

EXECUTIVE *eye*

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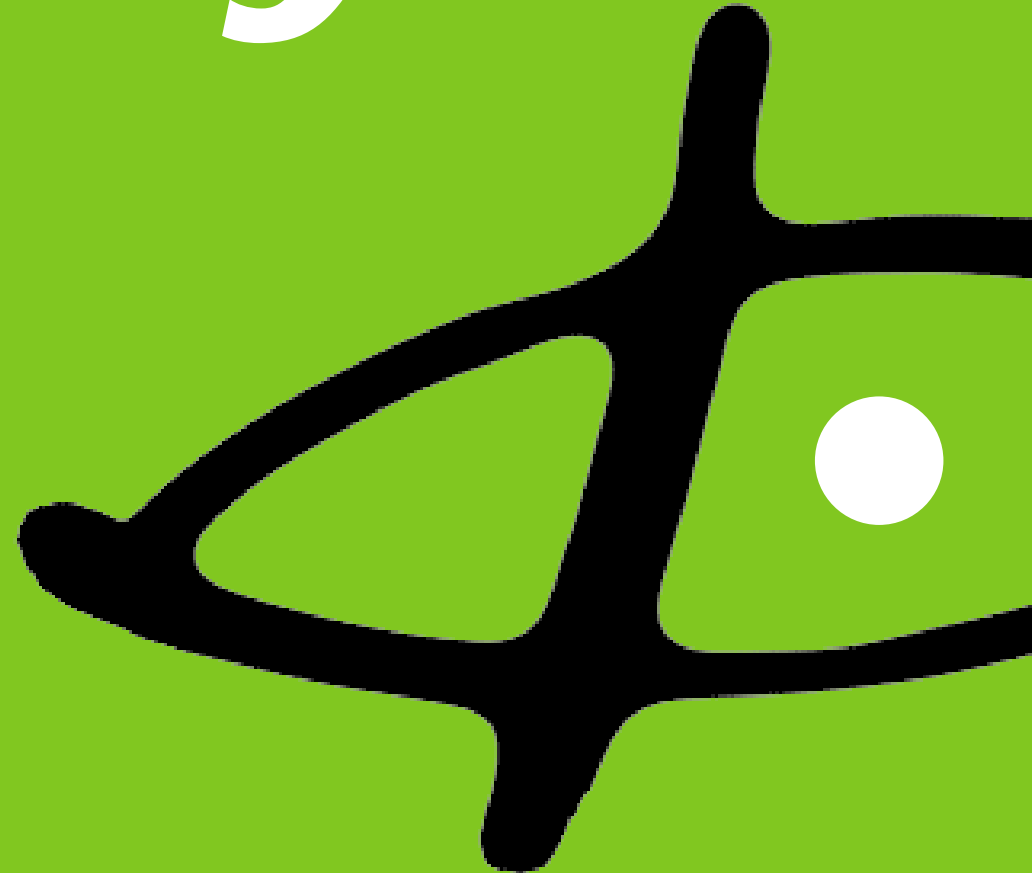
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THE NEW BLACK



Anne Isaacs

The image of outplacement has changed. The days when people might have tried to hide the fact that they were being outplaced are now happily in the past and we are hearing more and more people say that there is kudos in being outplaced with the right company. Who knows, it may even be this season's must-have (and it's a lot better for you than the other 'new blacks' which are apparently high heels and knitting).

Being outplaced has gathered a certain chic. It now quite rightly implies that you are a valued employee, seen as important by your company and therefore

Executive Action MDs Anne Isaacs and Guy Penny track the latest trends in outplacement and find that tailored services are now something to shout about.



Guy Penny

probably by others too. It is an acknowledgement of your worth as a person. The thinking goes that if you insist on good quality cars and clothes, why shouldn't you also get good quality outplacement and be proud of it?

The key words are, of course, 'good quality'. No one wants to show off an old banger or an ill-fitting suit. In this period of consolidation when many outplacement companies are one-stop shops offering off-the-peg HR solutions, Executive Action is uniquely placed to tailor its programmes to each individual's needs.

