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*It's all about the way you think*

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# Coping With The Work

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# About me – Leigh Nomchong



- I have been a psychologist in private practice for 30 years
  - I have had a variety of roles including providing advice to Govt, Private Industry & NGO's such former ACTDGP, Engineers Australia & other agencies such as the US Embassy.
  - I provide Expert Witness Testimony to the Magistrates Court & Supreme Court
  - And I typically work a 50-60 hour week, and have done so for the last 30 years
- ...The following is how I cope with my work*

# Coping With The Work

The purpose of this workshop is to make you aware!  
...Awareness leads to insight!



“You dont know what you dont know”

- Donald Rumsfeld, former Secretary of State for the Bush Administration, when answering questions to reporters about the lack of Weapons Of Mass Destruction (WMD) after invading Iraq, costing the American tax payer several billions of dollars.

The more aware you are of an issue/problem the more power you have to resolve it. If you have no awareness of an issue, does not mean that issue ceases to continue to exercise its effect upon you – you simply dont know why the effect is taking place Eg Asbestos – when people first started coming down with respiratory illnesses for no apparent reason, they were initially diagnosed with having a psychological problem!

“Awareness is the greatest agent for change” - Eckhart Tolle

So the purpose of this workshop is to increase your awareness of how you work, how you cope with your work, and whether you have functional or dysfunctional ways of coping with your work. With this insight, you can then make changes that serve you best and so cope with the work.

# Course Content



**Stress Control** – you cant live without it, so lets learn how to live with it

**Managing your workload** – work is work, right? - maybe!

**Dealing with Mistakes** – making wrong right and right wrong!

**Dealing with difficult Clientele** – well its our business after all!

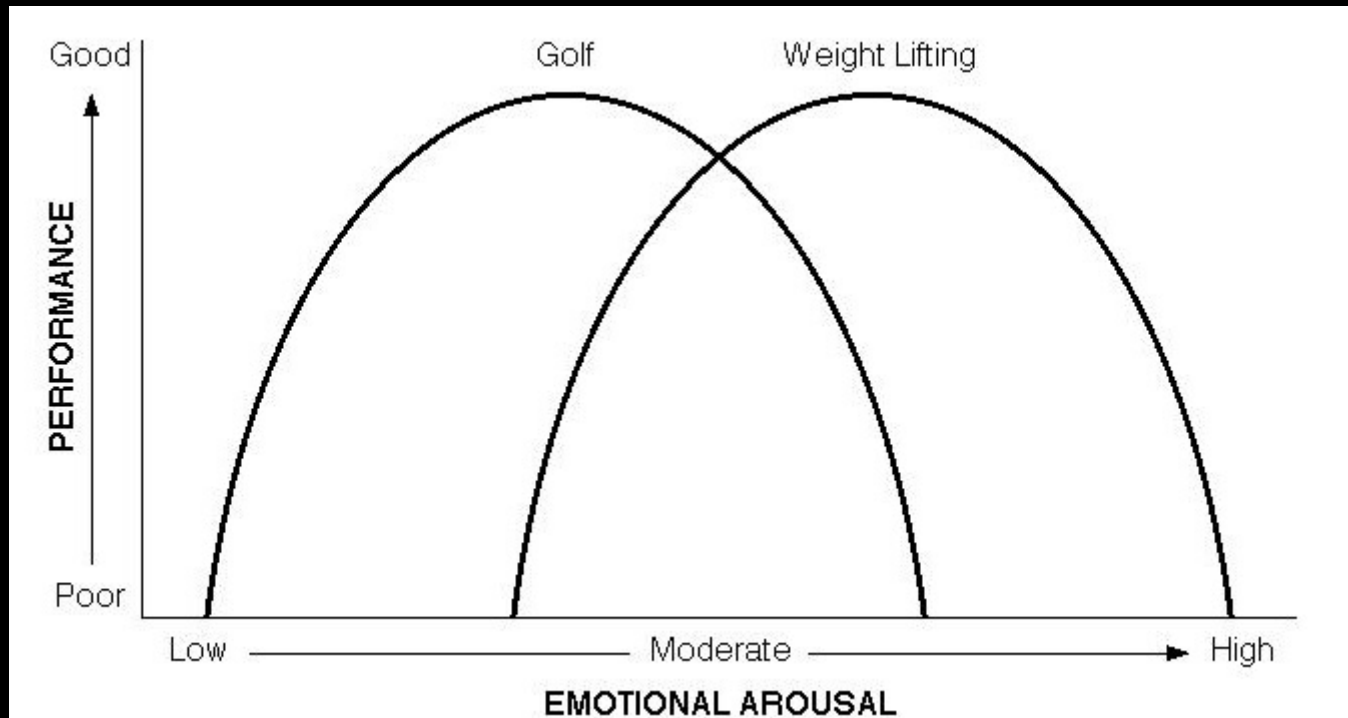
**Quality control** – making the outcome the same as the intention.

