

Freeing the Champion within

- a novel case study

Chris Sangster

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This e-publication acts as an additional case study resource to the book publication by the same author –

Growing Workplace Champions Chris Sangster

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Foreword

This is a story of self discovery, development and progress. Beyond that, it's hard to define specifically - it charts one man's path towards personal enlightenment but in a consciously-chosen downbeat, non-esoteric manner. It considers a whole range of development techniques - but more at an overview level to tempt further investigation, rather than in a detailed, how-to-do way. It reviews the applications of holistic and altruistic thinking within a business atmosphere - but is far removed from a standard, business management tome. It explores a whole range of "alternative" experiences for consideration – without trying to force anyone to think anything they aren't open to consider. It is based almost entirely upon elements of the author's direct experience but is not written as an autobiography. Does this make it the camel outcome of a horse designed by a committee? We prefer to think of it as being more like a unicorn designed by a bunch of angels with business experience!

Although written as a novel, it tips more than a casual wink towards business applications by having an appendix which identifies the business and personal development aspects featured in each chapter, as relevant – as well as giving a whole raft of associated practical exercises which can be attempted, which underline and consolidate the thinking in the chapters.

The background

Having worked in a variety of business training and management development arenas while based in London and Brussels, Chris moved with his wife to spend several years in Wiltshire - a very special place in Britain which is steeped in ancient history, energies and levels of awareness. Because of this, Wiltshire has a magnetism which attracts a wide range of people from the UK and abroad, interested in openly studying these matters. And so it was that Chris met many wonderful souls who influenced his life dramatically - no special mentions are required they know who they are! Love and thanks to you all. The overall experience caused the author to have a fundamental reassessment of his key life goals. These have progressed to become a blending of holistic principles with an existing awareness of business best-practice - thus creating a model for a holistic way at work, which grows and evolves to this very day and beyond.

The e-book elaborates upon the way holistic thinking can be applied positively. It charts the beginning, not the end - developing these principles is certainly feasible. What Chris calls "Workplace Championing" is a way forward where people truly are treated as "our most important asset" and where a working atmosphere of co-operation and empowerment is encouraged and sustained from above. All that is required is an open, consistent and honest approach towards others.

For ease of reference, the particular skills and techniques which are described in some detail within the text are identified in the chapter contents section of the appendix. This should give you an idea of the range of "taster session skills" which are incorporated in the text - by all means feel empowered to look further into those which interest you. Equally, leave to one side any you're not prepared to consider at the moment – they may become pertinent later, as your awareness blossoms. The activities section gives a degree of reinforcement and inter-activity for those readers who are motivated in this way. In this final appendix session relating to the e-book overall, you'll find some additional practical exercises to try, which should help to further reinforce the message. These activities move the storyline on to a more developmental level - even allowing business employees to claim Continuing Professional Development credits, if that's important to you. Otherwise, you can always just read the chapters, as an enjoyable and enlightening story!

For anyone fired by a desire to apply the techniques illustrated by Harry's story in their own work - and indeed life - situations, can we commend the detail of the integrated triangle and holistic development track models. Details of these and their associated philosophies can be found in the website - www.the-integrated-triangle.com Feel free to e-mail Chris with any queries, comments and examples (chris.sangster@btinternet.com) - especially if these are the result of your considered applications of Harry's ideas, applied within your own work or life aspect. He will respond, although on occasion ultimately rather than instantly, due to other commitments. He also works with clients, on a development consultancy basis and will be happy to discuss involvement with YOUR company.

Freeing the Champion within

Chapter One

Harry's business luck had changed on Friday the thirteenth of August - he would never forget that date! Sitting at his desk, he had experienced a strange feeling in his gut as he read the article in the company newspaper. Above the smiling face of the MD, Charles Milton, was the heading "A New, Slimmer Company for the Twenty First Century". Milton had joined the building society relatively recently, fresh from six years fronting one of The Lancaster's major competitors. Harry recalled with a wry smile that their mission statement had been "to be Number One" - but now they had been sucked into The Lancaster by their former MD, with total loss of identity, branch network and swathes of less influential staff. Predictably, the board members of both companies had ensured their own futures in the new company, complete with healthy share options and pension provision.

Harry's Department was front line - so the staff had felt fairly safe from the intense scrutiny which cut through The Lancaster like a cold north wind. It wasn't, of course actually Harry's Department. He was certainly considered to be a major player - a manager who, in his own view certainly, managed relatively well. But he did not see himself as being a thrusting leader. Certainly, he enjoyed working with people - and was in his element when organising new business and product development - but Harry never dreamed of actually heading up the Department. And, anyway, his current Head of Department, Derek Copeland, had held the position for over seven years, with no signs of wanting to move on.

Harry had proposed many good ideas in his earlier years with the company - showing an enthusiasm and vitality which had undoubtedly attracted corporate

attention. This had resulted in a fairly rapid scaling of the lower rungs of the promotional ladder. With the passage of several more years and the enlarging gaps between higher rungs, however, Harry's enthusiasm for change and 'progress' had waned. Not extinguished, he liked to think; rather damped down to a latent flicker. All he needed was a following wind, for the flames to burst forth once more - or so his theory went!

As time had gone by, Harry had channelled more of his energy into outside pursuits - no single interest, such as fishing, model trains or the darts team down at the pub - but he and Lynda spent many happy hours gardening. Harry was also an avid reader and planner, with much of his quality thinking time spent walking with his dog Isla by the river or over the hills. He still felt enthusiastic about his work, however, especially when involved in project design - that was when he particularly felt that his knowledge and experience were being positively applied.

He often found his mind working through some business problem while walking with Isla at the weekend. He certainly didn't begrudge this mixing of business with pleasure - his brain worked more clearly while in the countryside and it was all part of sorting out his work/life balance, after all. Somehow, the fresh air and open vistas helped his thoughts become more objective and 'bigger picture', placing any crises in more manageable proportions.

Harry and Lynda had two teenage children - a daughter Jane and son Charles, who was the elder by two years. Harry wouldn't dare call them 'children' to their faces any more, as they had both reached the age when they knew everything that was held to have any validity in real life. Harry often had to suffer the bemused smile of drawn

impatience as he tried to implant some of his values and beliefs in what he considered to be still-developing minds.

He had some success communicating with Charles. Conversations could almost become animated when limited to football, music and the price of baked beans. However, the flow mysteriously slowed to a trickle when subjects were of the academic work, exam results and helping around the house variety!

On the other hand, Jane at fourteen was at an age when anything Harry said was taken as either a personal insult or direct criticism. Harry had grown weary of the assertive (or downright aggressive) responses - or strained silences - and found it easier to leave notes for her - carefully worded and checked to remove any possible misunderstanding prior to dispatch.

Although slightly saddened by this state of affairs, he promised himself that it would undoubtedly improve in time, when his children gradually grew in confidence as they became young adults in their own right. Thinking about it, Harry realised that he had gone through the same periods of monosyllabic insecurity, when he had been a teenager and generally felt threatened.

And things, he now reflected wryly, had appeared to improve in The Lancaster Building Society after the reorganisation. Several of his colleagues had taken early retirement, setting off clutching their engraved watch, ready to pursue long-felt dreams. Some of the former freedoms and flexibilities had been reduced, it had to be admitted. However, talk in the restaurant and meeting room had shown signs of becoming positive again as revised products came on stream and new accounts were being opened at a dramatic rate.

Friday the thirteenth had started with the usual weekly meeting. When Copeland had failed to turn up to chair it, Harry had taken over the reins and directed the discussions. He felt proud that they had managed to cover a wide range of subjects, incorporating, he felt, a lot of positive input from the staff. He could even recall his conversation as he had walked back to the office with his close colleague, Gillian.

They had discussed the new products which were coming on stream, the complex planning ahead and the wide range of development and product training which would have to be arranged. Harry had felt the buzz of enthusiasm as he talked it over - making him look forward with quiet excitement to the potential of the months ahead. If he could only extend this dynamism which he felt when talking with Gillian, to make it work with the whole team - well then the department would really start flying!

He had only just returned to his desk and was sitting looking through some new memos in his in-tray when the phone rang. He could remember very clearly the conversation which followed -

"Mr Williams, it's Mr Copeland's secretary here. Could you pop up and speak with Mr Copeland for a moment."

"Sure, Teresa. Could you give me fifteen minutes? I've just come back from a meeting."

"I think Mr Copeland wants to speak with you now, Harry. Is this a problem?"

However often people used that phrase, it always made Harry feel slightly annoyed. Any 'problem' was invariably created by the person asking if it was a problem - but the implication always seemed to be that he was being inflexible.

That request from Copeland to "pop up" had sent warning bells ringing in his head. This particular wording had in the past always indicated something negative. He searched rapidly through the contents lower down his in-tray - nothing there which should absolutely, definitely have been completed by now, as far as he could see.

Dumping the papers back into the tray with a sigh and, feeling decidedly uneasy, Harry set off along the corridor with a whirling mind and a fast beating heart.

Chapter Two

In contrast, Harry's mind had felt totally void those ten long minutes later, as he returned to his desk - or rather the desk which had been nominally his for the previous six years or so. Miss Anderson from Personnel walked silently by his side, as she had done so often with so many people during these last few months of company reorganisation. When would it be Miss Anderson's turn to have someone else walking by her side, to watch over her until she was escorted safely off the premises? She probably felt that it could never happen to her.

As indeed had Harry, considering his job to be pretty water-tight. But there he was, being escorted along the corridor - and watched closely as he cleared his desk. Friends and erstwhile colleagues had gazed shocked and sightless at page and screen as he was finally escorted out of the department which had until that moment been his responsibility. Only after he had finally left had the eyes of the remaining employees met, silently questioning but still unable to grasp the inhumanity of this rapid action, however often witnessed.

All too soon, Harry had found himself at the bus stop, after the keys of his BMW had been tersely requested by Security at the front desk. Beside his brief case stood two plastic carrier bags which Miss Anderson had thoughtfully provided for the personal effects from his desk. Harry had noticed her surreptitiously checking that he hadn't included any company property or documents, a responsibility which he had tested to the limits when he carefully deposited his company desktop pen set in one bag. This had been allowed to slip through Miss Anderson's procedural net.

The mute contents of the in-tray on his desk, so recently checked, had remained untouched - and had probably been reallocated to the remaining, compliant

managers within the hour. With a further percentage point of efficiency savings achieved through Harry's exit, the ripples on the surface had doubtless rapidly smoothed to leave an apparently calmly-flowing corporate river once more.

Lynda had been in the sitting room when he turned the key in the front door, having experienced with mixed feelings his first bus journey for many years. Harry had been allowed the luxury of one telephone call - much like the condemned prisoner - to alert Lynda to the fact that she would unexpectedly be setting an additional place for lunch. Without speaking, the two had stood hugging each other for a while, unable to think of anything appropriate to say.

Harry's voice had choked as he finally spoke:

"The redundancy package should keep us going for a few months, and I'll soon get another job - just you see if I don't. I'll show these stupid bastards that they've kicked out a good one. Over twelve years with the company and not even allowed to say proper goodbyes. Treated like a bloody criminal - and for absolutely no reason."

Lynda remained silent, responding by tightening her arms round Harry's heaving shoulders.

Harry's initial aggressive drive had waned somewhat over the months which followed as letter after letter came with the words "regret", "unfortunately" or "inappropriate" leaping out from the opening paragraph. He of course still felt convinced that he could handle any of the jobs for which he had applied - as long as he would be comfortable in the role. He therefore intuitively avoided any job adverts requesting "young, dynamic players", "specialists with two to three years' experience" and

similar indicators of the type of "fast-moving, customer-driven environment" which he could happily live without.

Some of the jobs for which he had applied actually specified the practical skills which he had - and which he had used successfully and professionally prior to achieving the dizzy heights of paper-driven management. He would love to have the opportunity to apply them once more and get really stuck into making them work successfully again. But company HR departments and agencies seemed to have a major problem believing that someone could accept a reduced role - thinking instead that this would lead to dissatisfaction and the rapid need to move on. Not so, as Harry and countless others who had been "let go" could confirm.

Charles had gone off to University - at least that was one less mouth to feed (and Charles had one hell of a mouth, devouring crisps, toast, pot noodles, chicken kiev's and similar convenience foods with breathtaking speed and frequency). The grant they had received didn't of course reflect Harry's new "resting" status - but was certainly better than the proverbial poke in the eye with a sharp stick.

Jane, struggling with examinations, boyfriend troubles and less-than-perfect skin texture, continued to leave Harry in no doubt that he was dossing around unjustifiably. She made it patently clear that she wouldn't accept any comment regarding her work when he was obviously slacking around at home all day. Harry didn't even attempt to present his side of the story.

And so it had come about that Lynda had put an advertisement in the local paper, offering Charles' room for rent, in order to get a little extra income. They had discussed the possibility of having a lodger in the house with mixed feelings - or

totally negative ones in the case of Jane (perhaps understandably as she would be the one sharing the family bathroom!) - but it ultimately had to be accepted as a financial necessity.

Charles' room was quite a large one, especially once the miscellaneous guitars, sports kit, thumbed copies of *Loaded* and other trappings of hesitant manhood had been moved into the attic, leaving floor space which hadn't seen the light of day for many years. By requisitioning bits and pieces from around the house - an easy chair from one room, a bookcase from another and so on, and buying a small cooker at the local auction - they had managed to put together a comfortable bed-sitting room.

After a little crawling around in the attic, Harry had even succeeded in setting up an aerial for a small colour TV and, with a fresh coat of emulsion to cover the tape marks where Charles' collection of music festival flyers had once proudly hung, the room had been declared fit and ready.

All that remained was to wait and see what response came from the advertisement!

Chapter Three

Mrs Gladstone's must have been the seventh phone call Harry and Lynda had received in response to that single advert. It has to be said that initial reactions were not altogether promising. She sounded a bit vague and off-hand on the telephone but the memories of some of the previous callers and their outlandish comments and requests encouraged Lynda to speak as enthusiastically as she could. Marketing exercise complete, a convenient time was arranged when the good lady would call to view. Harry & Lynda punched the air as the receiver was replaced. YES! It was now several months since Harry had lost his job and things were beginning to get tight.

And so it came to pass that, four days later, Harry found himself struggling up the staircase with the last of several large suitcases, cardboard boxes, countless plastic carrier bags, large mysterious objects in bin liners and various odds and ends which had spilled from the slightly battered blue car. Evidently, Mrs Gladstone did not travel light! However, with the help of the storage provided by the large chest of drawers and built-in wardrobe, stashing the odd item under the bed and secreting the overflow of "less necessary items" in the attic, the room soon took on a semblance of order. Mrs G was firmly ensconced. Harry had to defuse a passing bout of rudeness from his daughter Jane but, with the first cheque behind the mantle piece clock, ready for triumphant transfer to the bank the next day, he went to bed a slightly happier man that night.

Harry's appearance was becoming increasingly casual, to the point of being almost sloppy, since he had stopped going to the outplacement company's "job club". The concept had been good, with attendees encouraging each other to write CVs and discuss interview strategies and so on but, as more and more of the younger members disappeared into new jobs, it only served to make those over 35 feel their

age rather acutely! So, Harry, at 42, took to staying at home and studying from books instead.

With the current total standing at forty six letters of application resulting in forty two standard letters of the "Thank you for the interest you have shown in our company, **however....**" variety and two interviews which were enlightening but non-productive, Harry was waiting for responses to the final two letters. One dated back so far that it seemed unlikely that he would ever hear from them - but the other was quite recent. Both were for middle management jobs which he knew he was perfectly capable of doing at least he was pretty sure he was mind you, there were probably others better than him Harry felt his confidence ebbing away like the receding tide in the sand.

Mrs G had been in situ for two days when Harry knocked on the door to check how she had settled in. Arrangements seemed to have been going fairly smoothly, with few further moods from Jane, who was well clear of the bathroom and off to school before Mrs G surfaced. Harry had not as yet met any vision in dressing gown and slippers, but had heard footsteps going to and fro. Having a lodger was perhaps going to be less intrusive than he had imagined. Waiting at the door after knocking, he heard the television volume being turned down and Mrs Gladstone calling for him to come in.

He was quite surprised by what he saw. Around the walls were posters of Native American Indians, dolphins, crop circles and other similar images. On the little pine coffee table which they had bought in the local DIY shed (£14.95 and worth every penny) there were various crystals, an oil burner and several small framed pictures of what looked like deities (in as much as Harry knew what a deity looked like, from

his admittedly limited experience). God, thought Harry (rather appropriately!), we've got a rampant wowser here. He hoped that his face didn't show his surprise, as he scanned surreptitiously round the room, checking for black cats, wax dolls - or perhaps even a simmering cauldron! Nothing - well, that was a relief anyway!

An hour later, he was still chatting with Mrs G, with the conversation ranging round topics so varied that it left each subject area hanging ripe for further discussion at some later point. To his surprise, Harry found himself expanding openly about his current situation to this woman who, after all, he did not really know from Adam (or more appropriately, Eve). She had an easy openness about her, accepting statements at face value but at the same time probing further and occasionally questioning in a kindly, non-threatening way. Harry hadn't experienced this kind of openness in his work environment for many years. Although evidently no business woman, she seemed to understand the world with an accepting confidence. She spoke openly - almost in positive thought cliches at times - but, in Harry's present state of mind, her message was both heart-felt and spot-on!

"You are what you want to be!"

"Well, if that's true, it doesn't seem to be working for me just now."

"It's true all right. No doubt about it. Now, why is it not working for you?"

"I only wish I knew!"

"Perhaps you have doubts?"

"Well, wouldn't you?"

"Just focus your mind on what you want to be. Are you clear of this?"

"I think so but it gets confusing applying for a variety of jobs. Some will be closer to what I want to do than others."

"But reviewing them should help to clarify what you really want to do, don't you think? Focus, that's what you need and confidence in your abilities and love."

"Love! Now there's something that was missing in my last job in most of the jobs I've had. You surely can't expect love to feature in business! Come on, if you go down that track nowadays, you're likely to be sued!"

"OK, call it respect, co-operation, regard, concern, understanding or whatever. It's what we ask from others in our personal life - why shouldn't we expect the same in business. What makes working with people any different? It's basically treating others as you would wish to be treated Do unto others, as you would that they should do unto you."

"Ah, the Bible. I wouldn't have thought that you would be quoting from the Bible, with all these pagan things around!"

Harry motioned to the various pictures and artefacts on the table. Mrs Gladstone smiled patiently.

"Pagan in earth awareness perhaps but not anti-Christ. Most of these sentiments pre-date the Bible anyway. There are many confusions in the religious tomes: additions and emphases to aid the control which clerics demand. I think of the energies governing our Earth as being more encompassing and Universal than any one religion. Holistic hmmm ... yes. Energies to enliven us and bring us forward - not to restrict our flow. We must talk more about this sometime."

Harry was pondering on this when Lynda's voice sounded outside the door.

"Are you in there Harry? I've been hunting for you for the past ten minutes."

Harry said his goodbyes and hurried downstairs behind his slightly miffed wife. He was to have many more, similar conversations with his new-found mentor - which Lynda would grow to understand and even encourage, when she saw the benefits which Harry gained from these constructive sessions with Mrs G.

Chapter Four

So, what was the way ahead? Harry's mind was sifting through the various possible means of earning a crust as he walked with Isla through the woodland. The wind sounded gently in the tree cover, long tailed tits trilled as they flew in little groups from tree to tree - he could even hear a woodpecker from time to time, drumming against a hollow trunk. The dog sniffed with deep concentration as she raced on ahead. It seemed quite a wonderful world, totally untroubled by hidden agendas.

Harry had no problem with filling his day - he had various little projects going and regularly spent time thinking through possible money making schemes. Filling in the various application forms and writing letters to go with his CV were also very time-consuming activities. "If only we could get by without money!" thought Harry - but there was no getting away from the fact that it was indeed very necessary.

Although they could economise on the luxuries such as restaurant meals, going to the cinema, buying new clothes and such like, there were always the boring regular payments for electricity, council tax, insurance, school dues and so on, which drained the monthly amount. This wasn't helped by these damned Direct Debit arrangements, which caused the fragile balance on the hole-in-the-wall cash machine screen to drop dramatically between viewings. Harry had taken to making most of his transactions via the machine to cut out the need to face bank employees across the counter. However much he told himself that it was just a job to them, he felt the unspoken criticism as he saw them scanning the screen, paying special heed to his growing overdraft ... or so he felt.

So, there had to be some means of income.

The possibilities didn't exactly leap out to meet him! The first obvious thrust was to get another job. He was already using up a great deal of energy in trying to achieve this - with little positive outcome to date, as already noted. Harry found it quite unnerving reading some of the job advertisements nowadays. Things seemed to have moved on so much since he had last applied for a job on the open market, some twelve or so years ago. Apart from the terminology getting more jargon-infested, there seemed to be a tenseness and seriousness which hadn't been around when he was younger. That was it ... he realised suddenly business had lost its sense of fun. When he had been younger, things had been more relaxed. Perhaps a little "ad-hoc" at times ... but the work was done - and done well. Now, everything needed to be audited and monitored, with regular reviews by watchdog bodies, the media and the Government. It all had to be based round targets nowadays – even to the extent of distorting the key outcomes to give something which was both measurable and quotable. Too often, decisions were made rapidly and subjectively, without proper consultation, with the implementation problems evident to some only being officially acknowledged grudgingly in hindsight.

In short, the natural humour and positive fun had been sucked out of the workplace.

This would certainly have to be one of his own 'must haves' when selecting his next job - not that he would have the luxury of selection, in all probability. Still, at least he was being selective when considering his applications. He had also spotted several advertisements asking for associate management consultants, which he supposed was another possible avenue. If these consultancy companies happily took graduates straight from university, with no business experience other than working in a shop over the summer holidays, surely they would welcome ex-managers with at least ten years' experience.

But the sad fact was that the business world was suddenly awash with experienced middle managers, with some large percentage of them trying to make their way as consultants. Some well-placed individuals had managed to arrange with their previous employers to have some regular work each month - and thus a regular income. Indeed, some companies were getting round 'downsizing' by this "outsourcing" - in effect employing the same people but paying them consultancy rates through a different budget, allegedly saving money overall. Somehow, Harry didn't feel that he would get much enthusiasm from Copeland along these lines.

He could not imagine Miss Anderson being reprogrammed to accept him inside the hallowed premises again, after her recent efforts to protect the company silver! He had made one or two (albeit fairly half-hearted) efforts to approach companies with a view to consultancy work, but had never got beyond polite chats. So, not much mileage in that concept, then!

When he had mentioned the situation to Mrs G, she had suggested that he become self employed. Many of the people she knew had taken this direction and she was absolutely sure that this was the way of the future. However, by the same token, she was equally convinced that LETS exchange schemes would universally do away with the need for currency. When Mrs G became convinced about something, her enthusiasm showed itself clearly in the advice she gave. Harry found himself listening to his new-found mentor more and more - surprised how so many of her life-based ideas were just as relevant when applied to work situations.

Harry quite fancied the flexibility which went with being self employed - but what specifically could he do? It turned out that most of Mrs Gladstone's friends practised alternative therapies, had small shops or were hairdressers, gardeners and the like.

Much as Harry liked pottering about in the garden, he didn't fancy doing gardening for a living. He was what could be described as a fair-weather gardener - the concept of digging or pruning in the rain or the snow just did not bear thinking about. And he somehow didn't picture himself as an aromatherapist!

On one of his now infrequent visits to the pub, Harry had met a neighbour who was self-employed. Bill had tried various things over the years, starting with the ubiquitous spell as a financial planning consultant. Many seemed to try this avenue but few achieved anything near the targets, departing leaving a trail of once-sympathetic relatives holding dubious policies. Bill's most recent focus seemed to be selling water filters.

"Self employment's OK, my son, but there's one thing to remember - don't put all your eggs in any one basket. I've got four little schemes going just now - sometimes one has a good month, sometimes another but it means there's always some money coming in at the end of each month. The money side's the real bummer in self employment - even when there's little new business around, you still have all those regular bills to settle – and no monthly salary cheque. You've got to keep juggling those balls in the air, if you'll pardon the expression."

"How do you start off getting the business?"

"From contacts - networking - and just being a bloody nuisance, banging on people's doors, or phoning them up. Now that you mention it, have you ever considered the amazing benefits of a water filter only joking I can see you've more serious things on your mind just now. I might get back to you later on that one. Oh, and

another thing, if you do go down the self employed road, for God's sake keep your overheads as low as possible.

It may seem rather grand having fancy office premises, a top-of-the-range car, mobile phones and all the trappings - and these bastards at the bank will throw money at you to get all these kinds of things if you draw up a poxy five year plan - but it's these loan repayments which hang over your head every month, regardless of how little or how much you've earned."

"How do you know what your business growth is going to be over that number of years? A hell of a lot can happen over five years, as I've seen to my cost!"

Bill licked one finger and held it silently in the air.

"You've spotted it, my friend! Who knows? Even the bloody bank manager doesn't know if he'll be employed in five years! As long as the bottom line figures look healthy and the calculations look as if they add up - and you say you expect to get bigger each year by some impressive percentage figure that seems to keep them happy. It's all a nonsense though.

Take the Channel Tunnel - you don't have any shares in that, I hope? Still losing money after all those years and it's largely owned by the banks now - and what's the sense in that? It takes them all their time to get your monthly statements right - what do they know about the business of running a hole in the ground? Hole in the wall cash machines, perhaps - God knows, they seem to be increasingly using them as "cash cows" to swell their profits as well. Whoops, there I'm off again!

You'll probably gather that me and banks are not exactly the best of chums - not the best of chums at all. Now, you may not be in the market for a water filter just now but I could offer you a rather fine, virtually new fax machine..... special price for you, of course!"

Harry drank heavily on his pint of 6X and, with relief, spotted someone else he recognised from his Job Club days. If Bill's attitude represented what self employment did to the soul, perhaps it wasn't for him. The thought of having to grasp every opportunity to make a sale left him feeling cold. Still, he assumed that there were others who were not so pushy, and who were making a healthy go of it.

"You don't want to listen to Bill too much - he's a noisy sod! There's lots of us who are self employed and are making a reasonable living. He's right about one or two things, though - about spreading your skills, keeping your overheads as low as possible and not being blinded into taking out lots of business loans. I'm mainly a graphic artist, but I also do design consultancy and - would you believe - I qualified with ITEC as a masseur last month, so I have that as a string to my bow as well."

"How do you manage to keep them all going?"

"Well, to be honest, I haven't got much work with the massage yet - and the design consultancy work is a bit on and off as well. One thing I haven't got my head round yet is the way the pay rates differ so much. It's hard to come to terms with this - if you can earn several hundred pounds per day as a design consultant, it doesn't seem worth doing a massage for an hour and only getting twenty pounds or so. But then, there are times when twenty pounds comes in very handy!"

It's best if you can reach a happy medium - maybe earning the big bucks for a few days every month, so that you can afford to spend some time doing the lower paid work that you find relaxing and enjoyable. But Bill's right about one thing - you can only really relax and enjoy your life-aspects in the slow lane if you feel confident that the monthly bills will get paid - plus a bit over for the unexpected.

Don't believe these folk that say that you don't need money - I find that most of them have some other form of income from a partner, pension or whatever - or some of them have just developed the art of living off other people!"

"Thanks, Colin. I'll obviously have to think this through some more."

Harry's problem was establishing which of his skills were the most marketable. He would have to think long and hard about this. Lynda had been a maths teacher before the children came along and had managed to return to the world of work as a computer programmer several years ago. She worked on short contracts - although they often lasted many months - so she was in effect self employed, and enjoying it. She had been working as an associate for a company long-term, which made the tax man twitch periodically, proposing the need for limited company status.

At the point of Harry's surprise news, Lynda had been enjoying a fairly extended "rest period" between contracts - one of her first actions after recovering from the initial shock was to telephone her handler at the computer consultancy and ask for her CV to be circulated for possible work. Although nothing suitable was currently available, she was fairly confident that something would turn up ultimately. Harry had totally understood her decision to turn down the offer of immediate employment from

one of the private utilities in Liverpool; the concept of spending each weekday evening in a B & B in that corner of God's Earth was more than anyone deserved!

So maybe there would be a reversal of roles, with Lynda working and Harry keeping the home going. He felt quite comfortable with that - but he wasn't sure whether, after doing it for a few months, his confidence of working in business again might suffer irreversibly. He realised, however, that Lynda had experienced exactly the same trauma when she had returned to work. Her experience had probably been worse, in fact, because she had been out of the system for - what - almost ten years. Harry hadn't fully appreciated the stresses involved at the time - but he did now!

Harry met Mrs Gladstone in the corridor, as she struggled to her room with several supermarket bags of groceries.

"Stocking up your collection of plastic bags then? Here, let me give you a hand."

"What? Oh yes. Thanks. I hate shopping, so I tend to go very seldom and buy far too much. How's the job decision-making going then? Have you figured out what you want to do and be?"

"Not completely - I seem to have decided some of the things I don't want to be!"

"Well, that's some kind of progress, I suppose. You've got to start thinking positively though. Try writing down the things you are good at on a piece of paper your skills, your successes, your real goals if there were no financial or other blocks in your way.

Ask yourself questions like - 'if someone gave me a thousand pounds each month just for being me, what would I really like to do with my time?' - or, 'if I wanted to do something really useful and helpful for mankind, what would it be?' Responses to questions like these can help you put your finger on what you really want to be.

Don't think too deeply about it; just ask the question and write down your immediate ideas. Fresh ideas are often good ideas. You'll be OK. Your aura's brighter now than I've seen it for a while."

"My what?"

"Aura - your energy. Never mind - I'll tell you more about it some day, when you're ready."

"I do feel that I'm a bit better balanced now - I think all this planning and thinking is helping. Perhaps we can talk some more when it's convenient."

"Sure, but talk with Lynda as well. Your future's a joint decision. Don't block her out. You might even come up with something which you could do jointly. Run a hotel or holiday cottages, do tourist trips, have a little shop who knows. Just let your minds flow free."

Harry certainly hadn't thought along these lines. Twenty plus years in business had narrowed his vision. Perhaps it was time to start looking at the sky and not at the cracks in the pavement. He laughed to himself as he recognised that as one of Lynda's sayings. When he thought about it, it was great the way that these different

people - his wife, his friends and neighbours, even his lodger - were helping him clarify things in his mind and make the way ahead more evident.

After dinner, he sat musing about his situation. If he was receiving this informal assistance from so many people, encouraging him and helping to point him in the right, positive direction, he realised it was surely up to him to get his act together urgently. Harry reached for his pen and note pad and started thinking.

"What key skills do I have?"

"What money-earning activities would really excite me?"

"If Lynda's earning as well, what work would I really like to do?"

"How do I go about getting my first work, if I took the self-employed route?"

"What facilities would I really need - and how could I get these as cheaply as possible?"

Harry scribbled down his ideas as they came flooding to him. This was more like it - something positive was happening at long last, and he was in control of it!

Chapter Five

After further conversations, Harry learned that there was, in fact, a Mr Gladstone - but that Mrs G (or Yeva, as she preferred to be called) had felt the need to live temporarily in the Wiltshire area, "to be near the energies". The two seemed to have a convenient understanding which kept them both sane, with Yeva popping home periodically to spend some quality time with her husband. It seemed that, in the past, she had toured abroad for extended periods on her own or with friends, visiting Native American Indian, Aboriginal and other sites around the world; Mr Gladstone was truly one in a million in the understanding husband stakes!

On her return from her visits home, Mrs Gladstone always took several days to revert to her more esoteric Yeva persona, settling back to her single way of life in the bedsit. She seemed to come alive at night, with the light shaft still showing under her door as Harry and Lynda went off to bed. But she was no late riser either - obviously one of those people who needed limited periods of sleep to be able to continue functioning effectively. Although far too polite to ask her age, Harry reckoned that she must be in her late-sixties. It was difficult to judge this as her appearance - especially her face - seemed to fluctuate noticeably, depending on her mood and attitude to life. Yeva seemed to be capable of "tuning in" to the atmosphere or energies around her, looking more youthful and at peace when she was in this state. Whatever it was she did (or perhaps took!), Harry was keen to find out more about it.

Harry felt that, in some strange way, he was already aware of many of the matters she spoke about during their increasingly frequent conversations. Perhaps he had read about them somewhere, or maybe they were already in his subconscious. Living in Wiltshire, he was certainly aware of what seemed to be commonly referred

to as "earth energies" or "ley lines" and had seen people dowsing these energies around the stone circles at Avebury.

Yeva had talked a lot about the earth energies, which abounded in the area; about the old long straight tracks; about the ancient burial sites and so on: all manifestations of energy which could, so she said, have a positive effect on people who were conscious of them. Harry was fascinated by the thought that, if these did affect people positively, perhaps there was a place in business for building a similar binding energy which might get people working more cohesively together. It was a nice theory, anyway but how could he become more aware of this what had he heard it called in business? yes, that was it 'synergy' ?

Yeva used a pendulum - a crystal on a silver chain - to show Harry that there were energies around, with the pendulum gradually swinging in a straight line away from her body, changing to a circular sweep at points as she moved slowly around the room. Harry was intrigued by the possibilities presented by having some form of latent energy inside him, which could respond to the natural earth energies in this way. He was sure that he could link with these and learn to apply them more actively.

His mind returned to his new, if slightly "cooky", mentor's quotation, which he had now heard many times: "You are what you want to be."

He had already realised that this could only be true if he could first establish - really establish precisely - what his ambitions, or goals or objectives were. In other words, if something wasn't happening for him, perhaps this indicated that he wasn't clear what he was trying to achieve - or perhaps that he really wasn't keen on doing it anyway.

Being precise about his end result or outcome, and "going for it" as the expression seemed to be nowadays, would result in his energy increasing, as well as creating a more motivated atmosphere all round. And if he could get a job again and succeed in encouraging a similar positively-charged atmosphere, there's no telling what dynamic things might happen.

Harry found himself getting quite excited, thinking positively once more about developing people and working in a team, just as he had done several years ago as a middle manager, working to build the morale of his staff - and as he had been discussing with Gillian just before his untimely exit from The Lancaster. Yeva smiled quietly to herself as she saw this enthusiasm bubbling to the surface once more, pushing aside some of the doubts and disappointments of the recent past.

"Those were the days," Harry mused aloud, "we worked naturally as a team then, before all these bloody restrictions, procedures and short term, 'bottom line' responses."

"There's no reason why you can't apply these energies in a way which would improve your business dealings, you know."

"Fat chance. I haven't even got a job!"

"Yes but you will - and then you can let your enthusiasm flow again."

"I wish, Yeva - but things seem to get more and more controlled as time goes by. There are regulations and documentation covering more and more - supposedly to

set and maintain standards, just like old Copeland's Quality Assurance in my last job. Instead, it seems to inhibit initiative and enterprise, which seems rather ironic!"

"It is. But increased bureaucracy and controls are a sure sign of a Government or company which lacks confidence in empowering its people. Look at it this way - if someone feels that colleagues are getting ahead of them, what do they do?"

"Well, I guess that the instant, cynical answer is that many would hold them back, taking their dynamism as a possible threat, showing up their own weaknesses. I guess that's what many organisations do - what do they call it in Japan? The "tall poppy" effect, isn't it, where anyone standing out above the rest is cut down to size. Not very dynamic - it creates a society where everyone conforms, with initiative down the pan. The "tiger economy" in the east was much lauded at one point - now it's India and China that are flavours of the month. But a lot of their working conditions, wage structures and management structures were present in this country several hundred years ago – we've progressed since then."

"Yes, some techniques will work in particular countries because of their current attitudes, work ethics and priorities. It's wrong - downright stupid - to think that the whole process can be transferred lock, stock and barrel to work efficiently in a different society. Sometimes the so-called efficiency is just down to the fact that their workers are paid a fraction of ours - there's no real way we can compete with that."

"And no way we can return to those days. Indian graduates in those Bombay call centres are getting paid about one sixth of what we pay staff in the UK. But that's a good wage in their economy, so they're still highly motivated. If I was ... no, **when** I am working again, I'll definitely try to help staff develop and channel their energies

into improved job satisfaction and encourage them to work together effectively in their teams."

"Of course you will. Channel energies, eh? You're beginning to talk my language now! There's that old saying that it's only when you've developed someone else to fill your job that you can be promoted yourself. You stick to thinking positively - it's only a matter of time before all these controls, requirements and restrictions will begin to collapse beneath their own collective weight.

We're already seeing people power - and the media - standing shoulder to shoulder against some of the more stupid edicts and regulations - especially those pushed through without real democratic debate. I'm sure this will happen more and more, as common sense and public accountability prevail. It's becoming increasingly down to the people - us - to stand up and be counted. Remember the story about the Emperor's clothes. It just needs enough people to be convinced that the honest, co-operative way is the right way and to point a finger at examples of spin-doctored nonsense, for some key parcels of lies to fall out of the sky!"

Harry loved it when Yeva got carried away like this. It seemed to him quite incongruous that this rather large, old age pensioner in a tie-dyed smock, surrounded by all the trappings of a totally off-the-wall existence, could discuss business matters at all, let alone come out with such clear-sighted good sense. She really inspired him.

He longed for the opportunity to put some of his new-found enthusiasm to work once more - to get more people thinking and working in the right direction. What he really needed was a bloody job - NOW!

The letter arrived the following day.

The interview was set for Thursday of the following week. This was his chance. This was the opportunity to show his real energy - and how he could apply it dynamically in this new job.

As the intervening days passed, however, some of Harry's earlier doubts resurfaced.

Perhaps there would be younger, better people there. Perhaps his knowledge and techniques were dated. Perhaps he didn't want to be a manager again. Perhaps his age would be against him. Perhaps perhaps.....

The day before the interview, despite various supportive chats with Lynda and Yeva - God, they must be getting weary with his indecision - Harry was still having doubts. Yeva noticed that his back was tense, his shoulders hunched and his head held at a slight angle. The pressure was getting to him. As the moment of truth drew near, the fear of possible failure was beginning to loom large in Harry's mind again.

"Come up and talk about the job this evening - it will help you prepare for your interview."

"Have you ever had a job in a big business?"

"Just come to my room around eight thirty this evening, OK?"

When Harry entered the room, he found that it was only dimly lit by a small bedside lamp and a couple of candles. There was a smell of incense - Harry spotted spirals of smoke coming from a little brass burner by the fireplace; he could also smell a herbal fragrance which, though vaguely familiar, he couldn't quite identify.

"What you need is some total relaxation to get rid of that stress around your shoulders."

"This sounds intriguing - what do you have in mind?"

"I'm going to give you a massage."

Harry then noticed that there was a massage table with towels spread over it set up to one side of the room. He had never had a massage - but had always really fancied the idea. He had never known where to go - some of the advertisements in the newspapers looked decidedly dodgy and the therapy clinics he was aware of seemed to be set up more for a female clientele. And here he was now, with a masseuse actually resident in his own house. This was a wonderful opportunity!

