have a helpful nature, but pointless devoting a lot of time to people who probably won't do anything with your advice anyway.



Wisdom Unwanted

Here's a tale from the early days of the internet. An enterprising soul set up an online library aimed chiefly at the business community. It was intended to be a repository of business wisdom on a broad range of subjects. Anyone could submit an article or booklet on their specialist subject or area of expertise. Each time it was downloaded, they received a modest payment. While such services may be commonplace now, this was quite an innovative idea for its time.

A successful businesswoman, Sonia, loved this idea and saw that it had huge potential. She happened to have a lot of good material about time-management — a subject that she had taught to executives in many different companies. Keen to be part of this amazing new online library, Sonia wrote a neat booklet and gave it a moderately witty title: 'There Are Only So Many Hours In The Way'.

By any standards, it was an excellent booklet: well written and containing a wealth of practical advice and good ideas. The library owner thought it was exactly the sort of high quality content he wanted to offer and wasted no time adding the booklet to the library. Sonia looked forward to making a little bit of money from her work.

Weeks passed but, to Sonia's dismay, nobody wanted her booklet. There were zero sales. This was puzzling, given that it was clearly a practical, useful guide on a subject that was of interest to just about everyone in business. The apparently total lack of interest was as baffling to the owner of the online library as it was to Sonia herself. It took them both a while to figure out what the problem was.

If you like, *stop reading at this point* and see if you can figure out the reason for this apparent lack of interest in what was, by any standards, an excellent booklet full of good information.

Here's the answer.

Although Sonia's booklet was excellent, the problem was simply that nobody could *find* it. All Sonia's potential customers were going to the online library and using search terms like 'time management' and 'efficiency'. None of them was tapping 'There are only so many hours in the way' into the library's search facility.

Once Sonia realised what the problem was, she revised her booklet and gave it a clear, simple title: 'Time Management Made Simple'. It wasn't creative or mildly amusing but it *was* clear. When Sonia re-submitted her booklet to the library, it became one of the most popular downloads and brought in a nice amount of cash.

Lesson: Give things clear, simple titles so they are easy to find.

Commentary: Clever, ingenious or witty titles, while they may be fun, can also be counter-productive. Unless there's a compelling reason to do otherwise, use plain titles that describe, in simple and direct terms, whatever it is you're offering. Here are two simple tests to apply when choosing a title. (1) When my target audience are searching for this, will they be able to find it? (2) If someone sees this title, will they be able to tell, in five seconds, if it's what they want?

Selling A Synth

This is a story from the world of music technology. In the early 1980s, two companies developed remarkable synthesisers that, for the first times, offered 'sampling' capability. You could take a sample of literally any sound — even a dog barking — and then play tunes with it via a keyboard. These days, this sort of thing is rather commonplace but at the time it was very exciting, ground-breaking technology.

The two companies were the New England Digital Corporation, whose synth was called a 'Synclavier', and Fairlight, whose synth was called... a 'Fairlight'. They were bitter rivals, both very proud of their products and striving to achieve dominance in what they knew was going to become quite a lucrative market.

At the time, the most high-profile, successful music producer in the UK was Trevor Horn. He had produced chart-topping tracks and albums for a wide range of artists and was known for his highly creative, innovative approach to music production.

A sales rep from Synclavier was attending a music industry trade fair. As he wandered around the stalls and exhibition stands, he suddenly noticed to his delight that Trevor Horn was just a short distance away. The sales rep knew that if he could persuade the great Trevor Horn to

use a Synclavier, as opposed to a Fairlight, this would be great for PR purposes. Not wishing to waste this golden opportunity, the sales rep approached Trevor Horn, politely introduced himself and launched into his sales pitch. It went something like this:

“Mr. Horn, I work for Synclavier and I’m a huge fan of your work. Everyone knows you’re a brilliant producer and I just want to say this. If you just want a gimmicky box that makes a few weird sounds, sure, go and get yourself a Fairlight. But let me tell you, if you want something that is a sophisticated musical instrument in its own right, one that opens up countless new creative opportunities for an artist like yourself, and that integrates seamlessly with the rest of your mixing desk, then believe me — you want a Synclavier.”

Trevor Horn listened to this eloquent and passionate sales pitch with interest. After a few seconds of thoughtful pondering, he said: “Thanks. That’s very helpful. I just want a gimmicky box that makes a few weird sounds, so I’ll get a Fairlight.”

And he did.

Lesson: Know what people want *before* you start your sales pitch.

Commentary: When you’re selling, it doesn’t matter what *you* think people want or *ought* to want. Your assumptions could be wrong and wreck your chances of making a sale. Always make sure you know what the customer wants, and something of their interests and loyalties, *before* you launch into your sales pitch. Otherwise, you could well alienate the customer and drive them into the welcoming arms of your competitors.



It's Simply Impossible

Here's a lesson I learned a long time ago but it has served me well.

This happened back in the 80s when corporate video was considered new and exciting. I worked for a creative media company and, among other things, we had a pretty good video production facility. Naturally, we were always pitching for work.

We knew that a particular government department, called the Manpower Services Commission or MSC (which doesn't exist any more) used a lot of video production services and, not surprisingly, we did our best to get hired by them. Unfortunately, someone from the MSC told us very clearly, "We can't use you because you're not on our list of approved suppliers. Sorry but it's all rules and regulations here. We have an approved list and we can only use the suppliers on that list."

Naturally, this raised the question of how we could get *on* the list, which is something we pursued as vigorously as possible.

As it happens, we did eventually get quite a big chunk of work out of the MSC. They needed a lot of video to be shot in and around Leicester, which is where my company was based, and we offered very good terms, so they hired us. Of course, we were glad of the work.

I got on very well with the main MSC guy I was dealing with, called Alan. Towards the end of the project, which went very well, I asked Alan a question. I said, "Look, we're obviously very pleased that you hired us for this project and we hope you'll do so again. But can I ask you about something that's been puzzling us? We were told categorically that you couldn't *possibly* hire us because we're not on the approved suppliers list. Yet, here we are!"

Alan smiled and sipped his coffee. "Ah, yes, the approved suppliers list. Yeah, well, I just decided to ignore that."

Lesson: Just because someone says it's impossible doesn't mean it is. Rules aren't flexible but people are, or at least can be when it suits them.

Commentary: It's quite common in business to be told that something is *utterly* impossible, and *completely* out of the question, because of a particular rule or regulation. What several decades of experience have taught me is that this is hardly ever true. Business is about people, not rules. Rules aren't flexible (by definition) but people can choose to be when it's in their interests. If someone wants to work with you, or to 'bend' a rule, they'll always find a way. Sometimes, as in this story, they just shrug and decide to ignore their own rule!



A Significant Question

Sarah is the founder and manager of an excellent digital marketing agency. She helps her clients to devise effective marketing strategies that address every aspect of their online presence and reach. Although Sarah loves her work, there's one aspect that gets a bit repetitive. Sooner or later, every single client asks her the same question: "Can you help us to get first position on Google search results?"

As it happens, there's very little Sarah *doesn't* know about search engine optimisation. It's one of several areas in which she can offer a lot of specialist expertise. However, whenever she gets asked about this, Sarah asks her client one, simple question. *Before you read any further*, see if you can guess what the question is.

Here's the answer.

Sarah says, "Yes, of course we can help you to achieve top ranking on Google and other search engines. However, first of all, let me ask you this: what have you done to *earn* the top position or to *deserve* it? Are you the best at what you do? Do you provide a more efficient service, or better value, or better range, or what? In what sense can top position be justified?"

Sarah's point is that when you use Google, or any other search engine, you want useful results. If you're searching for an electrician in your areas, for example, you want to find the one who offers the best possible match for your precise needs.

This is also what Google, the company, wants to happen. They want people to find their search engine useful rather than to be disappointed because they get links to companies that turn out not to be very good. The point is not to 'trick' Google into giving you top ranking. The point is to *earn* it. Otherwise, you're failing to serve the interests of your own customers, of Google and anyone who ever uses a search engine.