We have resisted the general trend in order to stay small, specialist and strongly committed to the needs of each client. We genuinely care about each individual and this attitude invariably leads to more creative outcomes because we explore all aspects of the client's career to make sure they make the right move, instead of just taking another job.

Consultant Ray Sheahan, who joined the company when the Leeds office opened in 2001, was impressed by our commitment to individuals. He said: "It is very easy for companies to say that they

tailor their services while in fact they are only tweaking a standard product, but here it happens for real. There is no script, just expertise and a willingness to engage deeply with each person's situation."

Feedback from the clients backs up our beliefs. Over the last year, Marketing Director Laura Renoldi has been conducting interviews with clients past and present in a bid to continually improve. While the answers she has gathered will influence the services we offer, the message is that Executive Action's style should not change.

'Outplacement is tailored to support you as an individual'

THE NEW BLACK

[CONT.]

Recurring words used to describe it included: tailored, creative, supportive, stimulating and intimate. One client summed up the difference between Executive Action and its competitors, saying: "You are not forced through a series of modules like you are at some other companies.

"The outplacement is tailored to support you as an individual so the experience you have is different from that of another colleague leaving at the same time. For example, some people simply want to find another job while others may want to take time out to explore a range of options. Executive Action can help you do either."

A CLASS ACT

Opera singer Barbara Madsen and actress Annabel Leventon use their on-stage experience to train Executive Action clients in presentation and interview skills. Mary Morrison talked to them about how performance skills can benefit business.

Barbara Madsen started singing at the grand old age of 28. Within two years she was doing master classes and performing song cycles in front of an audience of ex-international opera singers for whom Benjamin Britten had written. When she joined Executive Action eight years ago, she found that a wealth of skills crossed over from her artistic career into the business world. "As a singer has to quickly get to know the conductor, orchestra and choir, so the client has to go in and perform with new people. It's all about the way you present yourself – you need to be the person they expect you to be," Barbara explained. "It's important to hit the note first time, there is no second chance."

According to Barbara, the parallels between a good singer and a good interviewee involve bringing together talent and expertise – and always remaining flexible. "There is no ten-point plan. The chemistry will always be different," she said. "The key to preparation is knowing yourself and feeling good about yourself. If you can't answer a question, so what? It's the way that you say that you can't answer it that counts."

Barbara believes that knowing what kind of person you are is important. Accountants need to be seen as a safe pair of hands while marketing executives should be ebullient with a touch of extrovert behaviour. "I try to persuade people that

life is about performing," she said. "Every audience is different, so you must use your emotional intelligence to read the situation. Think to yourself - I'm going to make you remember me!"

'Life is about performing. Each audience is different.'

Annabel Leventon won a scholarship to St Anne's College, Oxford, where she read English. She paid her way through college by singing for a dance band that subsequently played at Prince Charles' birthday parties. After acting in the West End, Paris and the States, she founded a female rock band which changed history by winning a landmark court case that made intellectual property a protectable asset.



'Alas poor profit margins...'

A CLASS ACT [CONT.]

It was around this time that Annabel realised how little lawyers knew about presentation. Annabel started coaching them, and got better performances as a result!

Suddenly, in her forties, a whole new career path opened up and she joined Executive Action to share her presentation skills with clients.

Annabel's technique is to help clients focus on the hidden message that they are sending out.

"Bodies and words must speak the same language," she said. "You have to be in the right frame of mind to sell yourself. If you are feeling low you need to turn negative nerves into flowing positive energy."

Her sessions constitute crash course in telling the truth. "If you feel comfortable, the person you are talking to will feel comfortable. You need to have 120 per cent belief in yourself, in what you are doing, just as an actor does."

And there are more fundamental techniques: "You must sit up straight," she added. "If you don't, you can't breathe and then you can't speak."

While continuing to star in West End shows, Annabel is committed to developing her skills to help clients. Most recently, she took a fast-track psychology course to back up her judgements. She said: "If a client has an interview lined up, I may only have a couple of hours to turn their lives round so I have got to deliver exactly what's right for them."

THE WAY WE WORK



Keith Carby
CEO Inter-Alliance

2002 was a very busy year for Inter-Alliance, the UK's largest IFA. A period of extraordinary growth, which saw the company topping Deloitte & Touche's Indy 100 Awards, highlighted the need for a whole new infrastructure and approach. As the year began, a Boardroom shake-up brought fresh blood and far reaching change.