**Staff Management** – we need them and they need us – how to make it work!

A lot of these subjects appear separate, but they actually overlap, as you will see as we progress.



# What is stress?



Inverted U hypothesis – Yerkes Dodson Law - The law was first described in 1908 by psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dillingham Dodson

# DETECTING STRESS

Stress is invisible, subtle and incremental in its effect. You can slowly build up very high levels of stress over time and not know it. The body, being as sophisticated as it is, helps you ignore the tell tale beginnings and lets you keep on keeping on. But eventually, the condition will creep up and the beginning signs will develop.

## THE BEGINNING SIGNS OF STRESS

The beginning signs of stress are not what you think. Many people say they are not stressed, usually saying they are tired, fatigued, not sleeping well or cannot relax. These are the beginning signs of stress, but they are often ignored and can be over come with a good weekend or a good nights sleep or and short holiday. But such actions do not overcome the cumulative effect of stress. The first signs of serious overstress are usually physical!

- Increase in headaches
- Reduction in concentration, attention span, memory performance
- physical symptoms including rashes, ringing in the ears, fatigue, vision problems
- Disrupted or poor quality sleep
- Increased intensity of pre existing conditions such as migraine headaches, infections, dermatitis
- Vomiting or nausea, irritable bowel
- Sore Jaw or chipped teeth (from grinding teeth at night)
- Hair loss
- Tinnitus
- Dizziness
- Moody, irritable, intolerant – everything annoys you!



and of course, there are psychological signs:

Again, mood swings, irritability, lack of tolerance

Increased levels of depression

Increased levels of anxiety

Increased levels of phobias and fixations

Feelings of being overwhelmed circumstances

Again, poor sleep

Inability to cope

Difficulty taking on new ideas or understanding new concepts



*WEAKEST LINK: Stress operates on the weakest link in you. So if you have a predisposition to have headaches, when you are under a great deal of toxic stress you will tend to have more headaches with greater intensity. This applies to whatever your weakest link may be.*

# STRATEGIES



Lets finally, talk about what to do about it all. There are some strategies that are generally accepted as being very useful in minimising the amount of negative stress that we suffer.

- **Exercise**: If this could be put in a pill it would be the most widely prescribed medication in the Western Hemisphere. Do more exercise, at least 30 minutes per day for 3 days a week.
  - **Diet**: We are what we eat. If you eat highly processed foods such as fast food and tv dinners, there is a very good chance you will fatigue easily, not sleep well, put on weight, develop a sugar addiction and be prone to stress.
  - **Sleep**: Anyone can work for long periods with little or insufficient sleep and still achieve things, but eventually you will develop a sleep debt. When you have a sleep debt each subsequent sleep is less refreshing and your ability to perform is continually diminished.
  - **Power Nap**: It only needs 15-20 minutes and you are recharged for the next several hours. But be careful, take a long sleep as you will set off a different sleep cycle and you will wake up groggy and disorientated and may take you quite some time to normalise.
  - **Vitamin Supplements**: Often stress interferes with the digestive system's ability to absorb nutrients and one theory suggests that a way to approach this is to super saturate the digestive system with nutrients, vitamin supplements being one way of doing that.
  - **Avoid pollution** in all its forms: mobile phones, WiFi, pollution in your diet, chemicals
- Music while you work: Studies have found it reduces stress, soothes and improves your coping



# Exercise

- Not everyone can have a power nap in the middle of the office, but when you cant take a break – you can take a breath
- Meditation the quick and easy way
- 1X5 break



# Managing Your Workload



# The hours we work

The Kung Bushman, (they call themselves “The Cann”) one of the last remaining hunter/gather tribes in the world, have had numerous anthropological studies carried out on them. One interesting fact to come from these studies is the amount of time spent by any individual, on average, expressed in a 24 hour day, to sustain themselves. That is, to find food, keep a shelter, provide protection for themselves and their family.