"That sounds great. I've always fancied one but I must confess I don't really know what I'm supposed to do."

"I give Holistic Massage, which is an all-over massage which combines different stretches, holds and strokes. The atmosphere is important as well - that's why we have the subdued light and incense. I usually have relaxing music playing too."

"That sounds great. Do I need to take all my clothes off?"

"That's totally up to you and what you feel comfortable doing. Leave your pants on if you want - you'll be covered with towels anyway - I'll be working on one area at a time. I'll leave you for a moment to undress. When you're ready, would you lie face down on the table and put these towels over you?"

When Yeva returned, Harry was lying ready under the towels. She adjusted them, smoothing the material over his body and then switched on a CD player. The room filled with some gentle flute music, with a fluctuating piano in the background. There were also some strange noises which Harry realised after a while were in fact whale calls. He settled his head into the face-rest on the end of the table and closed his eyes. He was already feeling more relaxed.

The period of time which followed was one of the most pleasant he had ever experienced in his life. Yeva's fingers seemed to move magically over his back and shoulders, first smoothing in circles, now kneading, now pulling, now holding. Sometimes, with her hands still, he could almost feel the energy, in the form of heat, entering his skin. The smell of the oils was beautiful - much more complex than the initial herbal smell which had met him as he entered the room - as the mix of essential oils reacted subtly on his body. This was truly an experience which everyone should have, preferably as regularly as possible. At least once a day seemed to be about the correct frequency!

As Harry lay with his mind drifting, Yeva's voice periodically brought him back to the surface with a series of questions. She listened carefully to his answers as her hands moved over his skin confidently - probing for more detailed answers just as her hands probed the knotted muscles and over-tight tendons. The questions flowed.

"What would you consider your greatest successes to be?"

"Tell me more about that one."

"Which one are you proudest of achieving? Why?"

"Which area of management do you enjoy most?"

"Which activity did you avoid as much as possible when you were a manager?"

"How did you motivate your staff? Describe one of your best projects."

"What do you consider are your best three skills?"

"Describe how you've applied these successfully in business."

"Tell me about a failure you have experienced - and what you did about it."

"Which skills areas do you feel you need to improve?"

"How will you go about improving these?"

"What would you say was the best way to organise a team?"

"Describe your greatest success with a team development project."

"Do you know that you have a little lump on your leg here?"

"How clear are you about the responsibilities of the new job?"

"Tell me three key questions you want to ask about the new job and company."

"What would you do during your first week in the new job?"

"Why should the company give you the job?"

By the time Yeva's hands were pulling firmly up the sides of his chest, Harry's body felt fully relaxed. At the same time, his mind felt totally clear about how good he was, what special skills he had to offer, how successful he had been in previous jobs and how he would apply his personal skills and capabilities to the specific management responsibilities of the new job.

He knew that he was bloody good - and he would show them!

Chapter Six

"So, we've heard about some of your past experience and successes, Mr Williams.

Why do you think you would be the right person for this job?"

The interview had been going well. Harry was surprised at the number of questions coming up that Yeva had already raised the night before. It was almost as if she was psychic - come to think of it, she probably was! He felt good about the way his answers were coming over with quiet confidence. He also felt good about the relaxed state of his neck and shoulders, thanks to that wonderful massage. Harry focused his mind on the question.

"I feel that, with my experience and skills, I can help my staff to develop to their full potential - to help them personally as well as develop them to be part of the team, for the benefit of the company."

"And how do you propose to do that then?" This came from the slightly weary-looking Personnel Manager, sitting saggily in his chair, body language screaming, 'I've got another four of you tossers to listen to today before I can get home to tend my begonias.' This man felt secure, thought Harry; he was probably the one who might potentially master-mind the escorting of redundant staff from the premises - who created the rules for the Miss Andersons of this world to follow. Harry pushed such negative thoughts aside and refocused his mind on answering the question.

He found himself enthusiastically expanding on his belief in empowerment. He explained its importance in making individuals aware of - and also responsible for - developing their own skills and capabilities. He described one or two situations in previous jobs where he had encouraged staff to make their own decisions. He

explained the ideas he had about applying a support system within his department, with each individual learner being reinforced by a mentoring/coaching arrangement which he found himself referring to as 'championing'. He'd read a book about developing or growing workplace champions recently and it all seemed so sensible, when he had thought it through. As well as fitting in with many of his own ideas which he'd already tried out, it took the whole idea further and gave it a proper structure.

Of course, in order to succeed, it required direct support from the training and development department, requiring them to take on a more proactive role. Wisely, Harry decided that the interview was not the right time to try to convince this personnel manager that he'd have to broaden his horizon! However, taking a piece of paper, he sketched out the triangle idea to show the three-way individual, workplace champion and training support bond, then went on to describe the way the inter-relationship worked. A 'holistic approach', Yeva had called it, when he had described the ideas to her. Still slightly unsure of what was meant by the expression, Harry had agreed. He'd have to ask further about that before he could explain it to others!

He compared this level of empowerment with the more traditional ways of training people, where there was often the tendency to create staff who were more dependent on being told what to do and how to think. He saw the Personnel Manager's face cloud over at this challenge to his traditional status quo of bog-standard courses but Harry was in full flight - and enjoying himself wonderfully.

"I feel that, if we can encourage individuals to believe in themselves, be involved in the decision-making and focus clearly on their goals, they're more likely to achieve

these goals - both personally and within the team. The important thing is to have an atmosphere of positive support around them, from managers, mentors, supervisors and so on so that they feel empowered to seek out the development and experience necessary. They can then become what they want to be."

Harry's face prickled slightly as he recognised Yeva's phrase being incorporated in his explanation - but, damn it, he wasn't just repeating some old cant from a Management Training tome. He really believed that this was one of the key truths - this came from the heart, not just from the head!

The Personnel Manager started from his thoughts of his prize begonias - was this guy for real? It was some time since he had heard anyone speaking openly and honestly - he had become used to hearing the stereotyped replies which interviewees had been schooled to say through some "Interviewing Skills" course. Perhaps this Harry Williams did have something special.

He studied Harry with renewed interest, pushing all thoughts of his potting shed to one side for the moment.

The Line Manager - who would be Harry's direct boss if he was successful - was warming to him visibly as the interview progressed. The interview shifted subtly from question and answer to more involved discussion, with Harry asking as many questions about the functions and plans of the Department as he was supplying answers relating to his experience and future intentions. It was noticeable too that the manager was making real efforts to explain the situation and future plans - he was trying hard to sell the company favourably to Harry. A good sign! The company was in the service industry, involved in large scale catering. Although the timescales

would be much shorter and the pace much faster than he had experienced at The Lancaster, Harry found the challenge very real and exciting.

The Personnel Manager had less direct input to the discussion now, but followed the animated discussion with interest. Eighty minutes or so after entering the Board Room, Harry was shaking hands at the door. A successful outcome.

Harry walked across the car park with a veritable spring in his step. He felt the most elated he'd felt since he couldn't think. A very long time anyway. He's really enjoyed being inside business premises again. He also felt "good vibes" about Bob Cowie, the guy who would be his Manager if he got the job - he had felt really comfortable communicating openly with a business peer again - it was almost like talking to Yeva!

Lynda was waiting for him when he arrived home - afraid to ask but trying to glean any information from his bearing, expression or actions as he walked through the door. First signs seemed positive.

Harry chattered on enthusiastically about his interview, about some of the specific areas they had discussed, about the people he had met and the impressiveness of the premises. He had not felt this enthusiastic for a long time. Lynda smiled as she saw the Harry of old shining through.

"I thought that it went really well - I seemed to click with the guy who would be my boss but who knows?"

Harry's previous doubts were beginning to return as the immediate elation subsided. He had seen a very confident-looking, "bright young thing" waiting outside the office as he left. Very much one of a type, with hyper-confidence and the latest transient theories exuding shallowly from every pore.

Surely they would go for this dynamic young thing rather than an old trooper like himself. Maybe Mr Cowie was just being polite ... and the Personnel Manager obviously saw him as a threat to the status quo. Maybe he'd said too much been too outspoken too "tall poppy".

The old doubts were beginning to resurface. The next couple of days were not comfortable ones for Harry - or for those around him. Tension mounted each day as the moment approached for the post to land on the mat - then fell stressed and depressed to the floor with the circulars when it was established that THE letter had not yet arrived.

It then became a long day waiting for the next post to arrive!

Chapter seven

The letter finally arrived three days later. Quite a fast turn-round really but it had seemed like an eternity to Harry and everyone else. He tore the envelope open and scanned the first paragraph quickly for the usual negatives. His heart beat more rapidly as, instead, he read the words "pleased", "interesting views", "offer you the post".

Yes! He was going to have a proper job again!

The atmosphere at the meal table that evening was elated, to put it mildly, with thoughts of what Harry would do at work - and how they would spend the first pay cheque. Perhaps some priorities might have to wait for a month or so, until the overdraft and credit card repayments had been sorted out. The prospect of regular pay cheques again was magic - he could see his way pointing positively ahead again, after that recent static period of doubt.

Harry was learning to cope with prolonged timescales, thanks to Yeva's little talks. After she had patiently explained the concept to him several times, he could now see the image she had sketched of his potential progress stretching ahead. Her description was similar to the image given in another book he had read - of a long straight track, with the outer boundaries marking the natural and man-made controls and rules which governed life and work. Inside these confines, the goals, milestones and progress of his own journey towards an ultimate objective were represented as a winding path moving along the track. Sometimes his path would pause (as it had done for these past few months); sometimes it would even turn back on itself due to some blockage - but ultimately it progressed like a serpent along the track.

Alongside, the paths of others meandered and inter-twined, creating a spaghetti of progress. In all cases, goals were achievable but timescales less predictable!

It was amazing the release which the prospect of a regular income brought to both Harry and Lynda. Lack of money - or regular income - gnaws at the gut in a way that those who are not in that position cannot begin to realise. Perhaps, once a few months had passed and finances had settled, they might even manage to afford a break in their favourite retreat cottage in the western highlands of Scotland.

Lynda understood totally when Harry said that he wanted a quick word with Yeva; she had grown to respect the obviously positive effect which this woman had on her husband - without any fears of him being led astray romantically! If past experience was anything to go by, she knew that the "quick word" would extend to several hours, so she settled down with a book in front of the fire for a quiet evening.

Yeva gave Harry a hug.

"So, you've cracked it!"

"Thanks to you."

"Not at all. You obviously sold yourself well. All you needed was self confidence - and love."

"There wasn't much love from the Personnel Manager, I can say!"

"Well, he's probably a doer rather than a thinker - his vibration level's likely to be pretty low, after all."

"What do you mean - vibration level?"

"Energy levels - everything vibrates to some extent - atoms and molecules. You must have done that at school?"

"I suppose we did - but it seemed like a big, sort of Universal thing. I never thought about it being applied to people or specific things. You mean even this solid wall is vibrating?"

"Sure, how do you think the radio waves get to your portable radio in the bedroom? The transmission wouldn't work if the wall was truly solid and impenetrable."

Yeva described the ways that things and people vibrated - and her belief that people could develop this energy, or vibrational level, as they became more conscious of each other and tried to work and co-exist positively together. As individuals increased in awareness - or spirituality, as Yeva preferred to call it - she described how they moved towards a "higher level of collective consciousness".

Harry was getting slightly confused. At times, Yeva was quite meticulous ... even ponderous in her explanations - but at other times, she seemed to zoom forward, assuming that he knew and totally accepted concepts which were both very unique and very confusing.

"What's this collective consciousness? We're all conscious, aren't we?"

"Yes, in the sense that we're not un-conscious. We're aware, and looking around us but only seeing what we want to see - or sometimes what other people want us to see. Think of the Emperor's clothes story again - that involved a shift of consciousness. First of all, it was only the small boy that would acknowledge the Emperor's nakedness - then suddenly, everyone could see it. It needs a critical mass of people thinking in the same way - of doing things in the same way - for others to be influenced. It's sometimes called the 'hundred monkeys principle' - where, if you can get the first hundred or thereabouts in the pack to do something, the thinking is that the majority will ultimately follow."

"Critical Mass - eh! I like it. I've never thought of that as applied to a bunch of people but I see what you mean. What you're saying is that some of this consciousness is already there latent inside us?"

"Yes, although it's more dormant in some than others. I think of it as 'Angel energy'. The energy's already there, waiting to be acknowledged. When we realise that we have the power - the ability - to use it, then it gradually manifests, ready for use. Sure, we need to develop it we're always moving it on - onwards and upwards but once we've set off down the track, there's no stopping us. Our energy, our consciousness will gradually increase, more and more. The pace may vary but the direction's there. It's all part of our personal development.

Have you heard of dowsing for water, or for energy lines in the earth?"

"I've heard of dowsing for water - I've seen that on TV - all the twitching sticks and so forth."

"Well, some North American Indians or Australian Aborigines can sense water - or find their way along tracks - intuitively. They don't need twigs or rods - they can just sense it. Some of my friends do this as well. I'll introduce you to Isabelle when the time's right - she can see these energies ... auras ... as different colours. We can all dowse, to some extent, once we raise our consciousness, feel confident and believe that we can do it. Self-confidence is key. Remember when I showed you the pendulum? I'll show you dowsing with a rod sometime. You must have a go yourself."

"Yes, I'd like that. But our ability to co-operate and to understand the feelings of others - you're saying that kind of consciousness can be raised as well?"

"Yes, Harry. With a little bit of effort. And when it happens with more and more people, a lot of what you call 'hidden agendas' will be exposed for what they are."

"Standardisation seems to be the mantra nowadays. There's a lot less flexibility than there was when I started working. It's certainly easier to monitor someone by looking over their shoulder and ticking off steps and stages on some checklist. It may be fine when building an engine but it's just too simplistic when dealing with human beings. They're all individuals, with unique needs and aspirations. If we're trying to encourage empowerment, we need to encourage more flexibility again. The focus must shift once more."

"Be aware of people, Harry and treat them openly and fairly - as I'm sure you do. That's as much as you can hope for at the moment. Encourage that awareness - that

"angel energy" - to activate once more - in you and in them. Just keep on doing that, and encourage others to do the same."

"Angel energy - I love the image of that, Yeva. But how do I know that I'm becoming more aware of these kinds of things?"

"Oh, you'll know, Harry - it's already happening to you."

Harry fell silent, thinking about this. He did feel more aware of what was going on around him, sensing people's feelings and responding to the moods and atmospheres he was experiencing. That was probably why he felt so attuned to the reactions from the Personnel Manager, and Bob Cowie, his new boss-to-be.

"So, a heightened awareness should help in my new job then?"

"Sure it will. If people are more conscious of one another, they become aware of what individual colleagues want - and don't want ; know - and don't know ; are capable of doing - or prefer to pass to others. They can then apply this knowledge positively within the team, pooling their talents and supporting each other so that the overall effect is better than the sum of the individual parts. The team can finish up achieving something collectively that the individuals within the team could never match. That's what the holistic effect is all about. We use it in complementary therapies like massage - the atmosphere, mood, conversation, music and so on all add to the benefits from the therapy itself. There's no reason why you shouldn't apply the same thinking in business. There you are, you see - you could become a consultant doing holistic development!"

" I suppose I could. Yes, why not? There's a problem, though. If I told some people about the areas of my work which I had problems achieving - my work shortfalls - they might well use that knowledge to mess me around rather than help me! It's hidden agenda time again. I can think of several managers who might do that."

"Of course you can. There are always the bastards in our midst - the dark influences - the heavy egos in it for number one. Nothing's plain sailing. We always need a down side - to compare the up side against. If it's rainy all the time, we yearn for sun but, in the Mexican desert they get fed up with the sunshine and yearn for rain! As it is, you enjoy summer because you've lived through the cold of winter. Think of them as "highs" and "lows" - not positive and negative.

A lot of people think of negative things as being dark or evil; think instead about positive and negative as they are in a battery - both necessary to generate the energy. Think of the low or negative side as being important as well, in its own way.

When the time is right; when enough people have changed to allow that hundred monkeys principle to kick in, then the dark, negative-thinkers will be in the minority and the new majority will feel confident enough to set things right.

It's already beginning to happen, if you look around. There's more and more public indignation about executive salary packages and bonus payments, even when they 'retire' early, or miss their targets by miles. We're becoming increasingly annoyed at the salaries and expenses paid to politicians, regardless of how mediocre many of them are. There are public complaints about companies taking advantage of their employees and about "black holes" appearing in company pension schemes. Indiscretions by politicians or the clergy are openly criticised, as are situations where

autocratic politicians, nationally and internationally, over-ride public opinion without proper debate. Waste and pollution, ecological destruction, international meddling and “regime change” for potential commercial gain, reactive freedom fighting used as a reason for draconian “war on terror” controls, dishonesty and fraud, manipulation by 'spin doctors' - the list goes on and on.

The people - directly and through the media - are progressively standing up to be counted and questioning these situations - things are moving, if you look around.

Of course they won't change overnight - and they will take longer in some areas than in others. In some countries, interference, vested interests and fundamentalism will continue to try to upset attempts at positive change and drag things back to the old violent ways. But things must change ultimately, for stability to be maintained. And the world – the universe – is ultimately self-healing. Just think of that winding serpent trail along the long straight track. The pace of progress may appear interminably slow at times but the goals will finally be reached - have no doubts!"

"Do you think this same change principle can work in businesses, Yeva?"

"Of course it can. If we are hoping that national leaders will ultimately change their stances for the common good, why not business leaders equally?"

Thinking about his previous company, Harry realised that there had certainly been a lot of positive work and co-operation, to counter some of the negative, hidden agendas emanating from senior managers (doubtless thanks to the devious influence of old Copeland). There had been areas where people were helping each

other – there had even been some informal tutoring and one-to-one coaching. Harry acknowledged there was indeed some hope for the world!

"I must try to apply this positive thinking in my new job, to make people more conscious of each other - to get them working more co-operatively."

"Yes, and get them more involved in their own self development, taking personal responsibility - we've been focused on this in promoting personal holistic and spiritual development in our groups for ages - it's high time business applied its benefits."

"Well, I suppose business has things like lifelong learning and getting our work/life balance correct - but individuals could still be more directly involved in their own personal planning. The attempts are there, if you search them out."

"People will always be more likely to get involved if they've had a hand in selecting what they do. They can decide their own targets, choose how long they need and so on. It makes sense, if you think about it. It happens in real life, so it should happen in a company staffed by real, live people. Get them more involved in the process - but make sure help is on hand. People can't change suddenly - they need support. Otherwise, as soon as they hit their first brick wall, they're likely to give up and go back to their old ways again. And then the opportunity will have been lost. With the right support - and consistent support - there shouldn't be too much of a problem."

"There shouldn't be, Yeva, but somehow there often is."

"Maybe now - but it must change. It will change where we stop measuring success purely as an annual return to the shareholders."

"Ah yes, the bottom line. Important, sure, but not if it cuts out everything else. It's time that things moved a bit faster."

"So, do something about it. Become one of the hundred monkeys!"

Harry knew that it was up to him - with a little help from Yeva's angel energy.

Chapter Eight

"I'm going along to the group meditation tomorrow night. Would you and Lynda like to come with me?"

Harry wasn't sure. In common with many people, he felt slightly suspicious about meditation - largely because he wasn't sure what he had to do. It was probably down to fear of the unknown but he found the whole idea a bit unsettling. He'd seen TV programmes with people in strange robes, carrying out weird rituals - it all seemed a bit off-the-wall and ego-centred for his liking. He didn't like ceremonies - even some of the activities in the church he used to go to were too much for him - he certainly hadn't gained any inner peace or relaxation from them.

"I don't think I could get into the atmosphere of it all - I'd feel a bit embarrassed. And I'm not sure what to do. Maybe I'd cough in the middle of it and spoil it for the others. I'm just not sure that I'm ready for it."

"What is it exactly that worries you?"

Harry didn't want to offend Yeva in any way, as she obviously took it all seriously.

"I'd feel a bit stupid, just sitting there with my eyes closed. What am I supposed to do?"

"You prayed when you went to church, didn't you? It's very much the same."

"Yes, but there, the minister says things and you just listen. Church services may be a bit condescending and twee at times - but at least you don't have to think much. I wouldn't know what to focus on, doing it myself."

"Don't you pray on your own?"

"No, I prefer to figure out my own solutions, rather than asking God about it."

"Fair enough. Well, some meditation is led, with someone giving you directions to follow and things to think about. Some types have a particular focus. Other forms give you what's called a Mantra - a word or sound which doesn't necessarily mean anything - but you repeat it, to help you empty your mind of day-to-day thoughts and relax totally. With some, you just sit in silence, with your own thoughts. Some others give you a particular unfathomable statement to ponder on. There are many different ways - there's bound to be one or two which you might feel comfortable with."

"I suppose it does help you relax."

"Yes indeed. It helps you - and it can help others as well. One advanced group I belong to meditates for peace and healing for the planet, which gives us lots of things to focus on - all those countries where there are wars or unrest or disasters at the moment. They all need support to help them progress."

"But, how can you, sitting in a room here thinking about some country, make any difference to what goes on in that country?"

"It's the collective consciousness thing - it's like your idea of the hundred monkeys principle, gradually building support. Alongside that, can you accept the possibility that a group working together like that can be generating and focusing energy?"

"I guess so. If you can feel energy or a "buzz" building in a crowd at a football match or a pop concert, why not with a large number of people meditating? Yes, I can see that - but how can your group focusing on thoughts about some action which is happening in another country have any effect on that remote action?"

"It's not just our group. There are lots of other groups around the country, focusing on the same thoughts - often at the same time. To this, you can add similar groups of people doing the same thing in countries around the world. Just visualise all these little glimmers of energy - angel energy - twinkling around the world, helping create a brighter, more positive light! It's not just meditation either - add the power of conventional prayer, positive thought, affirmations and so on it's powerful Harry!

"I suppose so. I guess using the same types of focus and positive thought could apply at work - for teams developing a synergy, for example. It could help them come up with new ideas - some lateral thinking, perhaps. I can see the potential but I'm not sure I'm ready for going to meditation yet, Yeva."

"Maybe not now. The group I'm going to tonight just does simple meditation. Isabelle can tell you what to do. Think about it - I'm sure when you do come, you'll find it enjoyable and you'd meet some new and interesting people."

With little conscious effort, Yeva was empowering Harry to work through his doubts and concerns, to a point where he was beginning to see his own way forward in a

more positive light. The knowledge and awareness were already there - it was just a case of coaxing and coaching it out into the open.

"There's a real need for people to focus more, don't you think, Harry? Yes. When business teams meet together, they should try including a bit of meditation or quiet thinking time before they start their meeting. Call it something different - 'Focus Time', or something like that, so that the idea doesn't put people off - but it would certainly help them relax, concentrate and bring their personal energy to the group."

"Well, if it's a simple session tonight, I may give it a try. I'll check with Lynda whether she wants to come. Can you give us a few hints, to keep us right for a start?"

Going to meditation with Yeva was to introduce Harry to many wonderful people - people with an open and peaceful attitude towards life - and to one very special woman, Isabelle, who led this particular group. If Harry had to label her style of leadership, it would certainly be democratic almost laissez faire at times but there was no doubt about the positive - almost magnetic - effect she had on the group. At times, this manifested itself to maintain the direction of the group.

Isabelle certainly became an inspiration to Harry - who was now being helped in different ways by both his esoteric ladies. Lynda too felt the benefit of these meditation times, which helped her focus her thoughts and see the way ahead with greater clarity. In time, she was to become more involved with Isabelle's various groups - gaining greatly from them. The overall effect - the holistic effect - was that Lynda and Harry both felt an elevated benefit from each other's company.

Once Harry had gained confidence after several meditation sessions, he was left wondering why he had worried initially – reaching the conclusion that it was the usual thing about fear of the unknown or the different. Others he knew found similar strengths from prayer and other more conventional methods. There was no one path, trod by everyone ... but the importance of each individual finding some sense of direction and a precise awareness of goals and milestones along his or her chosen life-path was becoming increasingly apparent.

His nervousness resurfaced when he turned up on his first day in his new job. Once again, Harry found himself feeling insecure and unsettled. Harry - who had worked in large companies for years, travelled extensively and reached a senior, decision-making position in his previous job - was reduced to moist armpits and three visits to the bathroom before stepping across the threshold for the first time!

As soon as Harry introduced himself, the receptionist had responded in a very friendly manner, putting him instantly at ease.

"Welcome to our company, Mr Williams. Mr Cowie asked me to take you straight up when you arrived. Could you come this way please."

Harry chatted to Julie, the receptionist, as they walked along the corridor. The conversation flowed easily, helped by his recent experience of meeting and talking to the members of Isabelle's group. Somehow, they were more open, with more varied interests than the old Job Club, where his 'colleagues' had been more concerned with scoring points. He found himself increasingly interested in people now - in how they felt about things and their interests, beliefs and attitudes.

With this more co-operative atmosphere around, the overlying feeling of competition and aggression, present in many companies and environments, seemed to be totally unnecessary.

In their brief conversation, he discovered that Julie's first love was aerobics. She was a trained instructor and ran various classes during evenings and at weekends - with a secret desire to have her own club and do it full-time. Harry had an easy manner which encouraged people to open up and discuss their innermost feelings: feelings that they could share with him without any fear that they would be broadcast further. Julie responded to this and, even in the course of their walk to Bob Cowie's office, the two formed a bond, chatting like old friends.

It was the same at the meditation group. He found it quite fascinating hearing about the wide range of backgrounds and experience which were represented - and learning about topics which he had never experienced before. Slowly, he was finding out new skills and knowledge areas. Through this very informal level of mentoring and coaching, his experience and view of the world was expanding almost daily.

What fascinated him most was that here in Isabelle's group of friends was a quite disparate collection of people who were united informally by a common purpose. There were no rules and regulations which said they must relate positively together. However, people listened to each other, considered - and accepted - views expressed by others and openly offered views of their own. Although these views sometimes differed, they helped each other reach compromise solutions, by suggesting alternative strategies, offering direct assistance or encouraging possible actions. In the main, ego was kept firmly in check, only surfacing occasionally where an individual felt the need to assert rather than co-operate. Different individuals

would take the lead at different times during discussions, depending on the topic raised. It was a joy to be part of.

This was the kind of holistic atmosphere, through mentoring, coaching and co-operation, that Harry wanted to develop at work - what was it Yeva had called it? "angel energy" - that was it. If only he could get it to work. He would get it to work - he just knew he could.

Julie was still describing some of the exercise routines she used as they arrived at Bob Cowie's office door.

"Thanks, Julie. I'll talk to you some more about your plans - I'm sure they can happen, if you really want them to. Just take it slowly and be clear in your mind what your first priorities are. Think it through financially as well - you must be true to yourself - but be realistic as well. Don't pretend it will be easy if it won't be."

Bob Cowie looked up from his screen as Julie escorted Harry into the office.

"Ah, our new man has arrived! Thanks Julie. I guess you've been letting Harry in on some of the inner secrets about the company, have you?"

Harry and Julie exchanged glances and smiled.

"So, Harry, what are your first impressions?"

Harry had already seen the building when he came for his interview. Anyway, he wasn't too bothered about actual building layouts. His previous company headquarters had the impressive marble hallway, various statues and other signs of

show - but so what? It was the real rather than stone people and how these people interacted within the organisation which seemed the important issues to Harry now.

"There seems to be a very friendly atmosphere, Mr Cowie."

"Call me Bob. Yes. The staff here work closely together, so we don't bother about formality. We certainly try to have friendly dealings with each other - and with our customers as well. If you do what you agree to do, there isn't much call for dealing with each other in any way other than honest. We work pretty co-operatively here, Harry - not much need to push for your rights, as long as you meet expectations."

For the next hour or so - Harry lost track of the time - he and Bob discussed initial priorities; the operations of a high-output catering company which he would have to learn; ways of working with and developing staff; current contracts which were in hand and the range of other activities with which Harry would become involved in this new world of international airline catering.

In the afternoon, after briefly viewing the production and transport set-ups, Bob showed Harry round the Distribution Department which he would be heading up. He introduced people individually, then retreated into the background of the conversations to allow them to forge relationships. Bob was empowering him to get to know his staff from day one; preparing the foundations for a solid future working relationship.

There didn't appear to be any degree of internal politics around in his new company. In the weeks which followed, Harry was to find out why!

Chapter Nine

"I've arranged for my first staff meeting tomorrow."

"Are you clear why? Haven't you talked to them all individually by now?"

Yeva's reply surprised Harry and he thought for a moment.

"Well, yes - but we usually have staff meetings - they're considered to be a good thing."

"But are they? Is there a clear purpose? Does everyone get a chance to speak?"

Harry thought back to his experiences with his previous company. The theory was that everyone should enter into the discussion - but normally it was the usual people banging on about their pet theories and the other usual people sitting saying nothing.

"Cast your mind back, Harry. In your previous company, roughly what percentage of those attending those meetings hardly ever said a word?"

"Oh I don't know maybe about 25%. More, perhaps, at some meetings."

"Well, that's a waste of time, isn't it - and money as well. Think of the cost of having all these bums on seats round the table. Why do you think they didn't say anything?"

"Lots of reasons, I suppose. They weren't interested in - or informed about - the subject; they had more pressing problems which were occupying their minds at the

time; they were scared of being 'shown up' or laughed at; they weren't encouraged to speak by the Chair; they lacked confidence. Lots of different reasons."

"Were you organising these meetings?"

"Some of them."

"So, what did you do about it, if you were aware that these problems existed?"

Harry was beginning to feel threatened - and because of this, he began to feel a little annoyed. He'd grown accustomed to this questioning tactic being used in his previous company - and applied the normal response when threatened - attack!

"Look, it wasn't my fault - I made sure I was organised. I couldn't help it if these lazy sods weren't prepared for the meeting. Some of them didn't have two original thoughts to rub together. At least it was a chance to give out the same information to them all, whether or not they were listening. It's all very well for you to pontificate - I don't see what I could have done differently."

"It's OK, Harry. I wasn't suggesting that you should have done everything for them - I was just wondering if there was any way you might have created a different atmosphere - one where individuals are encouraged to do more for themselves."

"Oh sorry. I just flipped a bit. You opened up some old wounds from my last job, that's all. Sorry."

"That's OK, Harry. Lots of people at work have got old wounds - especially after the long recession and all the financial and domestic pressures they've been under. There are many things around to threaten them. All these threats and pressures make it even harder to create a proper, conducive atmosphere at work ... as well as in life to get the individual and group energies working in harmony again."

"Ah, these energies again. So, what should I have done differently then - or, more to the point, what should I do now to make sure there's a positive working atmosphere for my new staff?"

"Think about it. Each of the individuals in your team - or each person attending the meeting - has got something to offer. They shouldn't be working in the company or be present at the meeting if that's not true. With a little support and encouragement, each of them will enjoy being involved in activities which they see as being positive. They should also enjoy taking part in making these decisions - after all, it could change their working environment. As chairman or team leader, you're the guy that can make it all happen. Just think of yourself as the person who can encourage this potential energy to grow and grow."

"You mean, a facilitator! That's what they're called nowadays."

"A facilitator, eh? Sounds a bit grand but fair enough, suit yourself. Facilitator it is then! So, how do you think you might facilitate your team to get more involved with all those ideas and energies?"

"I suppose, first of all, I need to create the atmosphere where individuals feel confident they can use their skills. If they feel their workmates respect them, they should feel brave enough to speak and maybe voice concerns during the meeting."

"That's a good starting point. So, if they're clear about their own personal strengths - and those of others - what happens then?"

"They'll begin to see how to combine them for a better end result and ..."

"..... and feel encouraged to work more closely together!"

"I was just going to say that."

"Wow - you must be psychic! Incidentally, that's a good description of the holistic approach - when the end result of some combination of things proves to be worth more than the sum of the individual things."

"That's a bit vague. What do you mean, exactly? Give me a real example."

"Sure. Let's see now. Say you have three people involved in a project where one is good at thinking clearly, the second has had experience of similar projects and the third is good with words - good at writing reports and so on. Combine these skills and the team's final result is going to be better than any one member could have produced.

"Oh right, I can see that. So there's a holistic knock-on effect between the different personal actions which gives a better end product - a well written, informed report, in this case. It sounds much like 'synergy', which is used a lot in business."

"A combined effect which exceeds the effects of the individual components. Yes, it's very much the same. *Synergy* is used in science, implying a sort of heightened chemical combination, while *holistic* is more philosophical, bringing positive development outcomes to the individuals and everyone affected by the activities."

"God, you're amazing, Yeva. How do you know about these things?"

"I've been around, Harry - around and around! I'm just applying the basic ideas of a more spiritual way of thinking to fit your more mainstream needs."

"You mean, your Pagan philosophies and all that sort of thing?"

"It's not Pagan, or Christian, or Buddhist or Muslim or whatever. It's not a faith thing. It's more to do with altruism and selflessness finding the standards of conduct which bring out the best in people."

"Such as ...?"

"Having a balanced, objective take on life; listening to people and responding, rather than pontificating; seeing and applying the bigger picture; empowering people to think and act for themselves, acting honestly and openly..... things like that."

"But it must tie in with believing in some form of God?"

“Not as such, necessarily - but certainly a belief in some form of higher all-powerful energy helps. I guess that’s why I usually refer to it as holistic rather than spiritual some people can’t see the wood for the trees and find the whole “spiritual” thing a bit threatening. It’s anything but, really. It boils down to getting people to act openly and helpfully towards each other ... getting rid of those hidden agendas.”

“Do you really think it can work, Yeva?”

“Of course, given time and the right, consistent atmosphere. I’ve seen communes and groups of people in villages that have managed to work together in a supportive way - so why not within a business? I’m only applying the same kind of thinking to meet these various business needs that you’re describing. It’s not rocket science!

So, how would you plan to organise - sorry facilitate - your meeting so that it could build towards a holistic end result?”

“Well, I must get everyone involved. I’m good at listening to people so I want to hear from everyone - then pick up and expand their key points. It’s quite a complex business, airline catering. I’ve already heard examples of where very impressive, first class in-flight meals have been delivered without any hitches but other situations where the quality standards failed or aircraft were delayed because the catering wasn’t supplied on time. Some of these problems were certainly down to the scheduling and distribution, which is what I’m responsible for.

I'll get as many views as possible about how the team can work better together, how planning and scheduling can be streamlined; how the atmosphere in the department can be improved"

".... and get them to commit to ways of becoming more personally involved. Remember, you're not asking for lots of suggestions about things that you need to do. You're involving everyone so that they do what they decide is important."

"Empowerment - right, that's a good point - then it becomes a positive thing, rather than a moan session where they spend the time complaining about things that are wrong and listing things that the company and other people need to do."

"Exactly. Thinking positively can cut a lot of that crap - which in the main is history anyway. You can't do a lot to repair these errors of the past - you weren't even with the company at the time. Use them as learning experiences, by all means - but look forwards, not backwards. Move on. Life is a learning experience, Harry. Keep learning in the Now and don't dwell on the past.

So, you've already spoken to most of them?"

"Nearly all of them, yes. I made notes afterwards so I've a pretty good idea of the skills and priorities that each person has."

"Do you reckon they're aware of each other's capabilities?"

"Their competencies? I suppose so - certainly the work ones, like scheduling, planning, dealing with the chefs and drivers and so on. I suppose they might be competent at other things which they haven't had a chance to apply at work. I

noticed someone's in the local Toastmasters; there's someone else treasurer of the cricket club; one woman is involved in training special constables. All these kinds of capabilities could be applied at work. I think in some cases, people probably get involved in activities outside work because they don't get an opportunity to apply and develop these personal areas of interest while they're at work."

"So, that might be a good starting point to try developing your holistic team. It's part of getting a correct work/life balance. Get each person to speak briefly about some activity they've been involved with during the past month - in life as well as work - something that gave them a really positive buzz. While you've got them talking, they could also describe one thing which they would like to do to improve the work in the Department."

"You're terrific Yeva - are you sure you've never worked in business?"

Doing that would build up a really useful bank of information and possible skills for the future. It'll identify those who might want to be involved in specific projects - and pinpoint those who might link together to give the broader holistic end result.

That's magic, Yeva - It's all beginning to make sense."

"OK. So you've got your pile of ideas. Then what do you need to do?"

Harry paused. "Make notes? Send round a report? Feed all the ideas up to Bob for further comment? List them in some form of"

"Perhaps all these things but, first and foremost, you'll have to make sure that the atmosphere's right for all these ideas to happen - and that they do happen."

"Oh, come on, Yeva, they can't all happen. Some of the ideas in any brainstorming session are bound to be too idealistic, or impractical, or whatever."

"Bar the occasional oddball, each of these suggestions makes sense to the person suggesting it - and it's quite likely that some of the different ideas can link together. Given an open, non-critical atmosphere, most people will adapt their ideas a little to reach compromise. That's where you come in, O Great Facilitator!

If they feel that you're only going through the motions - that you're just listening to their ideas but won't do anything about them - or worse still, that you'll push through your own ideas regardless well, you'll have wasted a golden opportunity. Very rapidly you'll all be back at square one, mistrusting each other and trying to score points."

"That's all so true! People go on impressive management development courses to learn stuff like this or to learn how to be a mentor - and you just come out with it!"

"It may be the stuff of expensive training courses - but it's mostly common sense. Call it applied experience, if you want. Just never lose sight of the fact that you're dealing with people. As a group, they can sometimes be rather daunting. The crowd instinct sometimes brings out the worst in them - but, as individuals, they're just like you and me. Treat each one with respect, love, understanding whatever you want to call it. I'm happy calling it love. Treat them like individual energies, each requiring some unique form of help to become more aware, more effective."

"Just like you're treating me, I guess!"

"Your energy is increasing, certainly. You probably won't believe this, but I can see a purple glow - threads of light - around your head just now."

Harry wasn't too surprised at this - with all these new experiences over the past few months, his current "super-charged" feeling made the idea of the occasional flash of purple or golden light seem perfectly possible. Come to think of it he'd already seen brief flashes of light out of the corner of his eye, from time to time.

"Is that an example of seeing what you call 'angel energy'?"

"Absolutely. It's potentially there in everybody. The more you're aware - the more you see."

"I never thought that I'd have my own personal angel!"

"I guess that he, or she, has a range of responsibilities - but you'll certainly get some quality help! Just focus on that angel energy - it's a spark in everybody in every member of your staff. You want to help - facilitate - empower even! - these sparks to join together to increase the illumination. It's the holistic idea again. Once the energy's there, people can apply it for their own benefit, the team benefit, the department's benefit - the total Company benefit and so on, onwards and upwards."

"Angel energy. What a wonderful picture that creates. So, how do I build this energy while I'm running the meeting tomorrow?"