In the latest of our articles on executives' effective working relationships, CEO & Chairman Keith Carby and Interim Finance Director Geoff Dribbell talk about how they made things happen at Inter-Alliance.

Keith Carby

I had only been in post for one day when I recruited Geoff. For me the finance function is absolutely crucial so one of the first things I did when I became CEO was to find a good FD. I went straight to the interim management department at PWC and met with several candidates. Geoff was the best by far. He had all the technical skills and

experience that I was looking for as well as the right personal characteristics. I am not interested in anyone who doesn't have a good work ethic. Good companies are run by teams and teams can't function if everyone isn't prepared to do their share of the work. It sounds basic, but it's true. From the start, I knew Geoff was someone who would enjoy working hard – he can have a laugh about the things that ought to be laughed at while always giving 100 per cent.

A sense of humour and of proportion was important given the huge task ahead: a major change strategy that involved massive

restructuring. It was nobody's fault, but Inter-Alliance was built on a flawed business model and it had to be rebuilt, turning it from a fragmented model enterprise with 87 associated companies into a more conventionally structured, integrated plc that could benefit from economies of scale and also create a brand. The rebuilding job was immense, involving a lot of emotional baggage as well as complex financial issues. It was much tougher than we expected, but by working as a team with determination and commitment we achieved a tremendous amount in a very short space of time.

THE WAY WE WORK [CONT.]

'Common values are crucial in a top team.'

CEO Keith Carby

Geoff was integral to the success. While I largely managed the restructuring, he took care of the figures and he was also able to deal with the broader change issues, as well as restructuring the finance function. A lot of FDs like order and predictability and there is something to be said for that, but in my experience human organisations in troubled times tend towards chaos. For me, an FD who sticks within the narrow realm of figures would be no good in these circumstances. He or she wouldn't have been able to rise to the wider challenge, but Geoff has worked in a lot of change situations and is at home with the ambiguity and uncertainty that is inevitably involved in most change programmes. Common values are crucial in a top team.

Geoff and I both believe that short-term expediency is the enemy of long-term

achievement. Some people fail to do the right thing because it is too tough, but we both feel it is better to have that tough moment and then to know that we are building on solid foundations. We won't just nod a thing through because it looks too difficult to deal with at the time. Again, it seems simple, but running a business doesn't call for great intellect. That's very valuable but is less important than good values, hard work and commitment.

As well as all the restructuring and running the business, we also acquired another company in 2002 (HST plc) and have just completed a further acquisition (the assets of Hartland Ltd). I see Geoff as an anchor man in these deals, backing up the negotiations with strong support. Geoff is a full blown member of our top team. It's this sort of team work that has allowed Inter-Alliance to

make such progress over the last 12 months.

Our personalities couldn't be more different, but this is a good thing. We complement each other. As long as you share the same basic business values and principles, it doesn't matter if you are completely different in terms of personality.

Geoff Dribbell

Most of my career has been within companies undergoing change so as well as the traditional FD duties I have always been involved in broader commercial issues and restructuring. Keith was looking for that because he needed to bring about a lot of change at Inter-Alliance very quickly.

When I took the role as interim FD, Keith already had a clear vision of what he wanted to achieve. It was just a question of making it happen within the timescale.

The strategy involved change across all fronts within 12 months so a certain momentum was necessary.

During 2002, we worked together on a major restructuring, the acquisition of HST, the raising of finance, development of a new IT platform, and a raft of other issues. This amount of involvement is, I think, unusual for an interim FD who would normally be brought into a company to handle a defined project or just the numbers. Since I have been here, I have dealt with a whole range of issues relating to finance, people, technology and investor relations which has been much more satisfying for me than just looking after the numbers.

Keith knows that I have an appetite and capability to handle a large volume of complex, diverse work. We are both able to see the broader picture as well as

paying attention to the details. We share a common outlook and high professional standards which are essential when you need to get a lot done in a short space of time.