The average time a Kung Bushman spends each day on the above life maintaining activities is **THREE HOURS!**





Attitude is everything!





# Attitude

- Your attitude is everything – if you hate your job, feel helpless, hopeless – then your experience of work will be significantly adverse. If you hate your job, ask yourself why? Then address the answer. Don't rely on caffeine, comfort foods, alcohol etc to manage your toxic experience of work. Rather, look at what the issues that are causing you to be unhappy in your job and deal with those issues
- OK, let's say you're happy in your job, you're just overloaded! Then the rest of this discussion is for you.



# Prioritisation

How prioritisation should work as opposed to how it often works:

- We often make a judgment on priorities on the basis of emotional factors rather than an outcome basis eg Do I like the person I am dealing with? Is this really important? I'm tired – who cares anyway!
- Priorities are determined on a range of factors, including:
  - Importance of the task
  - Forced level of priority eg by a superior
  - Ease of completion of the task
  - Availability of resources



# Preparation & Delegation

## Preparation

- The 3 rules of success are preparation, preparation, preparation
- But you have to balance this with priorities and resources (one of which is time)

## Delegation

- Can it be delegated?
- Are you guilty of micro managing?
- Should it go up the line or down the line?
- Prioritisation fits here
- Do I have the skill set?

Contemplate before you act, then act.



# Adaptability & being Flexible

Sometime priorities change. You have to adapt &/or be flexible in how you carry out your tasks, and assign priorities to over related tasks. But there can be some problems.

Ownership – this is when you have put so much time and effort into the task and suddenly it is no longer a priority, or worse, its been dropped! Because you took ownership of the task, now you cannot let it go! Yet its happened! - the secret is to have a sense of satisfaction in what you have done, and then be flexible, adapt to the new situation and act accordingly.

Routines – they are efficient, but we can fall into the trap of them becoming habit, worse – tradition!