"What do you think? It works better if you figure it through yourself."

"Right. Well, I suppose - make people feel that they can achieve things and make them feel confident that I ... and the company ... will support them. From what you were saying earlier, I must keep an eye on the meeting and make sure that the quiet ones get a chance to speak - and summarise the outcomes from time to time to help the ideas grow."

"And how will you make sure that the angel energy will get brighter, year after year?"

"Most important - if I promise to do something or help someone, I make sure that I come up with the goods, so that they can rely on me. Then I guess, if there's some kind of overall plan and goal, people can see that things are moving forward."

"And you can set down various milestones along the way."

"Milestoning - that's quite an up-to-the-minute business planning idea, Yeva!"

"Roads have had milestones for a very long time - there's nothing new about being shown where you're going and how you're progressing. However, it'll certainly keep your folks moving forward. Onwards and upwards - eh?"

"Yes. And I suppose one of the most important things is to listen to what they have to say. And try to use their ideas. And keep them informed about changes and other developments."

"Listening is just as important as getting the message across, especially when you're working with groups. There are so many problems around caused by poor

communication. The solution's simple. Remember - your team has been working in the company for longer than you have, so their knowledge of the various production processes, possible hiccups with transport and food preparation and so on is very valuable. Listen to what they tell you - some of it may be a bit cynical at first but you can sort that out progressively. Use their ideas where you can. It all helps the energy grow. Oh - and let them be involved in growing it!"

"Empowerment. Put people in the position where they can help themselves. Once they've thought through their plan, they....."

"Go ahead and follow it with conviction. Wowee - that's common sense again."

"It may be, but lots of companies don't do it. They have things like set procedures to follow; pre-designed record sheets and forms to complete; targets and processes that are inflexible - all discouraging individuals from applying their common sense ."

"OK, sorry, I wasn't trying to belittle it. You go for it, Harry. Help their ideas and their enthusiasm grow. Mentor them or coach them or coax them or do whatever is necessary - but keep that energy moving forwards."

Harry gave Yeva a hug, excited at the thought of being able to build that team energy and produce something real again.

"It's great having my own personal mentor around, Yeva, here just when I need you. My angelic champion! Thank goodness you took the room!"

"It was meant, Harry - it was meant to happen. God bless, you'll do just fine."

Chapter Ten

Harry sat in his office, feeling elated.

The meeting had gone well. As planned, each member had briefly described his or her key strengths - and how possible it was to apply them at this time. Each person had also come up with one suggestion of a way that the work of the Department could be improved. Harry had noted all these ideas.

Some people had been more hesitant and self-conscious than others; one or two had initially come over in a rather aggressive way, expecting their views to be challenged by this new boy - especially someone who, in their eyes, knew sod all about catering and had, so the grapevine said, "spent his time selling life assurance or mortgages or something".

Attitudes soon softened when they saw that Harry was open to all suggestions and willing to discuss issues until they became clear and understandable to everyone.

With a sudden flash of inspiration, Harry had asked everyone to list the five most important things in their lives - and then the three key goals which they had for life generally. He didn't give them long, so he got their immediate reactions, rather than the measured answers they thought he would want. He was quite surprised that many of the most important priorities and personal goals linked directly to their work. He had assumed that people would be keener on their home life, hobbies, interests outside work and so on. It became clear that a positive atmosphere at work and the likelihood of success and job satisfaction were thought to be as important as the

level of pay. Or, to use one of the in-phrases of the moment, “a good work/life balance was key”.

This came as no surprise to Harry who, being a “Theory Y” kind of guy, tended to see the best in his staff whenever possible. He agreed wholeheartedly with the theory, which basically said that employees were positive and enthusiastic towards work, if given the correct working atmosphere and environment. What was something of a surprise was the obvious interest and concern they showed towards the successful working of the department and indeed the company. He found this very satisfying - that energetic spark of hope was most certainly alive and active!

Harry had also led a brainstorming session to list as many ideas as possible for new development projects and positive progresses for the Department. They'd taken it further and selected six key goals from the list. The group were keen to set up one or two teams to pursue some of these goals - Harry was pleased to step aside and let them get on with it. He was fascinated when they selected people representing an obvious range of skills for each team to ensure that (in their words) "We won't get stuck in a rut with too much arty-farty thinking - or have a group where there's not the right balance of thinkers or doers to get things progressing properly."

Harry could see that, intuitively, they were aware of the different ways that individuals worked and learned together, without knowing the fancy terminology. He made a mental note to hold a short session to explain the concepts of Honey and Mumford's activist, reflector, theorist and pragmatist learning styles and Belbin's various team roles that he'd been reading about - but there was no rush as they obviously understood the principles anyway. In the meantime, "arty-farty" would do just fine!

The list included several good ideas for streamlining the meal distribution system - which was largely built round 'cook and chill' methods and therefore had to be stored and handled very carefully. He must discuss these - and various other suggestions regarding equipment re-design and changes to schedules - with Bob Cowie, as it was gratifying that his staff had evidently thought through some of the problems - and had come up with what appeared to be valid solutions.

Harry was pleased with the results of this first meeting - and with the positive atmosphere that had been generated. It was now down to him to make sure that things happened and that the different teams could continue progressing, getting his support as and when they needed it. His gaze ranged around the office, as he thought through the progress he had made over these past few weeks.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in. Oh hello Anne. How can I help?"

"Are you busy? I was wanting to ask something. Oh, incidentally, that was a very useful meeting I hope you don't mind me saying so but I think it's the first meeting I've been to in this company where we got some real results. There's a real buzz around as a result of it - I just hope that we can do some of the things that we talked about!"

"I'm glad that it went so well. It's up to me - to all of us - to keep that buzzing atmosphere going. As far as I'm concerned, we'll have a go at achieving all the key suggestions anyway. Some will take longer than others and some will doubtless

have to be revised and refined as we look further into the detail - but we can all take a hand in making sure they keep pushing forward. What was it you wanted to ask?"

"It's probably not important but I'm pretty hopeless at the word processor - and I was wondering if I might be allowed to go on a course?"

"Do you use the computer a lot for doing letters or reports, maybe?"

"Not really. I use it for reports periodically - but I'll probably be doing more of these in the future. It takes me so long to do them - partly because I'm very slow at typingbut mostly because I'm learning by trial and error as I go along."

"I suppose you can gradually pick things up that way but you could obviously use some help with the package itself. Have you had a chat with the training department?"

"They say that their budget has been cut and that there are others with higher priorities than me."

"Well, that's not too motivating, is it? So, perhaps we'll need to sort something out in the department itself. Leave it with me and I'll ask around. I'll definitely get back to you by the end of the week. In the meantime, could you make a list of the particular word processing areas you need help with. Try to be as specific as possible."

When Anne had left the office, Harry sat thinking.

There must be people within the department who were pretty expert at using this particular package. If it came to that, he knew quite a lot himself, thanks to all those reports, procedural guides and other things he had produced while with his previous company. They had used a different package so he supposed that he had still something of a learning curve to achieve himself. However, there must be at least one 'expert user' in the department who could be encouraged to help.

Anne didn't really need a full-blown training course, which would doubtless cover areas which weren't directly relevant to her, as she was only an occasional user. What she needed was a little personalised help, available in her workplace, to focus on the techniques she actually needed to use. What she required was ... what was it called again?... that was it ... workplace championing ... she needed some combination of informal coaching and mentoring to help her progress.

Harry had read an article about a system called 360 degree championing - which was described as the process where anyone who was experienced and competent at a particular skill or technique could pass this on to someone who needed that skill. The learning could be transferred in a fairly informal way - although still following some sort of structured plan, of course. Most of these champions, or coach/mentors certainly weren't qualified trainers - and their level of seniority in the company wasn't important.

The important thing was that the workplace champion would be around to help the learner as and when required, to keep them progressing when they got stuck. With this help, the learner could gradually become confident as well as competent. Being able to apply the ideas in their actual job would make sure that the learning was relevant. It all made wonderful sense, when you thought about it!

It suddenly dawned on Harry that, using these ideas, he had vast potential within his department - people with a wide range of skills who, given the right atmosphere, would be happy sharing them with others. Age and status was unimportant - it was just as possible for the likes of Anne to learn typing skills from the office junior as it was for him, Harry, to teach the Supervisor about time management and work scheduling. And the beauty about internal workplace championing - as well as being cheap, of course - was that there was assistance on-tap to help sort out glitches as the ideas were put into real practice. This was so often the problem when individuals went off on formal training courses - they lacked the follow-on support when they were trying to put the theories into practice, back at the workplace.

He knew that it wouldn't be easy - that he would initially have to convince people that they should get involved ... or perhaps even prior to that, he'd have to convince the company that it would be a worth-while exercise.

Harry realised that he too was experiencing a form of, probably, mentoring from Yeva, Isabelle and the wide range of people he was meeting. People from all walks of life, with a wide range of interests and beliefs, who were happy to share these openly with others, in order that they might understand and "spread the word" further.

"If I can get this workplace championing idea going in the Department", thought Harry, "it'll build co-operation amongst staff and really get the energy flowing."

At that moment, Harry could have sworn that he saw a glimmer of golden light among the pages in his in-tray.

He still felt on a high when he got home that evening and started telling Lynda about the day's events. Her early years as a teacher before the kids were born meant she was still interested in learning theory, although she got very angry about all the meddling and change for its own sake which was currently happening in the world of education. She listened with interest as Harry enthused about his ideas on applying this new concept.

"Your Training Department may not like it - all those people becoming involved in training each other. They'll probably think that anybody who is to be a ... what did you call it? ... champion, which they'd probably think of as a coach or mentor, should be trained as a full-on trainer. I bet they start banging on about 'sitting with Nellie'."

"Who's Nellie?"

"Oh, it's a phrase which trainers use - in a slightly derogatory way - to imply that on-the-job training carried out in an informal way using experienced staff who are not actually trainers can be rather vague and can teach bad habits."

"That might be so, but surely there are some pretty good Nellies around. All they need is a bit of help with the basics of planning and packaging the information - in understanding levels and structure and questioning skills things like that. With a bit of input on that, they'll be able to pass on their knowledge and skills quite professionally. Anyway, I'm not looking for people who can stand in front of a group and teach them - I just want people who have experience and knowledge and who can demonstrate and transfer this to others enthusiastically and helpfully."

"One thing you'll have to watch for - these people aren't trainers, so they each have their own job to do. They're co-operating in this way as an extra - the company's got to be supportive of that, or these new-found champions will get fed up pretty soon!"

"Yes, I can understand that. The whole process certainly needs support from on-high. I'll have to talk to Bob. With that support firmly in place though, I'm sure we can help them, to make sure they do it in a fairly structured, sympathetic and loving way."

"Loving! You won't get much of that in training!"

"That's what I said to Yeva about business generally. It's not the physical kind of love - aching loins, intense eye contact and all that stuff. It's just showing warmth, respect, understanding like we respond to each other now rather than those steamy evenings of our youth in the back seat of the Cortina!"

"Shush, Harry, the children might hear! Well, in that case, they need to be clear what they're trying to achieve. Then they can figure out what their learners need to cover, to be able to meet the goals. I think it's important that they can put the information in a sequence of steps and stages too there should be a clear logic."

"So, you mean give themselves sort of milestones and then figure out the stages which they must cover to achieve each goal?"

"Yes. They're normally called objectives - and they're aimed at the learner rather than the person teaching - the coach or mentor ... or champion, as you're calling him. Objectives give a check on whether the intended direction is being followed - and let you know when the target's been reached. Oh ... and another thing select

people who you think can work sympathetically with others. Give them a little initial training in the skills and thinking behind your ideas - and a lot of support. It's worth the effort - you'll be gradually building up a valuable network of theseah"

"Workplace champions "

"that's it ... workplace champions ... in your department."

"That all sounds quite possible and exciting."

"Just keep it straight forward - and don't overload them too soon. You tend to go charging off when you get enthusiastic about something. Don't scare them in the early stages. There's also something very important you need to do first, before you start off down this particular track."

"What's that? Find a room for the sessions?"

"No, no a lot more important than that - in fact you don't really need a room. It will work perfectly well in the normal workplace, as long as the distractions and noise are not too great. No, what you must do first is make sure you have support from the top."

"You mean Bob? He'll be OK."

"You may well think that but you've got to talk it through with him - and perhaps even check that your ideas will be supported by people higher than Bob. Remember about getting clearance for the time-off which your champions will need to be removed

from their normal work. Once you get going, you don't want anything happening which could slow down - or worse ... stop - progress. It just needs one major block and all your good plans and preparation will collapse in a sad pile. Believe me - I've seen it happen too often in my years of teaching."

"I guess you're right. I'll talk it through with Bob very soon."

Chapter Eleven

Harry stood in front of one of the major stones near the south circle at Avebury. Eyes closed, he was lost in his own world, with many and varied thoughts flowing through his mind. He often came to this very special part of Wiltshire - a large neolithic settlement with the very impressive remains of two stone circles, enclosed by the remains of a main circle and banked ditch. Around him, other like-minded souls stood, similarly lost in their own thoughts near the various large and weirdly-shaped stones which make up the south circle.

Isabelle came up behind him.

"Can you feel the aura - the energy coming from the stone, Harry?"

Harry returned to the present world with a slight start.

"Auras. Now Yeva was talking about these coming from people. Do you mean you can feel them on the stones in this circle as well?"

"Yes. If you hold the palms of your hands out forwards and walk towards one of the stones, you should reach a point where you experience a different feeling. Some people get a tingle in their hands; others feel a slight breeze. Try it."

Much to Harry's surprise, he did feel a slight tingling in the palms of his outstretched hands as he walked towards the next huge stone, which must have been at least five metres tall. He found this all very interesting.

Harry had decided on the spur of the moment on Friday evening to join one of Isabelle's workshops. This one was on dowsing energies and they had spent a fascinating morning practising with dowsing rods and pendulums around the room. The visit to Avebury in the afternoon was by way of a practical field trip for the workshop members, to test out their skills in the "real world", if it could be called that!

The group represented a wide mixture of ages, nationalities and appearances and Harry soon realised that it represented a wonderful, informal example of the workplace championing idea which he was beginning to apply at work. Members of the group were helping each other, with one who was quite confident about dowsing using this confidence to help others over the first hurdle of doubt. Someone else was well informed about Avebury and its layout and was answering questions from colleagues as they marvelled at the massive stones. Isabelle moved around the group, giving a word of encouragement here; listening to a conversation there; helping where necessary but allowing people to transfer knowledge and enthusiasm to each other unhindered.

"This", thought Harry, "is really what learning is all about."

With the help of a dowsing rod to indicate the direction of the energy clearly, Isabelle was now showing the group the path of an energy line which passes through Avebury.

"This is the Michael Line, which passes diagonally through the south of England. It has been dowsed all the way from Cornwall and heads out towards the Wash. It meanders around this area, going through Windmill Hill - which is part of the Avebury

complex - and then heads through Ogbourne St Andrew, on the other side of Marlborough."

"So, if this is a meandering energy line, is it what's called a Ley Line?"

"No, Alice. Think of a ley line as a straight energy line which links a series of important sites. You get them passing through old tumuli - burial mounds, some major hill tops, important cross roads, very old properties and so on. And, before somebody asks, we're not sure which came first - whether the burial mounds were built on an existing ley line or whether the energy was created from the sites. I think the energy lines were there first - but nobody really knows."

"You get important buildings - manor houses and churches - built on ley lines as well, don't you?"

"Yes. The sites were chosen to gain benefit from the existing energy - or in the case of the churches, often to cap what was considered to be pagan energy. Look, there's even a chapel built within the stone circle here - built with stones which were broken up when conventional religion tried to destroy the circle, seeing it as a threat."

On Harry's various visits to Avebury, the evidently powerful attraction of the place always amazed him. He had been coming regularly for three or four years now, summer and winter, day and evening. Whenever he came, he was almost certain to see groups of visitors walking quietly amongst the stones, greeting each other in a relaxed, friendly way. This was so different from the atmosphere in many major cities where people avoided making eye contact out of fear or apprehension. Perhaps he

should get his team out to Avebury for a picnic or something - that would get the group energy going!

"I've just realised how you could apply the thinking behind these energy lines in Life"

Isabelle laughed. "Let's hear your theory then, Harry - I suppose its another of these ideas to get business on its feet again!"

"Well, I suppose it is - but it can be used just as well in normal life. If we've sorted out a personal goal, we have it there somewhere down the line stretching ahead of us - the ley line, like a corridor, with the walls giving us the controls."

"The parameters - I think that's what they're called."

"You could picture it as a long straight track, like the ones there are around Wiltshire."

"Yes, just like that. Watkins wrote about them. So you have this ley line track, with boundaries on either side - representing the limits of what is acceptable or available. You could think of some of the boundaries being naturally created - while others were man-made."

"Like hedges for the natural limitations and fences for the man-made rules and regulations?"

Yes. Then, inside this track, if each of us has a meandering energy line - our personal energy flow - this progresses slowly along the track, bending and weaving....."

"..... and sometimes stopping still or curving back on itself"

"Yes, that as well, but always keeping within the limits set for the overall track and heading towards the ultimate goal. In an ideal world, our personal progress would be a straight line running up the centre of the track, reaching the goal as quickly as possible. In the real world though, we have all the stops and starts, obstructions and meanderings which mean that achieving our objective usually takes much longer."

"But, if you know the limits and controls and keep sight of your ultimate goal ..."

"... you'll keep progressing positively along the track."

"Yes. That would explain my problem with timescales. I know that something will sort out OK in the end but it's the waiting - and not knowing what I can do to get things moving sometimes - which is so frustrating!"

Isabelle smiled at Harry. She loved it when he got all enthusiastic about things. As often happened, his enthusiasm had transferred to several of the others in the group, who had joined in the discussion.

"That's why some activities take so much longer to achieve than we would like - but, if we're clear about what we want to achieve, we will get there ultimately."

"You mean, 'You are what you want to be' - Yeva told me that one."

"Yes – I've heard many permutations of that phrase, all saying much the same thing. If you have a clear focus and really want to do something - and if you have faith in yourself and those around you - you will succeed ultimately."

One of the other group members gave Isabelle a hug. "Thank you Isabelle - that's really encouraging."

"It was Harry's idea - it's him you should be hugging!"

Harry had gradually become aware that, in any group of people, different people were at varying, unique points along their individual development paths. If he imagined this as a bunch of energy lines snaking along the track, there were these little energy glimmers dotted along the way, with winding, intertwining lines running back from each one. The glimmers of energy represented each individual, or their point of progress on the track. Thus, when conversations such as this started, there were always individuals with ideas and thoughts to add, while others listened intently, still trying to piece the different parts of their personal jigaw together. Then, of course, there are usually one or two doubters.

Occasionally, he would literally see a flash of inspiration as someone suddenly realised the solution to some question they had been trying to figure out. Once again, the synergy of people interacting without any hidden agendas became a really positive force. This is what he had to get going at work! This was what he visualised as "angel energy", in a tangible form!

Harry watched Isabelle in action. As far as he was aware, she hadn't had any formal training in running these types of development workshops but it all seemed to progress naturally for her. She obviously had a general idea of the structure or plan for the day, which was there to assist but not restrict progress. She listened to what people had to say and allowed them to discuss things within the group, acting as a kind of chairwoman - or facilitator, even. However, she always seemed to be in overall control, at times bringing the group to order just like an old-fashioned teacher, so as to act as a mentor for new information - or to explain the next activity.

Somehow, through it all, she managed to maintain a feeling of happiness, with regular laughter keeping the group together. And so, the workshop progressed as a relaxed, memorable experience. If only he could get his team building sessions working in the same way. When he thought about it, there was really no reason why they shouldn't. He would make sure that they were happy and memorable experiences. There, he had established another goal for himself - he would bring some additional fun and happiness back into the workplace once more!

All too quickly, the workshop came to an end and, after chatting for a while with several of the members, Harry set off for home.

Lynda was fascinated to hear about the workshop, as much about the way Isabelle kept it going as about the energy lines and Harry's new theories.

"I've always thought there was some kind of energy transmission from people which attracts like-minded people to bond together. I suppose that's much the same as the aura you're talking about.

Yes, and when you think about it, we use expressions like 'feeling the buzz' and 'on the same wave-length', which imply some sort of energy link. So, if this energy linking happens in a - what do you call it?..... in a synergy or holistic bonding - you've got a good, positive thing going - good vibrations, I suppose."

"Ah, the good old Beachboys! Yes, there's another phrase we use which has links with energies. I'd never thought about it like that before. Right, that's what I'm going to do at work. This workplace championing idea is a good starting point."

"Well, you do what Yeva suggested. As well as being sure of your ideas - and that your first attempts must be successful, make sure that you have Bob Cowie's support. Get him to lobby the directors for their support as well. There's no point in setting something in motion only to have it grinding to a halt due to lack of facilities or support."

"I know, I know. I've arranged for a meeting with Bob tomorrow afternoon."

Chapter Twelve

"That sounds like a good idea, Harry - why don't you give it a go and see how it works."

"I'm a bit worried whether it'll be allowed to work properly."

"How do you mean? I've said that I'll support you all I can."

"I appreciate that - but can we count on support from the senior management - and particularly from the Director herself? And what about all the Supervisory levels - will they feel that they can allow the time necessary for team meetings and releasing people for planning and delivering these championing sessions, when it comes to the crunch?"

"Well, I suppose that there will be crisis times when the occasional meeting or one or two of the planned workplace championing sessions will have to take second place. We are here to despatch the meals to clients, after all, so that must take priority."

"I accept that - but what'll happen where we have the odd stick-in-the-mud supervisor - Stuart Tucker, for example - who won't support the people and won't want to allow time out, even in the slacker times just as a matter of principle?"

"We'll have to sort them out until they do!"

"Do you mean that?"

"We, Harry We. He reports to you. He's your Supervisor, so it's up to you to work on him first and foremost - but you'll certainly have my direct support. Unfortunately, there are always the Stuarts in this world, who need to be pushed a bit harder."

"Maybe he had his fingers burnt in the past some time, when he tried to use what he thought was a bit of initiative. I heard there was a problem last year with menu substitutions on a PIA flight. I suppose we've all had the times when we used a bit of initiative and it blew up in our face. I guess it's down to how the crisis is managed - as to whether you try again ... or retreat into your shell, like Stuart has done."

"Sure. If you give people some rein to make their own decisions, then run with them, you've got to support them as much as possible afterwards, even if their decision was not one hundred percent."

"That's how I see it too. So, what's the best way forward then, Bob?"

"First, we need to get the Director on our side.... which is quite possible - she's become interested in running the business more ethically since attending that conference. I'm sure she'll buy into your holistic ideas, with a bit of persuasion. I'll have an initial word, if you like. Then, if you can give me a good sales pitch to follow, I'll pass the message on to the departmental heads next week. Can you produce a one page statement setting out your key ideas and requirements in time for that?"

Then, with her support, we may get some form of internal works council going - nothing too formal - just some vehicle to allow people to air their views, discuss preferred outcomes, keep informed about proposed changes that kind of thing."

"So, with a system like that in place, if someone like Tucker refused to co-operate with the championing and staff release and such like, the council could consider the situation and then make a judgement that Tucker would have to follow?"

"In principle, yes. You should think a little more positively, though. The council would be there to build ideas rather than to control people. It's still initially your responsibility to try to work things out with Stuart. He's not all bad, you know - he just takes some of the regulations too much to heart nowadays. As you say, he got his head in his hands for making these decisions with the PIA incident - there were one or two other things prior to that they were all by the book, mindand he did show initiative but the results didn't please the clients! "

"Ah, the 'tall poppy' principle"

"Yes, so he finds it safer now to keep his head down alongside the other poppies - which means he hides behind the regulations at times. He's not the only one, by any means - there are a few 'jobs-worths' around in this company, like any other! Generally though, a fairly informal works council arrangement would make people feel that their initial attempts at trying new ideas are not going to return to haunt them. The council being there should make the Supervisors think a bit more, before automatically saying 'No'!"

"And, above all, the feeling that there's official support should give folks that extra push - and confidence - to try these new ideas sometimes. It would be great, if it really does work, Bob."

"If we think positively and keep a clear sight of the goal, it will work - we'll make it work, Harry."

As promised, Bob phoned Harry a week later, as soon as the meeting had closed.

"Harry, the Director's very keen - just as I thought - she's even offered to become involved with the council herself!"

"That's great, well done. And the workplace championing ... the mentoring idea?"

"That too. I must confess that I sold it to some extent on the basis of reducing the direct costs of training - but I also stressed that the outcomes would be more directly relevant to our needs. That went down well. She liked the idea of the team spirit being improved as a result. Synergy and your holistic ideas seem to be becoming popular just now - make the most of it! Oh, as we predicted, someone did suggest a potential concern at non-specialists being used to run training sessions .."

"But they're not really training sessions as such. Anyway, we'll just have to show them that our champions, although not trainers as such, are probably better informed about their particular subject areas and applications. Being applied at the work place makes it a lot more relevant too and having these workplace champions on site allows extra, on-going input - helping the learner get beyond initial problems and blocks, as and when they arise."

"If you keep up this level of enthusiasm, Harry, it's bound to work. Talk to you soon!"

Harry reached into his in-tray and took out the file marked 'WORKPLACE CHAMPIONING'. He noticed that he had written 'releasing the angel energy' in pencil underneath. He smiled as he imagined this latent, holistic energy in his staff, waiting to be activated.

"Right - it's time things began to happen", thought Harry, I must tell Yeva the news tonight."

The good lady turned down the music as Harry knocked and entered her room. She listened carefully, nodding periodically, as he described his new-found ideas.

"That all sounds great. Colleagues sharing ideas and assistance - it sounds like you could organise it in much the same way as the LETS arrangements."

"LETS - what's that, Yeva?"

"It's where people group together and offer services to each other on a one-for-one trading basis, with no payment. You cut my grass for an hour - and I'll give you an aromatherapy massage for an hour that kind of thing. We all have skills we can offer - and services we need. Sharing like this makes it more meaningful, somehow - as well as cutting down on the need for actual money."

"Right, I suppose that the exchange of skills side is much the same. I can work with someone to help them produce a Powerpoint presentation on the computer - and get some kind of credit token, which I could cash in later if I needed to learn about something else - Excel, perhaps.

So, from your experience, are there any problems in systems like this? Are there any snags I should know about, so we don't fall into the same traps with the overall organisation behind our workplace championing idea?"

"There aren't many, really. Of course, there are always some people who are keener on receiving services than giving them. The points system in the arrangement usually takes care of that, as they soon run out of credits. I don't suppose you could run a credit system though. You'd have to keep an eye on this time element as well, to make sure your what did you call them....?"

"Workplace champions or just call them coaches, if it's easier to remember."

"..... OK. ... your main champions don't feel that they are spending too much time developing others and aren't getting a chance to develop themselves. If you monitor who's helping who and record this centrally in some way, you can make sure that the system works."

"OK, I'd plan to have some form of recording system anyway, for the learners. It's already in their performance reviews, logged as their CPD."

"Good heavens - CPD ... what's that then?"

"Continuing professional development. It's becoming the thing that everyone's got to have, to record that they're keeping up to date in their regular reviews at work. Actually, delivering training as a coach/mentor can count towards your CPD, just as the outcomes when you are receiving training can. Are there any other potential drawbacks which might happen with running a system like this, Yeva?"

"Well, if you take any group of people, I guess you won't be able to cover the full range of skills. When we tried it, we didn't have anyone in the LETS group who could do plumbing. Electrical work, plastering, joinery and so on no problem, but for some reason, we didn't have a plumber. The lack really showed when we had these heavy frosts a couple of winters ago!

In the same way, you'd probably find the occasional specialist area where you didn't have a capable coach or champion - for a very specialised skill, for example, or a new computer package that you need but nobody's used before."

"Yes, that could well be the case soon. Mind you, these ideas run parallel with other ways of training and learning, so there's still a place for formal training in courses, computerised learning or learning packages. Anyway, what happened with your plumber shortage?"

"Simple really - just like you say, sometimes you just have to use other methods and buy in services as normal. There was actually a plumber in a neighbouring LETS scheme but he was kept very busy... and he had his paying customers to attend to as well, of course."

"So, I suppose that although sometimes departments might exchange champions or learning visits - at other times where there's no champion available for a specific need for whatever reason, we might still need to bring in trainers to run sessions."

"Exactly, there is a place for buying in the specialists though you'll still save loads by using your own champions as much as possible. You can save by trimming the

training experiences as well, making them really relevant to what individuals have said that they want and need."

"How do you mean, Yeva?"

"Well, I've been on workshops where I already know a lot of the stuff which is covered. I've been on two day workshops where I would have been quite happy just attending the second day. Or, maybe if the tutor had told me about a book to read beforehand, I could have just done the practical sessions. Saving my time - but also making me more enthusiastic and motivated when I'm there."

"There's certainly a move towards that - short tutorials, self study packages, e-learning and so on. It's called 'bite-sized' learning, would you believe! Or blending various methods to make the learning as specific as possible. It's certainly working in theory but a lot of people still seem to like going on courses."

"Maybe they do, but some of them still complain about the material or level not being right or it being mainly a waste of time or whatever. It's something you should think about. Ask your Training Department - they should know. Don't expect instant answers, mind - give them a bit of time.

It might even make them feel good being able to advise you. Everyone likes to feel wanted - and also feel that they're a bit of an expert in their own field. So often we get stuck in churning out the same stuff at the same level. Make the trainers feel they are the experts and try to get a bit extra out of them."

"This wouldn't be applying your holistic angel energy again, would it?"

Yeva laughed. "Call it what you will. It's in there waiting to come out anyway."

"Sometimes it's a little difficult to get information from the Training Department."

"Maybe egos are getting in the way; maybe they feel that you're challenging their authority a bit - they doubtless see training and development as their bag, after all."

"I suppose so - but these workplace championing ideas will take some of the pressure off them - they should be pleased."

"They will be once they see it working properly. It's likely they'll initially be unclear about what's involved. They'll probably view it all as a threat. Lack of information can be challenging. Talk to them about it - ease their worries. Ask their advice about some of the detail, too. Anything to make them feel wanted and important."

There seem to be so many problems in the world today because people don't talk properly to each other - or if they do talk, they don't really listen to what's being said."

"Pardon? Sorry, only joking. Yes, some people assume that their audience knows a lot about the topic, which puts those listeners who are beginners at a disadvantage so they start being negative."

"It's always safer to assume nothing!"

Harry laughed.

" 'Assume nothing', eh - that sounds like another Yeva saying to set alongside 'You are what you want to be!.'"

"There are plenty more where these came from! Not now, though. Just work with the Training Department. Your various ideas should help them – mind you, you'll probably have to explain what you mean by workplace championing, to get the various definitions as specific as possible. Just remember - you need their help and support as well, especially if you're going to use books and videos and things. There's a bit of mutual trust to be built up I would say - and it might be quite difficult. Changing the subject slightly - how about your own personal development?"

"What, the more spiritual side, you mean? I feel a lot more aware now - of people, of things around me, of energies and their interactions - it's all very interesting. The grass seems very green; the sky very blue - it's great, really! I seem to be learning so much from the various new people I'm meeting and overall the world around me seems a lot brighter..."

".... I meant at work, actually, though your personal development for your life aspect is very important as well. I said before that you were getting more conscious - your energy level's rising - visibly rising."

"How do you mean?"

"As you become more conscious, more aware, your body gets to a higher level of fine tuning linked with your surroundings. Your energy relates more directly to that of people around you. You've the potential to affect them positively, if you focus on it."

"That all sounds a bit esoteric and guru-like."

"It doesn't need to be - it can be quite straight-forward. It's like you being aware of things being brighter. It's that spirituality thing I was explaining earlier. Being more aware; more focused - but otherwise, quite normal. Think of the people in your life who inspired you in some way. Perhaps a teacher, your father, some public figure or whoever. Not a real, thousand-dollar guru among them, usually - but they certainly influenced you in a positive way. You can do the same for others; you must do the same for others. You have work to do, Harry!"

Harry thought about this quietly for a while.

"I suppose I am doing something positive in the company now?"

"That's what I was really asking earlier. How do you see your own personal development progressing at work?"

"So far, I suppose I've been spending most time setting things up to allow my staff to develop - the championing, the team work and so on. I haven't really had a chance to focus on my own development. Perhaps I'm not really developing."

"Don't you believe it, Harry. How would you describe your role, as a manager?"

"To get the Despatch Department meeting the deadlines, objectives and quality standards which I've agreed. Basically, to make things happen, I suppose."

"Ah, the 'Great Facilitator' strikes again! So, who is really meeting these deadlines and standards?"

"My staff, I guess."

"Correct. And what's going to encourage them to achieve these various goals you've agreed?"

"How do you mean? Oh, I suppose me keeping to my side of the bargain, smoothing the track for them so that their individual and team energy paths can progress. It all comes through managing more openly - facilitating rather than controlling, I guess."

"Exactly - with a good manager, the organisation happens whether he's around or not. Folks are confident that they can take the initiative, because the framework's already there. Good leadership, on the other hand, is making sure your department is moving forward in line with future developments which you're also doing. So, your own development is happening, through your work with your people. In time, you'll be able to focus more on particular areas of your own progress. For the moment, you could get involved in the championing process yourself, both as a champion and a learner, to expand your business knowledge. It's really starting to happen, Harry - keep that energy flowing!"

Harry knew that he could - this whole idea was taking wings and flying!

Chapter Thirteen

Almost three months had passed and, in Wiltshire, the crop formation season was coming to a close, with the farmers taking advantage of the long dry spell to harvest the fields of corn. The drone of the combine harvesters sounded well into the night as they continued to collect the grain under the glare of headlights.

Harry was feeling good. Things were really beginning to happen at work – the workplace championing ideas had taken off, with a wide network of people helping each other. Other departments had latched on to the idea and Harry was devoting time, as and when he could afford it, to helping them set up their own systems. In line with a book that Harry had read, this form of coaching was linking with a shift towards individual development, with people empowered to have a greater role in their own career planning. Tying the whole thing together was a new, supportive role coming from the training department, as the third corner of the integrated triangle.

He and Bob were now talking about the possibility of expanding this triangular model - of individual, workplace champion and development support - to involve several of the other key departments. After some initial misgivings, the Training Department was now enthusiastically involved in supporting the programme. Starting in a relatively small, focused way, the triangular model was being used to support the development and on-job training of all new starters. Once that programme was bedded in properly, the refined and established model would be applied to other groups of learners.

The teams were also progressing positively, with different groups working on several new projects, as well as reviewing current working practices. One team in particular,

looking into an integrated strategy for communications, was working co-operatively to a very impressive degree.

Over that summer, Harry had become interested in the crop formations - complex patterns in the standing corn, rapeseed and other crops, which had appeared in several fields within easy driving distance. Indeed, living in that part of Wiltshire, it was difficult to remain unaware of the phenomenon - although there were formations in other southern counties, and abroad, as well. Several of his new-found friends were enthusiasts, needless to say, and Isabelle organised trips for foreign tourists who came to experience the energies present in the genuine formations and marvel at the sheer size and complexity of the beautiful patterns laid in the corn.

Isabelle showed Harry pictures in a series of calendars she had for the four previous years, which showed how the formations had progressed from fairly simple circles to complex formations measuring over one hundred metres across. It was all very strange and puzzling.

"What do you make of them, Isabelle?"

"There are many theories about how and why. In some way, I feel the genuine ones are messages being communicated to us - not in as many words but more an overall impact. To make us aware of the vastness of the Universe and the energies which lie out there and also within our land. "

"But, if they are messages from on high, what are they communicating? I heard that they were made by a couple of guys with a garden roller and a wooden board!"

Isabelle thumbed through the pictures in the most recent calendar.

"Some are more than likely man-made - but even that shows an effort and intention. A bit like artists forging a masterpiece - it's a challenge to reproduce effectively, rather than seen merely as cheating the system. But there's no real energy in the man-made ones - we can certainly psychically feel a living, different energy in the genuine ones - through dowsing or, if you can, just by feeling it with your hands. Just like you did with the stones at Avebury, remember? You must experience the energy inside one of these formations, Harry - I'll go with you if you want."

Harry had a sudden thought.

"Perhaps I could take some of my team out into a formation - see if they can feel anything special - it might help the team thing develop even further. We could take a picnic. Would you come too, Isabelle, to talk to them about it? That would be great!"

"Yes. Don't you have a group who are looking into communication for the company? Experiencing the energy involved in this form of communication should be an eye-opener for them! Yes, I'll come along and be your crop formation facilitator - on condition that someone can come and show me how to use this new word processing package I've just bought - I can't get any sense out of the bloody thing!"

"You have yourself a deal!"

As Harry's teams had started meeting socially from time to time after work, arrangements for a trip to Alton Barnes posed no problem. Although many formations in the area had already disappeared with the harvesting, the one at East

Field was still intact, although badly trampled by the thousands of feet which had visited it over the summer.

The convoy of five cars arrived by the side of the road and everyone climbed out, stretching. Harry, with Lynda by his side, introduced his work colleagues to Isabelle, who smiled happily at them all. Predictably, and understandably, there were a few sceptics. They'd seen the TV programme where the hoaxers had been interviewed and therefore totally accepted the hoaxers' claims to have produced every formation. Doubts might have begun to surface when they saw the sheer size and complexity of the formation in real life - but, in the main, they remained sceptical.

There were the usual, self-conscious shouts of 'ET, phone home'; 'is that a UFO over there?'; 'beam me up Scotty' and so on as Isabelle led the group down a tractor track 'tramline' in the corn stalks until they reached the formation. Still she said very little, waiting for the effects of the environment and the energies to make their impression on the group. As they entered the formation, the group gradually fell silent. The energies, strongest in the centre of the formation and close to the ground, were beginning to have an effect.

Isabelle stood with her eyes closed, swaying slightly. She sat down. Harry and Lynda joined her. Soon, the entire group was sitting in a circle near the centre of the formation. No-one spoke; many had their eyes closed.

After some time, Isabelle began to speak, talking about the circles, the energy and the various theories about the nature of the communication. She spoke of electromagnetic forces and impulses, hieroglyphics, the Nazca lines, zodiac formations, the interaction of our personal energies with those external to us, lights

seen in the sky at night in the area, the presence of strong earth energies in the area and the need to rebalance these. She quietly described some of the effects which these formations had on bringing people together. The information poured out.

No-one interrupted, although some were plainly overwhelmed by the amount of new concepts and information which was hitting them. Harry was aware that Isabelle was going too far and too fast for some of her listeners - but did not like to interrupt as she seemed so deeply immersed in her subject.

Later, as the group sat in the pub garden by the canal, people began to talk about their experiences while sitting inside the formation. Many had felt some type of special energy - with one or two feeling slightly sick as a result. Some others had "seen" flashes of light inside their heads when they had their eyes shut ("There's that angel energy again", thought Harry to himself). Lynda felt very tired as a result of her time in the field and sat yawning periodically - though definitely not through boredom! One or two tentative questions followed, which Isabelle answered quietly and positively, often in turn posing a question to the enquirer to get them thinking for themselves more deeply.