Lesson: The point is not what you *want*. The point is to *deserve* what you want.

Commentary: When you're running a business, it's easy to focus on what you think you'd like, such as good search engine rankings or more customers. However, this isn't enough. You have to take the actions to *deserve* and to *earn* what you want. This may sound obvious but it isn't. Sarah says it's surprising how many of her clients express a sincere interest in *somehow* achieving top position on Google but have never considered why Google *should* give them this position.

A Tale Of Sales

A very enterprising friend of mine, Paul, once set up a 'wheelie bin' cleaning service. He had plenty of practical sales experience and decided to sell the service using a tried-and-tested approach: a leaflet drop plus follow-up visits a couple of days later.

To his dismay, Paul discovered that this way of selling the service just didn't work. When he knocked on the doors where he'd previously left his leaflet, he found most people had paid no attention or simply thrown it away. Most of the time, he met with blank stares and puzzled looks. He estimated that he got about one sale from every twenty houses.

Paul discussed the problem with a few other experienced sales people. It was time for a different approach. This time, he went round the houses with a clipboard bearing a simple form ready to be filled in. Paul knocked on the door and if nobody answered simply moved on. If someone did answer, he explained the service and asked if they wanted to sign up there and then. If yes, he had his clipboard ready for them to sign on the dotted line. If not, he simply offered a polite 'good morning' and went on to the next house. This way, he got about four sales out of every ten houses.

Lesson: There's no such thing as one, correct sales technique. What works best in one situation might not work in another.

Commentary: There was nothing *wrong* with the first sales approach that involved a leaflet drop followed by a visit two days later. Many products have been successfully sold door-to-door using this approach. It just wasn't the right way to sell *this* particular service. The 'one shot opportunity' turned out to be the most efficient strategy. Did Paul lose some sales because a householder just happened to be out when he called? Yes. But it was still the most effective approach and he wasted a lot less time. Different sales approaches work for different contexts, products and services. As ever, let experience be your guide.

The Book Collector

A writer I know called Jaq used to work in a store dealing in rare and antique books. It was an interesting experience, surrounded all day by books that were, in some cases, worth tens of thousands of dollars. The store was also beautiful: elegant floor-to-ceiling wooden shelving and gleaming glass display cabinets. Customers often remarked that the store looked like a museum, albeit one in which everything was for sale so long as you had a large amount of cash to spend.

One day, a man came in with his daughter, aged nine. Let's call them Andy and Diane. Andy explained to Jaq that Diane absolutely *loved* reading and was particularly fascinated by old books. He dearly wanted to encourage her interest in antique books and their history but, unfortunately, simply couldn't afford most of the books in the store. Just to take one example, he had noticed a signed first edition of 'Where the Wild Things Are', priced at \$20,000. Andy ruefully admitted that he just didn't have that kind of money to spare.

Jaq appreciated Andy's position but wanted to do what he could to help. He had an idea. He had a chat with Diane and asked her what she knew about 'The Wizard of Oz'. She admitted she knew hardly anything apart from having seen the movie. Jaq explained that the author, L. Frank Baum, actually wrote fourteen books in the 'Oz' series. He showed Diane several first editions that were on the shelves, much to the young girl's delight. Jaq offered a little bit of advice about collecting rare and classic titles, using the Oz books as examples. He demonstrated how to assess quality and value and gave Diane a few tips about judging whether or not a particular book was worth investing in.

Turning back to Andy, Jaq explained that the books he'd been showing Diane, numbers 2-14 in the 'Oz' series, were relatively affordable (all under \$3000 at the time) and that building up the collection was something he and his daughter could do together. He said that under his (Andy's) supervision, and with occasional help from their friendly neighbourhood book-seller, Diane could learn to appreciate not only the books themselves and whatever literary merit they had but also their history, provenance, significance and value.

Jaq pointed out that books last a lifetime and so does the *love* of books. Diane could enjoy building her collection over years and decades to come. What's more, her collection would, in the fullness of time, appreciate in value.

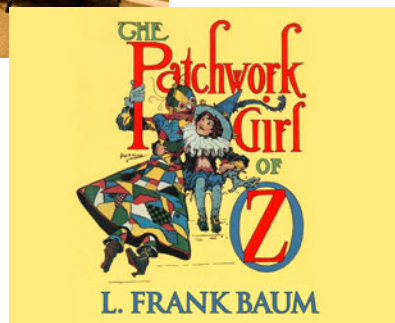
That day, Andy bought his daughter a rare first edition of 'The Patchwork Girl of Oz', the seventh in the series. From that point on, Andy contacted Jaq every few months to enquire about adding to his

daughter's collection. They eventually owned the entire 'Oz' series as well as several other famous literary series. The book collection, which as Jaq predicted appreciated significantly in value, came to represent a lifelong bond between father and daughter.

Lesson: Sometimes, a book isn't just a book and a product isn't just a product. See how the purchase relates to the customer's *life*.

Commentary: Clearly, you can't sell everything the way you can sell rare books. If someone just wants to buy a new stapler for the office, it would be strange if you started congratulating them on their investment in a lifetime of pleasure and fascination.

Nonetheless, there is a lesson worth learning here. Where appropriate, always remember to look beyond the product, the price tag and the sale. Think about how the product relates to the customer's life and, more specifically, their *emotional* life. Don't be afraid to talk in emotional terms because, for many products, the emotional payoff is a major buying trigger. When you can see the bigger picture, you help your *customer* to see the bigger picture — and big pictures are more persuasive than small ones.





Communication Matters

In the 1960s, the British Steel company had a large operational research (OR) department that applied statistical methods to management issues such as stock control. They also had a large computing department that was quite sophisticated for its time.

Back then, computer programs were written on sets of squared paper known as coding sheets. These were sent off to be transferred to punched cards and processed, the results being delivered a few days later. If the slightest mistake was made, such as a single character being out of place, the program would fail and the whole thing would have to be corrected and re-submitted for processing.

One day, a programmer asked an OR analyst if the data they were about to submit contained any special characters. The analyst said no and the program and the data were sent away to be processed. Alas, the program failed. Why? Because the data contained brackets. The programmer was using the word 'special' in the technical sense of *non-alphanumeric* (anything other than letters or numbers). The analyst meant 'special' in the everyday sense of *peculiar* or *unusual*, and never imagined that characters such as brackets were considered 'special'.

Lesson: In any context that uses technical jargon, beware of terms that are open to interpretation or judgment.

Commentary: The point of any technical or specialist jargon is to *avoid* ambiguity so that everyone communicates successfully. This generally works well. No two engineers are likely to disagree over the meaning of 'transistor'. However, some words are open to *interpretation* according to the perceived context. This is particularly problematic if a word means one thing in everyday, colloquial usage but something quite different in a technical context. Try to look out for such words and avoid potential misunderstandings. However much time it takes to do this, it always takes a lot longer *not* to do it.



A Date With Disappointment

A former work colleague, Tina, told me she was organising a class on dating and how to find one's ideal partner. She wanted me to go along — not because I had any interest in the subject but because she knew that I had run public classes and training events for years and she wanted my constructive criticism.

Tina's class ran from 10 am to 4 pm with a few breaks during the day. She got about 25 people turning up, which was a respectable turnout. It was clear that Tina cared a great deal about this project. She had poured a lot of effort into finding a good venue and making sure the day was well organised and ran smoothly. Without doubt, she was full of good intentions. Unfortunately, the class wasn't very good.

Tina started off by talking for an hour talking about the *history* of dating agencies and 'agony aunt' advice columns. Next came a very technical section on the psychology of attraction, all about the hypothalamus, the release of dopamine and norepinephrine and so on. She also talked about 'The Rules' and similar books that codified dating strategies.