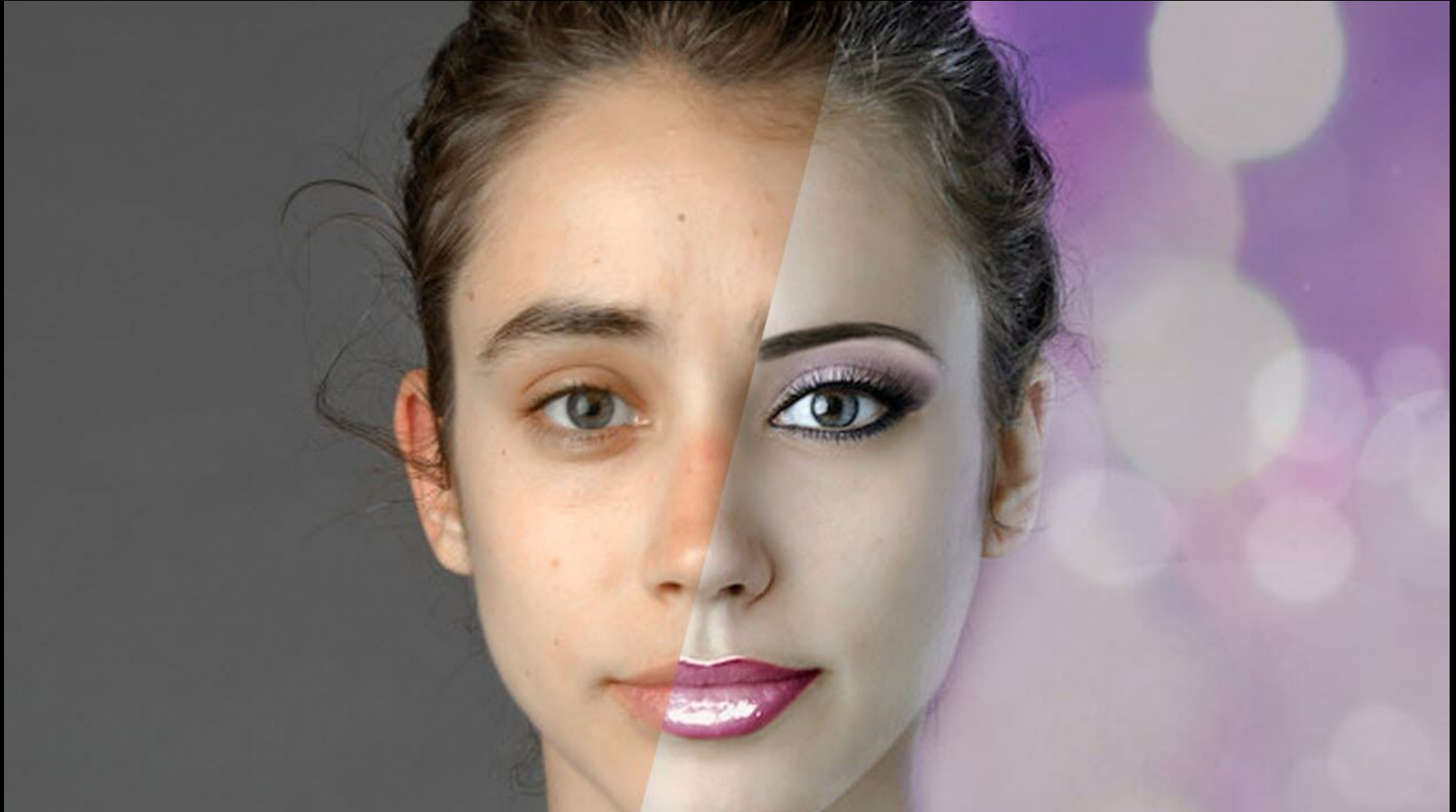
Realisation – knowing that there is a need to change

In other words, when the direction changes are you capable of changing with it?





# Perception (how you see your work)



If you think your workload is too much – it is! And if you think its not – its not!



TOO  
HARD  
OR  
NOT?



# Dealing with Mistakes



# Factors that bring about mistakes

- Assumption (more on this later)
- Bad communication
- No managerial direction (policy)
- Fatigue
- Micro management
- Ignorance of the job/task/project
- Pride (bias) in your work/product/employer



# Assumption

This is one of the most powerful influences on the making of a mistake, so I just want to draw you attention to it a bit more...

Assumption is where you make a perception and act upon it without;

- validating it
- confirming it with another
- satisfying yourself the assumption is reasonable in the circumstances
- and finally, making no preparations for the possibility that your assumption may be wrong!

**ASSUMPTION IS THE  
MOTHER OF ALL SCREW-UPS**

BEFORE YOU  
“ASSUME” ...TRY THIS  
CRAZY METHOD  
CALLED “ASKING”

# Decision Making

There are many decisions that we make on many matters, but no matter what the issue – all decisions have one thing in common, the decision itself.

Decision making requires the same thinking process no matter how big or small the issue is.

The magnitude or consequence of the decision can encourage you to make an emotional decision ie fear.

But all this does not detract from the actual decision-making process which remains the same.



# Learning



- Making mistakes is actually trial and error learning
- But you can avoid having to re-invent the wheel
- When the mistake occurs – process it, investigate, determine what went wrong, correct it for the future
- Where appropriate, devise procedures to stop others committing the same mistake