Soon questions came flowing thick and fast, followed by animated discussion about new and dynamic ideas relating to communication strategies for the Department - information cascades; the use of jargon; reorganisation of meeting structures and memberships, to produce better results; a review of the structures and procedures, to make sure that communication - both downward and upward - actually reached its intended audiences. The list flowed on and on. Someone noted the ideas down on a pile of beer mats, for future reference.

Harry's idea of taking the group into a totally different - he hesitated to use the word 'alien' - environment to stimulate new thought had paid off. The absorbed energy concentrated in that site had helped too. Perhaps, as he had suggested to Isabelle earlier, a visit to the stone circle at Avebury would have a similar effect. He'd try it soon. Although he had felt initial doubts about encouraging business teams to bond out of hours, he had to admit that it did seem to work. Today had certainly been a success.

The group gathered in the pub car park, preparing for the journey home ... but not wanting to break the bonded atmosphere, no-one made the first move. Harry moved over beside Isabelle and thanked her for her help.

"Don't thank me. The information was just flowing. They were very interested - once the initial scepticism passed - and the questions kept things moving."

"You get the silly comments even with our group - it's just a nervousness when faced with the unknown, I think."

"Yes, you may be right, Lynda. I find the same when I'm suggesting anything new at work. There's that initial scepticism, which often shows itself as an attempt to rubbish or at least cast doubts on the suggestion.

That's the crisis point, as far as the proposer is concerned. If you respond to and feed their doubts to any degree, or lose your confidence in selling the idea positively, the negative thoughts will win."

"That's true, but I find, if you answer any doubts with positive thoughts - if you explain something clearly, without trying to force your ideas on them too soon - then they often begin to agree with you. They sometimes even describe experiences which support the stance you're taking. Once you've got to that point, you've cracked it! Imagine a ring of positive light surrounding you, protecting you from negativity!"

"You're great, Isabelle - you conjure up some lovely pictures!"

"In time you'll see them too. It's given your group something to think about, anyway."

"Certainly has. It's left a few questions in my mind as well - but I need to think them through first .. I'm sold on the benefits of people - the individuals and the champions - helping each other, with added support when they need it. That's where the ideas about energies come into play. Yes, it's been very helpful, Isabelle - you're a gem."

Harry kissed his friend firmly on each cheek and she visibly glowed with pleasure.

"Do you think it's helped the group with ideas for their communication project?"

"Well, the ideas seemed to be coming thick and fast in the pub - and I think they were generated more by the angel energy than the ale!"

"Angel energy! You keep going on about that."

"Well, it's there, isn't it?"

Isabelle just smiled in reply.

Chapter Fourteen

Lynda and Harry had finished the dish washing and were relaxing in the sitting room with what Lynda endearingly referred to as a 'hot drink'.

"How's the job progressing, Harry? You seem to be happy. It seems such a long time since those days of doubt and despondency I suppose it's only five or six months though. Are some of your plans working?"

"They're beginning to. The workplace championing the coaching idea has taken off much better and faster than I expected, and everybody's keen on it - even the Director. She's known for being slow to catch on to new ideas!"

"Are you doing anything to help people's development?"

"It's funny you should mention that - I'm planning something just now. We use a thing called CPD - Continuing Professional Development, which encourages people to be more involved in planning their own development training - with a system to register the extra activities and learning in their files."

"That should keep the Personnel and Training Departments more than busy, if everyone has to do that! All those courses to organise and so on."

"I suppose so. But the beauty with involving the workplace championing thing is that it doesn't have to be through attending courses. CPD can also include things such as self study, guided reading, talks and seminars and so on they all count. You can even get credits for leading new training for other learners."

"So, your champions are actually helping their own professional development when they're working with someone else?"

"Yes, that's one of the beauties of the whole system. They can certainly count it where the activity involves new information and practices and so on."

"That's got to be something of a motivator, then. So, that covers the professional side but how does personal development come into your C D P, then?"

"CPD - Continuing Professional Development. Well, we're trying to find ways so that people can have a hand in deciding their own needs - being as precise as they can. And focusing more on their personal side - the work/life balance even their altruistic or spiritual side, getting involved in the community ... that kind of thing.

Yeva said something a while ago, about it being a waste of time people going on courses and covering stuff they already knew. It set me thinking. It boils down to the fact that, if somebody can be exact about what it is they want to be able to do - it's called their competencies, nowadays - the learning can be designed to suit. Then it'll take as short a time as possible to complete, because it focuses specifically on the new stuff they need to know."

"That makes sense. So, how are you going to do it?"

"We're still working through the plans but, basically, we're thinking that if each person is helped to think through their strengths and shortfalls, we'll all be clearer about the kinds of development that will be needed overall. Then we can sort out programmes and materials and championing plans in small chunks or units."

" 'Shortfalls' - why do you call them shortfalls - why not weaknesses?"

"I would say that 'shortfall' has a more positive ring to it. We all have shortfalls - things that we can't do so well. Sometimes, we can do something to improve - at other times, if you're an expert in some areas, you can afford to specialise and pass on some of your shortfall task areas to others who can do them better. It's not always a benefit being a jack of all trades. Looking at it group-wide, that's where combining skills holistically begins to kick in. Mind you, some companies try to have everyone able of do everything - through what they call cross training..."

"But is that not as much to do with cutting down on the workforce as it is with improving individual skills?"

"Oh, you old cynic, Lynda - though yes, you're probably right!"

"So, you get me to sort out my strengths and shortfalls, and then write down the extra areas of learning that I agree I need to complete. Then what?"

"You need to think about some of the blocks which could stand in your way - and the different ways of learning which you could use. You also need to be clear in your own mind what your future development path should be. It's all tied in with encouraging individuals to think for themselves - Empowerment."

"That makes sense. Empowerment - Self Development I was reading about that in one of my magazines recently. These sort of ideas, like stress management and

complementary therapies and so on seem to be becoming a lot more mainstream nowadays.

I can see how they could work in your kind of business set-up - but could they be applied for someone like me who's self employed, or my friend Pam who works part time and just wants to improve herself? Pam was talking about this sort of thing when we were swimming last week. Could the programme you're thinking about - or a similar one anyway - work as well for someone like Pam?"

"I don't see why not. The idea's probably ideal for someone like her because she could probably only attend a limited number of training courses, because of the cost. There are loads of other, less formal ways of learning which she could use though - and grants to help her do them, if she asks around. The early stages of sorting out her needs should be almost the same.

We have these exercises where we get people to identify their real needs - by asking rapid-fire questions such as what would you really like to do if you had a regular source of money; if you could choose a hobby, no expense spared, what would it be; do you prefer interacting with other people in groups or individually? Questions like that. There's a good little book called '*Brilliant Future*' which helps you plan - that's the one I've been reading recently. It's got loads of questionnaires, checklists and so on - a built-in personal planning system too. She could give that a try.

It's amazing the stuff that comes out in these rapid-fire questions. It encourages people to show their true feelings. When they complete questionnaires more slowly, they're often figuring out what they think you want to hear rather than telling the truth.

We use the answers from this stage to help people work out their strengths; what they really want to do with their future; the areas of their life generally that they want to develop it builds up quite a picture. And opens up opportunities – we refer to it as ‘kite flying’.”

“Why ‘kite flying’ ?”

“If you’re fairly clear of the direction in which you’re heading, you can keep your eyes and ears open for opportunities. There are items on the TV and radio - companies planning to do things, people visiting the area, government initiatives ... that kind of thing. If you work in a business and keep aware, you’ll hear about new plans and opportunities. There’s plenty of articles in the press as well ... new books on the market ... it’s just a case of keeping your senses aware.”

“So, what’s that to do with kites then?”

“When you pick up on something, you respond by discussing, phoning, e-mailing, writing - communicating in some way, trying to promote the idea that you and your special skills might just be right for the job. It’s all very similar to launching a kite up into the air. Not just one, though. You could have lots of them flying at the same time. You must have seen pictures of loads of kites flying together – it’s a beautiful sight ... they have kite festivals in China. In a big group like that, individual kites may fly for a long time before being really noticed – but then some will be spotted straight away, for some special trick they’re doing ... or because they look somehow unique.

All we need to do to keep the kites – the ideas - spiralling at the end of their strings is give them a gentle tug from time to time. Sometimes, we'll let one fall to the ground because it's not doing anything interesting at the moment - but it's still around to launch again in the future."

"But, there must be times when there's too many kites up in the air, tugging in the wind at the same time?"

"That can happen, I guess but I've always managed to cope so far. In that situation, I suppose it would just be a case of having to decide which ones you really want to be noticed and putting your main efforts into making them do their tricks. Perhaps some of the others would just fly along sedately without any attention ... or you might decide to pull one down and not bother flying it any more."

"It makes a nice picture. Kite flying - I'll remember that. Helping Pam's development could be one of your kites then - could you help her get on some training courses?"

"She may not need to go on full-blown courses - they can be a bit expensive, if you're on your own and don't have a company training department to fund them. There are loads of self study materials and books and videos and things she could get from the library - and she can get some help from the various local Skills and Enterprise agencies as well, if she asks."

"Yes, but I think she's probably more interested in sorting out the more personal side of her life for a start. She'd be better off doing that informally. From what you've been saying, she should begin by focusing on an interest she already has. She definitely needs help in planning how to get where she wants to be. Maybe one of

Isabelle's workshops would help. Could you suggest one or two books to read? None of these things should cost too much - all she needs is some help to get going and to keep going once she's started. Probably just talking to somebody for a start - some informal championing. Could you help her, Harry?"

"Yes. I'll be happy going through some of the exercises with her, if she wants. Actually, I'd be interested to try them in a non-business situation, to check out what I might have to change and adapt. Who knows, that might be my future direction, helping individuals like Pam rather than doing things inside a business."

"Now, Harry Williams - just you remember how hard it was to get that job. You hang on in there for a while longer. Just think of the regular salary."

"Yes, yes. It was only a thought. I'll certainly do some work with Pam."

Harry met Pam several times and enjoyed working from this different angle. She was a very able and willing learner - but was not slow to question Harry when she didn't understand why she was doing something. This in turn was good for Harry - forcing him to justify - and sometimes review - his decisions and stances.

The championing ideas – he couldn't really call them workplace championing when using them informally with Pam - were in fact a mixture of mentoring, informal tutoring and coaching skills. Traditional mentoring involved a one-to-one learning relationship, where someone senior took someone junior "under his wing", to develop him quickly. Coaching, like techniques used by sports coaches, involved working to improve existing skills in a way that suited the learner. Combining these more practical ideas with tutoring gave a complete cross-section of methods in the

toolkit, which Harry could dip into as he progressed. Certainly, working with Pam, along-side managing others directly involved in full-on workplace championing, was helping to clarify his own ideas, as well as keeping his ego well under control.

Harry had seen so many examples of the ego getting in the way of individual progress - but then it was always easier to spot ego in others! It was quite hard to keep the ego in check, when working through these fairly complex ideas and feeling in a slightly privileged position. But, that was it, Harry realised - it was a privilege and therefore a responsibility - even an honour - to pass these new ideas on to others. The real test for the ego comes when the pupil's skills overtake those of the teacher.

He had seen it happen several times at school and college - especially in the arts - where a pupil with a real gift for music or art absorbed everything which the teacher could pass on to them - then carried on to even higher levels.

When younger, Harry had played the guitar. He still pottered around but, in his teens, had been pretty good at finger-style folk music. Many years ago, Harry had started teaching his nephew. After a few months, David could keep up with Harry's chord changes and sequences quite easily; after a year or so, he was highly skilled, playing lead and rhythm, as well as bass guitar in a group. Harry could only listen with admiration!

That was real self development in action. Sadly, he'd seen cases of teachers or mentors holding back the progress of their pupils, unable to nurture those signs of brilliance. Perhaps in the future, the spotlight should fall as much on gifted children as on those who were disadvantaged, to make the best universal use of talents and abilities. Reality TV 'moments of fame' for the mediocre might be flavour of the

month but it was surely time to celebrate the achievements of real skill and professionalism to a much greater degree.

At work, Harry had also seen cases where ego-driven individuals couldn't cope with competition from others. This often resulting in some very underhand activities and subjective decisions being applied to disrupt the progress of others, in an attempt to eliminate their "threat" to the status quo. Managers, who were only too ready to pass judgement on the activities of others, could not cope with suggestions regarding changing their own performance. Business, humanity - and the world generally - had some way still to go in its holistic evolution!

At long last, Harry was also having more 'quality time' with his children, as they grew older. Charles, through connections at University as well as through an ever-deepening relationship with his parents, was developing into a caring, thoughtful young man. Harry really enjoyed their conversations and discussions.

He was even getting on better with Jane, who was becoming less abrasive with maturity. It had to be said that going back to work had made Harry more confident, as well as more patient and tolerant towards his daughter. The chemistry - or exchange of energy - was certainly more positive between them. This new bond was really welcome, coming at a time when Jane needed help in plotting some form of career path through the thick jungle of teenage doubts.

Through working with Harry, Pam had decided that she could use her skills on the telephone for counselling rather than selling insurance. Her sympathetic way with people worked well with those who were often heavily stressed. She was motivated to go on a full-time course towards a nationally accepted qualification, which she

passed with flying colours. Soon, she began counselling face-to-face as well as by phone, working for one of the health trusts.

Needless to say, Pam's confidence grew just as Harry's had. She was over the moon when she met Lynda several months later.

"Harry's personal development ideas worked a treat for me, Lynda. I 'm working as a counsellor full time now ... and I've just started supervising three others. It feels so much more rewarding than trying to flog insurance to people who probably couldn't afford it - and didn't want it. I'm loving it. I must come round and thank him personally."

"You're the success, Pam. It was you who chose to do counselling and who studied to pass the examinations. It's you who are making a name for yourself as a top flight counsellor. It's all down to your empowerment - sorting out your own personal path, picking up the baton and running with it along the track."

"That's true, I suppose, but Harry helped me see the finishing tape or goal I was running towards - and helped me sort out my personal milestones along the way. I'm very grateful." She gave Lynda a hug.

"I'll tell Harry - he'll be interested because its successes like yours that are his milestones. They help him see the way forward ... as well as showing him the ideas which work best. He will be pleased."

And, when Lynda told Harry, he was!

Chapter Fifteen

"Appraisal time will soon be coming round again!"

Harry looked up from his work to see Bob Cowie's face peering round the open door.

"Oh, right. This'll be my first time with our system here. We had what were called appraisal interviews in my previous company but they were pretty dire things!"

"Don't tell me - all heavy handed and backside kicking?"

"That sort of thing. Subordinate wheeled into boss; boss tells subordinate what he's done wrong; subordinate whines a little; boss pays little attention to whining; boss looks at list of courses and tells subordinate which courses he must attend; boss tells subordinate what his objectives are for the following year - an optional extra that one!; subordinate unsuccessfully tries to make one or two points; subordinate pointed towards door."

"Bingo. Ours used to be like that - although I must admit the subordinate has always been able to discuss things a bit. I'm pleased to say that we got things sorted out some time ago - we're much more positive and interactive now."

"Interactive in what sense?"

"Well, we have the appraisee (we prefer to call them that, rather than subordinates) making judgements about his or her own capabilities or competencies"

"You mean, measuring or scoring their own strengths and shortfalls? That could link in well with our ideas for empowerment and self development"

"Yes, I thought of that when we were talking earlier. So through this self analysis, they have some idea where they've performed well during the year met schedules, maintained the quality standards set by clients, followed hygiene and safety guidelines and so on. As well as quantifying these to some extent, they've also figured out the other areas they need to improve a bit..... or sometimes a lot. Obviously, some folk will make these judgements more honestly and objectively than others. They gradually get better at doing it, though, if they feel encouraged and not threatened. It also helps, of course, if they're clear about the standards and guidelines!"

"Which is down to good internal communications, I guess."

"Correct. For some things, we can just train them directly, to get rapid results. But there are loads of options nowadays, as you know. It's important that they have some say in selecting which methods they prefer - courses, coaching, self study packs and so on. I guess a lot of the development can come through your workplace championing ideas now, so that should make their development - and life generally - easier."

"People refer to them as "my ideas"! They actually came from a book called '*Growing Workplace Champions*' – I've just been applying and developing the ideas further. The crucial thing at the moment is to organise enough champions for the different areas, Bob."

"Sure - but remember the appraisal discussion's two-way - the individual's priorities may not be totally correct. A lot of these ideas are very new to them, remember. So it's back to negotiation - to sort out a final plan that suits both parties."

"Right, making the interview more of a discussion than a monologue! It helps if the appraisee has thought through his or her preferred development areas beforehand."

"Not only helps ... I'd say it's crucial. Our present system's not all plain sailing, though. We still get differences of opinion as to what the needs and shortfalls are. I remember last year, there was the situation where one appraiser thought the individual wasn't meeting deadlines - obviously a time management problem. However, the appraisee felt she sometimes couldn't complete things because the instructions or objectives were vague. So, in her eyes, it was a communication - or management - problem! At least it gave them something to work on - but for a while, it was certainly a case of two folk not singing from the same hymn sheet!"

When Harry looked through his staff files again after Bob had left, he found sheets of paper in each file which set out individual competencies and identified problem areas. These would be a good starting point - the employees were obviously used to this way of thinking. There seemed to be figures - fractions - marked against the different areas - but he couldn't quite figure out how they worked.

Harry popped along the corridor to speak to Stuart Tucker - he might as well try to get on with the guy, so here was an opportunity to seek his advice. To Harry's slight surprise, Stuart was quite friendly and looked genuinely pleased to be asked.

"In a way they are fractions - but not really. They're a rating scale of one to ten, with one the lowest, and so on. We're asked to rate ourselves on that scale - what we reckon our ah ...capability what's that called nowadays?"

"Competency."

"Yes, that's it, competency. So, someone with a rating of six or seven is better than average but still feels that there's room for development"

"And someone with a rating of one has loads of improvement to make up..."

"Right. Or else, if the individual has high ratings in other areas, perhaps we just focus him on these. Are you thinking about Tim's rating for computer literacy? Tim and computers just don't get on together! He'll never improve, however hard he tries - but he doesn't really need to use a computer much. He's absolutely superb at organising the drivers so, what the hell, eh? There's more to life than computers, after all."

"Fair enough. And I guess some of these drivers can be a bit stropky!"

"You bet. Got their little ways of doing things which they don't like being checked. I must confess there's one or two that scare the hell out of me. I keep well clear of them! But Tim has it sorted and manages to chivvy them along somehow. The guy's got a real skill, so his manager, Tony Smart, doesn't care if he still writes his reports and things by hand."

"So, people rate themselves then? There must be some kind of check made on the gradings, surely?"

"Oh yes. We look at them all and, if the immediate supervisor or manager thinks that any of the ratings are too wide of the mark, they would discuss it with the individual - just a chat, mind, nothing formal. Some of the supervisors have their own notes and tables of how they rate the guys. Strangely enough, there's probably more times when people rate themselves too low. Seems to be human nature for us Brits, generally - we're better at saying what we're bad at than boasting about our strengths. It's certainly better if the ratings come from them, though - it makes them more involved in the whole thing ... and more likely to respond positively."

"..... and I suppose it makes the follow-up training and development more effective - aimed more at their real needs. They presumably progress to higher scores then?"

"Sure - it is a fairly slow business, to be fair. With our new ideas using this workplace championing, training should become better focused. It'll save time as well."

Harry smiled to himself. It was funny seeing others buying into ownership of the championing idea - a sure sign that it was really taking root in the company. Yeva had been right - his own development was happening through the development of others.

Anne was walking along the corridor as Harry went back to his office. He felt on a high, after chatting with Stuart and to think he'd put off speaking to him for weeks, expecting him to be negative or critical.

"Do you have a minute, Anne?"

"Sure, I'm just on my way to my tea break."

"OK. How about bringing your tea in here. I want to hear how the company's appraisal system has worked for you."

"Can I bring one for you as well?"

"Yes please – that would be great just a spot of milk and two sugars."

Anne described the situation much as Harry had already heard. Two-way communication; statement format sheets with priorities, objectives and discussion topics prepared and exchanged by both parties before the interview, to provide a form of agenda for the meeting; confirmed outcomes at the end of the interview, to ensure that both parties are clear of future actions. This consistency was good as it meant the system worked both ways, with no 'hidden agendas'. He realised he must stop looking for these negative agendas - sadly, this still tended to be his immediate response, thanks to his previous job experience.

"So, does the system have any other benefits, as you see it?"

"Yes. We can use the session as a time to talk through any actions which our boss should have done but hasn't things which were agreed the previous year, for example, which haven't happened. Like my course on word processing - there's a good example."

"Has nothing happened with that yet? Hell's teeth, I'm sorry. I'll check on it and get back to you by the end of the week - I promise.

Harry made a note in his diary.

So, you mean that the appraisee is appraising the appraiser's performance to some extent, as well as the other way round."

"Eh ... appraisee ... that's me, I guess. Yes - I hadn't thought of it in such grand terms but yes, I suppose they are. It's only fair after all. If I've been given an objective but I can't complete it because of some blockage caused by my boss, it's only right that we should be able to talk about it. We can raise these problems any time though - it's not a case of having to wait ages for the next appraisal session. That would just waste time and be frustrating."

"But I imagine some appraisers are more open to discussions than others!"

"Sure - they're only human, after all but I can't think of any who won't at least give you the time to talk about it.

We can always use the work council as another, less personal way of sorting out work problems. I suppose the thought - or threat, maybe - of that helps to keep the two-way talking going. However, I would say that most people prefer to resolve things informally rather than getting all official about it. One way or another, we seem to get most things sorted out in a fairly friendly way. People trust each other as well."

"So, you'd say it's a good system?"

"Yes, it is - and Mr Cowie makes sure it keeps working. I think it was his 'baby' originally - so he's pretty keen on making it a success! The previous appraisal scheme was a bit of a shambles - or maybe I shouldn't say that!"

"I can well imagine it - the system I had at my previous company was bad as well! So, let's see - what have you put as your shortfall areas - your threes or fours?"

"Well - word processing skills for a start - I reckon I'm only a two or three on that. I'm not too clear on finance and budgeting either I think that's down there. I can't remember the others - what does it say?"

Harry looked through the list.

"Word processing; Finance and Budgeting – yes, they're down there. You've also got Cross-training on Operations. What do you mean by that?"

"I look after the desk at lunchtimes sometimes, to cover for Trudy. I can handle most of the simple things but some of the customers' questions stump me completely. It can't sound very impressive at their end of the phone!"

"No - but hasn't Trudy spent time training you?"

"Oh, yes. That's why I can cope with the usual things - but some of the phone calls with last minute meal requests or complicated queries are much harder to deal with."

Harry made a note in his diary to factor in development time for Trudy to think through some of the tricky questions she had been asked and write them down for Anne. Trudy could gradually build up a reference folio of questions and possible responses - which would be very useful generally. This was the other side of expecting people to act as champions - the importance of allowing them preparation time.

"So, what do you think about writing down your own strengths and shortfalls and deciding how you want to learn? Does it work OK for you?"

"Oh yes. It helps you face up to what you can and can't do. In the old days, I used to try to hide the things I wasn't confident doing, hoping that the boss wouldn't notice. Now, though, knowing your strengths and shortfalls helps you get through some situations where you know you might screw up - if you'll pardon the expression.

"That's OK - I know what you mean. The workplace championing system should help it all gel together. That's been very helpful Anne - and thanks for being so honest."

"Can I ask you something, Mr Williams?"

"Of course."

"I found it so peaceful in the crop formation that evening - and I was really interested in what that lady was saying. I got a bit confused though. Could she really feel - and see - some kind of energy in there?"

"Yes - she can tune into these things. She's a sensitive - a psychic."

"I thought she maybe was. But I always imagined them to be weird - speaking to the dead, moving furniture ... that kind of thing. Isabelle seemed quite normal."

"She is - but really clear images come into her head about things. I only wish I could do that. I get feelings but I don't see much. Then, I guess people tend to speak about people being clairvoyant but there's also clairaudient and clairsentient, through hearing and feeling. Some of the information she comes out with is really fascinating - really mysterious. She's a lovely lady - and she spends lots of her time helping other people understand these things better."

"Sort of being a champion for others - but in a different way from us in business."

"Exactly - though a lot of the holistic type of thinking combining things together; getting a kind of extra group energy going is equally useful in work and in life generally."

"So, how does she think these formations are made?"

"No-one knows really - Isabelle thinks it's a sort of combination of energies - from the land itself and from the universe ... helped by a group collective energy focus which we can provide. I think much the same. There's a lot of energy around in these places - and other ancient sites, mountains, waterfalls, cathedrals and so on as well - which can help us, if we tune in. Did you feel any different after being in the formation?"

"Yes, I felt calmer - and I'm more aware of the people around me now - there seemed to be some kind of bond which linked us together then."

"Yes, our auras. Psychics like Isabelle - and another lady I know called Yeva - can see these energy bonds. They see them as coloured energy lines and fields around our bodies. When we link together like that evening, they can actually see the energy links!"

"Really? It's fascinating. I'd never realised that there was this extra energy - kind of helping us, if we want it to. And it's all around us amazing!"

"Yes. I called it 'Angel energy' at one time and the name seems to have stuck! Helps us think positively - act honestly - go with the heart as well as the head. It's all good stuff, Anne. I hope it's helped the team - we'll see at the next meeting, eh?"

"Oh, there is a change. You can feel it. There's a lot more co-operation - a much better chemistry than we had a year or so back ... that's before you came, I suppose. Well, I'd better get back to the office. Thanks for the chat."

Harry watched Anne as she walked out of the room. He enjoyed speaking to her - as well as being friendly and intelligent, she was also attractive, in a serene sort of way. His mind wandered for a moment then he reluctantly turned his eyes to his bulging in-tray once more, focusing on the job in hand.

Chapter Sixteen

Harry sat on the side of the massage table. He had really enjoyed that first massage using essential oils and had been dropping hints ever since, in the hope that Yeva would offer him another one. The magic moment had arrived!

She stood beside him, a tray of little bottles in front of her on the table. The room was warm and comforting, with a very subdued light coming from a small lamp. Harry was feeling more relaxed already.

"So you want to unwind, do you? Let's see now. We'll start off with some of this."

She poured some sweet almond oil into a measuring bottle.

"Look at this - I get it from the supermarket. It costs just over a pound for this bottle. This is the base oil. Buy the same thing in a therapy oil store and they charge two or three times as much!

Now we'll add this - you'll recognise this."

"Lavender. Gosh, that's really strong. How many drops of that are you putting in?"

"Only three. Yes, it's very concentrated - they all are. They're essential oils. They have to be diluted in the carrier before you can put them on your skin. Lavender is one of the safer ones though - it can be used as an antiseptic. It's good for treating all kinds of problems, from bites to hot flushes..."

"I'm not troubled with hot flushes, thank you very much!"

"Well no; it's also good for nausea or burns - and it helps you relax, which is why we have it here. Now, I'll add a little of this one. Any ideas?"

"God - that's strong. I don't know it smells a bit woody. It reminds me of something - a bit like teak when you first smell it - but then it changes. Is it cedar wood?"

"No, but you're on the right track it's juniper berry. I'll put one drop in, to help the purification process. There. Now how are the muscles? Are they tense?"

"My neck and shoulders are, around here."

Yeva's fingers probed the side of Harry's neck.

"Ahh yes - right there; ahh and there too."

"Right, perhaps we need to add a drop of this one."

'This' smelt like a decongestant that Harry had used for the kids when they were younger.

"Marjoram. Helps aches and pains. I don't suppose you're pregnant! You can't use some of these if the receiver is pregnant remember that if you're ever massaging Lynda."

"Our child-rearing days are long gone..... Now there's a thought, though. I think Lynda would like a massage - I must try. I never thought of doing it myself."

"You should try. It's not difficult. Get a book - there are several good ones around. The different strokes are all described in them. But just try to figure out what I'm doing - I'll show you some of the actions as we go along. Long, sweeping strokes - that's the secret. Don't prod and poke around - get a flow into your movements."

"Using those essential oils, do you have an aromatherapy qualification as well?"

"Yes, I've got that - a long time ago, though. You certainly need it if you're choosing different combinations of oils to treat different conditions. But I just use this one simple blend for all relaxation massage now - it seems to work well for everybody. I've been using it for years and never had any problems. You can buy bottles of made up mixtures as well - but doing it this way works out cheaper."

Yeva put the cap on the mixing bottle and shook it vigorously, then sniffed the bottle and lingered a little.

"Mmm nice. Smell that. It's even nicer when it goes on the skin."

"Yes, I will try to give Lynda a massage - I'm learning a lot from you, Velma!"

"So, now I'm a massage mentor - I'll soon be able to call myself a Great Facilitator, just like you!"

"You already are that for me. You know that."

"So, I'll just light this incense stick there and get some music onand let's get started. Face down first."

Harry lay, gradually relaxing as the gentle hands smoothed the warmed oil into his shoulders and back. The fragrance, the atmosphere, the presence - everything was wonderful!

"How's the personal development progressing then?"

"You mean mine - or my staff?"

"Both, really; you'd be hard pressed to separate them, wouldn't you? The help you're giving them is helping you evolve - and they're helping you directly as well, aren't they?"

"Yes, we've got a really good atmosphere going at the moment - good positive flows..."

"Ah, that good old angel energy again, eh?"

"Yes. we've managed to do quite a lot. Let's see now...."

Harry lay and thought for a while as Yeva quietly and methodically worked on his body. It was sometimes difficult to figure out exactly what actions her hands were doing but the overall effect was certainly very relaxing. It was truly wonderful!

"We've been doing individual development things, mainly - but the teams are pulling together as well. People are clear what their needs are - and the internal co-operation – the workplace championing - is really working now. I think one of the best achievements is the level of group interaction that's gradually happening."

"Group interactionsmy, that sounds a bit posh!"

"Well, you know - co-operating together in teams."

"Yes, I had figured that out!"

"Individually, I suppose one of the best things is people facing up to - and talking about - their own strengths and shortfalls and working positively to develop them.

People are beginning to think for themselves - figuring out ways to resolve their own problems, while still asking for help where necessary. It works because they're confident they'll get our support when they ask. With things that they don't feel they can improve very much on their own, like backlogs on upgrade orders, or a truck shortage at peak times, some of them are even thinking of and proposing possible responses alternative strategies "concentrating to compensate", if you like."

" 'Concentrate to Compensate' .

That sounds like one of my sayings - now you're coming out with them!"

Harry laughed.

"Yes - 'You are what you want to be'; 'Assume nothing' and now 'Concentrate to Compensate'! Perhaps we'll have to write a business book, you and me help to sort out the world with our angelic pearls of wisdom!"

"We very well might, Harry - it might just happen."

Silence reigned for a while, as Yeva concentrated on the massage strokes.

"So, what else is happening?"

"Well, there's the mentoring and coaching ideas, of course. I'm chuffed about them - really pleased. The championing is being used more and more as the prime way of transferring new skills now. There's no longer that knee-jerk reaction of sending people on courses. The whole championing idea has made the learning much more specific - and it gets results much faster... when and where they're needed."

"And are your championing people still coping?"

"Yes - we're getting more and more people volunteering. We're well beyond our hundred monkeys now! We've certainly got the number of people on board now, to keep things moving. It's really beginning to happen, Yeva!"

"You like that hundred monkeys idea, don't you! So you're seeing the knock-on effect? Good. And you're still managing to provide these what do you call them? workplace champions with some tips and ideas, to help them put a bit of structure into their sessions?"

"Yes - though we're keeping it nice and simple."

"Have you been involved with coaching and mentoring others yourself?"

"Yes, I've done several things. I'm working with a girl called Anne on word processing skills. It's going very well."

"Ah, Anne. We have a bit of a shine for Anne, I think?"

Harry lay silently for a while, thinking.

"Be guided by your awareness, Harry. Remember Lynda. Be careful if you walk further down that path."

Harry pondered on this as Yeva gently massaged his sacral area with a circular, clockwise motion. Sometimes her words had a hidden depth to them, which made him think long and carefully, reviewing the implications.

She broke the silence.

"So, what else?"

"Oh the promised support from senior management is happening, which is good. The Director has been really helpful. And it's real support, not just throwing a bit of money our way and promising things but not carrying them through."

"I would think that's very important."

"It is - it's helped to sway some of the supervisors and managers who were a bit more cynical at the start. And, of course, the work council's organised and up and running - though it hasn't been required to deal with any crises yet.

The Director's involved, although she insists that one of the reps chairs it. So far, the fact it's operating seems to be making people think more openly."

"What else is new, then?"

"That's most of the activities but generally, the whole idea of this potential energy - of the holistic effect - is just great. I found it all a bit puzzling when you and Isabelle were talking about it in the early days but now I'm more aware, I just notice its effects more and more. The overall outcome having a greater effect than the sum of the separate parts - it all makes sense now. You may laugh but more & more people in the company refer to "thinking holistically" and even refer to the links between people as "angel energy" now!"

"It's your hundred monkeys again, Harry. You stuck with your ideas in the early days and brought the first few people round. Now the whole thing's motoring on its own. Well, not exactly on its own - it still needs a little help from its friends, so to speak. But the foundations are there. Well done! You deserve a bit of relaxation!"

"It's great, isn't it? Yes - another thing - it was a real brainwave having that outdoor team-bonding session with Isabelle. I would say, hand on heart, that the group were inspired by some kind of special energy that was around there - and now they're passing that inspiration on to others. It's just brilliant!"

"I'm really pleased, Harry - that's what it's all about. Isabelle is thrilled too, I know. So all this focus on energy is helping build a collective consciousness - bonding people together through similar ideas and goals.

Have you managed to talk to the Training Department about using different kinds of learning? You mentioned that some time ago."

"I've spoken to them in passing but we haven't got anything sorted out yet. We're planning to have some exercises which show different techniques. This'll help the champions get some experience of using the various methods. It should allow them to have a go at matching the best techniques to the different ways people like to learn. Some of them are beginning to realise that what works for one learner doesn't necessarily work for all. It's providing the variety that's important."

"We're all individuals, Harry - not 'Human Resources' but People. We look different - we act differently - we are different. Never let anyone forget that! So, remembering your early worries - the Training Department's not too stick-in-the-mud after all?"

"No, just like you said. Once they realised we wanted to co-operate, ask their advice and work together - the atmosphere changed. It's all going very smoothly."

"Maybe a little too smoothly!"

Chapter Seventeen

Charles was in the middle of his final exams now - the last hurdle before he broke forth on the big brave world of commerce - and Jane was working hard to get the 'A'-levels she needed for her offered place reading languages. Although all the effort was down to the two of them, Harry and Lynda were also finding it a bit exhausting.

At least Jane seemed to be clear what she wanted to do - and there were certainly various openings for those with languages nowadays, with Europe allegedly all one big happy family. But Harry wasn't so sure. The Europeans' grasp of languages left us Brits standing, generally - and English seemed to be more and more the business language anyway. However, he was sure that, once Jane found her feet and could see the scope of jobs open to her, she would do just fine.

Charles was more of a problem. He had taken a fairly general degree at one of the newer Universities and had little idea what he wanted to do with his life. Harry found it difficult to advise his son - the world seemed to have changed so much and Harry's recent experiences and frustrations on the job market didn't exactly make him a visionary employment adviser!

Charles had a real knack of getting on with people - he was a good listener - although at the same time, he had very clear views of his own. Over his years as a student, he had talked his way into several jobs to help supplement the grant. Harry was sure he could use this skill to get going - and gradually sort out his chosen path. After all he, Harry, had also taken some time figuring out what he really wanted to do.

Priorities and criteria had changed so much in the business world, however. No longer was there the concept of "Jobs for Life" - when young, Harry had felt the solution was specialising and gaining experience, because mature experience was marketable. This was not so true nowadays, with company paternalism less apparent and jobs more likely to be on the line as companies continued to pare costs to improve the 'bottom line'. With both employer and "generation Y" employee thinking more short-term and introspectively, things had become a lot more volatile.

In the great clearout of the mid nineties, many companies had lost much of their experience base through "re-engineering" policies. These had tempted many good, experienced staff to accept redundancy packages and quit, leaving some percentage of the less adventurous (who Harry thought of as "the short poppies") and the new generation of thrusting young graduates to progress the company as best they could. Thrusting they might be but, in many of the more traditional businesses, the resultant lack of experience and applications knowledge had a tendency to weaken the foundations rather rapidly and noticeably.

The need for qualifications had increased dramatically in importance, creating a real growth industry in assessment, validation and evidence collection, which Harry felt did not always provide the positive "value added" it was supposed to guarantee. He was beginning to have some interesting discussions with his son about the recent past and the expected future, now that Charles was more aware of the world.

"It can't go on for ever, Charles. Where a company is pushed to cut costs more and more, in order to make the level of profit which keeps shareholders happy, sooner or later it reaches a point where the pips squeak - and the decisions suffer. There is no way we in the west can compete with what were grandly referred to as the "Pacific

Rim Tigers". Their cutting edge is low production costs based on wage levels that this country struggled to improve many years ago - and no-one would seriously want to go back to that. The production of more and more of our products - electrical goods for example - has shifted to the far east – especially China ... and there's nothing we can do about it. It's sheer economics - everyone wants cheap products to buy. But then, now that we're buying less because of the current financial situation, China's situation is changing for the worse as well."

"That may be so, Dad – it means we've now lost most of our industrial base - and have become more and more reliant on providing services. They say that Britain's future may lie in services such as the financial sector - but that's not even guaranteed any longer, with other European stock exchanges breathing down our necks. And, weirdly enough, we seem to be selling off more and more of our service providers internationally – where's the sense in that? Call Centres were one of the big growth industries in the UK at one point – but then they moved to cheaper locations - initially northern Scotland where salaries were cheaper than the south. Then they discovered that call centres in India could be run for around a fifth of the cost – although complaints about the language thing are driving some users to return to the UK again. It's all a bit messy! How do you see business shifting then?"

"Well, I think any new direction must do an about-turn and take more account of the stakeholder ... take on board the needs of the individual. Both the employee and the customer, in different ways. Perhaps it seems a bit idealistic but I would say there were signs of a return to companies championing personalised, local service once more. Many people are just not comfortable with the centralised, computer-driven regional or even national reference point approach, especially where local knowledge and awareness is crucial.

I'm also not sure about this apparent need for constant change. It gets to the stage where it can sometimes become change just for its own sake. Both companies and the employees can lose focus - all those reorganisations and relocations that have been going on. Do they all improve the outcomes, in hindsight? Morale and motivation are bound to suffer – and there's a lot of time wasted during the transitions. We have to see things in a longer time scale - see the "bigger picture". The day of the quick fix has got to pass and be overtaken by genuine long term business plans. And I mean genuine, taking in ethical considerations, employee conditions, fair returns, work-life balance and honest dealings."

