



# CUTTINGS

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## FLEXIBLE WORKING

The ability to work remotely from the office through the use of the internet, email and mobile communications has led to a huge growth in the numbers of home workers. Not only does the worker achieve an improved work/life time balance, especially where there is a long commute, but flexibility of the work pattern allows them to manage their family and other priorities better. It is fast becoming an essential benefit.

Working with social work teams in Dundee, where team members were given the freedom to organise themselves in any way so long as they met their client needs, flexible working led to staff feeling less stress and achieving higher productivity. Just having the choice was seen to be significant even if it was not used. One social work assistant did not take part in the pilot project but identified the fact that she had the choice to opt in or out as an added benefit.

The reality, of course, is that it doesn't suit everyone. Working from home can be very isolating and where individuals are prone to depression, working from home can even exacerbate the condition.

Managers also find it difficult to adjust, even if remote workers tend to take more responsibility for decision making on themselves. Being 'out of sight' can also appear to be 'out of mind' when the manager fails to call. Whereas managers who call too frequently may be seen to be 'checking up'.

Many managers find a major difficulty in moving from measures of input (like hours at work) to measures of output (results). Line managers need to communicate clear goals, expected standards and be able to measure and assess work quality remotely.

There is often a fear that individuals will abuse the system and spend their time gardening. In Dundee these fears proved unfounded, as did concerns over a loss of team cohesion and support.

ICT can hinder as well as facilitate flexible working. Security of information and data protection is often such a high priority that access is so limited or slow that productivity falls. In the Dundee study, it was found that a lot of flexibility could be achieved without giving everyone a laptop or having remote on-line access. Batch

data transfer, and off-line working may be all that is needed. And as I reported in Cuttings 52, virtual workspaces and instant messaging have been proved to make virtual teams more effective than face-to-face ones.

Whatever else, avoid the security overkill highlighted by Scott Adams in a real life Dilbert story, where the newly acquired laptops for the sales force were screwed to their desks to prevent them being moved and stolen!

Flexible working, is not for everyone and it requires ICT support, and a supportive management. But it is definitely for some, and the pay off is great in increased productivity and employee satisfaction. The key is to 'walk the talk' and be flexible in its introduction, giving as much choice as possible. The experience is that if you put your trust in staff, they repay it several fold.

*Time on our side, Community Care, October 2004*

*Homeworking, HR Zone, January 2005*  
*Integrating Work with Life: Using AI to Successfully Implement Family-Friendly Policies Ai Practitioner 18, August 2002*  
*Virtual teams, Cuttings 52*

## THE TWELVE HABITS OF THE TOXIC MENTEE

As promised in *Cuttings 53*, here is David Clutterbuck's companion piece to his light-hearted look at how not to mentor, this time looking from the other chair:

1. Bring to the first formal meeting a long shopping list of things you want the mentor to do for you.
2. Expect the mentor to be available for you, whenever you want them.
3. Regard the mentor as your prime source of gossip to pass on.
4. Expect the mentor to always have the answer – that's why they are more senior.

5. Expect the mentor to decide when to meet and what to talk about.
6. Boast about the relationship to your colleagues at every opportunity.
7. Never challenge what the mentor says – s/he is paid to know best.
8. Blame the mentor whenever advice doesn't work out – s/he should have known better.
9. Treat mentoring sessions as mobile – the easiest item in the diary to move at the last minute.
10. Enjoy the opportunity to have a good moan or whinge, whenever

you meet – especially if no-one else will listen to you.

11. Make it clear to the mentor that you want to be just like them – adopt their style of speaking, dress and posture.
12. Never commit to doing anything as a result of the mentoring session. If, by accident, you do, simply forget to follow the commitment up. (Why spoil the fun of discussion with outcomes?)

*Quoted in Corporate Coach e-newsletter, Brefi Group. www.brefigroup.co.uk*

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# Snippets

A collection of thought provokers and quotations ...

- ✂ "Vision is the capacity to believe in what my heart sees, what others can't see. Vision is seeing positive possibilities where others see only negative probabilities." *Carl A. Hammerschlag*
- ✂ "Even if it is a little thing, do something for those who have need of help, something for which you get no pay but the privilege of doing it." *Dr. Albert Schweitzer*
- ✂ "Many acts of service cost nothing and take little time: listening, encouragement, compliments, gratitude, and compassion. Anytime you affirm the worth of others, you serve." *Chris Karcher*
- ✂ "The task of leadership is to align strengths in ways that make weaknesses irrelevant." *Peter Drucker*
- ✂ "There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about." *Meg Wheatley*
- ✂ "One learns in order to do better what one already knows how to do well." *Zen saying*
- ✂ "In times of rapid change, experience may be your worst enemy." *J. Paul Getty*
- ✂ "A leader is anyone who wants to make a difference at these times." *Meg Wheatley*
- ✂ The Chinese have a concept for that roughly translates to "heart and mind for wanting to learn." So whereas students in Western cultures may experience shame or guilt as the result of failing to achieve, the Chinese model of learning suggests that shame or guilt results from failing to *want* to learn. *Jin Li*
- ✂ "The creativity and positive energy you put forth come back to you many times over. So do the hurt and destruction. Which would you rather get back?" *Ralph Marston*
- ✂ "In this world it is not what we take up, but what we give up, that makes us rich." *Henry Ward Beecher*
- ✂ "You are what you think about all day long." *Dr. Robert Schuller*
- ✂ "I never let my schooling interfere with my education" *Mark Twain*

## Are you concerned about Plaxo?

"I'm using a new tool called Plaxo to update my address book. Your information will not be shared with anyone else. You do not need to download any software or register to send me your information. Please take a moment to review the information below and click the button to correct or confirm your contact information."

I am sure, like me, you have all received countless emails like the above from people who are using Plaxo software to manage their address books. (I even received two requests today from the same person, one a response to my non-reply to the other!)

I have a number of concerns, the first is technical – whenever I have tried to update my record their system has not allowed me to.

I have a logic question: what is the point of sending out an update request to someone whose email address might have changed?

But I have other, more serious concern, and after doing a bit of online research, it seems I am not alone.

One of the Plaxo founders was one of the original Napster people, whose aim was to steal intellectual property and breach copyright. This person has since left, but have the business ethics improved?

At present, Plaxo has 3 million users and zero revenue. Their stated aim is to have 10 million users and \$10 million revenue. Where will this revenue come from? Supposedly from adding revenue generating products to their free service – they will of course have 10 million people to spam at this stage of their development.

But even more sinister and worrying is that they could be sold or taken over. Even at 3 million, their database is very valuable for someone who wants to buy online contact details. If they do make their 10 million target, it will be even more valuable. Could this be how their founders intend to generate revenue?

And does it breach privacy laws?

*Subscribers to Cuttings can rest assured that they will not be receiving spam messages from my address book. I share my address book information with no-one, especially an online database that I do not control.*

*For those of you who wish to update their address books, my contact information is displayed in the next column...*

## Cuttings now every 2 months

Welcome to the first *Cuttings* in its new pattern of six copies per year: February, April, June, August, October and December. As always, please feel free to pass on this copy to anyone who you think might be interested, and if you want to receive your own personal copy, please send me an email.

### 2005 Public Programmes

**Focus on Influence** – is about developing interpersonal skills, reflection and insight, assuming responsibility, personal commitment, enhancing flexibility and achieving goals together with others.  
Belgium: 26-29 April (in Dutch)  
Netherlands: 11-14 October (in English)

#### Information and booking:

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*Or call me direct (contact numbers below).*

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