

THE POWER OF LETTING GO

Eight years ago, as an experienced graphic designer, Natasha Acres decided to go it alone and set up her own agency, Wow Creative, which now employs seven staff from offices in Swindon and Bideford, Devon.



The business had been “reasonably successful” according to Natasha, yet she’d begun to lose the passion that had propelled her into it in the first place and so growth wasn’t happening at the rate she wanted.

Natasha also wanted to develop other areas of the business but realised she’d become too bogged down with the day-to-day operation of the agency to find space for the bigger picture.

“I realised I needed to find a way to delegate – which is especially hard when it’s your own business. I was focusing too much on people not doing things exactly as I would, even though I really wanted to be able to trust them. Another reason I felt I was falling short was because I wasn’t spending most of the week out on my surf board, which was the main reason for establishing part of the business in Devon!”

Despite this insight, Natasha still wasn’t sure of how to move forward. But after an initial telephone interview with her coach at Coaching for Success, she had some homework to do with a deadline for their first face-to-face meeting: what were her personal and professional goals and how did she envisage the business running in an ideal world?

“It was also suggested I read a book called ‘Maverick’ (Ed: *This book by the owner of Brazilian company Semco has taken the notion of empowerment to new heights. We reviewed it in Newsletter 14 earlier this year*). That was my breakthrough moment,” says Natasha. “It made me realise why I’d gone into business in the first place and helped me to embark on the journey to changing my outlook for Wow Creative.”

“I remembered how I’d wanted to be different, to incorporate my own personality into how we worked with clients and to deliver really great service. That meant

training my staff very carefully but I realised I’d turned that into a need to control everyone and everything they did!”

Natasha and her coach worked through some visualisation techniques to help her clarify her goals and to take steps towards change. The first action she worked on was a whole team meeting at Wow Creative aimed at finding ways in which the business could effectively run itself, without the hands-on involvement that Natasha was used to imposing.

“I confess I found difficult to engage with visualisation at first, but it was actually crucial in helping me to prepare for the meeting and achieve a successful outcome. I was able to rehearse how to phrase things effectively and to practise letting my team control the proceedings, so that they were coming up with ideas for how things could work without me sitting on their shoulder.”

Natasha also found her coach’s own experience of and perspective on business and managing people, at a senior level, hugely valuable.

The response and the results have been “brilliant” according to Natasha. “We’re all much happier and more energised. I can sleep at night because I’m sharing the load, rather than worrying about the minutiae of every job, and I’ve got more time, a much healthier work/life balance and space to see the wood for the trees.”

So where now for Natasha and Wow Creative? Well now that the business is moving forward very nicely under its own steam with an empowered team, Natasha is starting to organise her new-found time in thinking about how to develop those new business strands, which include an environmental theme.

We’re hoping to revisit Natasha’s story in the months ahead to find out where her journey takes her next ... so watch this space in future issues of *CoachLines*.

(Ed: Take a look at www.wowcreative.co.uk - we think you’ll like it!)

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The War on Email: The Email-Free day

In a number of issues we've mentioned various pieces of news or research on the subject of email usage in companies and its effect on stress etc. The latest piece we spotted comes from www.timesonline where John Harlow reports from Los Angeles on how some companies are declaring 'email free days'!

Some firms such as Deloitte & Touche have asked employees to 'talk not type' for just one day per week and one high tech firm, US Cellular fined rebels who couldn't stop hitting the send button 1\$ and made them wear nametags with a large red 'E'.



One individual, an internet strategist of all things, declared herself 'email bankrupt' after receiving her 30,000th unanswered email - she simply hit delete and cleared the lot! She says she felt both terror and relief when her inbox registered zero for the first time in 10 years; then horror as it started to fill up again. (You think your inbox is busy - hers filled up at the rate of 1000 per day!!!)

Another big I.T. company, Intel are trying email-free Fridays after a team of 150 engineers piloted the idea by turning off their email system for 24 hours and declared they would talk to people instead. One engineer said it was scary at first with "people sneaking looks at their BlackBerries". However, he said, "after a few hours of talking to people...you realise it's like being addicted to junk food - you can live without it". Apparently his wife had to unplug the home PC to stop him checking on Saturday morning as his nerves "were jangling".

It seems that the average US office worker receives 140 emails per day, but hardly manages to read half of them and to respond to only about one quarter. How do you measure up? Fancy going email bankrupt? (Check with your boss first!)

Work/Life Balance & Mobile Workers

A report by Pearn Kandola for Cisco warns that companies should take special care over the mental health of their mobile workers (people working away from home and the office for more than 10 hours a week).