"And is all that likely to happen?"

"It could do, in some companies anyway. I would say there are certainly glimmers of light in the company I'm with. We're only part way down the path, of course - but we're certainly progressing. We're still struggling with the realities of the shareholder situation in the great Thatcher dream, they were supposed to be the 'ordinary person' but our company's shareholders are now represented - about 70%, I think - by two financial investors - with their say-so obviously influencing company decisions very strongly. There have been cases where one major financial investment shareholder, represented by one manager, can dictate whether a company continued to exist, without having any direct involvement in the company at all. That's getting dangerous, in my view."

"And what about the pensions situation? That seems to be a disaster on the horizon - for many people anyway. Not the politicians and directors who have carved out nice little arrangements for themselves ... but for Mr Average, like you or me. I reckon I'll

be very much on my own, pension-wise, by the time my retirement comes round, Dad - whatever age it will be by then!"

"Yes, the present raft of retired people have probably got more disposable income – the so-called "grey pound" - than any of us will have in the future - apart from those fat cats you mentioned. With the stock market yoyo-ing around, many of the private pension schemes - mine included - have dipped fairly dramatically. And all the financial advisers can say is - put in more money."

"With the costs of houses, mortgages and living generally nowadays, none of my mates can afford to put much, if anything, into a pension plan. And I certainly don't fancy working until I'm seventy plus!"

"That doesn't make sense either. Ten or twenty years ago, all the talk was about people working less, having more leisure time, retiring earlier. It's turned out completely the opposite, Charles. It's all very confusing - very impersonal."

"Well, it certainly makes me feel like working for a small company which still has some morals and sees me as a person. Or maybe I'll work for myself."

"You just keep an open mind, Charles. Don't put too many of your eggs in one basket - that was a bit of advice that Bill Giles gave me some months ago"

"Oh, him. Dabbled in several things, including financial planning and water softeners - quite a combination! Do you know that he's been done for fraud - some deal he did with a hotel chain for water softeners or something which never materialised - a dodgy one that!"

"It doesn't surprise me - but he did try to make a go of self employment for several years, so he persevered - and showed initiative."

"I guess so. I reckon I might travel for a while once I finish, to get my head sorted out. I reckon I can pick up work as I go, and get some wider experience of the world."

"That could be good, as long as you can support yourself - your days of living off your old parents are fast coming to an end!"

Charles laughed.

"I know that - I am grateful though. And Jane too. I know that you two don't always click - but she really does love you, deep down under the outer shell."

Charles put his arm round Harry's shoulder for a moment. Harry reciprocated and the two hugged briefly.

"Thanks, I like to think so. Now, I've offered to give your mother the thrill of her lifetime - I'm going to try to give her a massage!"

"I didn't know that you could do massage?"

"Well, Yeva's taught me a lot and I've read a book about it - and she's given me some mixed oil and the loan of her couch - so we'll see how we get on."

.....

Lynda sighed luxuriously.

"Oh, this is good, Harry. You've certainly got the touch. Oh yes - just there ah."

Harry had soon got over the initial worry of trying to remember what the book said and just did what came naturally, using movements which he remembered Yeva using. He reckoned he was managing quite well. "Long flowing strokes", she had told him, long flowing strokes working progressively up and down sections of the body - yes he was getting into the sequence quite well.

It was some time since he had really thought about his wife's body, he was ashamed to realise. As middle age had crept up on them, bedtime had become more a time for that final chapter of a book before settling down to sleep. Now, as he concentrated on each part of her body in turn, he realised how much he loved this woman. They had been through so much together, supporting each other. Perhaps these massage sessions would benefit them both.

Lynda opened her eyes and looked up at Harry.

"Oh, it's wonderful, Harry. You can do this to me anytime you want!"

"I'm enjoying it too - I could just go on and on. And I'll improve with practice."

By this time, it was dark outside, with the bedroom lit only by a couple of flickering candles. Music played quietly and the fragrance of massage oil hung in the air.

Lynda's body was now covered with towels and she relaxed in the added warmth as Harry very slowly and gently massaged her face and scalp. This was something which he really enjoyed - getting his brow massaged with small circular movements. Occasionally, he had 'seen' lights and images inside his head. They were difficult to describe in any detail as they came as quick flashes - but it was certainly an enjoyable sensation.

He finished by running his fingers slowly through his wife's hair several times, massaging her scalp with small circular movements. Moving round to the side of the couch, Harry ended by holding his hands very gently on Lynda's stomach. He closed his eyes for a few moments and let his mind drift. When he opened them again, Lynda was looking up at him.

"That was lovely Harry. I feel really good - all relaxed , and tingly too. I don't feel like getting up and dressing now. I think I'll just slip into bed..... are you coming?"

Chapter Eighteen

“So - a bit of a local celebrity now, eh?”

Harry looked along the bar, in the direction of the disembodied voice.

“Oh, hello Simon. You mean the article in the local rag? Hardly national acclaim!”

“Interesting though. I’d heard about this coaching and mentoring stuff going on in your company but I didn’t realise that you were the driving force behind it. My boss has cottoned on to the idea and wants to know more. Sounds pretty good - and bloody high time folks got more involved, I say. How does it work - the paper didn’t give many details?”

Harry shifted along the bar and climbed onto a stool next to Simon. He had come along to the pub that evening for a bit of a change - he seldom went out for a drink now - and virtually never on his own - and here he was talking about work again. Still, the novelty of the workplace championing - and its evident success in the company - still gave him a buzz, so he didn’t mind combining business with pleasure. In fact, he quite welcomed the opportunity to talk his ideas through - it somehow helped to concentrate his mind and spot the next step forward. This was probably how he sorted out his own development path.

The local newspaper had run a fairly basic feature article and one or two of the nationals had picked up on it as well, so championing in Harry’s company was certainly gaining maximum exposure at the moment!

“So, tell me how it works then, basically. Keep it simple now - and no jargon!”

“It is quite straight-forward, really. We call it workplace championing, for simplicity - but like you say, it’s really a mixture of mentoring and coaching.”

“What’s the difference?”

“Well traditionally, mentoring was where there was a one-to-one relationship between superior and subordinate, allowing the subordinate to be fast tracked ...”

“Hang on now - you’re getting into jargon land here! ‘Fast tracked’?”

“Well, you know – accelerated training and development to take over a managerial role. The mentor passes on information, knowledge and wisdom to the subordinate, in a fairly concentrated way. Like filling up a relatively empty vessel, I guess! Then there’s coaching - as in sports coaching - where it’s more a case of taking someone who already has a level of skill at doing something. Coaching helps them develop it further. Applying ways that suit them building on their techniques and ability.

I see the championing idea as a broader thing, involving as many people as possible. Would you agree that most people in business - and in life generally, for that matter - have some skills and knowledge that they could pass on to others who don’t?

They’d need some help - and the correct attitude, of course - but most of them could become involved in transferring knowledge and skills to others, given the right atmosphere. If you can accept that - think of the possibilities for sharing information and knowledge. It’s a vast potential of people who can help each other.”

“Well, maybe but do people want to get involved? I would reckon that, in my company, people would think it wasn't their problem - leave it to Personnel & Training - 'nothing to do with me, mate' kind of response.”

“You do get a bit of that in the early days. It's largely down to the way it's introduced - and organised. Everyone can benefit. The way we see it is that everyone is a learner but everyone can potentially be a workplace champion as well. Perhaps just for some particular specialism - it's totally up to them. It's a two-way thing, though, at whatever degree of involvement they choose. It comes more naturally to some than others - and most need some training in order to do it in a fairly organised way. But we've virtually all now capable of passing our special skills and knowledge on to others - and learning from others ... all in a relaxed, informal way. It's always happened to some degree - somebody showing you how to get unstuck when you're using the computer, for example - I guess this is just trying to get it sorted out in a more organised way, involving more people.”

“Maybe but your company's quite big, with head office support and all that. The company I work for has only got about 65 staff, with only one employee running the personnel department. I can't see that it could work for us, even though we had the support of the MD.”

“But it can. It can really work well in small companies like yours - and if your MD's interested, you're already well down the path as long as he carries on being supportive. You can't really expect your one personnel and training bod to run loads of training events, so getting your development informally through workplace championing is a real option.”

“She’d still have to be involved though”

“Of course - but more in supporting things happening, rather than trying to do it all. Think of her as the backup development support, providing the resources to allow the champion to help the individual learner.”

“Hang on - ‘Backup development support’ - what’s that when it’s at home?”

“Sorry - jargon creeping in that’s the support from Personnel and Training. It’s probably not going to be hands-on involvement, of course more likely to be help with resources, providing relevant information, arranging attendance on short courses all these kinds of things. Overall though, it involves giving the champions back-up support when they need it – rather than several weeks further down the line, when it could be too late. That’s the important bit. The company’s asking a manager or supervisor, or whoever is the workplace champion, to spend some of their time helping a colleague develop new skills, over and above satisfying their own responsibilities. It’s only fair that we mustn’t expect the champions to also spend ages planning, preparing and organising for the development sessions.

They should be confident that some resources - checklists, models, illustrations, workbooks and so - will be available. They’ll still have to prepare to some extent, of course. Think of the three elements - individual, champion and development support - think of them as corners of an integrated triangle, driving the development forward.”

“Lots of our guys wouldn’t want to get involved in being trainers, though. I can think of many of them who would make a real fist of standing up and giving a presentation. It’s just not”

“No, no. We’re not asking them to be trainers, giving presentations and all that stuff. A workplace champion’s not that. He or she is just working side by side with the person, showing him, helping him, supporting him at that point and also later when he’s making those initial hesitant attempts to apply the new learning as part of his day-to-day job.”

“So, they don’t have to be good at giving presentations and all that scary stuff?”

“No - just as long as they understand the ways people like to learn - include some structure and sequence - make sure they recap and check understanding from time to time - get the language and starting level of knowledge right things like that the way they put the message across doesn’t matter quite so much. We do give our champions some training in the structure stuff though, before we let them loose!”

“Maybe it could fit into our way of business after all. Yes I suppose it could. Does your company use this workplace championing to meet all your training needs now then?”

“God, no. There are still specialist subjects like computer software training or repetitive things like parts of the induction programme that are best done through courses - or sometimes e-learning, nowadays.”

“E-learning everything seems to be e-this and e-that nowadays. What’s e-learning all about?”

“I don’t even want to start on that this evening - I’ve bored us both enough about work for one night. It’s basically learning using the computer, which can be more flexible and interactive. There’s some good e-learning stuff out there now - but you have to pick and choose. Some of the programmes are a bit simplistic and some of them have very little real interactivity. I can show you a few examples, if you’re interested. Now, change of subject what have you been doing with your life?”

“OK, but just one last question - as I said, my MD’s suddenly keen on all this stuff, so it may be something I could get involved in running. How do you organise it - with all these individuals planning their own future priorities and expecting all this help from champions and background support - it could get quite hard to organise.”

“Not if it ties in with your staff review or appraisal system and CPD planning.”

“CPD?”

“Continuing Professional Development. Lots of companies use the idea nowadays. It’s built round individuals being able to talk through their needs with their boss or appraiser regularly. At review sessions. Do you have these?”

“Yes - we’ve got six-monthly reviews ... so we must be getting something right! So you reckon we’re going to see more and more of this CPD stuff around at work?”

“Yes indeed. It works best where you get a bit of structure sorted out. Forms, questionnaires, record sheets ... that kind of thing. I can show you one or two examples of these as well.”

“OK, that would be good. I’ll give you a call at work next week and maybe we can sort something out. Right, enough of this. I didn’t come here to talk about work!”

“Well you raised the topic! Anyway, what did you think of United’s performance on Saturday?”

Chapter Nineteen

Harry walked up the drive to the front door of the house, home from work for another day. Yeva was getting out of her car, struggling with the ever-present plastic carrier bag of groceries.

"Well, you were right - things were going too smoothly at work!"

"Why? What's happened?"

"The Transport Manager has blown his top about the report his team has produced, reviewing the distribution procedures we use. He's refused to accept it and recalled all the printed copies. He's threatening to disband the team. Called me one or two choice names as well, I can tell you!"

"I suppose the team did talk to him and keep him informed as they were writing the report?"

"Yes. At various steps and stages as things developed. But they didn't show him a final draft copy of the report before it was published. Apparently he was out of the office for a couple of days and, in their enthusiasm, they couldn't wait. Probably not a shrewd move, as it turns out!"

"And where do you come in to all this?"

"Nowhere directly. It was his team, although he's one of the managers who tends to keep a bit distant. The type who likes the idea of something going on, just as long as nothing very dynamic happens! However, my name is linked with the self and team development activities - so it's bound to be my fault one way or the other."

" So much for empowerment. What'll happen now?"

"We'll see whether this work council idea delivers the goods. They've called a meeting for next Wednesday and the Director's going to chair it. I'm going along to see her tomorrow, to discuss things."

"This is the crunch then. If your work council doesn't manage to sort the problem out and get that manager on your side again, a lot of what you've been working for will suffer. It may even collapse. You can't let that happen, Harry!"

"What do you think I should do?"

"I would say you should make sure that the Director gets the full picture - no secrets - no hidden agendas. I assume that she'll want to keep things going, if it's been working well so far, so she should be keen to keep it all open and fair.

Then, you need to have a chat with the team - and check through the report. See if you can spot what's really bugging the Manager.

Perhaps it's opened some can of worms that he'd rather keep closed; perhaps it's nothing in particular - just that he 'doesn't like his dirty washing aired in public', as

the saying goes. Perhaps he's just a bit old-fashioned and doesn't like being told his mistakes by subordinates. That's quite understandable."

"I suppose it is. There are quite a lot of the more traditional managers who find our new ways of thinking a bit hard to handle."

"Especially as some of it still has to prove itself as really working in the business world. Yes - don't rush them too much, Harry. Slow and steady, with times for reflection. What subjects did the report cover?"

"Oh, you know - things relating to the whole transport organisation: the peaks and troughs, the age of the vehicles, costs of our in-house servicing set-up, projected new purchases and so on. Nothing too out of the ordinary, really."

"Fair enough - but you don't want to make him feel embarrassed - or to feel that he's lost face. That's not fair - it's him who has to work with his team and carry on managing them, so talk to him and try to see it from his point of view too.

Try to highlight the main problems and think through some form of compromise something to make him a happier bunny. Then you'll have to make sure the team doesn't feel devalued either. They need to come out of it positively, with at least some of their key ideas accepted. Now there's a challenge for you!"

"You mean, reach a win-win situation."

"Oh, do I? OK, fair enough then a win-win situation sounds OK!"

Harry arranged for the team to meet the following day and spent an hour talking through the situation with them. He took the precaution of advising Tony Smart, their manager, about the meeting - it wouldn't do to tread on his toes yet again!

The main difference of opinion seemed to centre round suggestions about just-in-time techniques, which Tony was very strongly against - and ideas relating to using contract transport. The team had carried out a costing exercise which showed that the current system of company-owned vans and trucks wasn't economical. Their detailed figures proved that using an outside contractor was both cheaper and more efficient.

Tony Smart had spent years building up his present fleet and was rather proud of it and his team of drivers. He was adamant that contract drivers wouldn't have the same level of knowledge or experience.

As far as Harry could see, the team's report was mainly valid. Because the fleet was there to meet the delivery peaks, there were long periods when some or all of the vehicles were sitting around idle in the yard. However, the works council would not be reviewing the content of the report - their brief was to look at the team's procedures and decide whether they had been followed. Decisions would be made on the basis of this.

.....

Lynda looked up from watching the news on TV as Harry came into the sitting room.

"So, how did the council meeting go?"

"Quite well - more or less sorted; well, maybe not totally - feelings are still a little fragile and Tony Smart and the Director are meeting soon to talk through ideas for the future. Anyway, she - and the rest of the council - supported the team overall and agreed that they should continue, with care. So, Smart's had to give way on trying to disband the team, at least."

"Was there nothing negative said against the team then?"

"They got their wrists slapped for overstepping their brief and getting carried away. And I've got to work out some tighter guidelines for all the teams to work to in future - so that they don't go racing off applying bright ideas, without checking with their managers first!"

"It's only polite, after all, apart from anything else."

"True. They didn't mean to do anything devious; I think they underestimated Smart's interest and involvement in his Department, too"

"And now I suppose that his transport empire will come under close scrutiny."

"Yes, I guess so. The stumbling block was the team's suggestion of putting the transport contract out to private tender. Tony is dead against contracting and outsourcing. I reckon transport will stay inside the Department - but they might have to try to get some contract work themselves to take up the slack. There certainly is a lot of idle time for the fleet when you see the figures in black and white, so it was time that something was done."

"So, Tony Smart's not out of the woods yet, thanks to his team's efforts!"

"He'll need some time to get over it. It will actually tighten up his transport arrangements, if he works with it. Tony has some damned good ideas - but I doubt if he shared them with the team during their meetings - not properly anyway. I suppose these things have to surface, sooner or later."

"It doesn't look as if the communication was very good, all in all!"

"No, there's some development work needed there - mind you, there's another team looking into the whole communications thing, so maybe they'll be able to help."

.....

And help they did. The communication team really came up trumps - perhaps thanks in some part to their outdoor development session with Isabelle and Harry.

A very professionally prepared report, setting out and evaluating the pros and cons of a range of possible communication strategies, was produced in draft form, revised, approved and circulated. The team even proposed specific areas which needed developing and identified possible workplace champions.

Things were back on stream again, with everyone perhaps a little wiser from the process. Harry realised that the experience had clearly illustrated his ideas, of an established track with individual development paths running along it. In this case the boundaries were the guidelines within which the teams operated, clarifying what

could, and could not, be done. The team's path had been meandering along, testing the boundaries and, in this case, had crossed over the barrier to wander into the minefield which lay on the other side. With the revised and tighter guidelines, Harry hoped this situation wouldn't happen again.

Isabelle gave Harry a hug when he told her about the excellent communication report and the way the team she had met had worked so well together.

"Well done - things seem to be moving forward for you at long last! So, what's next?"

"Probably working more on the team development side - focusing the energy some more and getting people working together - less assertiveness, more co-operation."

"Once you get them to that stage, working co-operatively and more selflessly they'll gradually pull clear of the aggressive shades of assertiveness. And how about you, Harry. Do you feel your energy level is higher now than, say, six months ago?"

"Oh yes! I feel a lot more confident - and somehow more aware and conscious of things. The world seems a more multicoloured place now, Isabelle and I'm much more conscious of people - and what's going on in the world. I just seem to have more and more kites flying recently - lots of opportunities. Joining your meditation group on Sundays has been really great as well."

"Yes - and your presence has helped it too. Kites - Lynda was telling me about your ideas on these. Keep on launching your kites and pulling those strings, Harry, there are lots of opportunities out there. I've seen many signs that your consciousness is

raising, yes - and you're helping others to see things more clearly. You're very much part of us now, Harry but you still have work to do."

Harry remained silent, thinking. He certainly felt different but he got confused about what the changes meant - and how they were affecting him. Perhaps everyone felt this type of confusion at stages during their personal development.

"You can relax and focus your mind without going to a group meeting, you know. It's just the same as personal prayer. All you need is a peaceful place with as few distractions as possible. Some people meditate by emptying their minds, using a mantra word - or a sound, like we do sometimes or you can focus on a particular thing - world peace, the solution to a problem, healing someone, sending help to a warring country or whatever. I meditate for one minute each day for peace in the world, at twelve noon."

"One minute! That can't achieve very much, surely?"

"Don't you believe it, Harry. There may well be thousands of people all over the world meditating for peace during that minute. The power of concentrated, focused thought, prayer, meditation call it what you will - all those little sparks of energy - that's your angel energy really having an effect!"

Harry laughed.

"I suppose it is - all those little glimmers building in the same moment, to form a flash of inspiration. The hundred monkeys again! One minute at noon. I must start doing

that - so - focus on thoughts of peace in the world for a minute at noon. Right, I'll try ... and you reckon it has an effect? Why do people do it? What's in it for them?"

"Harry, Harry, you shouldn't have to ask that!"

"Oh, sorry. I suppose that I was seeing it from the general population's point of view. It is a thought though, Isabelle. Do you ever see any signs to show that some good or change is happening as a result of these kinds of efforts?"

"Think of the changes which are happening in the world recently - the end of the cold war, slow progress in settling differences, some countries working more closely together. There are many countries which we include in our thoughts - while with others, the meditation is more about encouraging people to persevere."

"Yes, but there are some blockages, surely? What about the ethnic cleansing which happens periodically - and the rising power of fundamentalism in some areas?"

Perhaps there is a purpose, if you think globally - lessons which may ensure that world opinion then prevents it happening on a larger scale elsewhere. You can see fundamentalism as a natural response to external threat. Different viewpoints are part of the balance - positive and negative - as in the battery. Like yin and yang ... opposite but complementary. Both necessary for the greater purpose."

"Like the sacrificial lamb, you mean? Small examples to prevent the larger mistakes. I guess so - though it's hard on those being used as the illustration!"

"There always will be the negative - there are still the single-minded dictators at large - but good will ultimately prevail. Our planet is safe, Harry - it can and will heal itself."

"Even with all the pollution - and the natural resources being used up - and the threat of nuclear disasters ...?"

"Ah yes, but nuclear power could be generated safely – fusing the nuclei with heat and magnetism rather than splitting the atom. Giving us true, sustainable energy ... like the sun. Reducing – or even eliminating the fissile materials ... but there are many doubts and confusions to overcome"

Harry remained silent. When Isabelle spoke like this, she became remote - with her voice almost disembodied.

"Greed must be controlled - we consume too much - things must change will change. We must generate rather than consume - preserve the resources which we still have and find alternative ways. The knowledge is there - we must only rediscover. It is everyone's responsibility - it is your individual responsibility, Harry."

Isabelle sat silently in her chair, gazing into the distance. Harry did not want to interrupt the silence - what could he say, anyway? Her conveyed words appeared so true, in as much as he understood them - but their relevance was so wide-ranging.

What could he, Harry, do about all this? He was no superman, come to save the world he was only Harry Williams, for God's sake!

Perhaps that was the key.

Chapter Twenty

Harry was in the sitting room, reading the evening paper, when he heard his name being called.

"Harry - are you watching the TV just now? Come and see this."

Harry climbed the stairs quickly and went into Yeva's room. (They thought of it as that now - poor Charles was in the small spare room this holiday; still, he didn't seem to mind - he was an easy-going lad, as long as he was fed regularly!)

The programme was about personnel departments and how they functioned in different companies.

"360 degree, emphasising upward feedback ... transparent appraisal ... this is the only way forward, reinforcing accountability ... underpinning objectives achievement and facilitating effective monitoring ... all other methods have inbuilt obsolescence ... should be eliminated..."

A power-dressed American consultant was in full flow, flashing large diamond ring and teeth at the interviewer, who nodded passively, overawed by the colossus before him.

"Isn't that the kind of thing you're doing, when you cut through all the crap and jargon?"

Harry nodded, concentrating on the programme. He had read articles about this type of appraisal, which used the Personnel Department as a kind of clearing house of information about people. They used feedback from the full range of people involved with the individual being appraised, from superiors through to subordinate staff. It was the complete circle of people with whom the individual interacted - thus the 360 ° in the description.

The programme showed an example where the boss of a department was the focus of attention at a meeting chaired by a woman from Personnel. They saw him smiling bravely while a cross section of people from his department made comments about his performance. These became increasingly assertive, bordering on the insultingly aggressive, as some of the subordinates warmed to the task. Part of the arrangement seemed to be that the manager wasn't allowed to defend his actions - but was meant to accept all the comments openly and positively.

"I suppose it has similar purposes to the techniques we're trying. We're working together in a much more open way, though - there's too much assertiveness and ego in there. They obviously haven't sorted out their overall guidelines - the Track that we talk about - properly. That's the most important thing. Open discussion may be a good thing - but they're trying to stand the old order on its head, with the appraisal now going up the way. It's still only one way though - it's got to be two way. You can see the potential problems of pettiness, vendettas, subjectivity, and so on. This kind of system is really open to abuse, don't you think?"

And sure enough, the programme was now interviewing a representative from another 'fast moving consumer group' company which had introduced the system around nine months ago. The Personnel Manager was describing how they had built up performance dossiers on all the managers - and how there had been a recent board decision to 'let 250 of the middle managers go'.

"Christ, here we go again the hidden agenda!"

The woman from Personnel was defending the situation.

"No connection between our upward feedback process and these selection decisions"; "sheer chance that the two should occur at the same time"; "the staff appreciate this need for rationalisation"; "bluster, bluster, blah, blah"

"Thanks for calling me up, Yeva, that was interesting. I suppose it's hard for companies who try to change their systems overnight - it doesn't usually work properly when rushed. Introducing our new co-operative ideas gradually has worked quite well for us, so far at least probably because we started applying it in departments where the managers were keen and we knew we'd get the support. That way, other departments saw the positive benefits which were happening and started asking to become involved. It's very important that they want to buy in to the process. If that happens, the whole co-operation model can gradually move positively throughout the company as if it's being steered by an invisible hand!"

"Maybe that's the angels in your in-tray again Harry!"

"Could be - it really could be", Harry responded absent-mindedly to the flippant comment. He was thinking.

"It certainly helps for people to see themselves through other people's eyes, when they discuss things. It comes as quite a surprise for some. Makes them think!"

"Sure, but doesn't it happen naturally when people are working together openly, without rigid controls and loads of bureaucracy. Isabelle said that when she met your team at Alton, they were really making fun of you when you went rabbiting on too long - and they set you right when you blustered on without listening to some guy's point of view in the pub afterwards."

"Did she tell you that? I suppose they did, yes. I didn't really notice at the time. That's bad, isn't it? I must pay more attention - listen to them more respect their different views"

".....it's all part of applying a little more spirituality in the workplace."

"How do you mean, Yeva? Do you mean like holistic thinking?"

"Yes, it applies the same principles - being a bit more selfless; listening to people more; thinking 'bigger picture'; being clear of outcomes and helping each other achieve them as a team that kind of thing"

"..... and having a consistent approach. Cutting down on this 'change for the sake of change' which sometimes seems to overwhelm everything else. And moving through assertion to work co-operatively"

"..... while accepting that you have to revert to being assertive sometimes - so that you can get things working again for the common good."

"Ah, the common good. Yes. When folks are working together, the support is more likely to be there. Not instantly - but the attitudes and atmosphere are right, at least."

"It's a good philosophy, Harry a nice idea."

"We're showing that it's more than an idea, though it really can work."

"Keep up the good work, Harry you're certainly progressing!"

.....

Harry spotted Guy Anderson from Training sitting in the corner of the coffee area.

"Mind if I join you? Did you see the programme on appraisal last night?"

"Yes. Quite interesting - but we've got a better system here, I reckon a lot more natural; less pain."

"Pain ... yes, that sums it up. You could see that manager suffering, Guy. It verged on public humiliation at times. Human nature being what it is, he's bound to remember how people reacted - especially that guy who was being openly critical. It was expecting too much, too quickly. And the company that moved the goalposts - using the information for redundancy selection"

"That kind of thing happens so often - quick fix thinking. They don't seem to look further than the end of next week! Companies need to be more objective - see the wider view - think beyond the bottom line, with real consideration for the employee, rather than mouthing platitudes or doing it so as to tick legal boxes."

"Well, you're feeling a bit negative, today, aren't you, Guy?"

"Sorry – I was at a CIPD meeting of trainers and personnel people last night – there was so much moaning about the trials and tribulations of the job that it's got to me a bit. Some of the things that go on in other companies!"

"Yes, we're quite fortunate the way things have developed here I've been meaning to ask you, Guy - could you spare me an hour or so to talk through some of the latest learning methods?"

"Sure, whenever you want. I was wanting to hear a bit about these workplace championing activities you're applying - perhaps we need to swap ideas. What kind of thing do you want to know?"

"Really anything that'll fit with the championing idea - to give people who'll be acting as champions some idea of the range of methods they can tap into. We need a variety, rather than always doing it the same way self study rather than always telling them, for example I'm not too sure of the range but there must be lots of different ones nowadays."

"Oh yeah, of course there are. I'm free tomorrow afternoon. Is that any good?"

"Great. Let's say three o'clock then."

Chapter Twenty One

Guy sat across the table from Harry, a mug of coffee clutched in his hand.

"So, let's start simply, Harry. There's on-the-job training. They'll know that - working alongside a more skilled person, who explains the job and shows them how it's done. There's a simple sequence - explain, demonstrate, get the learner to try it slowly, help and correct - then keep an eye on the learner as he gets faster and more confident."

"Right. Our system uses that kind of training a lot - although the quality varies a bit at the moment, depending on the champion. The quality and consistency are things we still need to sort out. Sometimes, the learner is pushed a bit too fast and doesn't get a chance to practise properly."

"Consolidate yes ... that can easily happen. If someone's experienced and has been doing a task for ages, they can easily forget how hard it is for a beginner. They can easily forget the simple steps and stages as well. If you're going to train somebody - or coach or mentor them - you need to be clear of the steps. Take changing gear when driving a car, for example. What would you reckon was the hardest bit for a learner to grasp?"

"Oh, probably the bits where the clutch is involved, so that it doesn't jerk or stall."

"Yes, so these bits need extra practice - maybe even separate from general road driving. Also, the person giving the training needs to keep aware of what the learner's trying to achieve the areas he's likely to find hard and the standards he's working towards. Do you know about objectives, Harry?"

"Oh yes, I've printed out a sheet explaining them, which we give to the champions - it's got some tips and examples as well. They seem to be OK on that side of things, though some actually use them better than others. It takes time to sink in but the results are much better once they've twigged."

"Great. Objectives are a very good reference point or focus for training - so your champions must be clear that objectives give the end point, saying what the learner will be able to do..... much the same as a competency, I suppose. Then you've got to get your workplace champions thinking in small steps - call it 'bite-sized chunks' - I find that creates a picture they can remember. Make sure they give the information to their learners in these small steps - with gaps between, to allow the ideas to sink in. And finally, they've got to have practice - remember the saying:

'I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand' "

"And presumably, the champion then pulls back bit by bit, letting the learner get on with it - but keeping an eye open for any mistakes or problems. What do you mean about the small steps, Guy?"

"Learning builds in small steps - give them the basic information first then explain the detail. They're only ready for the practical exercise after that - 'I do and I understand', remember?"

After a fair bit of practice and experience, they'll gradually move on to adapting their thinking to suit different situations but it'll take a while before they'll be able to judge how they're doing. If they're pushed too far, too fast, they're likely to screw up - and that'll demotivate them very rapidly!"

"Right, I can see that. OK what about some other techniques. I want them to be aware of as wide a range as possible."

"Well, I've jotted some down here maybe, if I run through, you can tell me the ones you want to do. There's coaching you're already using that along with your mentoring as often as not, they're combined together nowadays but there are subtle differences.... which you obviously know already. Then there's open learning skills - using learning materials to let them do it flexibly at their own pace. If it's working through computers, this is usually referred to as e-learning nowadays. There are a few more open-ended things like discovery learning, accelerated learning and discussion groups. You could well be doing some of these - one way or another. Nowadays, there's a move towards mixing the different types of learning for best effect - common sense really – which is referred to as 'blended learning'.

It can of course still include the good old training course, especially where there's new information or skills to get across to groups. That'll probably always be one of the best ways for training lots of people in the same techniques - induction training, for example or training in things like communication or project management skills.

Remember to think in smaller sections though - in modules which can be built together in different ways. If we link it in with testing people's existing competency first of all, we may find that they don't need to study some of the earlier modules, if they've proved they're already capable. It makes learning more time effective."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, if you test someone to see how competent they are before the training starts - and they achieve a high score - and the test's valid - there's not much point in them going through that part of the training programme. They're already proved they know the information."

"I suppose so. I'll need to know more about this competency testing, Guy. Let's stick with the different methods first, though I'm OK with the differences between mentoring and coaching, although I tend to lump them together as championing."

"That's fair enough but you will come across people who prefer one or the other as separate techniques. Coaching is working with somebody to encourage them to improve the awareness and abilities they already have. You're helping them to help themselves. It's used a lot in sport - there are lots of trained and qualified coaches around."

"Yes, I remember seeing a coach working on someone's golf swing, focussing the learner's attention on a particular element - the position of the thumb on the grip, I think it was - so that the learner concentrates on this"

"Right. And then your idea of mentoring within your championing ideas is slightly different from normal, isn't it, Harry?"

"I suppose it is. We're more concerned with getting as many people involved in helping each other as possible. So we don't make anything of the manager/subordinate roles which are often in place with traditional mentoring."

"That's fair enough, I guess. With traditional mentoring, there's often a one-to-one relationship, where the more senior mentor is sowing the seeds of ideas and helping the learner develop them. Giving them the basis of knowledge and experience in a concentrated way, so that they can grow it further themselves, with help."

"Like the Tibetan says - 'We must pass through the Hall of Learning before we enter the Hall of Wisdom!'"

"Is that from one of those books you read, Harry? Never heard that one before. It's true though. Use your championing to get the information across and then facilitate or help the technique to develop – to consolidate - for the learner as they apply it in the workplace. Sow the seeds and help them grow. Then wisdom from experience can follow.

Moving on to other techniques, there's little point using questioning to try to extract knowledge if it's basically not there. It's like – coaching's not the best way for someone to learn from scratch. Also, applying trial and error - the kind of activities that are often used in discovery learning - is a rather slow way of teaching new skills. It's quite good for developing things like problem solving skills, I reckon. Overall, though, I would say that it often takes up a disproportionate amount of time reaching

a conclusion. No - applying your ideas of workplace championing, with elements of both mentoring and coaching thrown in - that's usually an effective use of learning time ."

"I reckon so. Now, what about open learning, Guy? We've already used some of the commercial stuff in the department - it seems to work well with some people - the kind who naturally like to work on their own...."

"Yes - it's best for them - and for folk who are fairly confident using a computer where it's in the form of e-learning If you pick the good stuff, with lots of interaction for the learner ... and check that it meets the needs as closely as possible ... then e-learning's a good way forward."

"We've found that some people who are more used to the traditional training courses have problems concentrating and staying self-motivated, working on their own."

"That's quite natural, Harry, if you think about it. Folks like that need more help at the start - a sort of induction training programme to prepare them for using different techniques, I suppose, to get them used to the new way of thinking. All forms of open learning have got to be interactive lots of feedback and exercises.

It doesn't have to be by computer, of course - there's some good stuff set out as simple workbooks. In some programmes, the level and detail will only give an introduction to a subject ... then you still need a supplementary workshop or organised practical exercises or whatever, to consolidate. Then you're back into the blended learning idea again. Just be clear that the overall programme's meeting your objectives. If open or e-learning's used properly, it can be really good. Then again,

I've seen companies using it more as a cheap, fast way of getting lots of people through the stuff without being too clear about how relevant or effective the learning actually is."

"Ah, those hidden agendas again! I'd say that the Director's fairly committed to supporting us, though - she's given us loads in the last year to spend on resources."

"Have you gone mainly for buying books then?"

"No, no..... books, videos, packs with CDs or cards which can be used anywhere. Then there's computer-based e-learning, including CD roms, DVDs and interactive video programmes. We also have a contract to access a whole set of on-line e-learning modules – though, as I said, some of these are very much at an introductory level. With many people having their own computers at home now, they can also access stuff straight off the internet as well. There's a lot going on."

"There certainly is - it's really changing the face of learning. It's important to have these resources available, though. If we're expecting people to act as champions at work or do self-learning at home, out of the goodness of their hearts, the company's got to give them support - the resources, the time, the facilities, the encouragement."

"It does seem to be working ... better with some than with others ... but that's only to be expected. Now, I think my head's taken in as much of this stuff as it can just now. Is there anything else I should know, before we call it a day? Where's your list?"

Let's see - Discussion groups: I know about them - we have these and they're working well using a facilitator. Mind you, if you have a good chair person....."

"Exactly - with a bit of organisation and facilitation, discussion groups work very well. So, what's next? - Discovery Learning. OK, right - we've already mentioned that you're not too keen on that, are you, Harry?"

"No. I think we work best with a bit more structure. I'm all for people working out what to do and using a bit of experimentation and so on but I reckon, in the early stages at least, we can achieve more where there's some kind of overall structure to follow. OK. Thanks, Guy. That's been very helpful."

"That's OK. Don't forget courses either - mix and match - use the complete range that's available remember blending. Your holistic ideas are right out there at the front though! The Director's keen that we respond to individual needs - which is where the whole championing thing has been great - and a lot of that's thanks to you!"

I must confess I was a bit suspicious of you in the early stages - I thought you were some clever dick trying to rock the boat and do me out of my job!"

"You know me better than that now, eh Guy. No hidden agendas - that's another saying I must add to my list!"

"What list's that?"

"Oh, it's some sayings that friends of mine come out with periodically - things like:

'You are what you want to be'

'Assume nothing'

'Use bite-sized chunks'

'Direct your path along the track'

'Concentrate to compensate' and now -

'No hidden agendas'."

"You could always add:

'Objectives encourage focus' *and*

'I do and I understand'.

Yes, these friends of yours must have quite an insight into life!"

"Oh, they do, Guy, they certainly do!"

Chapter Twenty Two

Isabelle sat at the front of the room, with a group of eighteen eager faces watching her, hanging on her every word.

"So far in this workshop, we've looked at some of the medical reasons for stress - and how we can do something about them. We've looked at the different types of person you might be - and how these types react differently to stressful situations.

There's people like the type Ian said he was, who tend to get keyed up, blame other people for the situation and then blow their top. Watch out for your heart, Ian! Then there's the more relaxed type who take situations as they happen and don't get worked up if they really can't do much to change the situation - their train running late, for example. You said you were like that, Jane. That's good - try to keep it up!

And how do people respond to stress? In different ways, really. You can get some who respond by working harder and harder which can obviously create even more stress. Some get overwhelmed with bouts of anxiety or depression; others feel really helpless, not knowing what to do to get off the treadmill....."

"I was like that in one job - I was seconded to work on a project which was heavily behind schedule, hopelessly managed and didn't have the resources it needed. I worked on it for seven weeks. Sometimes we couldn't do very much as we needed information from other sections - then we'd have to work massive chunks of overtime..... but the worst thing was that the project leaders, so-called, kept changing their minds. That meant that things we thought we'd completed had to be

re-done - which then screwed up the schedule even more! I was getting to the stage where I couldn't sleep at night and was dreading going to work each morning....."

"Right, David, so what did you do?"

"Well, I reckoned that the stress was being caused by the overall management being totally overwhelmed by the project. There were too many agendas going on at the same time and the project management was poor. Having tried to get things better organised at several meetings - but come up against various managers who couldn't or wouldn't get a grip on things - I just thought 'stuff it'. I reckoned that my health was more important than their screwed-up project, so I quit."