Tina's students didn't care about any of this. They wanted to know what they ought to *do*, in practical terms, to find their ideal partner — which Tina only discussed for about an hour towards the end of the day. For the rest of the time, Tina was sharing material that *she* found fascinating and knew a lot about but which her students thought was irrelevant and rather dull. Her students left very disappointed.

Lesson: When you're teaching, don't focus on what *you* happen to find interesting. Focus on what your students are there to learn.

Commentary: This is an easy mistake to make. I've probably made it myself a few times and I often see people make it when they first get into teaching and training. A little bit of background info is fine, but stay focused on what your students have paid to learn.

Don't Mention The Score

Some years ago, the England football team were due to play an important match on a Thursday afternoon. The match was going to be shown live on TV and then, later in the evening, there would be edited highlights. My friend Marc, who has a passionate interest in such things, knew he would not be able to see the live afternoon broadcast. As a successful businessman running a software consultancy firm, he knew he simply couldn't take the time off. However, he looked forward to getting home from work on Thursday, at about 9pm, having a bite to eat then pouring a beer and settling down to enjoy the big game.

Marc wanted to make sure that, when he finally sat down to enjoy the match on Thursday night, he wouldn't know the score in advance. He made careful plans accordingly. He explained the position to his wife and two teenage daughters. "When I get home on Thursday, I don't want to know *anything* about how the England game turned out, okay? Please be careful not to say anything about it. I want to be able to sit down and enjoy it without knowing the result." Marc's wife and daughters said they understood: message received loud and clear!

Thursday dawned. The day of the big match! As planned, Marc went about his working day being scrupulously careful not to learn *anything* about the England game. He had carefully instructed his work colleagues to observe a 'code of silence' about it. Even as he was driving home, Marc took care not to listen to any radio broadcasts or accidentally glance at newspaper stands or any other possible sources of information about the result.

Finally, at long last, he reached his front door. Phew! He'd made it home still in a state of pure and blissful ignorance about the outcome of the game. He let himself in and was immediately greeted by the youngest of his two girls. "Ah careful!" he said with a smile. "Remember, I don't want to know anything about the match."

"Oh it's okay Dad," said his daughter, "you don't need to worry. *There weren't any goals.*"

Lesson: If people *can* misunderstand something, they *will*.

Commentary: If you are giving someone important instructions, you obviously want to avoid misunderstandings. Unfortunately, this isn't easy. Anything that *can* be misunderstood *will* be. It's up to you to do all the heavy lifting, by which I mean to anticipate and block *every* possible way in which the communication might misfire or the other person might misunderstand something. There's no perfectly reliable way to achieve this. All you can do is try your best.

As a writer, I've come across this problem many times in my career. It's impossible to write instructions or user guides so perfectly that *no-one* will *ever* misunderstand *anything*. It's one of those areas where perfection, though desirable, will remain forever beyond the reach of human endeavour. Nonetheless, it is better to be aware of this problem, and to at least *try* to anticipate problems, than to not be aware of it.

Before briefing someone on what you want them to do, or *not* do, try to imagine every possible way in which your attempt to communicate might go wrong and see if you can prevent it from happening.

In this case, Marc needed to add a piece of information: "Even if there aren't any goals, I still don't want to know". He didn't mention this because to him, with his knowledge of football, it seemed too obvious to be worth mentioning. His daughter, who was far less interested in such matters, wasn't in a position to appreciate this. To her, 'no goals' meant more or less the same as 'nothing to mention' and therefore, by extension, 'nothing that needs to be kept secret'.

Whenever you're giving out orders and instructions, take a moment to say to yourself, 'There weren't any goals'.





The Call Centre Saga

I once saw a TV show devoted to consumer affairs. On this particular edition, the subject was call centres and how useless they can be. Several people were in the studio to tell their stories of broken promises, being kept 'on hold' for an hour and similar dismal experiences.

There was a representative from the call centre industry in the studio. He accepted that call centres did sometimes let people down; there was room for improvement and everyone in the industry had to raise their standards. Having acknowledged that there were faults and failings to be addressed, he said he just wanted to make one more point.

He invited people to think back to what life was like *before* call centres. Consider the example, he said, of trying to handle a problem with your electricity bill. You had to put your coat on, travel into town (possibly in bad weather), find the company's office and wait for the person you needed to see. After all that, the meeting might turn out to be largely a waste of time and then you'd have to make your way home again. All this would take up at least a couple of hours of your time.

Contrast this with phoning a call centre and being on hold: you're dry and warm at home; you can have a cup of coffee, watch stuff online, have something to eat, do some work, play with the dog. Yes, he said, call centres should do better but it's not really so bad. Let's maintain a healthy perspective and see the positives as well as the negatives.

Lesson: Choose your comparisons wisely. They have a big effect on your judgements, assessments and feelings.

Commentary: Whenever you make a comparison, you have a choice. You can choose comparison A and get angry or annoyed or choose comparison B and see that things aren't really so bad. Always be aware of your options and see how a different comparison might be fairer, offer a more balanced perspective and stop you feeling so stressed.

Mr. Unhelpful

Here's a lesson I've learned many times during the years I've been working for myself.

I once organised a public lecture for about 20 people. There was quite a lot of work involved: obtaining confirmations from the attendees, checking who had paid, forwarding names and numbers to the venue, getting people's preferences for lunch, printing the lecture notes and so on. Almost everyone who signed up for the lecture was co-operative and easy to deal with. There was one exception, whom I'll call Bill and who was rather hard work. Trying to get information from Bill was like trying to pull teeth. He was hopeless at returning calls or messages.

In fact, for the ten days immediately before the event, I didn't hear from Bill at all. This was rather exasperating and caused problems for me, the venue and some of the other attendees. It later transpired that Bill had gone on holiday for these ten days — without thinking to tell me or anyone who might have wanted to contact him. Of course, in this day and age, even being on holiday doesn't mean you can't reply to an email or a text message. "Yeah," shrugged Bill when I politely raised this point during a coffee break, "I didn't think to check my messages while I was away." Well, thanks a lot, Bill!

The lecture went ahead as planned with Bill in attendance. As he had caused quite a few problems for me and for others, it would have been understandable if I had behaved rather angrily towards Bill or at least been rather cold and distant, simmering with thinly veiled contempt and resentment. Instead, I treated Bill in the same warm, polite and friendly way I treated everyone else.

I'm glad I did. About six months later, Bill got in touch and gave me a huge chunk of very well paid work. If I had fallen out with him on the lecture day, or made my real feelings clear, I would have never have got that work.

Lesson: Even when it's hard, always treat people well. You never know when they might do you, and your business, a big favour.

Commentary: Business is about people and, as we all know, people can be maddening, exasperating and difficult to deal with. However, you never know the future. Sometimes, heroes hide their capes and angels keep their wings tucked back. Be slow to snarl, argue and criticise. As a general rule, talk to everyone the way you would if you knew that, six months from now, you were either going to need their help or they might be thinking of giving you some lucrative work. This is a policy that pays off well.



The Spider-Man Suit Test

Among the many talented people I'm lucky enough to know is Spencer Cook, a brilliant Animator and Animation Director. Among other credits, Spencer was the Lead Character Animator on 'Spider-Man 1 & 2' and Animation Supervisor on 'Spider-Man 3' directed by Sam Raimi and starring Tobey Maguire. He shared this story with me.

At one point during the production of the 2002 'Spider-Man' film, a senior producer, Susan, called a meeting of some of the top people at the movie studio. She said, "As you know, we've been spending a lot of time trying to get the Spider-Man suit to look right. Well, we're getting pretty close to the final design and the wardrobe people got a test suit ready. We've shot about 30 seconds of Tobey wearing the suit and we'd like your opinion. Do you think it looks okay?" She then showed the executives the test footage.

The studio execs watched the test footage a few times and then offered their considered opinions. In general, they seemed to think the suit looked fine. However, they had some reservations. "The colours don't register strongly enough." "The webbing pattern on the suit looks good but lacks definition." "The spider logo on his chest isn't quite the same as the design we approved."