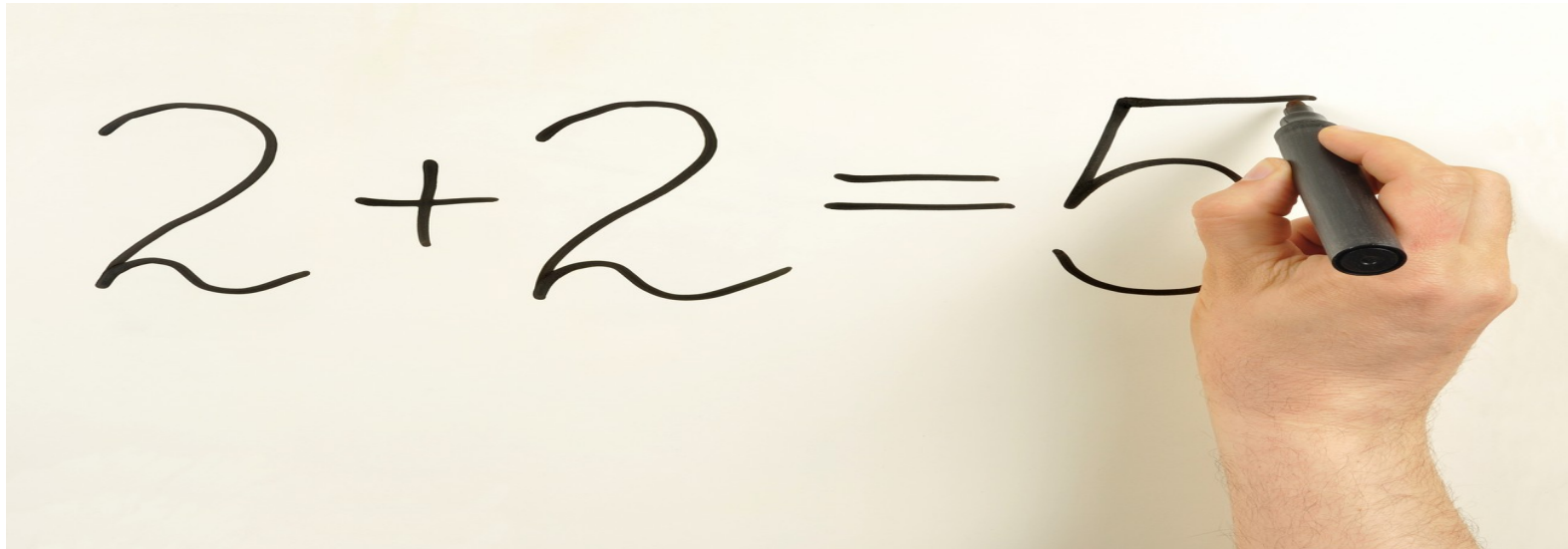


# Exercise

What is the most common mistake made in your office?

- Timing?
- Typos?
- Miscommunication?
- Assumptions?

I will be seeking suggestions from the floor



# Dealing with difficult clients





- They have no previous experience with the legal profession, or authority
- They have unrealistic expectations (which are based upon what they have seen on the media)
- Their perception of right and wrong
- They don't understand the difference between Legal Justice system & justice



- They have been traumatised by the issue (Pain, Depression, PTSD, Anxiety)
- They have been badly handled by a predecessor & are now being assertive (all men solicitors are bastards)
- They have no understanding of the costs of legal process, or the time it takes to do things



# Personal reasons for being difficult



- They handle stress by being aggressive or putting on a front
- They are doing this under instruction of another
- Cultural differences (Asian, African, American)
- They play the victim in all matters where they feel out of their depth
- They worry about money – as they are not working, yet still have bills



# Some Psychological Issues



- Trauma & stress can make people make emotionally based decisions that defy logic
- As a consequence they can react in unpredictable ways
- Pain affects all cognitive function including memory, concentration, comprehension, attention span and so on





# Difficult Clients & their characteristics

Personality  
Types  
You  
Need  
to Know



<http://positivedrugs.com>

- The person with a chip on their shoulder (anger issues, sense of injustice, the need to control the situation)
- The person who needs an audience (they waste your time)
- The helpless person (they will rely on you for everything)



And of course the....