"You mean you resigned from your job?"

"No - I asked my boss to take me off that seconded project and put me back into my usual department. I was doing them a favour, after all - I had my own work to do. If it had come to it, mind you, I think I would have resigned. If I'd been stuck on that project for much longer, I would have had a nervous breakdown, I swear - and no job's worth that, I reckon."

"That's true, David - though you have to be very brave to go the whole way and resign! It sounds like that project wouldn't achieve all its results anyway - probably muddled its way through to some kind of botched conclusion. That's actually a good example of the 'fight or flight' response. In your case, you chose flight; can anyone think of a way that David might have fought the causes of stress instead?"

"He could have worked out a revised overall plan and talked to the manager"

"I tried that - but the plan was set up before I was seconded there and they wouldn't change - too many bruised egos! I've never seen so much stress. There was no way we could effectively meet the deadline ..."

"Could you have asked formally for the completion date to be pushed back, to give more time to sort out the problems?"

"Tried that too, but it was bogged down in internal politics and the senior manager didn't want to lose face. Believe me, I thought through the possibilities as objectively as my nerves would allow - and flight won over fight from whatever angle I looked!"

"OK..... I think you made the right decision, David - and you've lived to tell the tale! What actually happened to the project in the end?"

"The new system did get up and running, with a bit of a delay, but there were a few teething problems and glitches which should have been sorted before go-live date. I was involved in the induction training which came right at the end of the project plan, so a lot of the detail we needed wasn't available at our planning stages, thanks to slippage. They muddled through - but it could have been organised much better."

"Well, that's a good example for us to think about. OK. Now I'd like to introduce Harry Williams, who's come along to talk to us for a while about Personal Management - and how this helps to cut down on stress. Harry's involved with this in business, but he's promised me that he'll keep well clear of business jargon. We'll tell him if he starts blinding us with science, won't we! So, over to you Harry."

"Thanks Isabelle. I'd like to start by supporting what David was saying. You do get situations which are disorganised yet restricted, where there's little you can do about it. Stress will just continue to build up, in an ever-increasing spiral.

There are three main areas which I'd like us to look at - we'll cover two of them today. Applying them should help you keep stress under control. As Isabelle said, they apply to business - but we can use them in very similar ways in day-to-day life. There's more and more talk recently about getting your work/life balance correct."

"Yes, we may well talk a bit about that in a later session."

"Right then, Isabelle - I'll leave it on one side just now then. So - the three areas I'd like to focus on are: managing your own time, setting your own goals and communicating your message clearly. We'll look at the first two today and maybe I can come back and do the communication side another time."

Harry handed out a questionnaire which checked on the activities they thought were time consuming. He then got the group to underline the ones which they believed they couldn't control. There was silence, punctuated by the occasional whisper and the sounds of pens on paper as the delegates listed the periods of time they spent on various activities in their average week - if they could identify an 'average week'!

They made a series of headings, such as: 'travelling'; 'eating'; 'thinking and planning'; 'telephoning'; 'waiting for decisions from others'; 'working on specific things'; 'meeting people' and 'writing e-mails, memos & letters'. Then they estimated times for each. As an extension of this exercise, Harry showed them how to time-map over a week, logging the time they actually spent on these different activities. The differences

between their estimated time spent per week - and the logged time they had actually spent - on some of these headings would be an eye-opener. They could then use the differences to identify some ways they could use their time better.

As they warmed to the subject, the group began to suggest different ideas they could use to control their time. The group had a wide mix, including housewives, self employed, unemployed, regular workers and part-time workers, so the approaches and responses covered a very broad spectrum.

One of the key things which Harry tried to get across was the possibility of saying 'No', when you really couldn't find the time to do something. He reckoned it was better to say 'No' straight away (giving logical reasons, of course), rather than making false promises. That way, at least you didn't let the person down or create last-minute crises. There was always the possibility of delegation - which worked just the same in domestic life.

"You can always use what's called 'prioritising'."

"What's that Harry? It's not an American idea, is it, with a name like that!"

"It's putting things into a priority list - A, B and C ratings - and having an over-riding X factor, for special cases.

A ratings are very important - they must be completed: they're usually things which have a deadline or other measure. So, it could be getting to work on time, getting a report written, getting the kids to school, or buying food for the evening meal before the shop closes things like that.

B ratings are less important - they still have to be done but they've a lower priority. It may not matter whether they're done today or tomorrow. Mind you, leaving it off until tomorrow might then mean it's upgraded to an **A** task, which then must be completed that day. Do you see how it works?"

"Yes, I think so. A **B** task might be putting a load of clothes through the washing machine. It could be done today - if it's good drying weather - or we could leave it until tomorrow, if there's no real rush. But, if we're running out of clean clothes to wear, doing the washing tomorrow would probably become an **A** priority, I guess."

"Spot on; very good! Now, a **C** task is the least important. In business terms, it's often the type of task which you can delegate to someone else. It's not because you don't want to do it - it's because you could be spending your time better, doing things which need your knowledge or experience or whatever. In business, the boss spends ages sometimes at the photocopier copying reports, or fiddling about collecting statistics. Other people can do that - senior managers should be spending time making decisions as a result of the report or statistics - that's what they're paid to do."

"I'd a boss once who prided himself on being one of the team, involving himself in all the menial jobs - which we would have been quite happy doing. As a result, he never got round to making decisions ... he wasn't really doing his job properly at all."

"Many of us can probably think of someone like that! In domestic life, we often can't delegate - but there are still **C** tasks which we shouldn't waste too much time doing - or should leave off doing until all the **A** and the more pressing of the **B** tasks are complete. Can anyone think of examples?"

"How about clearing out a cupboard or sorting magazines into piles"

"..... gardening - that's always a **C** task for me!"

"Yes, well - as long as you're not using it as an excuse to put off work that's necessary. Pruning bushes might be a **C** task as you could put it off for a while and few people would notice - but, if you don't cut the grass regularly, the whole garden looks a mess. So - pruning could be **C**, while grass cutting is more like a **B**. So, that leaves us with the **X** factor.

This is where a crisis is happening - so it over-rides previous decisions. A **BX** task might then take priority over an **A** task, for example. Take the washing example I mentioned. You might have put off washing the clothes until tomorrow - then your son comes in and says that he has a job interview tomorrow and asks if his white shirt is clean. Well, of course, it's dirty, so washing a load including that shirt becomes a **BX** which you might have to do straight away - or supervise him doing, of course! - before you leave to visit the supermarket to buy food for the evening meal. Prioritising is a flexible thing - it's the way an organised housewife or business person works normally. It can also involve multi-tasking. To some extent, it's common sense - we're just trying to make sure that more people use common sense, I suppose!"

Harry ran through various different ideas about time management with the group, asking questions, encouraging discussion and giving them little exercises to keep up the interest. They finished up with a brainstorming session to discuss possible

answers to some of the problems which people had called out and Harry had listed on the flip chart.

Finally they all wrote down their personal action plan of three things which they would try to do differently, to make better use of their time. Harry had really enjoyed leading the session, which had gone very well, thanks to the relaxed atmosphere.

"Well, thanks Harry - and well done for keeping away from the jargon and using examples that we could understand. Harry will be doing another session with us later on Goal Setting, as he said, but first, I'd like to show you something else which you will find helpful when trying to relax.

This is a form of visualisation - it's a kind of guided meditation, where you combine relaxing your body with relaxing your mind. Once you get the idea, you can do this by yourself - but it's probably more pleasant and relaxing doing it as a group with someone leading the session. Don't worry about the word 'visualisation' - some people actually see images in their minds - others can feel things inside but don't actually see pictures or images. Some people just picture it in the way it's being described to them. Any way is fine - don't try to be something that you're not - that'll only give you more stress, which defeats the whole point. Just be ruled by your heart. Relax and go with the flow.

So, can you get into a position where you feel comfortable it may be lying on your back on the floor; or sitting relaxed on an upright chair with your hands loosely on your thighs or, if you're up for it, it might even be in a yoga position! Just choose something that suits you - there's plenty of space.

Right. Is everyone settled? So, let's try this relaxation exercise. I'll put on some 'plinky plonky' music - focus for a little while on your breathing and the music - then I'll start."

The 'plinky plonky' music turned out to be called 'The Highest Apple': rather pleasant, wistful music from the island of Skye with flute, lowland Scottish pipes and gentle backing instruments, which rose and fell like hillside breezes. A hush fell over the group as they relaxed into the sounds, minds already drifting into a different plane.

"I want you to focus first on your toes. Stretch them and release any tension which you have there. Just your toes... focus ... now move to your feet. Don't try too hard. Stretch and flex your feet - imagine you're barefoot on firm sand by the edge of the sea. Focus on your breathing - your rhythmical breathing ... gently deeply, like the waves on the beach. Picture your bare toes in the wet sand ... imagine the contact between your feet and the ground - and feel the extra energy ... the stressful energy slipping away and grounding into the sand. Focus on your breathing for a while.

That's it - now move your attention to your legs - feel them heavy for a start now feel the weight flowing down your legs to your feet and out through the soles of your feet into the wet sand. Feel it moving in waves slowly that's it flex and wiggle your feet to help the movement, if you want. Now, rest for a moment and focus your mind on the music again. Fine."

Isabelle's voice continued quietly, directing the attention, suggesting the thoughts and feelings as she gently moved the delegates' concentration around different parts of their bodies, focussing, relaxing and encouraging the flow of any stressful energy out to ground. The group was gently directed around different parts of the imagined

beach, feeling the waves on their legs, the wind in their hair and the dry sand on their skin. They explored caves, looked out to sea from the top of a large rock and moved carefully over wave-smoothed shingle. Above the sound of the plaintive pipes, there were sounds of occasional sighs as bodies relaxed into the mood.

Gently, after around fifteen minutes, the relaxation and visualisation session was coming to a close.

"And now, in your own time, I want you to bring your mind back to focus on your whole body - your body sitting in the chair or lying on the floor focus on your breathing ... your deep, slow breathing ... breathing in ... holding it ... and breathing out. Now, I want you to bring your mind back into the room, where you are in communion with the other people here. Relax for a moment and, in your own time, open your eyes and lie or sit quietly for a while."

The music continued to play gently as the members of the group gradually refocused their eyes and sat or lay quietly. The simple visualisation had obviously had a calming effect.

"Now, when you're ready, it's time for a break and a light lunch."

Chapter Twenty Three

Lunch completed, the group settled down again for the afternoon. Many still felt the relaxing benefits of Isabelle's visualisation session so, with a combination of that and the good lunch, Harry would have to work hard to keep them awake! In the training world, this slot was known as 'the graveyard shift'!

"So, Setting Goals. Would anyone like to say what they think of as a goal?"

"It's an end point something that we are trying to reach or achieve."

"Right. There's nothing mysterious or complicated about it. The goal in football - that's the end point of all the dribbling, set play and shooting. Where you see lots of fancy footwork and passing backwards and forwards in centre field, it may look good, but it won't add much to the end result if the ball doesn't ultimately progress towards the back of the net.

Having said that, it's unlikely that we can just start off and head straight for a goal. There are usually hiccups, back-tracking, pauses when we can't do much and so on. I always like to visualise our progress towards a goal as a twisting path moving along a defined track, with milestones along the way and the ultimate goal at the end. So, let's have some ideas of the kinds of goals that you have?"

The group sprang into action, calling out their ideas.

"Saving up for my holiday"; "Finishing the decoration of my sitting room"; "Building the conservatory"; "Completing my OU essay before the deadline"; "Getting a job".

"Yes, these are all goals - but some of them are clearer than others. How about the last two on the list there?"

"Is it that the essay example is more specific - Gill must be clear of the title already and there's a date that she's working towards"

"..... And the job one's more vague."

"If you'd been trying for a job as long as I have, you might be a bit vague as well!"

"Hang on, Colin - that's maybe one of the reasons you're having problems. Are you clear in your mind about the type of job you want? Would you prefer indoors or outdoors; in customer service or more backroom, away from people? Do you set yourself targets of jobs to apply for agencies to contact that sort of thing?"

"I maybe did initially. It's OK for you, you've got a job but it's hard to keep being enthusiastic."

"I know, Colin - I was out of work for almost eight months - I've been through the panics and the depressions. But, you can start by setting yourself some milestones and goals - and keep your eyes open and grab any opportunity that appears - flying kites, I call it. It all helps and, sooner or later, someone responds to one of your kites and then you can really start the stunt kite aerobatics - showing them what you can do. If you like, we can meet up afterwards and talk your plans through - see if we can spot some opportunities."

"Yes. that would be good sorry."

"That's OK. I understand totally - we'll talk about it later. OK, group. First of all, there's a mnemonic that will help you check that your goal statements are clear.."

"A new-what?"

"A mnemonic - a memory aid. Something to help you remember. It's often a sequence of letters which form a word - an anagram - with each of the letters standing for something. This one's : SMART. I've no idea where it originated - it's one of these ideas in training that's gone the rounds for a long time. It's useful though!

Harry wrote the five letters vertically on the flipchart and then added the words:

SPECIFIC

MEASURABLE

ATTAINABLE

REALISTIC

TIMED

"Like I was saying, the goal must be as specific as possible - not so that it looks good on paper but to be sure you've really thought through what it is you want to do. So, we had Gill's essay - on a specific title and for a length that the OU's stated and probably, at the tutorial, the tutor has explained the need to use various sources and so on. So, everything's pretty specific.

In this case, the goal's measurable in the sense that Gill has to write an essay of say two thousand words; she has to include references from the various suggested sources and the OU has presumably already set down the criteria - the standards - which are expected for essay writing. Then, of course, in this example, there is the measuring or scoring which the tutor will carry out, judging the content, style, quality of argument and so on. So there's a lot of measurement possible in this example - maybe more than with some others.

You should always set yourself goals which are attainable. And be realistic here. These two link together, really. Don't set yourself a goal of making absolutely no mistakes - of being 100% correct if you do, making one simple error will blow your chances of achieving the goal. Allow yourself a bit of flexibility - room to manoeuvre.

Think on a scale of one to ten. If you reckon that your performance currently is around six, for example, set yourself the goal of achieving an eight or a nine. Leave the ten for some time later - let's face it, we can virtually always improve our performance in some way, so we're rarely a consistent ten!

If you're setting a goal that involves other people, you'll need to allow for even more flexibility. That's especially true as far as timing goes - the last word on our list. Allow some leeway but at the same time, be very clear of your timings along the way. Set mini deadlines to achieve, so that the overall project is kept on stream and on time. That's what I've been calling the 'milestones'."

Harry gave them a few short exercises to do - partly to reinforce his points; partly to relieve the boredom of having to listen to him after a good lunch - to show them the

ideas behind producing regular milestones to chart progress. He showed them a very simple example of project planning - and how a critical path was mapped out to make sure that activities progressed logically within deadlines, to prevent delays.

"You mean, with my conservatory, the foundations have to be laid before a certain date, because the erectors are coming to fix the frame then. We've booked the carpet layer for the first of next month, so everything will have to be finished and cleared out before he can do the flooring."

".... and you'll have to keep an eye on them to make sure that the various milestones are met in time. Give yourself a bit of flexibility - if you don't want an ulcer - and do be realistic. Don't push the builders to make promises they won't achieve. Builders agree to ridiculous deadlines because they think that it keeps the punter happy. Well, it may do initially but it just causes stress in the end. Be realistic!"

Harry finished off his short session by getting everyone to set themselves three personal goals that they would achieve within the next three months. They beavered away in a contented way: writing down four or five milestones for each goal. This would permit periodic checks, as well as allowing them to chart when they needed things from others. Doing this flagged up the possible blockage points on their 'critical paths' which might need watching.

They set all this down in an individual Action Plan sheet that Harry had given them. He moved round the group as quickly as he could, checking here, suggesting there, questioning and confirming.

"OK, then. So I think that we've all got that. You've got my phone number so, if you're having any problems with getting these ideas up and running, just give me a call and we can talk about it. And, as I said earlier, if Isabelle invites me back, we can look at Communication next time."

"Thanks Harry - we'll certainly have him back, won't we folks? Right, let's take a break now before our final session with Bill."

As Harry was standing drinking his cup of tea and gazing out the window at the fields beyond, one of the delegates came up.

"That was interesting - I enjoyed that ... and I'll be able to use it in my work as well as when planning some of my domestic affairs. What's your view on all this talk about work/life balance, Harry?"

"I think it's very important, ah"

"Peter ... sorry, my name's Peter - or Pete."

Hello, Pete. Yes, very important - but companies often seem to be seeing it largely from the full-time/part-time hours of work point of view. You know, if somebody's only working three days a week with the company, their work/life balance must be OK. I think it goes much deeper than that."

"In what way?"

“Well, for a start, different people are looking for different things from work. Some need the social contact; some need to work for their self esteem. Priorities differ, with some almost living for their work, while for others, it is a means to an end.”

“So, you mean work/life balance could vary quite dramatically for different people in the same organisation? I suppose that’s true, if I think of some of my colleagues - Tony lives for hill walking and rock climbing, so he’s largely earning a wage and keeping his nose clean at work so that he can go rushing off around the country at weekends to hit the mountains.”

“Exactly, whereas there will be others - perhaps you’re like this - who are trying to develop themselves at work, applying as many of their skills as possible to improve the way they carry out their jobs ... “

“Yes, which lets me use life skills at work - but I can also use some of the techniques I’ve learned at work to make my life more effective. Like what you were showing us about using critical paths, for example. I have used that at work a little - but I’m also involved in amateur dramatics, so I could use of it there to help plan ahead.”

“There you go - that’s a good example, Pete. If you take mentoring and coaching as well – or what’s now referred to as “workplace championing” - there will be many people working who are not directly involved in training - but who have some potential for helping others to develop. They might be a parent, or be involved with the scouts or guides, or coach a football team ... or just have a special skill which they can pass on to others. There’s all that life experience and potential which we can encourage at work - with many people benefiting from the chance to apply these

talents. It's usually easier to spread your wings and expand your role a bit in your present company - easier than applying for a different job elsewhere."

"Very true - I've found that myself. I hear you're involved a lot with coaching, Harry."

"Oh yes. We call it workplace championing. It's a good way of getting people involved

The conversation was interrupted by Isabelle clapping her hands at the front of the room, to attract people's attention.

"OK then folks. Can I get you all to sit down now and we'll start our final talk. For this session, I've asked my good friend Bill Allison to come along to demonstrate some of the basics of self massage - mainly head and shoulder massage but also some ideas for applying pressure points to release stress. So, over to you, Bill."

Harry found this a fascinating session.

The presentation progressed smoothly, with some good visuals, practical demonstrations on members of the group and short sections of lecturing. The visuals were a mixture of images to show close-ups of pressure points on the body - and graphics giving key words and phrases. These visuals really helped get the message across.

Bill's style was relaxed and confident, but at the same time keeping his presentation moving forward positively, gently pushing members of the group back on course if they meandered too much in discussions.

Harry really enjoyed the experience of watching Bill in action - of being able to stand back and study a professional presenter in action. By watching the audience, Harry could spot the activities and techniques which were most effective. The content and detail were, of course, fascinating but Harry was most impressed by the way Bill had structured the session, as well as hitting the correct level to meet the needs of the audience.

One of his teams would shortly be presenting the results of their project study. This time, the procedures had been followed - Harry had made sure of that! The presentation was to be given to the Director and main board members. It was an important event where the outcomes could have a real effect on the future direction of the company. Harry was proud that the team had worked together so well, producing this study which could literally change the direction of the company. It would be an added bonus if they could deliver it in a professional manner as well.

"Perhaps I can work with them to create a professional presentation like Bill's," thought Harry. "They have the information - it's all down to getting the planning sorted; of keeping an eye firmly on the presentation's overall objective - or goal and identifying and using the various talents present in the group, to best advantage."

This would really be the holistic effect in action, with different individuals bringing a whole range of individual skills to the team - allowing the overall effect of the team presentation to be greater and more effective than any one of the team members might have achieved in giving a solo presentation.

Working together on a team presentation like this would help them work co-operatively ... learning things about team work through direct experience - and learning skills which they would be able to apply back in the office.

Harry drove home from Isabelle's with his head full of ideas, as he planned how to approach this next stage in his team's progress.

Chapter Twenty Four

"So, where do we start then?"

"Have you figured out what you're trying to achieve with this presentation?"

"To impress Big Denise and get her to agree to our ideas."

"Let's keep things right and call her the Director - OK but can you be more specific? What do you expect her to be able to do - or know about - after hearing and seeing your presentation, that she couldn't before you started?"

"Oh be able to tell which areas of our business that would be better done by outside contractors"

"With costings and such like - she'd need facts and figures to support the recommendations, wouldn't she?"

"Yes OK - both of these. And presumably by implication, list those which we should carry on providing internally."

"But we shouldn't just imply, should we? Remember Harry, you said 'assume nothing!' We should say clearly the ones that must remain in-house as well."

"How about Big sorry, the Director being clear of the, like, judgements we used to decide these things?"

"The criteria - yes James, good. And how can we check at the end of the presentation that the message has got across clearly?"

"She should be able to, in some way, list the areas we've identified - and explain the main ideas we've given for each."

"Yes - that sounds quite clear - use words such as 'list', 'identify' and 'explain', which show the kind of activity that would be involved. Don't use words like 'understand', or 'appreciate' or 'be aware' - they're all a bit vague. I mean, the Director might think that she was aware of what we had said - but it's hard to measure!"

"Bags I don't have to test her! How can we check how well she's remembered things? We can't give her a test - she'd hit the roof!"

"No, not a test - although it might be OK if the presentation was a training one. Here, we can make sure the key points come over clearly in the final summary - and check from the way she responds. You'll soon see from the way the discussion develops, whether she agrees or not. Anything else?"

"Describe the benefits of using outside contractors?"

"Yes - and I suppose, to be balanced?"

"We should review the benefits of using in-house providers, where that's being suggested?"

"Good, so these are all, loosely-speaking, objectives for our presentation - or its goals. Can anyone spot the difference between an objective and a goal?"

"Is it something to do with who does it? Like, with goals well, we the presenters have goals - to give them such and such information; to go through the different benefits and things like that. The objectives you have been saying are more what the audience - Mrs Finlayson - will get by the end what they can do differently - the new stuff that they learn. That kind of thing. Is that right?"

"Yes, that's correct, Andy. I've written these different objectives on the flipchart. Keep checking them as we progress with the design. They'll keep you on the track - make sure you don't start including stuff that's not important. Although, remember, they are guidelines. The plan might changeand then you might have to change one or more of the objectives. But there would have to be a good reason!"

"Can we start designing our visuals now? I fancy doing some overhead transparencies. I'm good at art can I do the visuals?"

"Hang on Ed. We can't do them yet. We don't know the wording or pictures we need yet. No. What do you think should come next anybody got any ideas?"

"Should we maybe list the main bits of information which we'll need to cover under each of these objectives you've written up there - list the key points, maybe?"

"Yes, good. So how could you do that? You want to have as many ideas and bits of information as possible, don't you?"

"How about a brainstorm - that usually works for getting lots of ideas out quickly."

"Right, so that will get the information down on the flip-chart. Then what?"

"Sort them out under the main headings....."

"Get them flowing logically"

"Now can we get on with the visuals?"

"Not yet Ed. Here, take the pen - you can write things up on the flip-chart - that'll keep your artistry going! What do we have to do before starting on the visuals - Helen?"

"Well, we need to have sorted out the key points - the key statements. But even before that, we need to figure out how we're going to get the message across best."

"That's the visuals, surely?"

"Oh, shut up about the visuals, Ed."

"Getting the message across - the presentation techniques - such as?"

"Lecture, discussion, exercise"

"Visuals"

"Yes, visuals as a support for the presenter - or to summarise detail - or present statistics. Anything else?"

"As someone's already said, we couldn't give Big Mrs Finlayson an exercise or a test or anything like that!"

"Probably not - but we could have a list of the different services and functions in the company, and use that as a checklist or discussion prompt at the end. That would help people focus on the main choice, and make sure we didn't miss any out. It's not really an exercise - but it would get the Director and the other people involved - which is what it's all about."

"The problem's usually getting the Director to shut up and give others a chance - not encouraging her to get involved!"

"I didn't hear that, Allan! OK. So far, we've sorted out the objectives; made a list of the key areas to be covered to meet each one; set out some of the details under each; thought through the techniques which we plan to use and drafted out the key prompt words or phrases and other illustrations which we need for the visuals. Any thoughts on these, Ed?"

"There's not much scope for pictures, probably. If we're thinking of using different presenters doing sections of the presentation, it'll look better if the visuals are done in a standard way. Maybe a little Departmental logo - the same colours used for headings stuff like that. It will be mainly words, headings, statements. Do you want to stick to using the overhead projector? I went on a course on Powerpoint a while back but haven't had much chance to put it into practice. I can use it to design

the masters for the projector acetates but what do you think about projecting a Powerpoint presentation instead of the overhead projector? I'm up for it!"

"If you're confident, certainly using Powerpoint would be better. It would look more professional ... and we could get a bit of animation built in. I'll have to check if we can have a projector to plug the laptop into. Good for you, Ed. It'll give you a bit of practice! Remember - keep the wording on the visuals as brief as you can."

"Yes, I'll stick to key phrases - not complete sentences. I'll even cut it down to single words where I can. See, Mr Williams I am learning! So - how are we finally going to give the presentation?"

"I reckon that, seeing that Ed's so keen, he should do the whole thing - visuals, presentation .. the lot!"

"No way. This is a group presentation - we've all got to do our bit. I've got in first because I reckon that I'm quite good at doing the graphics and working the equipment and that kind of thing. But, the rest of you have got your own skills - at planning, answering questions, giving speeches come on you lot - what are you good at doing? Blow your own trumpets a bit - what are your strengths?"

"Yes - Ed's right. You've all got something you can give to the presentation. We may just need three or four people actually up front doing the talking, answering the questions and so on but there's the planning, producing documents and of course there's the visuals. Is everyone happy that Ed does them?"

"He'll just sulk if we don't let him!"

"Just the same as you'll sulk if you don't get to do some of the talking. Charlie's a member of the local Toastmasters' Society - did you know that, Harry?"

"Great, Charlie. Maybe you can act as sort of Master of Ceremonies or Chairman. It's good to have a link person, to keep things moving forward; introduce the different speakers; field the questions. Who else do we need for the actual presenting?"

"We need one person - or maybe two - to go over the more detailed, technical stuff who knows enough about the background to answer questions at the end too."

"Sue's been involved in doing all the research and compiling the statistics....."

"But I'm no use at speaking publicly - I just go to pieces!"

"Well, none of us really fancies standing up in front of the Director, given the choice."

"Charlie probably does, he's a masochist! How about if you don't have to give any of the actual presentation - but you're there to answer the questions at the end, Sue?"

"I don't mind that. I can cope with the questions - I just don't think I'm the best choice for giving the actual presentation - some of you lot are much better at projecting your voice and speaking confidently and all that stuff."

"Margaret and I can talk about the technical bits, if you like. We've been involved with the research too and we've both had a bit of practice talking to small groups during the Induction Training programmes."

"Fine, and Sue can help you sort out the detail at the planning stage. That leaves you and Gerry to write the documentation - that shouldn't be much of a problem for you two - you've turned out some pretty good reports and desk top published documents in the past. So, I think that's everything.

Charlie, you can do links summarise the key points that have been made, bring in the next speaker - or section of detail. You can also control the questions, feeding them to Sue or someone else if it's on a particular topic that they know better. And Ed, you liaise with them all to get the text for the visuals. Remember folks - the visuals take quite a long time to produce, so be fair and get your draft copies to Ed as soon as you can. I'll leave you to sort out deadlines, Ed."

"We'll need to practise all this."

"You certainly will. And it's very, very important to practise the links of a group presentation - to make sure you have the flow and continuity.

You have a maximum of thirty minutes for the whole thing, within the Board Meeting Agenda. That includes the time for questions - so I would work on the actual presentation lasting a maximum and I mean maximum of twenty minutes. There's no point in running over and then having no time to handle the questions to sort out any opposition and doubts."

"We should be OK. I've been reading about interactive programmes ... using virtual reality to recreate old buildings in three dimensions or show plans developing there are some fancy ideas about. Is there any chance of us using some of that?"

"I don't think we have the resources - or the time - to try that just now. It's all a bit high tech for what we're planning to do. Let's leave interactivity and advanced graphics for the moment - we can certainly use some in the future, if we try developing some e-learning programmes. For the moment though, let's get back to the final question section."

"What happens if there aren't any questions?"

"It doesn't do any harm to finish early - better early than late! But there will be questions you can count on it!"

"You'll cope with the Director, won't you Sue!"

"It's not just Sue on her own. The whole team's there - and remember, support each other. Charlie, you'll keep things moving, won't you? Watch out for anyone who's having problems. If someone's having difficulty with an answer - see if someone else can help. Think of yourself as a sort of Chairman, keeping things moving forward.

So, let's see now - we've got the objectives, the key points and the details to be included under each of these; we've figured out the different techniques we'll probably use and who's going to present the different bits. We've sorted out who's going to do the documentation"

"And don't forget the visuals"

"How could we, Ed. And we've got a Chairman or facilitator to keep things moving in line ..."

"... And to keep an eye on the time, too. That's part of your job as well, Charlie."

"OK - but everyone must pay attention. It's no use me waving at someone to get them to finish off, if they just go blinding on regardless it spoils it for the others."

"That's fair enough - follow Charlie's lead, everybody. Remember to keep things in line during the planning and preparation stages as well. Keep asking - 'Is this relevant? Does it help to meet the objective? Is it a need to know or a nice to know?'"

"What do you mean by that, Harry? What's the difference?"

"The NEED TO KNOWS - you must include; the NICE TO KNOWS are valuable, but not so important. Nice to Knows might be an example illustrating the point, a story from your past experience or a detailed description. They're all valuable to reinforce the Need to Know message. But, if time is catching up on you, you can cut down on the Nice to Knows - or even scrap some of them completely."

Watch you don't overlap onto someone else's material, by mistake. That happens very easily sometimes, especially if you've practised your presentation a few times you start referring to other people's examples, material, details. I tell you, it's a good way to lose friends rapidly!"

"Punch ups in the boardroom, eh - not very impressive!"

"That's another thing. You're working as a group, pooling your different efforts and ideas for the common good of the group - and the Department. Work together - help and support each other. Whatever happens, don't act against each other in any way during the presentation. Don't point out errors - or, if someone has said something which is really part of your bit, don't draw attention to this. Just repeat the statement. You could say, for example "As Fred has already mentioned" and then go on to make your point."

"But I thought you said earlier that we shouldn't repeat ourselves."

"Sheer repetition isn't good ... saying the same thing over and over. But this is a special case - a kind of emergency reaction to get over a problem. Also, remember that there's a difference between sheer repetition and reinforcing your point by explaining it in a different wayor coming up with a Nice to Know example."

"Can I get the equipment organised - the overhead - or laptop and projector, depending on what we use? - and I can help Ed produce the visuals; I've already talked to him and he'll show me a bit about how to use Powerpoint. Will that be OK?"

"That's fine, Liam. Make sure that you discuss the detail - so that everyone's happy with the decision. Remember - it's them who'll be using the kit on the day, so do it the way they want!"

"This is looking good - and we haven't even got the main facts down on paper yet!"

"No, but sorting through the planning has clarified what you have to do ... and made everybody feel a lot more confident. So, now you can get on with it."

Harry could actually feel the group energy - that holistic angel energy or synergy - as he watched the group working together round the large table. There was real enthusiasm as the presentation gradually took shape. This was holistic development working perfectly, with individuals identifying and offering their talents, working with each other, supporting and helping each other where required and linking their individual energies for an enhanced common good.

"The whole's worth more than the sum of the parts!"

"What? What hole's that, Harry?"

"Sorry - just thinking aloud. You carry on. You don't need me for the planning any more, do you?"

"No, I think the group energy's switched on now. We have empowerment - we have lift-off!"

(NOTE: This section appears as "The Presentation Planning Meeting" in pages 92-96 in "Growing Workplace Champions", author Chris Sangster

Chapter Twenty Five

Harry's watch beeped quietly as he sat working at his desk.

Sitting back in his chair, he focused on his breathing for a few moments and closed his eyes. He'd got into the way of pausing for a minute at noon and meditated whenever he could. Usually, he focused his mind on one or other country around the world that was struggling in some way - strife and wars, disease, floods or drought, forest fires, earthquakes there always seemed to be a major problem somewhere or other. Sometimes, where he had a business or personal problem of his own, this minute or so of peaceful reflection helping to get thoughts and worries into perspective. At other times, he just used the minute to recharge his energy, where he felt that this had been drained by pressing events (or people).

As the stresses began to build up in his business life (which seemed to be for ever searching for ways of increasing efficiency and productivity) Harry welcomed the benefits of these brief "time outs". He had read that it was fashionable in the world of broad red braces to take "power naps" periodically - this was his minimalist equivalent!

He encouraged his teams to have brief moments of thought at the start of their meetings - careful not to refer to it as meditation or anything which could be seen as religiously threatening to some. As it was, the "mind focus" or "reflection" times were seen as valuable by everyone, to detach their minds from the day-to-day affairs and bring them round to centre on that meeting's goals or agenda.

Harry's thoughts were broken by the telephone ringing.

"Harry? Bob here. I've got a favour to ask. Well, actually, it's Denise Finlayson who has asked me to ask you."

"Go on. How can I help?"

"She's impressed by the way you've got your department working so positively - she's completely sold on the idea of holistic individual and group development now your team work, personal development sessions, mentoring and coaching - the whole workplace championing system that you've got running so smoothly now. She's really keen on the whole concept. Well done. I know it was a bit of an uphill struggle from the start, but you kept on going!"

"It wouldn't have worked without your support, Bob - you know that. Guy Anderson's been great on the training side as well. I've had so much help and input from so many people, including the team members themselves. It's been a real pooling of energies - not just me. The whole integrated triangle idea is really beginning to work well now. Anyway, what does she want me to do?"

"We're having problems in the Supply Logistics Department. The manager John Kelly is a bit of a stick-in-the-mud, as you probably know - and some of the staff there have always been as stroppy as hell.

Too many lone rangers, doing their own thing without talking to each other - just not pulling together as a team at all. There's nothing you can put your finger on that's totally negative - they just need better leadership than John can give. They're so used to being told what to do and getting the blame in shouting matches when

things go wrong that they run around like headless chickens at the first sign of a problem developing"

"Oh God," thought Harry, "they don't want me to take over the management of Supply! Just when things are beginning to happen here."

He said nothing, waiting.

"She wants you to help John Kelly - give him some advice - work along with him for a while, in the hope that some of these holistic ideas you've been developing with your team will rub off on him. Do you think you could do it? Not full time or anything - just slotting in as you can. I suppose it's an opportunity for you to try some high level mentoring, if you think about it. I've said that I can probably release you for periods of time to be honest, I didn't really have much choice - she had that look in her eye!"

Harry breathed a quiet sigh of relief.

"If it's only part time, slotting sessions in - and if it's OK with you - sure, I can help."

.....

John Kelly was obviously very ill at ease.

"I'll tell you straight off - I'm not keen on this touchy feely team stuff that you do. I reckon I've got to tell my lot what to do then lean on them to make sure they do it and kick ass if they don't. They're lazy bastards, if they get half a chance. Let

them discuss what they'll do, and when - and they'll be running rings round me in no time at all. I'll tell you now - you wouldn't be sitting there if bloody Big Denise hadn't twisted my arm"

"OK. I know how you feel. I'm not going to try to ram anything down your throat! I've had my arm twisted as well, for the record. What I was going to suggest was that I describe one or two of the things we've tried as well as the benefits we've had from doing them. Then I thought, if you've got a particular operational problem just now, we might talk it through and see if there are any ways out of it, using these ideas."

Harry described the team development ideas which they were using - and how his staff was working better together as a result. He also explained how, having got the system up and running, it left more free time for him to concentrate on the longer term planning and other management tasks he had to do. John warmed visibly at the thought of having more time to spend on actual organisation and planning.

Harry gently led the discussion forward, questioning, expanding, probing - always making sure that John didn't feel threatened or criticised - or feel inadequate in any way. It was important in this early stage that he should loosen up a bit and begin to think more objectively. It was also important that he could be helped to figure out for himself how Harry's ideas could apply to the slightly different requirements of his department. John was being gently led towards empowerment.

By the end of this initial session, Harry was beginning to spot the first signs that John was more flexible than expected. Yet another individual was slowly realising that

Harry's ideas didn't pose a threat - and that he was not some theory-based pundit with a hidden agenda.

"I see what you mean by individual strengths and shortfalls - especially the shortfalls. I would call them weaknesses they've all got plenty of these!"

"We call them shortfalls so that people can accept them more positively - and feel more inclined to try to improve. Most of the time, anyway. I find it helps to talk about the detail as openly as possible, so that they don't feel threatened. If the boss uses any admission of weakness as a reason for blaming the person in the future, that's hardly going to encourage open-ness. Mind you, we've probably all got shortfalls that we'll never manage to improve much. Spreadsheets is one of mine."

"Oh, I'm OK on spreadsheets but I hate writing reports - I take ages to get the words right."

"Well, there you are then! But, the point with strengths and shortfalls is that the individuals are identifying their own - and taking charge of doing something about them. Just taking a bit more responsibility for their own future, really."

"OK, I can go along with that - though some of them probably won't think they have any shortfalls."

"I'll bet they probably do - they just may not want to tell you about them. They might not fancy the idea of how you'll respond!"

"What? Oh I see what you mean. Yeah - I suppose I've got to look at weaknesses more positively."

"Shortfalls shortfalls. Yes - and be patient try to encourage them some more. They need to feel that they can talk about these things openly, without you jumping down their throats. You'll find they gradually open up to you."

"So, what's the best way to get going?"

"Well, you could choose one or two problem areas - something tied in directly to the work - maybe quality control or dealing with problems over the telephone or something like that - and arrange a training session. Maybe run it yourself - or get in someone from the training department. Keep it a departmental thing though, so that your people can be working together. That will help the team bond develop and it should throw up any problems which might slow you down otherwise."

"OK - I'll give that a try. What else?"

"Well, these things take time to go over. I'll have to get back to my own work now, so we'll have to leave it for today. I'll give you this booklet though - it's notes from a seminar, which should give you a few ideas."

John flicked through the pages of the booklet, pausing to briefly read one or two of the key sections.

"Oh, here's something ... championing. Madam Director was bending my ear on that one - you've certainly sold the idea to her. She was telling me that she's going to be

talking about it at a national conference at Wembley - I can't picture her in a football strip, somehow!"