We have a very direct relationship. Keith is someone who wants to achieve things and doesn't want to spend time on superfluous or counter-productive activity. This makes effecting change much easier than it would be in a more political environment. Some people say they're willing to embrace change, but in reality they are quite conservative, or perhaps the organisation is conservative so you constantly meet with resistance. That simply hasn't been a factor here. Keith's approach is to say: what is the value of pursuing a particular course and what are the implications? And if it's a distraction or not worthwhile then he will

reconsider the options. He's got a clear vision and strong principles so I find him very easy to deal with.

Although we have very different personalities and backgrounds, we have similar values. Keith has a strong track record of growing businesses, such as Allied Dunbar and J Rothschild Assurance, and my background includes implementing change at the Alliance & Leicester and TSB. This shared interest in transformation will continue to stand us in good stead at Inter-Alliance. Now that the new structure is in place, we are looking forward to capitalising on the huge potential for growth brought by the changing market and regulatory environment. We will continue to break new ground and set ever higher standards, which is something we both enjoy.



Geoff Dribbell
FD Inter-Alliance

CHAMPIONS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Social entrepreneur and venture philanthropist Nicholas Colloff looks at the challenges and rewards of bringing a vision to life.

It began with a dream. Literally. A vivid, detailed dream of creating a project for young people that would make the deprived Sheffield estate where Kate King lived a better place.

It began small with two young people from the estate being asked what they wanted to do one Saturday. "Ice skating," came the reply. Kate, tapping into the details of her dream, suggested that if they did some work then they could earn the trip through a points system, and so the Dreamscheme was born.

Dreamscheme links young people's work, benefiting the communities where they live, with earning points that can be cashed in for leisure activities to which they might not otherwise have access. From these small beginnings, the Dreamscheme Network

now embraces more than 60 groups running their own schemes, supported by a small central team of which Kate King is the hub.

Kate is a social entrepreneur. A person whose vision, enthusiasm and energy can turn an idea that addresses a social need into a whole pattern of meaningful endeavour. Social entrepreneurs like Kate draw people in to share the vision and get empowered by it. Along the way, they build the appropriate structures and organisations to ensure that the work can grow in a creative and sustainable way, securing it for the future.

Chris Underhill is a serial social entrepreneur with a track record of delivering successful social organisations, both in this country and abroad. Beginning with Horticultural

Therapy (now Thrive), moving through Action on Disability and Development to his latest vision: Basic Needs.

Basic Needs is a new organisation that is developing a model to help poor people with mental illness and their families secure their basic needs and rights. Beginning with a pilot in southern, rural India, Basic Needs has helped hundreds of people with mental illness in only two years of operation.

First, it has helped them to be heard, to be allowed to articulate their own priorities for assistance, often as never before. Second, it has enabled them access to professional treatment, community support and renewed employment. The result of this model's success is that the organisation has grown rapidly, adding new

programmes in Northern India, Sri Lanka & Ghana.

Thus, it can be seen, that social entrepreneurs are essentially driven by values, by the need to leave the world a better place than they found it. As such, they are increasingly being recognised as effective agents of change. But like their commercial counterparts, they too can suffer from a lack of access to key support in the early stages. Visionary ideas, however simple, whether in social change or in business, can meet institutions whose conservatism and risk aversion leave the entrepreneur bereft of adequate resources to turn their ideas into reality. The recognition of this 'market failure' has spawned, first in the U.S. and now increasingly in the U.K. a new interest in 'venture

philanthropy'. Alongside the financial resources this implies, venture philanthropy has brought a focus on how to better nurture and support budding social entrepreneurs.

However, it is not a wholly new concept. Both Kate King and Chris Underhill have benefited from one of the originators of what is rapidly becoming a new movement: the charitable trust World in Need. This was founded as early as 1965.

World in Need was started by Cecil Jackson Cole, who invested it with a majority shareholding in his company, Andrews and Partners, the estate agency and financial services group. Jackson Cole had two essential and simple insights. First, that beginning is always difficult.

Second, that charitable start-ups could benefit from the support of people with business skills. Putting the two together after the

'Entrepreneurs thrive on new ideas, uncertainty and risk.'