After a lengthy discussion, during which the footage was shown several times, Susan thanked the execs for their views and said they had been very helpful. "In fact," she said, with a playful smile, "you've been far more helpful than you realise. You've told me all I needed to know!"

It was time for Susan to admit the truth. What she had shown the studio bosses was *not* in fact a costume test at all. It was an *animation* test. What everyone had been looking at was the first fully rendered test footage of the completely digital Spider-Man character. Susan had wanted to see if anyone could tell it was animated, not actually an actor in a suit.

Lesson: If you want an honest opinion, create the right conditions for one.

Commentary: Susan realised she couldn't just show the test footage and ask, "Does this animation look like a realistic human figure to you?" By telling the studio executives it was animated, she would have affected how they looked at it. This is why she deceived them the way she did. It was the only way that she could get an honest reaction. You can't simply ask people "Does this thing deceive you successfully?" because you have alerted them to the deception.

I love this story and have featured it in countless presentations. I'm a member of the Magic Circle (in fact, if you want to get precise, a member of *Inner* Magic Circle). This is my favourite example of deception, used well and constructively, *outside* the context of a magic trick.

A New Regime

In the early 1990s, Brian Smith (not his real name) was working as the Sales & Marketing Manager of a multinational chemicals company. He was based in France.

The French operation was very successful. However, following a shift in corporate strategy and some technological advances, the company had decided to re-structure its operation. For Brian's department, this meant losing one third of his staff (from 120 people to just 80). The company also decided to close eight regional offices. Many of its sales people and technical developers had to adapt to working from home and liaising with one another via their laptops and the internet, which was still in its infancy. While this may be quite a common way of working today, at the time it felt strange and was difficult for most of the staff to adapt to.

Brian got his people together, explained the reasons for all the changes and showed how they would be good for the company's future. Though there would be some redundancies, he pointed out that the company had initiated a generous outplacement programme for those affected. After his detailed presentation, Brian asked if there were any questions. To his surprise, there were neither questions nor objections. Brian concluded by saying that anyone who wanted to discuss the changes was welcome to contact him privately.

Over the next few weeks, numerous members of his team took Brian up on his offer and contacted him. Brian thought they would want to discuss the *facts* of the structural shake-up and the *reasoning* for this or that decision. This isn't what happened. Most of the time, people got in

touch with him to discuss one thing: their *feelings*. The majority of the calls he received concerned how people felt about the new regime or how it might affect other people in the team. Typical calls went like this:

“I’m worried Marcel won’t be able to find a job outside.”

“How can I physically meet my regional colleagues if we have no offices?”

“Do our shareholders really thirst for so much more profit that they don’t care about our people?”

“I won’t have a secretary anymore.”

“I don’t like working on a computer. It always crashes. People are not machines you know.”

Brian realised he had made a mistake in the way he communicated with his team. He had focused on facts and the reasoning behind all the changes. In fact, what mattered to everyone was their feelings and the feelings of some of their colleagues. When he started addressing feelings rather than facts, he found everyone became much more amenable to the changes and there was a much more co-operative mood.

Lesson: Facts matter but feelings often matter more.

Commentary: When implementing significant organisational change, it’s a good idea to first address the feelings that are likely to be involved (anger, disappointment and so on) and *then* explain the rationale (such as efficiency, profitability and competitiveness). Always remember that you are not just reorganising details on a company chart or entering numbers on a spreadsheet. You are dealing with the lives of *people* and people have feelings.

The Bored Trainee

Author Kathleen Hawkins was once working as an independent consultant, teaching a business seminar in a high-profile company. The seminar seemed to be going very well. The attendees were laughing, responding and enthusiastically interacting with each other during all of the group exercises. However, there was one exception: a trainee called Chris. He wasn’t smiling and though he participated in the exercises he looked bored.

Kathleen was worried throughout the day and kept asking herself what she was doing wrong. She became increasingly focused on Chris and wondered why he didn’t seem to be enjoying the seminar at all. In fact, Kathleen started to experience major performance anxiety. Why couldn’t she reach Chris? How could she be failing, so noticeably, to engage him the way she was engaging all the others?

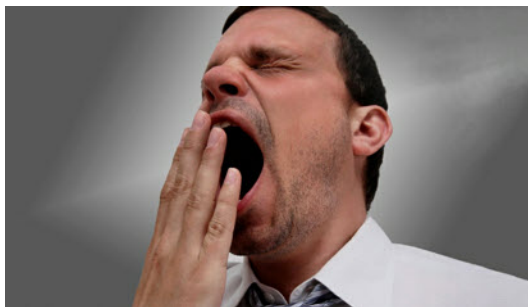
At the end of the class, as people were leaving, Chris walked up the aisle towards Kathleen. She thought to herself, “Uh oh, he’s going to give me a list of things that I could have done better.”

That isn’t what happened. Chris said, “Hi Kathleen. My Mum’s seriously ill in hospital, in the Intensive Care Unit. I almost didn’t come today but I’m so glad I did. The seminar was great! I really enjoyed it. Thank you.”

Lesson: It’s not always about you.

Commentary: Looking back on this incident, Kathleen acknowledges that she could have casually engaged Chris in conversation during a break to discover what was going on. By misinterpreting Chris’s expression (or lack of it) and his attitude, she had made herself anxious. This, in turn, meant that she risked maybe not performing at her best although, as it turned out, everyone seemed delighted with the seminar and her evaluations were very positive.

There are countless reasons why people think and act the way they do. It’s not always about you. Where possible, prefer facts to guesswork and speculation. If you don’t understand why someone is behaving the way they are, see if there’s a casual, informal way to ask them and find out. If this isn’t possible, resist the temptation to jump to conclusions, which could sabotage your own performance.





Different Worlds

One time, when I was hanging out with friends at a party, we started sharing memories of university and college days. I explained why I had always suffered from a bit of ‘impostor syndrome’:

“I did a Literature degree and always felt a bit of a fraud. It was easy. I just had to read a few books and then, in the exams, write essays about them. The questions were always vague, like: ‘Dryden used imagery as much to convey character as to express ideas. Discuss.’ I felt I could scribble almost anything, add a few quotes I’d learned and it would be good enough — after all, there was no ‘right’ answer. On the other hand, I had friends who were doing technical degrees, like engineering. They had to know *formulas* and *their* exam questions had specific answers they had to get right. I thought that was a far harder.”

As it happens, one of the other people in the group felt the exact opposite. “Really?” he said. “I’m amazed you think so. I did engineering and I always thought it was rather straightforward. Yes, I had to learn some complex formulas but, once I’d done that, the exams were easy. Apply the right formula, plug the numbers in and whatever came out was the right answer. But a question like the one you mentioned, ‘Discuss this or discuss that...’, well, I wouldn’t even know where to start! It would *terrify* me because there’s no formula to rely on, no correct answer to aim for. The way I see it, *we* had it easy. You arty types... I couldn’t do *your* exams in a hundred years.”

Lesson: ‘Easy’ and ‘difficult’ are relative terms, not absolutes.

Commentary: In any workplace, misguided views about the worth of one’s contribution leads to strained working relationships and poor morale. Everyone needs to feel valued for their contribution. Don’t think your work has *less* value because you find it easy. Don’t imagine someone else’s work has *more* value because you personally would find it hard. They may be thinking the same about *your* work.

Military Intelligence

In the 1980s, a large computer company was pioneering the use of artificial intelligence (AI). They were constantly seeking opportunities to show how AI could solve a broad range of practical problems. One sales consultant, who was ex-military, suggested that maybe AI could assist the management of an artillery range used by a British Army artillery school.

This school trained soldiers by firing guns over a large, vacant, fenced-off area of land surrounded by sparsely populated farms. As they used live shells, safety was a major concern. Whenever someone wanted to use this artillery range, they had to get permission from the training office. The soldiers in the office were required to calculate the potential range and damage of each firing. This was very difficult. As you'd expect at a *training* facility, the shells weren't always aimed accurately. What's more, they ricochet off the ground (like stones skimmed on a pond) and explode far from the intended target.