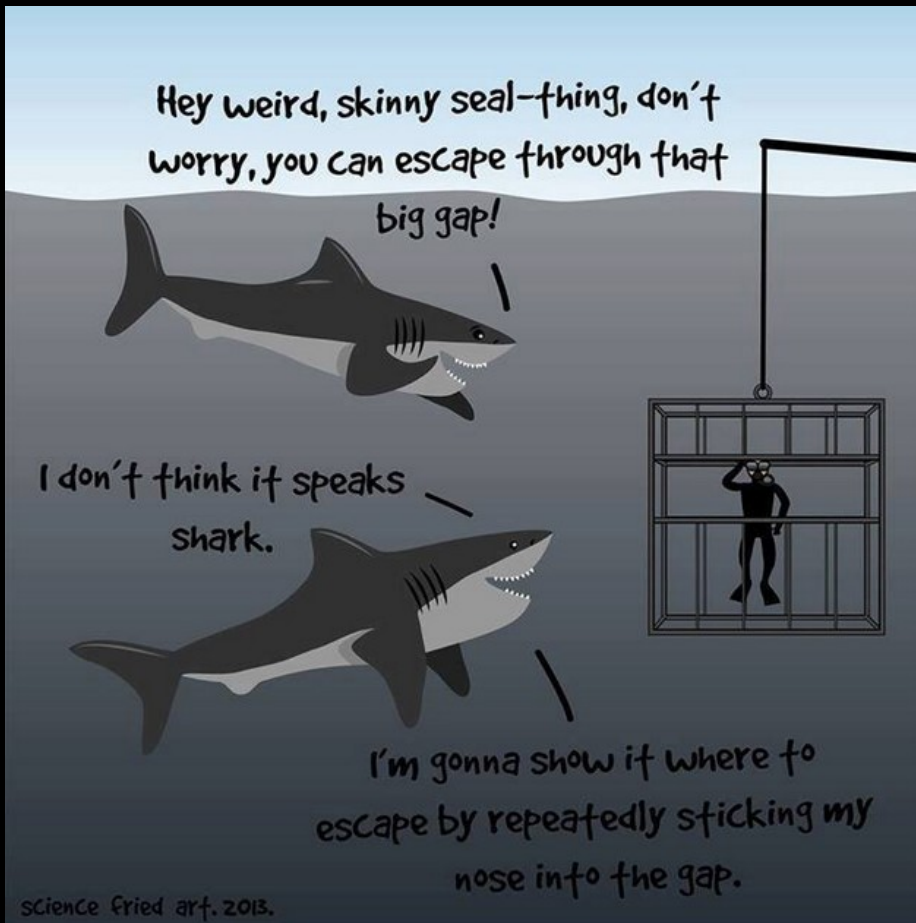
- The NFI Person!
- Their total lack of insight will cause you a great deal of stress work
- Repeat the message repeatedly!

# Ways to deal with Difficult Clients



# communication

- Communication
- If you cant get the message across – they cant get the message!



# Attitude again...



- How you think about the situation will determine how you experience the situation
- Be relaxed & comfortable & they will respond



# Ownership vs Responsibility



- Owning a problem has a major impact upon how you experience a problem
- Responsibility is when you don't take ownership, but you do decide to be competent & efficient

# Reflection



- Reflecting back to a person what they are saying validates them & makes them feel that you care and you understand.

# Soothe them...



- Be supportive in your manner & language
- Give them attention & you will be able to move quickly through the matter
- A smile costs nothing but helps so much

# “I am not the enemy”



- Remind them that you are working on their matter for them, so is your boss!
- Yes its difficult but you are doing what you can!

# Prepare, prepare, prepare...



- If you are not across the file, or cant get to the file quickly – you are left fumbling your way through any client contact – not to mention fumbling through your work!



# Being Assertive



- Knowing when to close
- How to have a thick skin
- How to say no
- Will being firm make things worse?

# When to be assertive & when not too!





- Client with anger issues – its a judgement call
- What is your role in the office? Should it be passed up or down the line
- When the client has been traumatised or in pain, you can make it worse!
- The many ways to say no :)

How do I cope at the end of the day?



# Affirmations



- Affirmations, Self Talk & Way of thinking
- Whatever you say to your self - its true!
- You are what you think!



## \$100 Bill example



- How to have a thick skin by simply thinking differently!



# Relaxation & Stress Management



- Exercise (again)
- Diet (again)
- Sleep (again)
- Happiness is a state of mind not a destination

# Debriefing...



- Taking a few minutes out to get something off your chest to a friend or colleague, can often give you that brief respite and a moment of acknowledgment yourself!