Harry laughed - but underneath felt a slight unease. He hadn't heard anything about Mrs Finlayson giving presentations at any conferences - and if it was happening, shouldn't he have at least been told about it? What was going on? He kept his worries to himself, however, and carried on talking.

"Yes, these workplace championing ideas are working very well. People are managing to do something about improving the way they achieve things, now that the mentoring and coaching atmosphere's encouraging them to help each other. Yes - empowerment - it's good to see it happen. It makes things a lot more 'immediate', if you know what I mean they can get an answer when they need it, so that they can keep moving forward, rather than waiting to go on a course sometime in the future. It provides solutions for problems, at the point when the problems actually happen. It's worked well for our department - it should for you too."

"I guess so. What else is there? What's this 'milestoning' about?"

"It gets a bit more detailed it ties in with personal development. Do you know about objectives?"

"Do I know about objectives! I've been writing bloody business objectives for years not meeting them, mind you but writing them. Yes - they're no problem!"

"OK. But it's important that you do meet them. It's more likely, if you get everybody thinking objectively - deciding what they're trying to achieve ... no, what they will

achieve and then writing these as key objectives. Each person should have about five - then they work out a sequence - priorities and so on. They have to figure out how they'll monitor the progress as well."

"And I suppose I need to keep an eye on them - to make sure each individual is progressing OK."

"That's right. Mind you, you're probably already doing that at appraisal time. Milestoning is good for teams too, when they start working in groups. They sort out overall responsibilities and pinpoint new skills areas which need development - either by having more people trained from scratch, or by improving those who are already doing it. You'll always meet one or two problems. Maybe the team's not good at forward planning, meeting deadlines, reaching agreements about outcomes"

"Meeting deadlines is an area which my lot could be working on. It's crucial in Supply, especially with this Just-in-Time stuff. I guess we've always used it for the foodstuffs but now we're supposed to use the same idea for materials and everything. It's problems with meeting supply deadlines which is the real pain in the butt at the moment probably the reason why we're having this chat as a result of my last ear-bending from Madam.

I suppose the problem's not only with my staff - it's more that the system seems to chop and change so much. You'd be amazed at the quantities of some of the foodstuffs we get through each week and we have to check constantly on quality as well as quantity, to make sure we meet standards. The quantities of meals required can suddenly shoot up at the last minute, especially with some of the transatlantic airlines!"

"That must be a pain. What are the main snags with using Just-in-Time for the equipment side of things?"

"I suppose it's largely teaching folks to plan ahead more. Before this started, we tended to hold stocks of most things so that departments would just phone us up or call in to Stores and expect us to have whatever they wanted. We usually did, as well! Mind you, we did have thousands and thousands of pounds tied up in all that stock. Some of the departments haven't got into the new ways yet, though, and give us a lot of stick when we can't supply their every whim instantly."

"Perhaps we need to have a word with Mrs Finlayson about setting out some tighter guidelines for departments. So Meeting deadlines is probably a good area for you to take for a first pilot exercise - to try it out and see how the system works."

"If it works!"

"Come on now - think positive. You are what you want to be!"

"Say again?"

"Oh, it's just something that one of my friends says."

"Right. So, what do I do first?"

"Read through these seminar notes - they'll give you a broad idea and I'll explain the detail on Thursday. You might even want to go on the seminar yourself - the company organises several each year, which are good for Self Development, Team

Working that kind of thing. The idea's built round a triangle, with the three corners represented by individuals, workplace champions and training support. It also covers things about personal planning, using communication better and working together on teams. We've applied a lot of the ideas - it's good stuff.

Also, think through some of the key problems you've had for meeting these supply deadlines you were telling me about. Note things down if you can..... to give us something to work on next time."

"Right, I'll try that. I think I've had about enough for one day - my brain's beginning to hurt! One thing though - this triangle thing you've been mentioning. How does it work?"

Harry picked up an elastic band from the desk and put it round his thumb and first two fingers, making the shape of a triangle.

"I can start off with this triangle here. The three points affect each other. Individual, champion (or just think of it as a mentor or coach for the moment) and back-up support from the training department - there they are ... the thumb and two fingers. There's a sort of fluid action between them - a synergy. Sometimes one pair is working more closely together - at other times another pair ... but there's always some level of interaction from the third one. See, if I move my fingers around, like so, each is affecting the others ... and depending on them to some extent. But, if the band drops off one of the three fingers - if we lose one of the three elements we finish up with the remaining two acting against each other like this."

Harry now had the rubber band on his thumb and second finger and these were moving backwards and forwards, working directly in opposition.

"Right, that makes sense. And what you've been doing is setting up the systems so that the three do work together. You've done well. Mind you, I can see that this is going to take a lot of my time to convince my lot. I hope it's all going to be worth it. Actually, it's got to work or I'm in deep jobby."

"So, we'll make sure it does work. Take it a step at a time little steps and big steps - encourage your team to meet the new needs as they develop. A lot of it's their normal work anyway - so it's hardly wasted effort. They'll just be working smarter."

"OK. Thanks for that. I'll give it a try. I'll put these seminar notes right on the top of my in-tray. Top priority - first thing on Monday. That's been very helpful ... sorry if I was a bit snarky at the start. You've been very patient."

Harry smiled - he could see yet another glimmer of his famous angel energy firing up.

Chapter Twenty Six

The entrance hall to the offices was empty as Harry walked in through the revolving door. The sunlight glinted on the marble floor and the large palm arrangement in the corner swayed slightly in the draught created by the door.

"Good morning, Mr Williams."

"Oh good morning, Julie - sorry, I was miles away - dreaming in a world of my own. How are you? I've always meant to ask you but there's always been other people around how are the thoughts about the aerobics progressing?"

"Very well - I'm doing three evening sessions at local sports clubs now and I've just started doing two weekend sessions at that new fitness centre which opened a few months back."

"You mean 'The Retreat' - that's a pretty classy place isn't it? I've heard really good reports about the facilities there! Well done! And how about your plans - you know - to switch to doing it full time?"

"I haven't said anything to anybody yet - but yes, I decided last week. I'm going to take the plunge I can get more classes when I'm available during the day as well. It's what I enjoy doing, so I've got to try it now, before it's too late."

"Good for you - go for it. I reckon nowadays, if a person really wants to do something, they should plan, then go out there and try it. You are what you want to

be - that kind of thing. It seems to be going well for you, with the contacts you're building up.

Just try to make sure you've enough money coming in each month to cover the basics - rent, food, electricity, a little bit of savings towards tax and so on - that'll keep down the stress levels! That's one of the down-sides of self employment - the monthly income is less regular and predictable. Mind you, with your experience here, you should ask about doing a bit of reception work at 'The Retreat' in between classes, while you're building things up. Yes - great - you'll do well.

How about this Personal Fitness Trainer stuff I'm hearing about. There seems to be money in that. Would it be worth doing the training for that as well?"

"Yes, I was thinking about that - it's quite expensive though."

"But worth it - maybe you could get a training loan and then pay it back gradually - there are these government grants now, encouraging lifelong learning. Once you've gone public in the company about handing in your notice, have a word with the Training Department. They'll tell you how to go about getting support. Talk to Guy - he's very helpful. I'll have a word with him. If nothing happens, tell me and I'll see what I can do. That's great - get on down that track, Julie - it's where you want to go!"

"It is, it really is, Mr Williams! I'll tell them at the end of the month, to give myself a little time to get my plans moving. Actually, I wasn't expecting to see you in the office today. I thought you'd be up at Wembley..... with Mrs Finlayson, you know. Isn't she giving a presentation at a big business conference, about all the workplace

championing and development things that you've been doing? I assumed you would be talking as well."

"She didn't say anything about it to me. Actually, somebody mentioned last week that she was going to Wembley - but I've been so busy, I forgot all about it. No, she seems to be flying her own kite on this one!"

Harry felt slightly puzzled as he set off along the corridor to his office. He gave Bob Cowie a call.

"Ah yes Harry. I thought you might call. Actually, I've been meaning to have a word but you've been out of your office quite a lot recently."

'That's because I've been tied up baby sitting John Kelly and his crowd, rather than getting on with my own work or working with my own team', thought Harry but he remained silent.

"I did suggest she should take you along so that you could give them some of your first-hand experiences - but she seemed keen to do it herself at this stage. She said she didn't want to take you away from your desk when you're doing all this extra, sterling work with Kelly's department. But don't worry, Harry, she's really pleased with all the things that are happening. I think she has plans. Oh, by the way, Guy from Training's been looking for you ... "

"Oh, right. I'll give him a call later."

Harry was soon busy with other things, pushing the Director's apparent unprofessional rudeness to the back of his mind. Luckily, there was little of this selfishness in the departments any more. It was great the way that co-operative team working brought out the 'better sides' of individual members of staff. People were helping each other, were more friendly, relaxed and understanding towards each other and seemed to have established common goals. Rampant egos were now few and far between and heated arguments followed by moody silences - a major feature of meetings in the 'bad old days' - were now virtually non-existent. As he came to understand more and more of his staff at individual level, he was beginning to appreciate their differing inner values and connections.

He was still thinking of these positive developments as he picked up the phone and dialled.

"Hello Guy - I believe you've been trying to get in touch."

"Harry - hi. Yes - you're getting a difficult man to get hold of!"

"I guess so - I've been working a lot with John Kelly recently - if I'm not in my department, you'll more than likely find me there. Not totally my choice, I must say - but we're progressing quite well now. What can I do for you?"

"Well, I was thinking about what we were saying last time we met. The Director's getting really keen on all this workplace championing and has suggested that we should put together a training pack for the champions ..."

"I've got one or two bits and pieces which I use, Guy - but I've never done anything formally. Yes I suppose it would be a good idea. What are her plans - have you heard anything?"

"Not a lot - although she's certainly keen to develop things further, that's for sure. What kind of things would you say we should include in the pack?"

"Well, I reckon the priorities for our combination of mentoring and coaching are different from say training or giving formal presentations. We're not too fussed about the finer points of delivery in getting the message across - it's the actual message that's key ... as well as the way they structure it, put it over in stages ..."

"Ah - the bite-sized chunks you were speaking about!"

"The very same! Yes. I'm more concerned with showing them the importance of thinking in an objective way ... knowing differing learning styles ... seeing how information builds being aware of the basic detail first before they can then flesh it out. Only at that stage will they be ready to apply their ideas properly"

"You mean the three lower stages of cognitive objectives?"

"Do I? Still get a bit lost with the jargon, sometimes!"

"Yes - first, establish the knowledge; second, explain the detail of each stage achieving comprehension. Then, and only then are they ready to move on to the third application stage - putting the ideas into practice. Makes sense really."

“Oh, I do that ... I just didn’t recognise the fancy titles! Yes, I go through that stuff with the champions, Guy. Actually, a lot of the detail’s set out in a book I use - *Growing Workplace Champions* – it might be an idea to have a few copies of that around. I reckon it’s very important that the champions manage to grasp the ideas - and the reasoning behind them – right from the beginning. Then, they need to appreciate the importance of reinforcing the theory with practice ... and knowing how much they can expect a learner to take in at any one time.”

“That’s often quite hard for people who are skilled at doing an operation - and don’t see themselves particularly as trainers. You need to be quite selective about who you choose as champions, I suppose?”

“In one way, yes. When I was looking for people to be involved in leading the induction programme, I was very careful – I chose the patient, sympathetic ones, who were likely to understand the problems that a beginner might have. But really, virtually all my staff are involved as champions now, in one way or another - so they all understand these basic standards or criteria.”

“Do they all apply them consistently, do you reckon?”

“Hell, no! Some are much better than others – and there are one or two who just can’t enter into the spirit of the whole thing ... but I’ve kept encouraging them and they do get involved in little ways. The whole process is contagious though - once we encouraged the first few to be up and running, most of the others wanted a piece of the action! It’s getting those first few doing it properly that’s crucial.”

“Which is where this training pack will help, Harry. Can we get together some time soon and establish some of the detail?”

“Sure - how about next Wednesday?”

Chapter Twenty Seven

Harry sat at Adam's Grave, a lofty vantage point on the edge of the Vale, with Lynda on one side and their dog Isla, on the other. As the two humans gazed out over the vista that stretched for miles, Isla scented the breeze, the hair flattened against her skull by the wind which always seemed to blow across this ancient tumulus on the hilltop. Below, the corn was a ripening gold, heads swaying in the ground-level breezes; above, patches of blue sky appeared through the drifting cloud cover.

"It's a beautiful world, Lynda - we're so fortunate to be living in this place! It feels so.... rightreally. I just wish we had more time to appreciate it together."

"That's the frustration, isn't it, Harry - so much time spent working. Perhaps we should try to do something where we can be together more. But I guess you're happy at work, now that things are moving. You must be really pleased with the way folks are involved in your integrated ideas now - seeing those plans come together."

"Yes, I am. I really am - even though I'm a bit bogged down with John Kelly at the moment and Denise seems to have her own agenda. The work's going very well though, that's for sure. I think there's only one department that hasn't got properly involved yet .. and they're not far off agreeing. Yes - it's going well."

As if in response, sunlight broke through the clouds, and fanned down over the landscape, bathing the fields in a camouflage of light and shade. It looked, for all the world, like the illustrations in bible story books where the caption reads 'and God spake to the people'!

"There do seem to be signs of a higher level of consciousness around nowadays. I suppose I notice it more in the folks we meet through Isabelle and Yeva than with those at work. But I would say that awareness is expanding at work a bit as well especially in the teams I'm working with. Probably with others as well, when I think about it. Maybe in a different way - at a different level from our 'Isabelle friends' - but there generally seems to be more open discussions of right and wrong .. and how people can work together .. and the fairness and unfairness of life."

"It's difficult sometimes though, isn't it, Harry. You think things are progressing getting more open and better for everyone and then things happen - like Jane being made redundant out of the blue; our local factory suddenly closing down, with work transferred to Swansea – presumably funded by new grants; Mike having that difference of opinion and being sacked for no real reason and so on. It makes you wonder whether the way people interact and business activities really are improving."

"You just have to. It can't continue at the current rate and remain stable - with manufacturing and now even services moving out of the country to chase cheaper wage bills. Things will have to realign long-term as far as employment is concerned, especially now that we supposedly have to work longer to make up for future pension shortages. The current financial situation's not helping either. It could progressively get harder to balance. The benefits of some of the older ways - traditional face-to-face service, talking to people who are actual specialists in the subject, finding a range of trades people to do work for you ... I just trust folks will gradually want some of that to return - and even be happy paying a bit more for it."

"It's the timescale of things changing that always catches us out, isn't it? We want to move on but progress seems so slow sometimes. It can reach the stage where we begin to doubt whether anything is in fact happening - if it will ever happen"

"There are signs though. People are thinking for themselves a bit more - realising that the official story is not necessarily true or right. Standing up to be counted, although some still seem to be swayed by political spin. The media's taking a more active role now going a bit too far at times, perhaps but the overall effect is casting a spotlight on much of the spin and selfishness. With politics becoming less democratic and more presidential, I guess the media's acting in place of a fairly limited political opposition. There are still negative vibes about but I reckon there are signs of co-operation happening as well ... especially if you look at individual cases."

"How do you mean, Harry?"

"Well, you know - seeing people singly rather than as part of the crowd. Then we can spot people who are confident enough to question what they see as stupid decisions, blatant spin or autocratic decision-making . What's happening with the government, big companies, the banks there's a lot more information in the public domain nowadays, with the internet, freedom of information and so on. People can find out the truth and the detail - and question decisions based on egotistical thinking. Like perks for politicians, for example. It's even happening in America. They used to blindly believe in themselves and their government as always being right and truthful. Now, there are doubts. It's those Emperor's clothes again, Lynda!"

"I suppose it's all part of your collective consciousness idea people beginning to think in the same way with the general awareness level gradually rising. What's the name you call it something to do with monkeys?"

"The hundred monkeys principle - yes. Get things started - and the rest are more likely to agree and follow in due course - well, enough of them to reach a point of critical mass anyway - enough to make it the acceptable way forward.

And doing it because they want to. That's the best way to encourage change - persuasion rather than enforcement. The cities still need a bit of love and light, though ... the aggression's still there ..."

"I suppose it's always going to be like that, where people are living so closely together. That's why more people are thinking of downshifting. It must be difficult to think clearly and co-operatively when you're in a city traffic jam or a steamy Underground carriage in London in the height of summer, especially if there's an atmosphere of threat in the air! But then, I guess there will always be the negative around, to get in the way and slow things down, Harry."

"I suppose so, but on the plus side, some of that media criticism has helped to explode myths that have been believed for a long-long time - and put a pin-prick in the inflated egos of politicians and so-called 'stars' from the sport and pop worlds who often don't twinkle quite so brightly when their surface is scratched!"

"Then there's the way the country's major assets - the railway, utilities and so on have been split up and sold off to the highest bidder – often foreign, which makes it

even dodgier. What was it that Macmillan said in Thatcher's day - 'selling off the family silver'? She brushed him aside - but he was probably right."

"Yes, many of the old ways are only memories now - I doubt if they could be recreated, even if we wanted. They may not have been perfect but they often gave a central focus point of responsibility. As you say, many of the utility companies are foreign-owned now, and selling each other's products but not producing them it just doesn't make sense!"

"I don't know, Harry, I really don't know! There's always the vested interests the 'what's in it for us?', greedy way of thinking. In amongst it all, though, I suppose there are genuine efforts being made to improve things."

"Of course there are. There's a lot of good work going on in the world. There are signs. Hundred monkeys, remember - we just have to gradually encourage the positive side – keep encouraging it and help it build."

Harry needed these opportunities to air his views - to help to sort them out clearly in his head. Lynda was not only a very good listener but was also great at picking up on any weaknesses in Harry's arguments, adding ideas of her own and getting involved in the discussions to help clarify and improve his stances and detail.

The couple walked silently along the ridge as the light began to fade gradually in the west. Isla ran on ahead, darting and sniffing as she tracked old trails across the hillside. Harry's hand reached out and grasped that of his wife. They stood together for a moment without speaking, watching the clouds gradually redden as the sun set.

"I haven't really been very close to you recently, love - I'm sorry."

"Don't be silly. You've been busy. And look, here we are - out together on the hill. You've been doing fine. You had a tough time - you're still getting over that."

"I guess so. God - that feels a long time ago now but I don't suppose it is, really..... I hope I never have to go through that again. Still, things are going OK at work - although Denise is being a bit secretive just now - I'm not sure what she's up to."

"How do you mean?"

"I keep hearing about her doing things which tie in with the workplace championing ideas - but she never mentions anything to me. She's talking to other companies, apparently. Bob doesn't seem to know much - or if he does, he's not saying. I just feel a bit left out at times, seeing that I started it all off. Still, I've always got you to moan to, haven't I!

It's strange. Often when we're together, I can't think of much to say but it's just good being with you. And I miss you when I'm at work - that's when I think of all the things to tell you! Still, we don't really have to speak, do we? I know what you're thinking and we often"

"... don't have to complete the sentences! Yes. We have been married a long time, Harry. You can't keep up a continuous conversation over thirty years! Don't feel that

you've always got to come up with new things to say it's nice just being together, you prune!"

"It's a while since you've called me that! Remember Arran?"

"Well, you really looked like a prune after you'd fallen into the river - and the water was cold!"

"But, come on Lynda - even though we understand each other so well and you know how I think I must have some strange little ways you'd like to improve?"

"Oh yes - You could be a little less serious. You tend to analyse the world rather a lot at times. Try to let go. Think of Isabelle - she always finds time to laugh. It's good to laugh - it keeps a perspective on things. Keeps you healthy, too. Will you try to laugh a bit more, Harry? Give yourself a break from setting the world to rights all the time!"

"I'll try - remind me if I'm getting too po-faced! The world generally - and work especially - could do with a lot more, straight-forward laughter. You're right. That's what I like about you, Lynda. You're always there to keep me on my toes - bring me back to reality when I get too bogged down in things or when I get carried away!"

"You're trying some pretty adventurous stuff, Harry - some totally new ideas you've got lots of your kites up in the air at the same time ... and some of them are tugging in different directions. Holistic thinking is hard for a lot of people to get their heads round, especially in business. Don't worry though, I think you're doing just fine - and we're OK. Just keep thinking positively!"

"Well, maybe so - but I'm still grateful for what you do. It would be so much harder for me if we didn't support each other if you thought some of my ideas and priorities were stupid and 'off the wall'. You see it with Annie in Isabelle's group. Her husband rubbishes her ideas at every opportunity - it can't be easy for her to keep on the track. But she seems to - perhaps that's where the strength of the group helps her. I tell you what - how about spoiling ourselves a bit? How about going out for a meal at the weekend or something else if you prefer. Just to celebrate."

"Celebrate what?"

"Oh I don't know just being us. Still loving each other being together being like minded"

"The heavenly twins, eh? Two little pieces of your twinkling angel energy, bonded together in spirit and travelling onwards!"

"Onwards and upwards - it feels like that sometimes. Yes - little pieces of blended consciousness, that's what we are!"

Chapter Twenty Eight

“That was great, Isabelle.”

“Thank you - it’s nice to have these meditation sessions on a Sunday evening - gives us a chance to get together and just be for a while.”

The small group sat peacefully round the table, staring at the candles flickering in the centre. The music played on quietly. Harry looked across at Lynda and smiled happily. They were with friends.

Yeva broke the silence.

“What do you think the group will be doing next, Isabelle? You’ve spent several years working at the ancient sites, balancing the earth energies. We’ve probably completed these now. Where do we go from here?”

“Well, I’m not sure that they are complete. Isabelle said we should expect a bit of a climax at the final site last year but it didn’t really happen - so perhaps there’s some more work to do on the land. I enjoy going out on our little expeditions.”

“We appear to have reached one of these blocks you go on about, Harry.”

“Yes, indeed, Lynda. Part of the group’s winding path. Mind you, it’s almost turned full circle, hasn’t it - if I can mix metaphors! Not necessarily a good thing for progress anyway. I guess it’s down to trying to figure out why we’re doing it - our objective or purpose. What would you say, Isabelle?”

“Why - well, there’s the question! Because it’s right, I suppose. Because we have a message to get out there into the world. Because

“But are we getting it out there I mean, really out there?”

“You must have faith. There are many like us, meditating, linking, working with the light and positive energies.”

“We believe that and know that - but it’s a bit ‘virtual’, to use a trendy word. Our faith tells us that we are part of a greater network - but we’ve no real idea what the network actually is. We sense the connection but we can’t be sure of the contact.”

“Harry, Harry, your faith in people isn’t fading, is it?”

“No - quite the opposite. What I’m trying to say is how do I put it that we’re sort of working in an inner circle. We’re being introspective preaching to the converted, if you like. We need to be spreading the message further outside the comfort zone. Trying to enlighten other people

“Sounds a bit like the Jehovah’s Witnesses. I’m not up for knocking on doors.”

“No, no. I don’t mean that. I mean well practising more widely what we think and talk about in the group here.”

“I think Harry means applying spiritual or holistic or selfless ... or whatever you want to call it ... thinking in our day to day lives. Like he’s been doing with his department at work. Is that right, Harry?”

“Yes, Yeva. It’s not easy. We keep going two steps forward and one back. We tend to assume too much. Some things seem quite normal and obvious to me now – as it is to all the others who have ‘seen the light’ or however you want to describe it ... such as working in a co-operative way or empowering someone to do something. But, when we initially tried to apply them in some other department, they were viewed with suspicion, or total lack of understanding.”

“That’s your hidden agendas, I suppose.”

“It could be - but it’s more that they seem to be thinking from a different viewpoint .. “

“People working at different vibrational levels ... different levels of consciousness.”

“Yes, I guess so. People are different - at varying stages of learning and development - but we should be able to help more of them move forward. They might be at different rungs on the ladder, so to speak, but I think our next priority should be to help more people to climb on to and then up that consciousness ladder. That’s our next challenge, I reckon move towards them a bit more. Be more proactive. Don’t wait for them to come to us that’s what I feel, anyway.”

The group fell silent for a while. There was a slight frisson of tenseness in the air. Some evidently felt that Harry was being too outspoken ... too ‘tall poppy’. They

thought of Isabelle as the guru, to be listened to - and didn't like it when others took the floor.

That was not Isabelle's way, however. She was no guru and, although she liked to direct, was keen on others taking an active part, albeit within her parameters. Like Harry's paths along the track in business, Isabelle really wanted people to take more of a hand in developing their personal paths - in becoming more empowered - rather than falling in line behind their perceived leader, waiting patiently for her to make the moves. That was not what she wanted - but she hadn't quite managed to establish the correct atmosphere to encourage others to open out. Harry, perhaps more than many, showed the confidence and awareness to take the necessary step forward. Isabelle broke the silence.

"What you say is true, Harry. It's not that our faiths or beliefs are threatened but we perhaps do tend to fall back, looking inward into our own group perhaps even feel a little superior at times ..."

"The old ego coming to the fore ..."

"Yes. We do seem to be in danger of losing our spiritual steam sometimes, I have to say. It does happen. When you're working towards something and then it doesn't quite peak in the way you expect ... it leaves you feeling slightly incomplete. Directionless. But at the same time knowing that we are going along the right lines. So, what's best to do? What do you think, Harry? You've been applying our holistic or spiritual way of thinking in business ... and getting things moving. Perhaps it's time to turn the tables and try to apply some business thinking in our world. What do you think?"

There was a slight stirring in the group. With a cough, Daphne spoke up.

“No disrespect to Harry but I feel you should make the decisions, Isabelle. We want to hear from you.”

“But that’s it, Daphne. We are a group of individuals here. I may be the focus but I don’t want to stifle the thoughts of others. I want you all to say things, suggest things. See me like a shaman - with knowledge to impart - and not a guru, to revere. That’s not what I want - that’s not how I see it. Just as we have ideas which can be applied in the business world - and Harry has been doing this more than most of us there are perhaps ideas from the business world that can help us. That shouldn’t be a problem for any of us. How about it, Harry?”

There was a ripple of body language round the circle of chairs as a few minds closed down. Daphne sat with arms crossed across her chest, staring at the candle flame.

“Well, OK, Isabelle, if you want. I think what you’re speaking about is called ‘facilitation’.....”

Yeva burst out laughing.

“The Great Facilitator, eh Harry?”

“That’s right. Yeva and I have been talking about this, on and off, for a while now. It’s a bit like having a meeting chairman or organiser a means of keeping things

moving in the right direction. The facilitator has a fairly clear idea of the direction the group should be going in and some of the knowledge that is necessary “

“..... but he or she steps back a bit and encourages the group to take the initiative. Yes, we’ve tried some of that in our company already. It works quite well. It was hard for a start, as we were used to being told what to do by the manager. We just sat there like blobs waiting for him to make the moves. But he didn’t - he kept pushing us gently forward, listening to ideas, encouraging those who weren’t speaking, summarising, keeping us on track periodically, when we got bogged down.”

“That’s good, Irene. Your manager was doing a good job there. So, if we think of Isabelle as the manager, so to speak

“Oh, goody I’ve always fancied being a manager!”

“Yes - well, consider yourself promoted! Isabelle’s the manager but she’s working in an atmosphere of facilitation. Expecting us to say things and take the initiative and not sit like sponges, waiting for her to direct things all the time. Then each of us can take some responsibility.”

“Oh, you mean empowerment.”

“Yes, empowerment. We all have feelings about what it’s best to do. We can’t express it as clearly and knowledgeably as Isabelle - but we can only learn by trying. Take introducing and leading a meditation session, for example. Has anyone other than Isabelle tried to do that?”

"I tried once ... just for a small group of us. It was hard - and it didn't flow anything like it does when we do it here ..."

"But you did it. And the group benefited from it....."

".....and you'll be better and more confident the next time you try."

As the group relaxed into the topic, it turned out that there were several little sub-groups around who met together for healing, or evening meditation or working with positive energies in a variety of ways. There were many waiting in the wings, trying things in small ways but not wishing to push themselves forward, in case they offended. The conversation ranged freely, with no attempt by anyone to take over aggressively but merely activating a simple desire to expand their experience positively. Even Daphne's arms slowly unfolded in line with her mind.

"Empowerment is good if it's done positively, encouraging people to become more involved. It's not passing the buck. A mixture of what we call facilitation and empowerment can allow experience, knowledge and skills to expand around the group. People will be encouraged to branch out, try new things, share their ideas more confidently, reach a wider audience. And if we can gradually do this more and more, our esoteric message can just as gradually spread."

"There's another area where we can learn from business practices - ways we can communicate our messages better. Nowadays, there are so many techniques available, over and above just talking together in groups. If we can get into print, that spreads the message further - although we may not know who's reading it!"

"I get regular e-mails from one or two people. Sometimes they are quite valuable - but sometimes they are so long, I just can't be bothered reading them."

"That can be a problem with e-mails - especially these mass circulation ones. They tend to grow and grow - or are sent to vast mailing lists, whereas in any other print form, they would probably be edited down....."

"Like in business reports, you have to have what's called the 'executive summary' - the key points set out in one page maximum, for the boss to read"

"I don't see why he can't read the whole thing, if I've taken the time to write it .."

"You may think that, Peter - but he won't, so it's likely that the impact of your report would be lost. You've probably already set out your key points in your conclusions anyway and written an introduction so most of the executive summary is already there in the report. It just needs a bit of tweaking!"

"So, what you're saying is that, if we're trying to get our message across more widely in writing, producing articles for newspapers and magazines or circulating e-mails, we should really get to the point write things down as key sentences not have too much extra detail. That sort of thing. Is that what you mean, Harry?"

"Absolutely. And make things easy to read - use bullet points, indenting, short paragraphs, short sentences. Give the information in small chunks - make it easy for the reader to digest."

“Well, I produce an information website and I keep all my information short and easy to read. Lots of people visit my website ...”

“..... but some of the stuff goes on for ages, Andrew. A bit of editing would help, really it would.”

“I don’t agree. I need to explain things in that amount of detail. The readers need it, so they can understand ...”

“But they won’t understand if they lose interest and stop reading half way through ...”

“You’ve no proof that they’re doing that!”

“..... and you’ve no proof that they’re not. You know the number of hits on your site - but you can’t have any idea how much information is being absorbed - or even whether or not people are actually staying in the site long enough to read the detail!”

Things were getting slightly heated in the group, as egos began to bounce around the walls of the room. Here was a case of the first attempts at empowerment requiring a degree of guidance and control. Isabelle quietly brought the discussion back onto an even keel, establishing some of the guidelines - the ground rules - to make it possible for group discussions to progress positively. Gently, egos were massaged back into their shells and out of sight, with the silent hope that they would gradually be held more under control.

“So, to summarise so far, in order to get more experience of spreading the word, we should be trying to have more open discussions, with more people involved in

leading sessions - or even parts of sessions. We should see discussions as a two-way process - listening as well as talking. See me as a chairwoman - or facilitator - to keep the ideas moving forward but don't feel that you shouldn't be speaking out yourself. I would like you all to take more of an active part in the group - suggest things; bring along things to read; lead any activities that you want to share that kind of thing.

Then, we need to try spreading the message a bit more. Set down some of our ideas; try to write articles and things for magazines; have the confidence to discuss our thoughts ... and not just amongst ourselves - with people outside the group as well. Spread the message - explain and apply our beliefs. Maybe offer to give talks to other groups of people - but to all kinds, not just those that are spiritually-inclined like us. So that all this is successful, we need to think carefully how we are saying things, so that the message is coming over clearly and consistently

“..... and aimed at the right level. We must always remember that different people are receptive at different levels - so we need to tailor the information so that it suits these different audiences. And, if we can build in ways which encourage more discussion, to get answers to some of their questions, that helps as well.”

“Right, Harry, thanks for that.”

“It's a pleasure, Isabelle. Thanks for listening ... thanks everyone for listening. Maybe there's one final thing to say. It takes time to get these new ideas moving - we need to do things in steps and stages”

“That's your milestones, isn't it Harry?”

“Yes, indeed. If we set ourselves some milestones, with timings - get an article printed in the local newspaper; invite three suitable people to join our group; seek out situations where we can improve our confidence by discussing our ideas in public, when appropriate that kind of thing it gives us targets and dates to head towards so that we can get a variety of kites flying with new ideas, trying to attract attention. It all helps to keep us motivated.”

“And spreads the word a little, too. That’s been very helpful, Harry. Bless you.”

“It’s a real pleasure.”

Yeva laughed.

“I can see your angel energy glowing from here, Harry!”

Harry smiled happily, as he gazed silently, if slightly self-consciously, at the flickering candle flame.

Chapter Twenty Nine

Harry felt frustrated.

Not from being in the tempting presence of attractive young women at work - or through any shortfall in his marriage with Lynda

No - Harry's frustration lay with John Kelly!

'Nothing personal,' thought Harry, 'apart, that is, from my own personal development.'

Harry had been working with John and his staff for several months now and things had certainly progressed - but oh so slowly. Harry had seen his theories about the meandering path along the track of progress illustrated to the 'n'th degree. If it had been visible, he reckoned it would have looked like a ball of wool once a kitten had tired of playing with it! In John Kelly's department, the old ways were deep ways - and the old hurts deep hurts. Modern management techniques were still something of a mystery to John, who still had some way to go in the art of listening to, let alone negotiating with his members of staff and others. At times Harry felt the learning in Kelly's department was very like Charles' and Jane's first faltering attempts at walking, those many years ago.

No sooner did the teams begin to stagger forward, spurred on by interest in some new activity or fresh progress, than they would falter, landing with a bump on their collective and figurative back-side, as a result of some flash of group insecurity.

"We shouldn't be making these decisions"; "I don't want to take the responsibility for something like this"; "Why isn't Kelly here?"; "What do we do next?"; "They'll never agree to us doing this anyway"; "You always pay attention to what she wants!"

The worries and lack of confidence kept bubbling to the surface, like lava in a semi-dormant volcano. And Kelly himself was just as hesitant and subjective.

At the same time, Harry's own departmental team were moving forward confidently, empowered to progress by themselves - which only served to increase the degree of Harry's frustration. Indeed, the empowerment which he had encouraged in his own team was now making him feel rather left out of things at times. They confidently discussed, negotiated and progressed with the work of their various projects, without needing to refer to Harry much, if at all! True, this is what the personal and team development was all about. True, their confidence showed that the training and development which Harry had introduced was really working but still he would have liked a little more of his old, hands-on involvement! However, he had to remain objective about it all. If they could succeed with him playing more of a background facilitator's role - fine! That was, after all, a sign of good management.

'I suppose that's what's happened with me and Yeva', thought Harry to himself. 'We used to have long chats about what I should be doing. It seems like ages since I've asked her advice I suppose my personal development has progressed to the point where I can fly solo as well. I guess, like me with my team, she's always there if I need her.'

Things were definitely improving within Kelly's Supply Logistics Department, however, despite the hiccups and recurring doubts. Individual team members were

beginning to help each other through championing, although this was still working at an ad hoc level, with some individuals better organised and more willing than others. Harry was using the 'softly, softly' approach, encouraging rather than coercing. The signs of progress were beginning to glimmer, however. This was the main thing, as far as he was concerned. The number of 'converts' building towards his hundred 'monkeys' in John Kelly's department was growing - it would only be a matter of time before the critical mass point was reached and real change initiated. As long as he could keep the momentum going.

One or two teams were actively involved in development projects as well, with John focusing his attention on the one which was reviewing standards regarding the meeting of deadlines. They had already identified that the current recording system was so complex and unwieldy that it was the major problem. They were now reviewing the efficiency of the whole internal communication process, both within the department itself and between departments.

As in many company departments, documentation was overwhelming the system - so much for the much lauded 'paperless society' which computer technology had promised. The team had established that the key problem was all the amendment records, confirmations, update reports, risk assessments and quality assurance documents, provided through forms, e-mails and other forms of 'bumph'. The Communication team was enthusiastically working on ways to identify and sever the useless heads from this bureaucratic hydra, to provide a more sensible, streamlined alternative.

One of their key issues was the volume of e-mails used. Although seen as valuable to record the progress and outcomes of discussions, the volume of copy e-mails sent

to large mailing lists 'for information' had got out of hand. As well as reducing the quantity, the team felt it was time to improve the quality of content and layout, bearing in mind that many of these could be used as legally-binding written documents.

Harry watched the team working positively and happily towards their collectively-agreed outcomes - it was really gratifying when signs of progress began to show. Things were definitely beginning to move in John Kelly's department - perhaps faster than he had believed. Harry was however beginning to feel increasingly that his own wings were being held, trimmed and restricted.

In focusing so much of his time on the paths of others, his own goals were beginning to become soft-focused. It was time for him to review his own path it was time for a chat with Yeva - she who could see ways forward!

.....

"But you do feel you're still progressing personally?"

"I suppose so, Yeva, but it's difficult to see sometimes. The things I'm doing with John Kelly's staff are very much the same as those I did with my people so I guess I'm not really advancing, even though I'm putting a lot more effort into doing it. I feel really knackered."

"So, the old angel energy's a bit droopy at the wing tips eh?"

"You could say that. Trust you to see the funny side of things! I suppose I was getting a bit po-faced about it - all too serious, just as Lynda said."

"You pay attention to what that lady tells you - she's a wonderful support, Harry, take care of her!"

"I will, Yeva. But how do I get back onto my own development path?"

"I think you're well along it. How many staff are there in Kelly's Department?"

"Fifty three, excluding John. I know that number off by heart, although sometimes it seems as if there are hundreds!"

"And how many do you think you've managed to move forward - how many are working fairly positively with the team ideas helping – coaching - mentoring – championing each other a bit getting themselves and their ways of working sorted out? How many do you think have gained even the faintest glimmer of your good-old angel energy?"

"Oh, I guess most of them - all but maybe five or six, who still hang back in the shadows and don't get involved. They've stopped being obstructive though - I guess they're too much in the minority now to have much effect. They still distract me sometimes with their negative vibes."

"Just try pretending they're not there - the negativity's obviously dying out in them. And remember your theory about the battery's plus and minus. Having them there unchanged should remind you - and the others - what they were all like, before you

started working with them. Think positive - you've brought around forty seven of them on towards higher things they will slowly begin to act more on their own. You've obviously more or less convinced John Kelly, which is a real success..... and of course, your own department's humming along happily on a higher note. You've got a great fan in Bob Cowie"

"Yes, Bob and Denise Finlayson seem to be very supportive.."

"Mmm I see a slight shadow around your dear Director at the moment, but Cowie's set to help you as much as he can. So, all in all, that's a lot of influence you've had on people since you've joined the company. Why are you feeling down, for God's sake - what are you expecting - Perfection?"

"No I suppose I'd like to concentrate on my own development for a while. It may seem a bit selfish, but I'd like to have time to think about my own progress along my own path to become more aware"

"You, dear son, can consider yourself aware - vibrating in harmony like the proverbial spinning top. Don't you see - your development is happening through their development. Your progress is coming through learning from and helping in their progress. That's what being a good manager is all about, surely. That's what holistic development is all about, too. Helping and supporting others, teaching others; concentrating on others. These benefits become benefits for the whole organisation –as well as moving your own development forward, of course. Think of the extra experience which you've had in these last months - think of the new things you've learned. That's all part of your own personal and professional development."