For the soldiers in the office, trying to perform these calculations was a tedious and complex procedure carried out using a huge map and large transparent plastic measuring tools like a giant's geometry set. The AI technicians proved they could develop a system that would perform these calculations far more quickly and accurately. It would lead to safer use of the artillery range and the cost, in relation to the artillery school's budget, was minuscule.

The idea was rejected. Why? For a disarmingly blunt reason: the school didn't want to spend money making soldiers' lives easier.

Lesson: You can't sell a benefit that isn't wanted.

Commentary: Not long after the AI solution was rejected, a training exercise went wrong and a stray shell caused a huge amount of damage to a neighbouring farm. No-one was injured, fortunately, but the Army still had to pay out a considerable fee as compensation. The money they had to pay out was many times more than the AI system would have cost — and the system would almost certainly have prevented the accident from happening.

In a related story, one of the earliest AI programs was an Expert System developed at Stanford University and called MYCIN. Its purpose was to diagnose bacterial infections. The data showed conclusively that the AI program was far better at doing this than even the most experienced physicians. Despite this important advantage, the AI program was never used. Why not? Because diagnosis was a part of the job that doctors said they *liked*.



Solving A Squabble

Despite my dependable talent for failure, I once ascended to the lofty position of UK Sales & Marketing Manager for a multi-national technology company. I was based in their London office.

Let me tell you about two of the people who reported to me. One was Lena, from Austria, who was also based in the London office. She headed up our training division and ran some of our major accounts. She was always brimming with enthusiasm and impressed everyone with her efficiency. The other was Jim, who ran our Manchester office. He was a capable and experienced manager with a talent for business development and a winning way with clients.

Lena and Jim were superb in their respective roles. The problem was that they didn't get on at all. For one thing, they had very different personalities. Lena was a highly confident fire-brand, always front and centre of every meeting. Jim was the laid back type who got good results with a 'softly softly' approach, never seeking to be the centre of attention. Perhaps their age difference was also a factor. Lena was the bright young ambitious talent, blazing her way up the corporate ladder. Jim was the steady captain, not a dynamic figure by any means but with decades of experience to offer.

On an almost daily basis, Lena and Jim complained to me about one other. Lena: "Jim has no idea how to sell the new courseware and isn't doing enough to fill the Manchester quota." Jim: "Lena just doesn't understand how we do business over here and my clients find her pushy and abrupt." So it went on, back and forth, day after day.

What made things worse was that I had no easy way of telling which of the many accusations being hurled in either direction were fair and accurate. I had neither the time nor the inclination to play detective, fact-checker, judge and jury every time another squabble erupted. Something had to be done.

I organised a conference phone call (this was in the era before Skype technology). I was with Lena in the London office and my boss was with Jim in the Manchester office. I stipulated that only one person was allowed to speak at a time. To start off, I raised one of Lena's objections and asked her to explain her point. Jim was then given time to offer his *factual* rebuttal. Then they swapped around: Jim's complaint, Lena's response. We carried on like this, point by point, until both parties agreed they had nothing else they wanted to bring up.

After the conference call, I told both Lena and Jim about a new rule. I encouraged them both to come to me, at any time, to share anything they were unhappy about. However, if it involved the other party, we were going to have another conference call where both sides would be heard. From that point on, Lena and Jim knew that if any dispute arose I would force them to talk to one another directly. This being the case, they started to talk to one another *first*, before getting me involved. Complaining to me became their last resort, not their first inclination.

Lesson: As a general rule of management, don't get caught in the middle of squabbles. Make both parties communicate with one another.

Commentary: People can be very good at *not* talking to one another, especially if they feel they might obtain a strategic advantage by outlining the other party's faults and getting you on their side. Never be seen to take sides. Create *constructive* dialogue and supervise it.

A Misguided Focus

Here's another story from Drew McAdam, whom we met in the first story in this booklet, 'Happy To Help'.

During his days as a freelance copywriter, Drew wrote press releases and advertorial for business owners and inventors. It was varied work that he liked a lot. He found that almost all his clients were making the same mistake: they were basing their marketing efforts *solely* on their product's ingenious design and features.

For example, one of Drew's client was a very talented inventor called Jeff. Among other things, he had devised a Digital Water Measuring System (DWMS) for the bakery and food processing trade. This was basically a box with a keypad and a big button. All the baker had to do was enter the volume and temperature of water he needed to be fed into his commercial mixing tank, then hit the big button. The machine took care of the rest, delivering precisely the right amount of water from the mains into the mix. This might not sound like a big deal to outsiders, but it was actually a rather brilliant and ingenious device.

Before Jeff invented his machine, the only way bakers could get this job done was to use ladders and buckets of water, or a hosepipe and thermometer, to fill the vat to a pre-established level. This was messy, time-consuming and not easy to do accurately.

Jeff's device was a triumph of ingenuity. Every mains and feeder water pipe is a different diameter and has a different pressure, meaning there are major fluctuations in the water supply between factories — which this new DMWS was smart enough to work around. Jeff was quite rightly proud of his device and all the clever thinking that had gone into its design. Unfortunately for his marketing efforts, he could *only* see his invention as an ingenious, technological marvel. This is what he constantly emphasised in all of his advertising.

Drew took Jeff to meet one of his customers. When asked to describe the main benefit of the DWMS, the customer simply said, “Instead of being in the bakery for hours, I just press the button and go home. It's great! In fact, I've been able to catch up on my favourite soap opera.”

From that point on, Jeff completely changed his marketing strategy. He suppressed his pride in the ingenuity of his device and stopped talking about it in purely technical terms. Instead, he focused on the benefits as *perceived by his customers*, expressed in simple terms. As a result, he enjoyed far more success and his sales went through the roof.

Lesson: Sell emotional benefits, not technical features.

Commentary: Most sales people understand the importance of selling benefits, not features. When you're selling, you have to discuss the product in terms of what the customer cares about and how it will benefit them on a personal and emotional level. John's customers didn't care much about how clever his invention was or the underlying technology. What they loved was that it was simple to use, made a hard job easy and saved them a lot of time. If you press the customer's *emotional* benefit buttons, they are much more likely to buy.



After The Merger

Frank was the CEO of a large insurance company that merged with a rival. The new, merged company had about 150 employees and 300 independent insurance agents. It was Frank's responsibility to ensure that the merger was a success.

Frank explained the company's plans to everyone and, for the most part, the transition seemed to go well. People adapted to their new roles and responsibilities fairly smoothly. However, Frank had one recurring problem. Many of the agents were calling him, privately, to complain about some of the *other* agents in the company — especially ones that had formerly been rivals. It was a feast of complaints, bickering and back-biting.

At first, Frank dealt with all these calls individually, resolving each conflict as best he could. When he realised that this wasn't working, he adopted a different strategy. All the insurance agents reported to a team of about thirty managers. Frank summoned these managers to a meeting.

"Look at the person sitting on your left," Frank began, "and then to the person sitting on your right. If I told you what they had said about you, you wouldn't want to be sitting next to them! I'm fed up having to spend hours a day listening to each of you bad-mouthing your colleagues. Do you want to spend your life complaining about one another or to play your part in building a new, very successful company? I won't have you wasting your time and mine slandering your co-workers.

"Feel free to call me any time if you want to discuss our products, processes or customer service. However, if you ever make a derogatory remark about a colleague, I will hang up on you. If you do it a second time, you're out, I don't want you poisoning us all."

Frank also instructed all his employees never to engage in gossip with sales agents. In a few months, the majority of the agents were socialising quite happily with one other and business targets were being met or exceeded. Only one person was fired.

Lesson: In any team or organisation, the most valuable asset is trust. Trust doesn't just build itself. You sometimes have to help it to grow.