## Sum Up of Strategies in dealing with difficult clients

- The way you think of a problem determines the problem
- Communication & Attitude
- Assertiveness
- Prepare
- Self Talk & Affirmations
- Ownership vs Responsibility - problems



# Quality Control



# Getting it right!

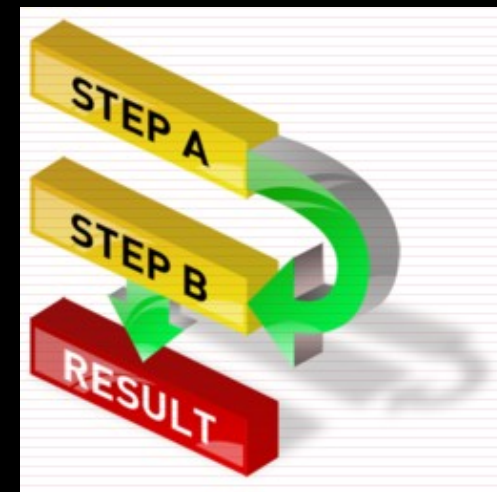


- Attention to detail – even when you are tired
- Get others to check your work/decisions/opinion
- Use a mentor or colleague for reflection
- Revisit the task/project/job after a short break, which can be doing something else for a while and then coming back to it
- Continually ask yourself “what am I trying to achieve? What am I trying to say?”
- Training and development. Do your staff need upskilling? Do you?



# Review your procedures

- Review office procedures. Review, Review, Review! Procedures often develop from history & become out of sync with current events eg the 12 monkeys
- Take an over view – does your organisation create the circumstances where it maximises or minimises the opportunity for mistakes, errors, misjudgments?
- Police your procedures – motivate and encourage adhearance. This can dramatically reduce the mistakes coming out of an organisation