The main issues is that the blurring of work / private life boundaries, loneliness and isolation put them at risk of stress and early burnout. The counter is 'regular, open communication' with visible recognition of success being shared with senior management. However, beware micro management as attention is valuable but not interference.

Many office based workers, especially managers responsible for budget allocation, find it difficult to see the value in lavish sales conferences etc yet this report recommends team building meals and social occasions as a means of aiding later communications via email and phone.

According to Kandola the kind of person likely to cope well with mobile working is:

- Extravert
- Disciplined
- Open to new experiences
- Self confident
- Resilient

Unsurprisingly, the key competencies mentioned are:

- Communication
- Customer focus
- Planning & Organising
- Flexibility
- Relationship building

Of course this all sounds obvious to sales managers!

What's Important To You?

This is of course a question of Values, something our clients will be very familiar with as we facilitate their discovery of

their own unconscious values. Now, in a piece of research published in the *Journal Occupational & Organisational Psychology* (2007, 80,2) Dr M Vansteenkiste links certain values to errors in design of organisational rewards.

workers who value material success, status and power more than personal development or helping colleagues are more likely to be dissatisfied with life, face more work/life conflicts and are less committed to their organisation.

His point is that many organisations turn to material benefits as rewards but this could be counter productive for both the organisation and the individual.

Ed: We're not sure what changes he's advocating, whether to rewards or to recruitment practices but there is a parallel with the work on extrinsic versus intrinsic rewards done by Kohn (see Punished by Rewards on our book page at www.coachingforsuccess.co.uk)

Trick Yourself Into Getting Fit

What do you regard as exercise - gardening, walking to the coffee machine, housework? Maybe it is if you think it is!

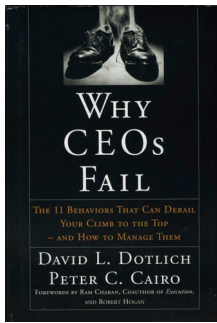
In 'Exercise and the placebo effect', Psych Science, researchers assessed the health of 84 women hotel cleaners then told half that the nature of their work meant they already lived healthy active lives in line with government guidelines.

One month later even though they hadn't changed any of their eating, smoking, drinking and exercise habits these women showed healthy reductions in body mass index, waist to hip ratio and blood pressure - the other half showed no change.



A very welcome placebo effect?!

The Shadow Side



Not wishing to end the year on a negative note this book is in fact all about being able to recognise and manage the key behaviours that have led others to fail. And you don't have to be a CEO to learn from them.

You may have heard it said before that your strengths can become your weaknesses and this is a central point of the book. It is full of examples of some of the best leaders

who managed to eventually derail their success by indulging in flawed behaviour that was closely related to the factors that originally led to that success.

The authors identify 11 key behaviours and make some simple suggestions for how to recognise and perhaps manage each. The 11 are:

- Arrogance- thinking you're right, everyone else is wrong
- Melodrama - needing to be the centre of attention
- Volatility - being subject to mood swings
- Excessive Caution - being afraid to make decisions
- Habitual Distrust - focusing on the negatives
- Aloofness - being disengaged and disconnected
- Mischievousness -believing rules are made to be broken
- Eccentricity - trying to be different just for the sake of it
- Passive Resistance - what you say is not what you really believe
- Perfectionism - getting the little things right and the big things wrong
- Eagerness to Please - trying to win the popularity contest

Our job as coaches is to get feedback for clients which they can use to become aware of what is described as the

'shadow side' of their personality and then to use our coaching skills to support them in managing the behaviour. We often start with a psychometric called the Hogan Development Survey, which is based directly on the behaviours in the book (available through our website)

If you would like to start the New Year by examining your own 'shadow side' and start watching out for the flip side of your strengths please call us on 0800 2889867!

On that note, all that remains is to wish you a Very Merry Christmas, enjoy the break!



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About us

Coaching for Success provides executive and personal coaching that helps individuals perform to their maximum potential.

Our corporate client list covers a range of industry sectors, including pharmaceutical, retail, finance and construction, and high profile names such as John Laing, Novartis, KPMG, Abbott and Johnson Controls.

Our coaches work with company personnel, on a one-to-one basis, enabling them to recognise the choices and opportunities available to them, to make decisions about career and personnel development and then to create and implement a plan of action designed to achieve success.

We provide professional coaching in the areas of:

- Executive Coaching
- Life Coaching
- Performance Coaching