Commentary: Trusting others at work is an act of generosity and acceptance. Trust flourishes when job skills and inter-personal skills are high. However, trust can be fragile and prone to falter, especially during times of high pressure, transition and change. It is one of a leader's first priority to nurture and develop trust. This may take time and there may be casualties.

A Lesson Of Lessons

Here's another contribution from my friend Jaq, whom we met earlier in 'The Book Collector'. Here's his story.

"There's one thing all teachers can agree on: no matter how long you've been teaching, there's always something new to learn.

I've been teaching for decades and these days I'm a university professor. Every semester brings with it new challenges and new fears, especially when I have to teach a new subject or a new curriculum. There are times when I'm allocated a new class just as the semester is about to start and, through no fault of my own, I have very little time to prepare.

This is exactly what happened to me recently. I had been told, at very short notice, that I would have to teach a course containing a lot of material I didn't know very well. To some extent, I felt I could rely on the classic teacher's axiom: 'stay one week ahead of the students and you'll be fine'. However, in this particular case there was an additional difficulty. As well as not knowing most of the course material, I wasn't all that *interested* in it either.

I stumbled through the first couple of weeks, trying to teach this new course to the best of my ability. Despite my efforts, I knew I wasn't getting the kind of engaged, enthusiastic reaction I got in my other classes. All my other courses were going pretty well, to be honest, but this new one just wasn't working out.

I realised the problem: *I was bored*. The subject felt boring to me and, despite my best efforts to hide my feelings, my students could sense it. Something had to be done.

One class, before I actually started lecturing, I sat on the corner of the desk and asked the students if they were as bored with the material as I was. They agreed it wasn't very interesting. Alas, we had to go through it all anyway.

I completely rethought my approach and changed the lesson. Instead of thinking about it as 'something we had to get through', I asked myself what could make it interesting. I began to look for real-life examples of the theories being explained in the book. More than that, I tried to find examples that my students would find funny and relevant, which I was fortunately able to do most of the time.

On the few occasions when I couldn't come up with something, I admitted this to my students and invited *them* come up with examples. By doing this, I made myself the butt of the joke (for not being able to

think of a suitable example) and also learned something new. As teachers often say: the teacher learns from the students. We ended the semester with a full classroom and positive reviews. And everyone, eventually, enjoyed themselves.”

Lesson: You can’t hide boredom and it’s contagious: if you’re bored, the people you’re talking to will be as well. Have a re-think. When it’s interesting for you, it will be interesting for them.

Commentary: Not all subjects are inherently fascinating and there’s no good mask for boredom. Difficult thought it may be, you have to find a way to inject some interest into the subject, making it interesting for you *and* your audience, or else it’s just a waste of everyone’s time. Fun and humour can help, as can ways of translating abstract theories into relevant, real-life examples.



A Sorry System

I used to work at a creative media company. This was back in the day when office computers were still fairly new and much more primitive than they are today.

Two young, hard-working production assistants, Alice and Nicola, took care of all the admin such as preparing contracts, call sheets and scripts. Unfortunately, the equipment they’d been given was next to useless. They joked that it was like something from the time of Caxton (hence the picture above). The very basic word processing software they had to use was unstable and crashed all the time — often meaning hours of work had to be re-done. The office printer also broke down frequently and sometimes had to be switched off and on again half a dozen times before it could be coaxed into actually printing anything. It also managed to ‘jam’ or scrunch up paper on a regular basis.

Alice and Nicola were both very conscientious — determined to get their work done on time and never let anyone down. Unfortunately, this meant they often had to work very long hours, or come in over the weekend, because the systems they were using were so unreliable and temperamental. They did, of course, raise these problems at meetings but the situation never improved.

At length, Alice and Nicola realised where they were going wrong: by shielding the rest of the company from the problems, they were more or less guaranteeing that nothing would improve. As far as management and the producers were concerned, there didn't seem to be a problem. The scripts, contracts and so on were always neatly presented and ready on time so all seemed well.

The two women adopted a different strategy. While still making sure nothing utterly crucial was ever late or missing, they stopped working *quite* so hard to cover up the system's deficiencies. Now and again, things were a day or two late, contained errors or weren't presented to their usual high standard. When the complaints came in, they politely and respectfully pointed out the source of the problem: the near-useless equipment and systems they were forced to use. One senior manager came down to see what absurd lengths they had to go to just to get a script typed up. "But that's absurd!" he remarked. Alice and Nicola agreed. "This is what we've been trying to tell you."

Before long, the company invested in better machines and software for the production office to use. This was better for everyone, not just the two long-suffering production assistants.

Lesson: If you want to gain, share the pain. People won't respond to problems they don't *feel*.

Commentary: I've seen this problem crop up many times in companies I've worked with over the years. As some people say, 'It's the squeaky wheel that gets the oil'.

If you are going to great lengths to shield people from problems, such as dud systems that *should* be fixed or improved, your heroism might be misguided. By hiding the problems you are perpetuating them and making sure they'll just get worse over time. What's more, the day will come when there's a major problem that you *can't* work around, leading to a failed project, a dissatisfied client or maybe even a serious accident.

It's only when you *share the pain* that you can expect the decision-makers to take notice. I'm not advocating reckless abandon or sabotage. You can do this judiciously, sharing *just enough* of the problems to get something done without wilfully wrecking vital projects.



Easy Promises

In my experience, friends can be amazingly helpful and usually are. Nonetheless, you sometimes have to take care. One time, I was checking out potential venues for some training events I wanted to run. A friend of mine, Ben, told me about a conference venue he had used from time to time that he thought would be absolutely ideal for my needs. This particular venue was many miles north of London (where I'm based) and a little bit awkward to get to. Nonetheless, Ben thought I ought to check it out. He told me the manager of the venue was called Eric and gave me his contact details.

My attempts to liaise with Eric did not go smoothly. He was difficult to reach and not very good at returning calls or messages. These were hardly promising signs. Even when I did manage to talk to Eric, he seemed rather absent-minded and forgetful. At length, I arranged to go to see the venue one Saturday morning. Given that it was going to be quite a long journey, I told Eric I would call him again on Saturday, before setting off, just to confirm that he would be there to let me in and show me round.

When Saturday arrived, I tried to contact Eric but couldn't reach him. He neither answered his phone nor replied to my texts. I felt inclined to simply cancel the trip but called Ben first. He told me quite emphatically that I should go up to see Eric's place. Time and time again, he assured me that Eric would either be there or would have arranged for someone else to meet me and let me in. He promised this, guaranteed it, gave me every assurance under the sun.

Swayed by Ben's assurances, and the lure of a potentially 'perfect' training venue, I made the rather long, arduous and time-consuming trek to Eric's conference centre. When I got there, it was locked and deserted, silent as the grave. No way in, no way for me to see whether it was suitable for my needs. Still no response from Eric. I went home, rather dejected. The entire day had been wasted.

“There was no-one there,” I told Ben on the phone that evening. “It was a complete waste of time.”

“Oh,” replied Ben. I could almost hear him shrug as he said it. “Sorry about that. I felt sure he’d be there.” It was all right for *him*, of course. It wasn’t *his* day that had been completely wasted. This is when I learned my lesson about people’s assurances.

Lesson: It’s easy to give guarantees that don’t affect you.

Commentary: I expect this is a lesson that most people reading this booklet will already have learned. However, I wanted to include it because it means a great deal to me personally. In my younger days, I was far too easily persuaded by effusive promises and guarantees. It took me a while to realise that it’s easy for people to make promises when they *personally* won’t be affected if they turn out to be wrong. Learning this lesson, simple as it may be, made a big difference and stopped me wasting a lot of my time.

If you want a promise or assurance to mean anything, especially in business, make sure the person offering it pays a price if they’re wrong. Otherwise, there’s a chance their ‘promise’ isn’t worth mud.