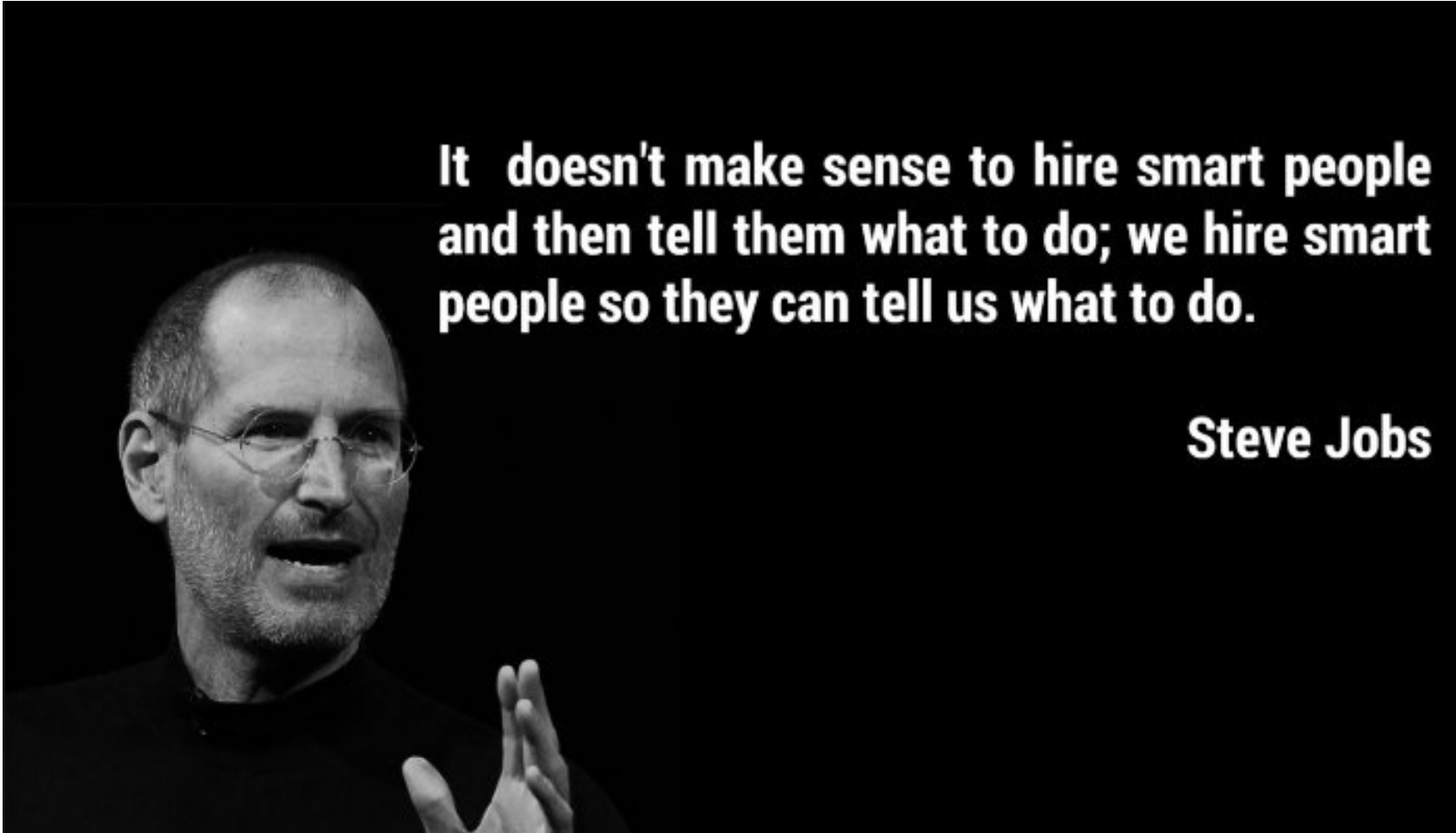
# Staff Management



Are you realising the best potential out of your staff?

**It doesn't make sense to hire smart people and then tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do.**

**Steve Jobs**



# Principles of managing

The purpose of a manager is to take the necessary steps and actions to ensure that all staff operate at optimum effectiveness in carrying out their duties.



# Concepts of managing staff

- **Clear goals** for what the organisation wants from its staff as a whole, each team and each individual.
- Clear sign that staff members are valued
- **A common sense of purpose:** Often the reason for staff being there is not discussed and they are not regularly reminded of the history and accomplishments of the organisation.
- **Simple rules or policies** that are accessible and in plain English that provide the information about actions and behaviour that are required and those that are not.
- **Trust** is developed in each staff member and in turn each staff member can have trust in the leadership – honesty and integrity at the centre of all relationships in the organisation.
- **Clarity** in what is negotiable and what is not negotiable for staff as a whole and what each staff member is allowed to do – and what independence he or she has in each situation.
- **Problems are dealt with immediately** but within the values and guidelines of the organisation
- **Precedent** – What ever action/direction you give, creates a precedent amongst staff who then have the expectation that this will continue to be the case
- **Training** – whether its in house or external, training not only improves productivity, it sends the message that staff are valued

# But there can be problems...



The dog ate my alarm clock – that's why I am late!



# Staff Conflict





# Conflict amongst staff

Yes it happens, but why?

- Personalities = conflict
- Belief systems of individuals
- Outside factors – relationships
- Health Issues - pain
- Attractiveness – sometimes staff
- can feel threatened by the
- simple appearance of others



# Staff problems continued...

- They are having problems outside work
- They struggle with health issues
- They have anxiety/depression
- There are cultural issues
- Marital breakdowns
- Dysfunctional belief systems



# Exercise

- You have to discipline a staff member over their behaviour in the office – how do you do it?
- Form into groups of 4. One person will be the staff member and the other the manager, the other two will be observers who will make notes
- Agree on the behaviour eg always late, disruptive, talking & not working, errors in the work - 10 minutes
- Afterwards the observers will share their observations with the whole group

## How to be a good boss

- Realise that management succeeds from the efforts of the workers
- Delegate and trust your staff unless you have good reason not to
- Know the strengths and weaknesses of your staff
- Do not threaten or intimidate, motivate instead
- Make decisions and encourage your staff to do the same
- React quickly to problems and be decisive
- Recognition – show how you value your staff
- Listen to what you are being told before reacting





# Summary

**Stress Control** – *you cant live without it, so lets learn how to live with it*

**Managing your workload** – *work is work, right? - Change your perception*

**Dealing with Mistakes** – *making wrong right and right wrong!*

**Dealing with difficult Clientele** – *well its our business after all!*

**Quality control** – *making the outcome the same as the intention.*

**Staff Management** – *we need them and they need us – make it work!*

Questions? Comments?