Second World War, he used his company to help people jump-start their charitable

organisations by providing the key, core finance. This was accompanied by support for governance, planning and fundraising to enable the organisations to grow and become sustainable. When each organisation was firmly established, he would firmly cut them loose, so he could move on to the next person bearing a good idea.

Many of the organisations that benefited from this help

CHAMPIONS OF SOCIAL CHANGE [CONT.]

have become household names, most famously Oxfam but also Action Aid, Help the Aged, the Anchor Housing Association and many more.

If World in Need's focus is on finance and governance for the new organisation, then the School of Social Entrepreneurs, founded on the initiative of Lord Young of Dartington, is focused on the entrepreneur's own learning. If being an entrepreneur cannot be taught – at least the basic personal qualities – perhaps ways of being a successful entrepreneur can be 'caught'.

The School aims to create a practical and developmental environment in which budding and expert social entrepreneurs can learn from one another – and from which people can identify the kind of expert inputs they need as and when they need them. There is nothing like the urgency of a present uncertainty or challenge to

stimulate real learning. The School began in 1997 and, nationally, is now on its fourth cohort of students, as well as developing regional training programmes in various parts of the UK.

Entrepreneurs thrive on new ideas, uncertainty and risk. As in the commercial world so in the voluntary sector, new organisations come into being through the inspiration of singular individuals or small groups of people committed to making something new happen. It is these champions of social change who are slowly becoming the focus of new ways of funding and support so that their impact on society can be made more effective and sustained.

- **Nicholas Colloff** is a former director of World in Need and the current director of the Christian Initiative Trust. He was the founding director of Opportunity International UK that develops microfinance projects in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

For further information:

- The World in Need website is: www.world-in-need.org.uk
- The School of Social Entrepreneurs website is: www.sse.org.uk
- Basic Needs' website is: www.basicneeds.org.uk
- The Dreamscheme Network is: www.dreamscheme.org.uk

SECRETS OF HANDSHAKING

Do you know your finger squeeze from your dead fish?
Ian Woolf gets to grips with the real meaning of handshakes.

In his article, *Handshaking: The Psychological Meaning*, Robert E Brown claims that this three second ritual can provide a good deal of information about the character of the other person. All that is needed is an understanding of their body language. To interpret handshaking, you will need to learn how to interpret the subtle signals that are sent during a handshake.

Important factors are engaging, pausing and observing in order to enable you to decide what kind of handshake you are receiving. Is the other person pushing, pulling or twisting your hand? Is the hand warm and wet or cold and dry? After the meeting, remembering what the handshake was like, ask yourself – who shook first? Who let go first? Was the person nervous or relaxed?

Compare opening and closing handshakes.

Learn to categorise handshakes:

The All American or Business Handshake:

The person looks at you straight in the eye, fully engages your hand, smiles and pumps your hand two or three times. The idea is that the individual is open, trustworthy and ready to listen.

The Lingering Handshake:

The one is firm with a warm grasp and two or more pumps. At the end it pauses or lingers. The lingering quality may denote frankness and sincerity or it may suggest that the person has something up his or her sleeve. You will just have to trust your gut feeling.

HANDSHAKING [CONT.]

The Two Handed

Handshake: In this case, the person takes hold of your hand, while grasping your wrist, forearm, biceps or neck with the left hand. The higher the left hand, the greater the manipulation.

The Push-Off or Pull-In:

Even though the grip is firm and warm, at the end your hand is pushed or flicked away. This indicates that the person will tend to be a stand-offish sort who would probably not make a good manager. During the Pull-In, the person holds onto your hand to pull you closer; this is a rather manipulative handshake. He or she may not be a good team player.

The Finger Squeeze: This is used to keep someone at a comfortable distance. This handshake can be quite painful. It reflects an insecure person who equates brute force with personal power.

The Dead Fish: This is the cold clammy indifferent handshake which tends to drain your energy.

The Topper: The other person offers the palm face-down, suggesting a controlling character.

Clearly no great leap of the imagination is required to realise how important the handshake can be in the domain of character appreciation. Anyone involved in the business of people management will do well to ponder Robert E Brown's ideas.

- Condensed from *Handshaking: The Psychological Meaning* by Robert E Brown. For more information see: www.rebrown.com