Goodbye Walter

For many years I worked at a software company in north London. Our training department ran courses teaching clients how to use our brilliant business software. This department consisted of a manager, called Walter, two admin staff and half a dozen trainers. Customers liked the training and the department generated a lot of revenue. All was well.

Following a bit of company upheaval, a new senior manager arrived. The new Mr. Genius reviewed the company’s entire operation and reached some conclusions. Among other things, he decided that Walter was superfluous, ineffective and had to go.

Let me tell you a bit more about Walter. He was among the more mature members of staff, having been with the company since it was founded. He had no particular expertise in training. As he freely admitted, he was only the Training Manager because, early in the company’s life, he had volunteered to set up the training department when nobody else wanted to. It’s fair to say he didn’t make a good first impression on people. He exhibited a rather frail, absent-minded demeanour, wasn’t particularly well-spoken, his suit was crumpled, he smoked a lot and wasn’t blessed with the greatest social skills. He sometimes looked like someone who had wandered in off the street and wasn’t sure where he was.

Mr. Genius argued that Walter was contributing very little to the training department, it would run just as well without him and he wasn't earning his (quite high) salary. In due course, Walter was shown the door.

Chaos ensued. It soon transpired that, for all his flaws, Walter was incredibly popular with everyone in the training department, all of whom felt fiercely loyal to him. Our clients also loved him and many said they *only* sent their people to be trained by us (rather than our rivals) because of the good working relationship they had with Walter.

The training department fell apart. Schedules got messed up, incorrect instructions were being sent out, customer calls were going unanswered and, in general terms, everything was going to pieces. For all his rather quiet and self-effacing manner, it was clear that Walter had been doing a *huge* amount of work that went largely unacknowledged — fixing small problems before they became big ones, being a superb diplomat, ensuring customers felt loved, making sure the pipeline was always full and money was coming in and generally steering his departmental ship away from all the icebergs.

It took a while for Mr. Genius to admit his mistake. Attempts were made to get Walter back but by then he had been snapped up by a competitor (who had, as a result, seen their training revenue soar). Not long after, Mr. Genius left the company 'by mutual agreement'.

Lesson: Be slow to criticise someone's contribution. It's not always easy to assess and errors of judgment can be costly.

Commentary: Some people deliver a great deal of value but go about it rather quietly. Don't ask whether they seem impressive or dynamic. Ask if their area of responsibility seems to be running smoothly, if they seem popular and if they are getting the desired results. If so, leave well alone. A crumpled suit isn't the end of the world. (I've changed Walter's name but this is a true story and I saw the whole, glorious disaster unfold before my eyes.)



The Warning Sign

“Wow! That sign could *not* be clearer. I guess we’d better go back.”

Picture the scene if you will. About ten years ago, I was fortunate enough to be visiting Hawaii, exploring The Big Island with my then girlfriend. We had decided to walk to an area, not too far from our hotel, where we had heard there were some active lava flows. Of course, these flows can be extremely dangerous. However, provided one proceeds carefully, and heeds all the best safety advice, it is possible to observe them in all their eerie, glowing glory. Countless visitors to Hawaii do this every year since it’s a remarkable thing to witness and not commonly encountered anywhere else.

We had gone quite a long way towards our intended destination when we encountered one of the biggest, most impressive warning signs I’ve ever seen. The sign itself was about half the size of an average house. It was bolted to the front of a rather impressive scaffolding structure that, we could only presume, had been built specifically to display this massive sign. The sign was not only huge but also perfectly clear. In essence, it said ‘Do *not* go any further along this path; this area is *seriously* risky and dangerous; you are *forbidden* from going any further; turn back and stay away!’

It seemed we had little choice but to head back. At that moment, two locals came ambling along the path on their way home. We said hello and had a brief chat, explaining that we had hoped to see some of the lava flows but, having seen the massive warning sign, we were heading back to our hotel.

“Oh, the sign? You can ignore that,” said our new friends. “They put that up years ago when things got bad. It’s been there for ages and they’ve just never bothered to take it down. Forget about it. Stick to the path, take it slowly and you’ll be fine.”

We took their advice and, while staying a safe distance away, enjoyed a rather thrilling evening watching tendrils of glowing lava unfurl across the rocky landscape.

Lesson: Not all barriers are as formidable as they seem. Check the facts. ‘Insuperable’ obstacles often turn out to be nothing of the sort.

Commentary: Solving problems is part of running any business. It’s always worth remembering that *some* problems, that seem tough and challenging at first, turn out to be irrelevant or easy to solve when you investigate them and *actually get the facts*. The huge warning sign in Hawaii is my favourite metaphor regarding this point.

Thanks And Credits

Many of my wonderful friends around the world helped me to put this booklet together.

The very talented Drew McAdam, whom I've known since forever, told me the story that started me off down this path ('Happy To Help'). He also contributed 'A Misguided Focus'. If you want a great mindreader to entertain you, get in touch with him:
www.drewmcadam.co.uk

My friend Kathleen Hawkins contributed 'The Bored Trainee'. Everyone in the world should read Kathleen's superb book, 'Spirit Incorporated' as well as all of her other books, including her recent best-seller 'The Mortician's Child':
www.winningspirit.com

Dimis Michaelides, whom I've had the pleasure of working with several times, is a first-class speaker, trainer and magician. He contributed 'A New Regime' and 'After The Merger'. Check out his website:
www.dimis.org

I'm grateful to the wonderful (and witty) Jaq Greenspon for sharing 'The Book Collector' and 'A Lesson Of Lessons'. He also regularly helps me with bits of research that I sincerely doubt anyone else could ever sort out for me!

My very fine friend Alan Jackson contributed 'Communication Matters' and 'Military Intelligence'. Alan is one of my favourite correspondents and is also a highly accomplished mathematician, statistician and solver of mysteries!

Marc Plant (who sadly passed away not long ago) was a great friend from my days in the software trade and a hugely successful businessman. He shared the 'Don't Mention The Score' story with me a long time ago and I've always loved it.

The great Spencer Cook, a Hollywood star if ever there was, told me about 'The Suit Test' and I am delighted to share the story here.

Countless other people have also contributed to this collection in one way or another, including of course all the people involved in the stories themselves (here granted anonymity). I am grateful to them all.

End Note 1: An Invitation

Do You Have A Story For Me?

As I said in the introduction, I expect that one day I will put together a second compilation of stories similar to this one. Have you a story you'd be willing to share with me and my readers?

The story needs to be an original one, preferably based on your own first-hand experience. I'm not looking for popular anecdotes or stories that anyone can scrape off the internet.

It needs to be a story that can be told in about 400 words and that has relevance to the business community — especially people who work for themselves. Please make sure it can fit the format you see in this book: story / lesson / commentary,

If you submit a story, please don't take offence if I decide not to use it. I can't use everything people send me. If I do use your story, I will rewrite it so that the booklet has consistency of style and tone. The finished booklet will be offered free of charge from one of my websites and there's no fee, payment or remuneration of any kind involved.

Send your possible contributions to: ian@ianrowland.com .

Thank you!

— Ian Rowland

End Note 2: Three Requests

Please Help Me If You Can

If you'd like to support me and my work, please tell all your friends about my various websites, all of which contain free booklets like this one. I'm self-employed and promote my work as best I can, but a little help to 'spread the word' is always appreciated.

For example, you can mention me to your friends in real life or on social media. Wherever people are discussing the joys and challenges of self-employment, or looking for a good writer or speaker, please give me and my books a mention and pass on the link:
www.ianrowland.com

Got contacts in broadcast or online media? Tell them about me or about this book. They might get a good story, article or feature out of it — if you've got an audience, I've got content! I want to help everyone who wants to work for themselves and do their own thing. Thank you for any assistance you can give me.

Improvements, Fixes And Flubs

If you have notes or ideas about how I can improve this booklet, or if you've noticed errors I should fix, I'd love to hear from you. If there are factual errors, things I should explain more clearly or typos, I'd love to correct them.

Please Send Me Your Review

Reviews are really helpful. I don't need reviews for small, free booklets like this one. However, if you have read any of my *main* books, such as 'How To Work For Yourself And Win', please send me a review that I can add to the product page on my website. My email address is ian@ianrowland.com. Your review can be published under your own name or can be as anonymous as you wish.

Your review doesn't have to be very long or a literary masterpiece. Short reviews can be great! Also, don't worry if your writing needs a little help or tidying up. I can take care of that for you.

You can also submit reviews to Amazon if you obtained any of my books from there.

What Can I Do For You?

Personal Coaching And Training

I work with private clients all over the world, either in person or via the internet. Some people contact me for help with weight loss and fitness. Others want a little help with areas such as self-fulfilment and personal success, building their business, creating a passive income or related subjects. Let's work together and see what value I can provide for you!

See any of my websites for details.

Talks, Keynotes And Corporate Training

I love taking part in live events! I offer excellent talks, training and keynotes on subjects such as persuasion and communication skills, working for yourself, creating digital products and building a passive income. I often add touches of magic and mindreading, just to make my sessions a little bit different!

To date, I've worked for the FBI, Google, Coca-Cola, Marks & Spencer, The British Olympics Team, The Ministry of Defence, Hewlett-Packard, The Philadelphia 76ers, CapGemini, BBC, Kier Construction, NBC, The Crown Estate, Iceland, Medtronic, Unilever, The Sunday Times Oxford Literary Festival, The Prince's Charities, McKinsey & Company, Eurostar Software Testing Conference, Ogilvy & Mather, Rabobank, London Business School, ABC Television, Channel 4, Cambridge Technology Partners, Synon, Valtech and many other companies.

I've also lectured at Oxford University, Cambridge University, the California Institute of Technology and Monash University.

Writing

A friend once described me as 'a book midwife'. If you have a book in you, I'll help you to write it, publish it yourself, market it and make some money from it. I've been a professional writer for over 35 years and I offer a complete, end-to-end service.

I particularly like helping people to create a passive income for themselves: create a product, set up a website, make money while you sleep. This is what I've been doing for about twenty years. I can guide you through the entire process! It's a challenging road to travel, to be sure, but at the same time highly satisfying and rewarding.

Social Media

I'd love to stay in touch via social media!

For each of my main websites, there is a corresponding Facebook page:

www.ianrowland.com
www.coldreadingsuccess.com
www.ianrowlandtraining.com

You can also find me on:
Twitter (@IanRowland1)
Linked In
Instagram



Some Kind Words...

“My FBI Behavioural Analysis Program hired Ian to work with and train our team for a full day. He demonstrated and taught us a lot about cold reading and how we could apply it to our work as behavioural analysts. Additionally, he also covered advanced communication skills, persuasive language and relevant insights into the art of ‘misdirection’. At the conclusion of his comprehensive seminar, he entertained our entire team and families with a mindreading show at an evening social. Not only was it great fun, but even today my team is still talking about it. I’d highly recommend Ian to anyone who’s interested in these subjects and wants a first-class speaker and trainer.”

— Robin Dreeke, *former Special Agent and Head of **FBI Behavioural Analysis Program***

“I regard Ian as a first-rate trainer and consultant. He has amazing material, he always delivers and he’s great to work with.”

— A. Sanghi, *Lead Economist, **World Bank Group***

“Ian has a very engaging and energising style and he was thought-provoking and entertaining throughout. Most importantly, everyone said it was a great use of their time. Ian gave us plenty of ways to work smarter and be more effective both professionally and personally.”

— A. Mellor, ***Marks & Spencer***

“Ian is the best speaker and trainer I’ve ever seen, and he hosted our day perfectly. We learned a lot, he was entertaining and I know we’ll be more successful this year thanks to what he shared with us.”

— D. Holmes, *Financial Director, **Healthcare Learning***

“We had some of the top experts around the globe in their field, but when we looked at how people were registering for the conference and what the attendees wanted, overwhelmingly we saw very large numbers signing up for Ian’s course, so much so that his class was the largest in the whole session that we had for those three days.”

— Chris Hadnagy, ***Organiser, Human Hacking Conference***

“Of the hundred plus lectures and shows we have hosted at Caltech none have brought more enthusiastic praise than your performance. I have now heard from dozens of people in the audience, all of whom said this was one of the most entertaining, informative, and above all funny shows they had ever seen. You are to be congratulated for breathing so much life and class into the science and skeptics community.”

— Michael Shermer, ***Executive Director, Skeptics Society***

“Ian's special talent lies in his ability to communicate useful information about self-improvement, business, psychology and, yes, magic to diverse audiences around the world. His books are essential reading and if you get the opportunity to hear him speak, don't miss him! For those outside the world of magic and mindreading, let me tell you that Ian is very highly regarded in the trade. He even gets hired to go to major conventions and teach other magicians! When I was Editor of the Magic Circle's magazine, I asked Ian to write a column on mindreading, which he did for 12 years to great acclaim.”

— *Matthew Field, **Member of the Inner Magic Circle***

“I've been an Independent Financial Advisor for 20 years and have learned from people like Dale Carnegie, Anthony Robbins, Jim Rohn and Brian Tracy. I now include Ian Rowland on that list. Having attended his courses and invested in some personal coaching with him, I cannot recommend him highly enough. His unique insights regarding positive persuasion and what makes people tick will prove invaluable in your personal and business life. He's funny, engaging and a leader in his field.”

— *Mike LeGassick, **Leading Independent Financial Advisor, UK***

“I make it my business to learn from experts. I spent four days with Ian and we covered a range of skills that I know will help me both personally and professionally — particularly inter-personal skills and ways to establish instant rapport with people. I think he's terrific.”

— *Sam Q., **Entrepreneur, Saudi Arabia***

“I'm a sales guy. I've studied all the big names and been trained by some of the best in the business. I trained with Ian via Skype and he just blew my mind with techniques and perspectives I never knew before. It's all practical. I use what Ian taught me almost every day. He opened my eyes to aspects of communication that truly deserve the term 'magic'.”

— *Michael Martin, **Sales professional, USA***

“I studied CRFB with Ian via Skype and without doubt it's my best investment this year! Ian is an excellent teacher and working with him is very enjoyable. In addition, Ian is incredibly generous with his knowledge in many adjacent fields.

— *Patrick Ehrich, **Teacher and Educational Trainer, Germany***



Training day for Coca-Cola Europe in Lisbon; lecturing at Masters of Magic in Italy; management training event at The Atomium, Brussels



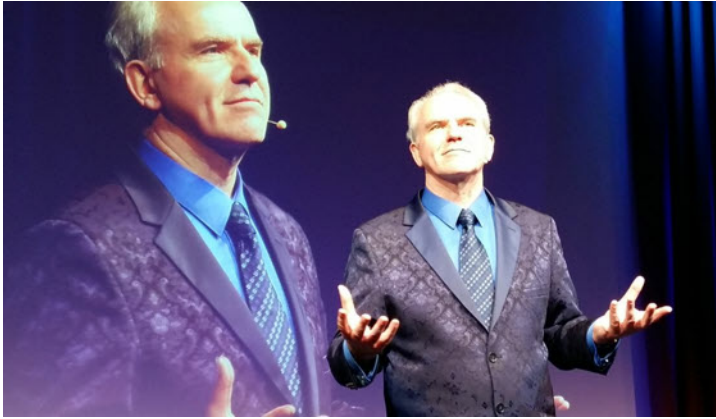
Training FBI field agents; teaching persuasion skills at The STTAR Summit at the Philly 76ers HQ; training a private client in London



Cold reading training for the Human Hacking Conference in Orlando;
the Human Hacking audience; management training for Cap Gemini



A demonstration in New York for ABC 'Prime Time'; lecturing in Gothenburg; training for the Alternative Investors Institute, Paris



A couple of stage shots; teaching a public 'Cold Reading For Business' class in London