"As long as the organisation steers clear of the hidden agendas."

"This is true. On a broader scale, holistic development means being aware of what's going on around you, both locally and throughout the world and becoming involved in it directly and more altruistically. It's all down to seeing that "bigger picture". It means working with your family to improve bonds and encourage love and interaction. It means linking with friends and helping - or championing - them to understand the wider nature of things. It means thinking positively and selflessly. It means working towards being totally free of ego.

Doing all this will encourage you to review the way you live - and focuses your mind on ways that you can improve even more and so your development continues, timelessly. In the same way that it works with teams, your whole person becomes more than the sum of its individual bits - your skills, knowledge, experience, beliefs and so on. Just think of it as your overall glowing energy - your aura - being greater than the sum of these individual sparks of what you call angel energy. You must be aware of that? Are you clear in your own mind what your own bigger picture is?"

"Bigger picture - how do you mean?"

"Your ultimate goal - why you're here - what you're supposed to be doing - what your focus is - how you fit in with the great master plan of Life how else can I put it?"

"Oh, that! Yes. I see my goal in life as working with people within business - to increase their awareness and empower them towards a greater degree of co-operation. To enlighten the proverbial 'man in the street' or perhaps I should say 'person in the street' nowadays!"

"The 'man in the street' will do just fine for me; I'm not heavily into all this PC stuff! Actions speak louder than mere words."

"OK, I won't quibble with that! People like us, who have thought through some of the ways forward and have some sort of belief structure to help us, are fairly well catered for, thank God. We also know like-minded people we can discuss things with, to help us over the barriers of doubt and confusion. And we're able to inspire, relax and focus our minds objectively, to head towards the next steps on the path.

But others need help to progress - not forced on them but ready and available when they become more aware and feel the time is right. It'll help them overcome the hidden agendas and protect them from attempts at aggression and assertion. In the end, I suppose we're working towards a more co-operative way of thinking, where they can push aside the negative and concentrate on developing themselves spiritually, for want of a better word."

"So, if you think it's happening in life generally, don't you see it happening in business as well - with your department and John Kelly's? And these are only the ones that you've been concentrating on helping. You're making it happen, Harry. Also, there are many others like you, never forget that. You're not alone, by any manner of means. Think about that for a moment. There's a lot of help around - the broader help and development you speak about is happening, all around, universally! And also remember that you can receive as well as give otherwise your own energy levels and health will suffer."

"I suppose so but it seems to take such a time - to move so slowly....."

"Harry, people have been working with this for hundreds and hundreds of years - thousands probably - it does take time, you're right. And remember that attitudes have changed during this time - the 'goalposts have shifted', as you would say! In some ways, signs of self-centred greed have doubtless increased during your lifetime, alongside all the technological advances and attitude changes. If you like, it's the negative side of empowerment. It's probably more evident in the business world - you've taken on a very big challenge focusing on trying to change business views.

Take the most recent revolution, in the past twenty years or so - some call it a technological or information revolution but that seems to be heaping too much blame on the role of the computer. It's almost a human reorganisation revolution"

"Maybe a re-engineering revolution would describe it better, as it's linking the changes in technology with the re-structuring of the people involved."

"Maybe so - I don't find the thought of re-engineering people a happy one, I'm afraid. However, whatever we call it, people feel threatened. Longer hours at work and brief, snatched holidays are praised for showing increased efficiency and worker participation. I read recently that a lot of people are not even taking the holidays that are due them each year. In truth, that probably stems more from fear of being found dispensable. Basing progress on survival of the fittest does little to encourage the selfless approach we know is necessary for co-operative working. Constantly pushing for change - sometimes for no clear reason - will tend towards human dignity suffering in the end. A period of stability must come, Harry, before it's too late."

"I guess we can have this when hidden agendas are exposed as wrong; when people are more honest with each other - right across the board; when politicians remember they are representing the people - not controlling them; When short-termism and spin are seen as manipulation; when ideas can be shared confidently, without fear of points-scoring

"..... and when business is run in a more ethical way - giving more attention to the bigger picture and less to the bottom line. That's when your holistic development ideas will really take off!"

"I look forward to that day, Yeva, I really do."

"It may seem idealistic to some but it's closer than they think. You've managed to do a lot already - don't you go belittling your efforts. There's a lot of momentum building in that company of yours - and now that the ideas have started rolling, it'll be hard for anyone to stand in their way."

"I can't imagine anyone would want to now. You can see the extra confidence showing in people - a confidence which comes from knowing what is going on around them - and what is planned for the future and how they fit into the frame."

"I certainly see these emanations in you Harry, and they will grow as long as you are allowed to"

"Sure With the right atmosphere, people can work openly together - and with the self-help atmosphere that this whole process brings, people feel they have an

individual, personal value within the company. This encourages them to work at improving their own capabilities - to build them further holistically."

"Development through selflessness, mutual help and support - an integrated triangle supported by love or respect, Harry - that's what it's all about. Call it any fancy business jargon you like but that's what it boils down to ultimately. Cut through all the crap - shrug off the negatives they're dwindling by the day, believe me - just focus on the selflessness and positive co-operation. You're doing a grand job, Harry. But you still have a lot to do. Keep on working with the positive, the light keep that angel energy twinkling!"

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Harry's work in the company continued with increased vigour after his chat with Yeva.

The energy in so many of the individuals - and through them, the teams and departments - had certainly heightened over these past months. People were no longer thinking with their own egos to the fore but were working closely together as members of the various teams. Informal workplace championing was happening on a daily basis, with the all-important follow-on support available where and when required, making sure that these new skills were reinforced confidently. As a direct result, individual strengths and capabilities were visibly improving and there was a happier, more positive atmosphere around in the department. The integrated triangle was pulsing visibly!

Although some of John Kelly's groups still struggled to find their preferred paths, with this soul-searching threatening to slow down their attempts at co-working, there were many examples of team co-operation shining through in the various project teams.

The complete holistic development process was now working well within several of the departments, with others showing interest. The Director spent a lot of her time promoting the ideas at conferences - and showing visiting delegations the benefits of the process in action around the company. Harry was often called in to talk briefly about the system and how it had evolved. He still felt uneasy being kept away from the overall planning, policy making and information dissemination which Mrs Finlayson seemed to now control. However, he had to admit that she wasn't blocking any of the plans - or restricting his path in any noticeable way. If there was any flaw, it was that of sketchy communication. Here was a company whose working practices and values had been challenged by a more open - dare he suggest, spiritual - way of thinking with the benefits clearly visible.

The energy was certainly being focused - the positive atmosphere in the building was tangible Yeva and Isabelle would doubtless have been able to see it, if they'd visited - but there was no need they both had faith in Harry and knew that he was progressing positively towards his goal.

The angel energy was awakened - and glowing brightly!

Chapter Thirty

"You're late back this evening."

Yeva was standing by her car in the drive as Harry walked to the front door, after parking in the garage. Music sounded faintly through her open door.

"I've been giving a talk to a group of trainers - spreading the message about Holistic Development and workplace championing and all that. Denise - the Director - arranged it for me. It went down pretty well - lots of questions and very little cynicism. You're out pretty late yourself.....that's Aeolia's 'Angel Love' playing, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's really peaceful. I've been out visiting Isabelle - we had a wonderful evening - it seems like we talked about everything under the sun! I must tell you some of it but, will you just look at these stars! What an absolutely wonderful display!"

Harry looked up. It was a clear, bright night and the black mantle was peppered with twinkling stars. It always struck Harry as wonderful that they could see so many - with the various recognisable formations standing out amongst the huge range he still had to learn about. This was so much better than his years in London, where the stars were masked by the permanent sodium glare in the night sky.

"It's amazing, isn't it - so vast."

"And those are just the ones you can see. Look outwards into the Universe, Harry, what can you see?"

"We're only beginning to learn the half of it , Yeva....."

"Not even that. See that star there - the pulsing one ..."

"With the different colours - blue, red, yellow?"

"That's Sirius. Now, there's a case for you our scientists discovered a second star orbiting it in 1970 we had no proof before that yet an African tribe had described the existence of the orbit centuries before. How did they know? You can't see it with the naked eye, obviously. There's a lot of knowledge out there which we already have, Harry: it's just waiting to be rediscovered!"

"Now, that's a weird thought, but I know what you mean. Isabelle said something like that to me, once before. Mankind thinks that it has advanced so much - but in some ways it's lost many of the ancient wisdoms. I just wonder if we'll turn full circle and rediscover some of these old ways. Encouraging inter-personal awareness again and reducing the dependence on using technology impersonally; individual choice gaining ground once more over standardisation."

"I agree, Harry. It's not really a retrograde step to realise and recreate some of the old ways, when we realise that they had advantages over the new. It's happened in civilisations before Anyway, how's your own self development progressing?"

"It's moving again, thanks. I'm getting more time to myself at work now - I'm mainly involved in my own department at the moment, thank God. Denise Finlayson and an outside consultant seem to be taking on many of the new initiatives I had a bit of a go at her about it at a recent managerial meeting but I don't suppose it

matters now, as things are progressing so well. I obviously still get a lot from my chats with you - and through going along to Isabelle's sessions."

"You carry on your work with Isabelle, Harry - she's a grand woman and she has so much to offer. She appreciates your input to her sessions. Without giving anything away, she was saying this evening that she has high hopes for you if you can just be a little more confident about yourself."

"I'm working at it Yeva, I really am trying. I'm reading various books too, which helps to expand the mind a bit."

"Keep reading - read as broadly as you can there's so many good books around. You'll find many different angles to the same message - and many messages from different view points. Read them all Harry, it's all part of your development - ponder on this. White Eagle's a good source – straight forward and understandable. Discuss the detail as well - I'm sure that Lynda will be happy to listen to your ideas - and it will help her development as well. You're keen on communication - so you know the benefits of discussing and sharing ideas.

Look for the positive - reject anything which seems to dwell on negativity. Don't concern yourself with conspiracy theories and all that stuff. And, above all, keep open and selfless - work from the heart, as well as the head. If it really feels right, it is right - but be conscious of others, when making these judgements. Get the level right. Take their awareness into account as well, to find the happy medium."

"Happy medium - I always think of Isabelle as being the happy medium! Yes - I am trying to keep to the positive ways. It's difficult sometimes though, when you find

people whom you expect to think and act in an open, holistic way, who then act very selfishly - trying to manipulate things for their own benefit."

"Ah yes - the old ego problem again. It's certainly around. Perhaps it shows touches of insecurity. Sometimes it's just a phase when they're trying to assert - to establish a name for themselves"

"But sometimes it seems to be a little darker than that. When they're using others, riding forwards on their backs before rejecting them or, worse still, sucking out their ideas and making them their own"

"This will happen, Harry. It's all part of those hidden agendas. Be trusting but be sensible. Don't expect everyone to work by your standards. It might happen ultimately though I doubt it will in this lifetime..... uniformity is certainly wide of the mark at the moment. Standards and priorities vary. Always remember that people are on different rungs of the ladder - some need more information and patience than others. Don't expect too much, too quickly - develop your connections slowly and carefully. Some of the things that are obvious to you are still earth shattering revelations to others. It's all part of the overall development process, Harry - be patient with them."

"I try, Yeva but they seem to progress so slowly, some of them."

"They have different priorities - a different agenda - which will be harder to change. We must understand that."

"Yes. So, how do you reckon I can progress with my own professional development - moving things forward at work?"

"You're on the right lines there, Harry - stick with it. Keep an open mind but remain aware as well. Trust by all means, but remember that there is still 'bottom line' thinking around - what is it they say - a shareholder ..."

"A shareholder society rather than a stakeholder society. Yes. Politicians seemed to get excited about stakeholding for a short while, but then the focus of spin shifted for the great leader of the moment and it just as suddenly faded off. The shareholders won through again! I guess, in the end, it's a case of finding a balance point involving them both. We certainly need the capital from the shareholders - but we need the motivated effort from the stakeholders just as much!"

You're right - we need both, to allow holistic thinking to spread more universally."

"Perhaps that's the next stage - to empower people towards thinking 'stakeholding' - employees feeling that they have a real say in things - in the working and decision making, the objectives and priorities..... like there is in the works council."

"Rather than companies only thinking profit, Yes. Stakeholder thinking certainly gets people involved - it gives a feeling that you're more in control of your own destiny. Mind you, they use the same argument for giving Directors large bundles of shares! As a stakeholder, you're likely to feel more involved - that your standards and priorities won't be messed about by some major shareholder in the City who knows little about your company and cares even less! Keep an open mind - flex to meet needs as they happen. People don't like to change too quickly - encourage them ...

don't force them. Be the Great Facilitator, Harry. Remember the power of positive thought and reflection as well - those will help you see the way forward....."

"Yes, it's helping already. The holistic ideas are increasingly seeing the light of day in business as "spiritual intelligence" - different name much the same ideas. Things become clearer when we think our way through them - brainstorming ideas in a sensible way, with everyone co-operating. You're right about being flexible - we've changed many of the ways we used to do things, now that people feel they can feed in ideas for positive discussion. It's all down to thinking objectively and openly. I'm sure that it's happening - the signs are there, all around us."

"They sure are! Just continue working to make these signs clearer for everyone. Remember there are different levels of consciousness what is it you say - 'Assume nothing!' Don't think, because you see or understand something, that everyone else will see it in the same way. Be patient be the champion within - be the selfless facilitator who enables others to gradually open their eyes. That's a great gift! Always remember that something which is totally obvious to you may prove a real stumbling block - or revelation - for others."

"I guess that's one of the most important things for getting information across, Yeva - judging the level of the listener and directing the message at that level ..."

"Sure - and being a good listener yourself helps as well. And another thing - don't underestimate the power of meditation - it helps to focus and concentrate and the energy generated can change outcomes, believe me."

"You're talking as if you're planning to move on, Yeva. You're not thinking of leaving us, are you? We need you here, you know!"

"I may have to move on soon; there's other work for me to do. You are well down the track now, Harry and you have Isabelle and Lynda to keep you moving forward. You can manage, with the help of that angel energy you see so clearly!"

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Harry sat at his desk, his eyes focused on the pink quartz crystal which he used ostensibly as a paperweight - but which he privately thought of as his "thinking crystal", used as a focus for quiet meditation times at his desk.

Things had gone so well for him over the past year or so. His work with individual and team development had progressed with few real problems - slower than he would have liked, to be sure, but there had been no problems which had stopped or reversed progress in any major way. He now had the quiet satisfaction of seeing more and more departments becoming involved in the process.

Individual development, planning, team building, milestoneing, mentoring, coaching, goal and objective setting, effective communication ... all these elements of the integrated triangle, workplace championing ideas were being used positively to bring about an overall holistic improvement to the working atmosphere. The energy of the collective consciousness emanating from the staff shone through at meetings and in

the building generally, as more and more staff members provided their individual glimmers of energy - and combined them for the common good.

The atmosphere in many of the work areas was increasingly positive, with people sharing, co-operating with and supporting each other. Team interaction was also working very well within (as well as between) particular departments. The visits by outsiders to view the developments at first hand sent encouraging signals to everyone - not least to Harry, who saw it as silent endorsement of his on-going efforts.

The company had flourished so well that it had become the focus of attention - thanks largely to being featured in the latest management practice book written by one of those business gurus - complete with three page interview with the Director herself (Harry even got a mention – progress indeed!). Hardly a week went by without a visit by a group of managers from one or other company hoping to incorporate some holistic, ethical thinking within their development plans. Many of these were from the UK but others came from much further afield. Harry's future was full of hope the angel energy was really flowing freely now!

The phone on Harry's desk rang.

"Ah, Harry. The Director's secretary here. Could you pop up and see her?"

Chapter Thirty One

Harry walked along the corridor, heading towards the lift and the Director's penthouse office.

Damn, Damn.

Why was it that, in situations like this, he always felt at a disadvantage, getting all tense and nervous. Harry felt the apprehension rising in his throat - drying it up, tightening it - as he stood waiting for the lift to Big Denise's office.

"Hello, Harry. Alright?"

Harry hadn't even noticed Anne walking towards him - which was a real sign of the degree to which he was caught up in his own thoughts!

"Oh sorry I was thinking about something yes fine. And you?"

"I'm OK, thanks. I'm a wizard on the word processor now - thanks for organising that!"

"Glad that it finally happened. Things come if you want them enough and you know ways to overcome the blocks eh?"

"Sure do. Thanks anyway."

Perhaps it was just old Copeland wounds being opened again, but what could Big Denise want? Why the sudden summons? He'd been doing OK recently - plenty of development in his own department and periods of involvement with an ever-increasing number of others. He'd had the odd argument with her about the way things were being done on occasion - and about how he was being left out of decisions but nothing he felt to be too serious. However Yeva had said that she wasn't sure of The Director.

"Come! Oh, it's you Harry. Come in. I think you've met Gordon Leslie, haven't you?"

A tall guy with glasses and a friendly face stood up and offered his hand.

"Yes, I think we met at one or two of the presentations. How are you Harry? Denise has told me so much about you and the work you've been doing. You've really got the Individual Development Planning and Workplace Championing System working amazingly. I've been doing work with several companies using quite similar ideas - and the set-up here is miles ahead of anything else I've seen."

"Oh, thanks."

Harry looked across at the Director, wondering what came next.

"As you maybe know, Harry, Gordon is a Development Consultant who specialises in personal and professional development. He's been working with me on an ad-hoc basis for several months now - and I think he's got to know our funny little ways rather well!"

Gordon smiled.

"That's part of the game, really - hitting the ground running....."

'God, there was that terrible expression again. It was all a bloody game to him. It was all right for these consultants - they always walked away, leaving others to implement their bright ideas.' Harry's mind raced as he smiled back feebly, still trying to figure out the way the conversation was leading.

"Well, not to beat about the bush, I've asked Gordon to come on board. Not full-time - just as a contractor for ten days a month - to get this whole thing really moving."

Harry's heart sank. What was she saying?

"Oh, right", he said hesitantly.

"It'll mean quite a change for you. Do you think you can cope? Guy Anderson's in on it as well. I think it will be a good direction for us to go, don't you?"

Harry was now totally confused. Denise had this way of speaking in italics - of assuming that everyone else was on the same wavelength but he hadn't the faintest idea what she meant. Was she saying that he wouldn't be involved any more. Oh, Christ she wasn't going to

"You're looking puzzled, Harry. I must confess that I expected a different reaction. You did get the e-mail I sent yesterday?"

"E-mail? No. I've been out of the office, working with John Turnbull. Dawn's off on a course just now, otherwise she would have got in touch and told me if there was anything important. Sorry, no, I haven't seen" "

His voice trailed off, not knowing what to say next.

"Oh, right. I thought that it was unlike you to look so vague! So, where do I begin?"

You'll be aware of the increased activity that there's been, with managers and directors from other companies coming round to see the way we do things. I've been going the rounds of various conferences, seminars and so on as well, blowing our trumpet, as I think you're aware. And as I said, Gordon has become involved in the exercise in the last few months. As you probably appreciate, I've been holding off involving you to too great an extent as you have your own department to run....."

"I've been working quite a lot with other departments"

"Oh, we know, we know, Harry. And a great job you've done as well. So, Gordon and I put our heads together to establish the next step. And that's what we set out in the memo....."

".....Which I haven't seen! Where do I come in to all this?"

Harry was getting rather annoyed with the conversation. Why didn't she get on with it.

"Your role? Yes ... I was coming to that.

We've decided that the company's practices have become such a benchmark in these techniques that we can justify setting up a consultancy division to sell our services into other companies. This is where Gordon comes in. He will be fronting the initial projects"

"Oh, but"

"Let me finish, Harry. He will be fronting the initial projects, with Guy Anderson working full time on developing the support programmes - and I'd like you to be the Principal Consultant, project managing the whole enterprise."

Harry felt his emotions welling up inside him.

"I don't know if I'd have time, what with all the work for the department. It's been hard enough slotting in the work with other internal departments."

"No, no. You misunderstand. We're talking full-time here, Harry. The Consultancy Division would be full-time for you and Guy, with Gordon's time being used to best advantage. We'll need to recruit others as the enterprise develops..... that will be part of your role as well. I haven't really thought through a total job description yet - but, if you're happy, we can sit down soon and write it together. I just wanted to know your immediate reaction."

Harry's scalp tingled. He felt his own personal angel energy welling up inside, driving him to higher things! To be able to work on this full-time; to work with a variety of organisations, all approaching the issues from different viewpoints; to travel around

the country..... and perhaps spend spells of time abroad; to have the responsibility of keeping various projects running at the same time. It would be difficult but it would be great!

"My immediate reaction? It's - Absolutely - yes!"

"Good, I thought it would be. Sorry that the situation with the e-mail has sprung it on you slightly. I should have run it by you earlier but I wasn't sure if the whole concept was viable, so I didn't want to raise any false hopes. I'm pretty sure it is now - certainly the figures Gordon has produced for me add up. There's this feasibility report I'd like you to read. Can we have a meeting ... let's see ... tomorrow afternoon to get things firmed up? So, it seems to be all systems go then great!"

As Denise spoke, she reached across to lift a large report file out of the tray on her desk and hand it to Harry.

"Ah – an angel from the in-tray....."

"Sorry?"

"Oh, nothing. I just recognised a glimmer of something. OK, Mrs Finlayson"

"Denise, Harry, Denise - you're one of the senior managers now! Incidentally, we can talk through your remuneration package when we meet tomorrow."

"Oh, right. So, Denise - I'll read this and make some notes of my own and then perhaps at the meeting tomorrow we can establish key responsibilities, talk through the way forward, some potential clients, possible staffing"

"Good for you, Harry. Get that old right brain working overtime! So, until tomorrow. Tell you what, let's have lunch at The Retreat. I'll get Sophie to book a table and confirm. Glad to have you on board, Harry."

Harry walked on air down the corridor.

This was the change he needed. This was his chance to spread the message - to get the workplace championing ideas – the integrated triangle - working in other companies - to reawaken his mission in life at a new, higher level. This was the way ahead that Yeva had been describing. She had lit his blue touch paper and was now retiring - to activate someone else, doubtless. His angel energy was activated and he was flying.

As he walked through the door of his office to telephone Lynda, he felt his heart beating wildly with the sheer excitement of the future stretching ahead of him. Now, he could visualise clearly his refined and redirected track, with milestones unfolding into the sunlit distance, ready for his revitalised, meandering path of progress - although not too meandering, he hoped! This was it!

He involuntarily punched the air with excitement.

"YES!

Thank you, angels!"

Appendix Section

This section incorporates a range of suggestions for follow-up exercises to help to consolidate some of the learning points embedded in the story. They are included as pointers and suggestions - you should be aware by this stage of reading that the author is a strong exponent of self-empowerment, so you are left to adapt the ideas to suit your own specific needs and priorities. Where relevant, the chapter numbers are included to cross reference the detail being reinforced through the exercises.

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A Series of Practical Exercises

1. Overall CPD (Continuing Professional Development) statement.

This book considers the principles of holistic personal and professional development and charts how these relate to individual and team work/life balance. It reviews a wide range of techniques which can be applied in either or both work/life aspects - and identifies the high and low points of progress. The hero, Harry, applies the holistic ideas learned from his personal mentors to in turn mentor the interpersonal and team build atmosphere within his workplace, with these activities helping his own personal and professional development to advance overall.

After reading, you should be competent to:

- *identify the criteria for applied individual holistic thinking*
- *consider and apply a range of techniques which will encourage this atmosphere*
- *discuss the benefits of applying the integrated triangle and holistic track models*
- *review the potential for practising holistic principles in your own work/life aspects*

- *evaluate the degree of progress achieved within the storyline*
- *identify selected techniques and activities which you could apply positively.*

After considering the above objectives, write a brief statement identifying the outcomes which you have achieved as a result of reading the book. These should cover areas such as :

- why I elected to read the book?
- what were my key objectives?
- how well did these match with the objectives above?
- what are the key messages I have learned from the book?
- which areas do I want to learn more about?
- how relevant are the models when applied in my own work/life?
- how will I apply this new information and way of thinking?
- what techniques can I use to evaluate my progress & success?
- what is my action plan to chart this progress?

2. Strengths, shortfalls, key successes and goals

In Chapter 5, Harry is asked a whole stream of questions by Yeva, while she gives him a relaxing massage. These questions are listed on page 36.

Consider each of the questions, as it applies to yourself.

These can be taken as the types of questions which you might encounter if going for a business job interview. They are also the types of questions which you should be asking yourself when you are establishing your current strengths and shortfalls - and

future goals. Make a note of your responses. Try to list a few more questions which you would consider to be relevant and valuable.

If you are interested in considering your personal development further, there is an associated book in the integrated triangle sequence - "*Brilliant Future*" (ISBN 0-273-65601-5) which includes a whole range of interactive sections as well as a personal planning system.

3. Applying the Holistic Model

In the fourth paragraph of Chapter 7, there is a brief description of my holistic development track model. This can be simply illustrated by a straight track bounded by fences and hedges, with periodic milestones.

The model consists of :

- *the long straight track ahead, indicating selected longterm objectives*
- *the parameters on either side - both natural and man-made*
- *the milestones of shorter term goals along the track*
- *the meandering path of each individual's progress along the track*
- *the interaction of individual paths on each other*
- *the need for regular review and potential revision*

Consider this model as it applies to you.

1. List some of the natural constraints which define your view of the track ahead.
(These might be standards of right and wrong, financial or family constraints etc)

2. List some of the man-made parameters which control your view of the track ahead. (These might be current rules and regulations, company objectives etc)
3. Write down what you consider to be your personal overall objective in life.
4. List a sequence of five goals which will progress you towards this objective.
5. Think of an example of where someone else's development path has interacted with your own leading to (a) a positive and (b) a negative outcome.

4. Running an effective meeting

There are several examples throughout the book of business meetings in progress. These cover a range from one-to-ones, through facilitated team meetings to more formal fully chaired meetings.

In Chapter 9, Harry and Yeva review the potential for facilitation techniques to be applied during meetings, to help them move forward positively.

- List at least three benefits which facilitation can bring to a meeting
- Considering one of your own team meetings, how would it apply?
- What additional information do you need to access in order to apply it?

5. Encouraging people to work openly together

In Chapter 10, Harry has a brainstorming session with his team to select new projects and identify possible ways of working more closely together on these projects. Several different management and team building theories are mentioned.

With reference to standard management development text books and the internet, find out more information (and note down the key elements) about the following :

- Douglas McGregor's Theory 'X' & 'Y'
- Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Motivational Needs
- Honey & Mumford's Learning Styles Questionnaire
- Belbin's Team Roles at Work
- Sangster's 360 degree mentoring - *Training Journal* article Nov 2000 (now referred to as "360 degree championing").
- Sangster's workplace championing model – www.the-integrated-triangle.com

Consider some of the real implications which these techniques might have, if you applied some elements of them in your working life. Make notes of possible actions.

6. Applied Workplace Championing

In Chapter 10 and periodically throughout the book, we review some of the key criteria which are necessary to apply widescale (or 360 degree) championing within the workplace. Towards the end of the chapter, Harry outlines some of the key characteristics necessary to become a successful coach/mentor (or champion).

1. From your experiences of being trained formally on courses, what would you consider to be some of the key differences between a trainer and a champion?

(Discuss your answers with a colleague.)

2. Assuming that you could become involved both as a workplace champion and a learner (or “receiver”) - list several subject areas which you feel you:

a) know enough about to be able to coach/mentor others, given some assistance and training in these championing techniques

b) would like to learn more about from someone who is a colleague and an active practitioner, rather than going off to learn about it on a formal course.

3. If you have any concerns about becoming involved in this type of championing process (as both champion & learner), make a note of them for further discussion.

7. Applying the Holistic Development Track model

In an earlier exercise (Exercise 3) we considered the structure and overall implications of the Development Track model. The direct applications of this model are discussed further in Chapter 11. With a broader understanding of how the model works, consider your own learning and development experiences and respond to the following questions :

- identify a longterm ambition or objective which you have still to achieve
- how far along your personal path towards achieving it would you judge yourself to be (on a 1-10 point scale where 10 = objective achievement)?

- identify a few of the interim milestones which you have already achieved
- identify the next 2 or 3 milestones which you are now heading towards
- whose help or intervention would help your own path to move forward?
- is there anyone's path which is getting in the way of your own?
- if so, how can you respond to assist overall progress?

8. Comparing and contrasting different styles of business presentation

From your own experience, you are probably aware of the different types of presentation used in an informal workshop and a more formal boardroom situation.

These are described, in terms of planning and delivery in :

- Chapter 13 - Workshop scenario
- Chapter 24 - Formal presentation

Neither is "right" or "wrong" - each has a valuable use in getting the message across to particular audiences. Write headings for "Workshop" and "Presentation", then :

1. List situations which would be best suited for each
2. Identify at least five key benefits of using a workshop style
3. Identify at least five key benefits of applying a more formal presentation
4. If you were leading the event, which style would you be happier using & why?

5. Which elements do you need to improve to “sharpen your skills” further.

9. Applying competencies

In Chapter 15, Harry and Bob discuss appraisals and establishing competency levels. Achieving competency levels is a key benchmark for personal progress - for example, the VQ (Vocational Qualification) system is based upon providing work-based evidence which proves individual competence.

In the MCI Management VQ framework, under “Continuously develop your own knowledge and skills”, there are elements such as :

- you assess your performance and identify your development needs at appropriate intervals
- your plans for personal development contain specific, measurable, realistic and challenging objectives
- you obtain feedback from relevant people and use it to enhance your performance in the future

1. How competent are you at assessing your own performance? Have you played an active part in discussing your performance during a recent appraisal session?

2. What would you consider to be benchmarks for this competency - perhaps one is “being clear of objectives and judging their achievement”. Note some others.

3. Can you identify some skill area which you consider yourself to be perfectly competent at achieving? Try to identify the main achievement areas which would be used as measures that you are competent.

4. Have you ever been on a training course where some sections of the course were not useful to you as you already knew about them/were competent at achieving them? How could that training course have been changed to meet your particular needs (and those of other course delegates) more specifically?

5. In order to carry out your work tasks as professionally as possible overall, what would you identify as the single competency that you need to improve most of all?

10. Stress Management

Chapter 22 considers some of the effects of stress in the workplace and at home - and one technique (prioritisation) which can be used to manage some of the causes of stress. Later in the chapter, there is a brief description of how Isabelle leads a visualisation session to assist in the relaxation process. It usually works best if, like Isabelle, there is someone leading the session and suggesting what you should do next - but it is possible to try this yourself.

It probably also works best if you're lying on the floor or a mattress, although you can do it sitting on an upright chair. It also works better if you have some gentle instrumental music playing in the background.

Basically, you're progressively working through the areas of your body which you can tense and relax - and slowly doing that several times to each area in turn. At the

same time, focus on your breathing, making it slow and deep. (If you find your attention wandering at any point, pause the exercises and concentrate on your breathing for a while until you become refocused)

Follow this sequence :

- toes (left leg)
- foot and ankle
- calf muscles
- thigh muscles
- buttocks
- *repeat with right leg*
- fingers (left arm)
- hand and wrist
- lower arm
- upper arm and shoulder
- *repeat with right arm*
- stretch and relax spine
- gently rotate shoulder blades
- gently rotate head and neck
- stretch and relax whole body

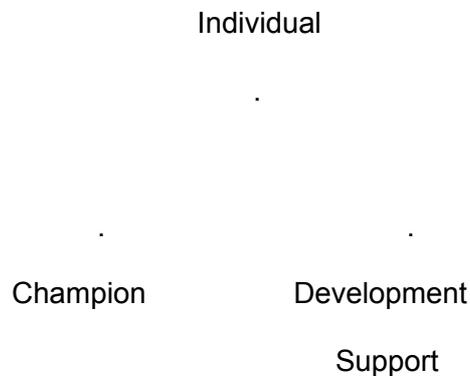
If, while doing these various exercises, you can picture yourself doing them in relaxed environments - feet in warm sand; lying on beach with warm sea washing over you; lying in warm sun in meadow of flowers etc, this may help the experience.

Finally, focus on your breathing once more, lie and relax and return to normal.

11. The Integrated Triangle model

Here's something else to try. If you look on page 221 in Chapter 25, Harry illustrates the synergy which is involved in the Integrated Triangle, with the aid of a rubber band. Find yourself a rubber band and follow the actions which Harry uses to demonstrate the holistic effect to John Kelly. The Integrated Triangle approach is also explained briefly in Chapter 18 and the relationship between individual learners and workplace champions (including Harry himself), with the support and resources necessary from the HR and Training Departments is illustrated throughout the latter half of the book.

Consider yourself to be the individual wanting to learn some new skill - in order to become competent. Identify a specific skill which you need to learn - and for which you can identify a suitable colleague who would be willing to act as your champion.



On your piece of paper, identify :

- the skill which you need to achieve competency levels
- some of the key objectives which you will need to achieve
- a colleague who could act as your mentor for this skill learning area
- the techniques you would like to use to learn this new skill
- some ideas of possible resources and other support you would need

Example overall goal: I will learn enough of a specific language to be able to hold basic conversations (ie beyond guide book phrases) when on holiday in 5 months.

Example milestones (starting at the first one and progressing)

1. Learn a basic vocabulary of words by hearing them spoken
 2. Learning (and practising verbally) simple sentence construction
 3. Constructing a range of phrases, using knowledge learned in 1 & 2 above
 4. Practising the use of these and parallel phrases, in aural exercises
 5. Listening (and responding to) recorded phrases, spoken at normal speed
- etc.

Try to write your parallel sequence of milestones to meet your identified goal.

As the text in page 194 onwards points out, having these subdivided milestones gives you stages at which to check your progress (and take any remedial actions necessary). It also helps you identify the resources and other support which you will need, to progress from one milestone to the next.

Writing goals, milestones and objectives is quite difficult and it takes some time to develop the skills and use them successfully. This is an area where it

is more than likely that you will need some direct mentoring help. You can also find details in a companion book written by the author – “*Growing Workplace Champions*” ISBN 978-1-84285-097-8 Studymates Professional

13. Effective communication through a team presentation

Chapter 24 charts the steps and stages involved in planning a team presentation, in the form of a running discussion by the team.

Look out for the following key words and make some notes about their application.

- Achieved outcome
- Objectives
- Checklist
- Visuals design
- Team selection
- Time subdivision
- Practice
- Relevance check
- Team co-operation
- Holistic effect

These are all considerations which help to build towards an effective presentation.

14. Personal Action Plan

The author has designed a personal action planning system called *ID Plan*, which is published and explained in the book “*Brilliant Future*” and is also available on the web (see the website - www.the-integrated-triangle.com - for details and free access). Only use the formats which you consider to be valuable and effective - it's there to help, not hinder you!

This is the stage where you should be sorting out your future Action Plan.

Below are listed some of the key considerations you should be making, extracted from the overall *ID Plan* system. Harry uses some of these ideas in Chapters 30 & 31, in order to chart his way forward. By responding to them in writing, you will be developing your personal action plan for the future.

1. What are my key strengths and shortfalls?
2. Do I need to develop any of my strengths further? If yes, which and how?
3. What can I do to improve or compensate for my shortfall areas?
4. What key development areas would I highlight for initial progress?
5. What support can I identify to help me progress in these areas?
6. How can I check that my planned strategy is the best way forward?
7. Rewrite your key development areas as a series of goals and related milestones.
8. What blocks, resources & support can I foresee? How can I continue to progress?

9. Is progress going according to plan? If not, how do I adjust to get back on track?

10. How do I define my actual outcome(s)? Have they changed from #4 - if so, how?

15. Responding to opportunity by flying kites

In Chapter 14 and throughout the storyline, Harry advocates his image of flying kites. Through this, he looks for opportunities which will help progress his development - as well as giving his ideas opportunities for practical reinforcement.

With each new response - letter, e-mail, phone call or face-to-face discussion - he visualises another kite going into the air. Some will fly unnoticed for some time - others will be spotted straight away. He does not have to bother too much about those which are up there, pulling in the wind. Occasionally, he may have to give one a tug on its string, to make it responsive again. At other times, one may be allowed to fall to the ground, due to lack of current interest. The image gives Harry a strong focus, keeping him aware but not too concerned about the progress of any one idea, until its time is right.

1. You should have a personal overall personal objective - a key goal - your own individual "mission statement".

Whatever you call it ... what is it?

If you're not clear in your mind what it is, think about it now. Write it down and keep refining the wording until you're happy that it covers all angles.

So, that's what you're planning to achieve ultimately.

2. Now, I want you to think laterally out of your box imagining the future before it happens.

What kind of opportunities might you spot, which would encourage you to launch a few of your own, personal kites, just like Harry? Think big. It might be a national company planning a new initiative. It could be a government plan to encourage development in a particular segment of the workforce. It could be local Community activity which may not bring you much financial reward - but could be very valuable experience (and publicity).

3. Have a personal brainstorm with yourself and write down as many ideas as you can. These are the types of opportunities which you will be on the lookout for. If you're very clear what your long term objectives are, you will be able to spot the types of opportunities which will speed you on your way. Go fly some kites!

The author Chris Sangster is available for in-company consultancy – or individual coaching (face-to-face and by telephone/e-mail) – see details on his website :

www.the-integrated-triangle.com

Other books by the author – see next page

Other books by Chris Sangster –

“Freeing the Champion Within” is a full-length case study illustration of the thinking encapsulated in the author’s “Integrated Triangle” model.

This triangle is reinforced by three books :

Individual

Brilliant Future

Prentice Hall

Development Support

Planning and Organising Personal and Professional Development Gower

Workplace Champion

Growing Workplace Champions

Stuymates Professional

Of these, the e-book “Freeing the Champion Within” links most closely with “Growing Workplace Champions” which, as the latest of the three books, incorporates the latest in the author Chris Sangster’s thinking on the refined model. “Growing Workplace Champions” is designed as a “how to” book for those thinking of applying the workplace championing brand of coaching/mentoring within their workplace, with the e-book acting as a reinforcing stimulus.

Chris has also written :

The Downshifter’s Guide to Relocation

HowtoBooks

(jointly with his wife Gillean). This follows similar thinking to that applied in “Brilliant Future”, encouraging readers who may be thinking of downshifting to a new entrepreneurial life, to select possible approaches and assess the extent to which they are likely to achieve success.

If these outcomes are positive, the reader can then gain many additional insights into the alternative possibilities for the relocation and setting up of the new business in later chapters.

Messages from the Mountains/ Echoes in the Atrium

Gordon Nott Publishing

This pair of inspirational books has been written by Chris as an enlightened view of work/life balance – giving a mix of channelled statements and background experiential detail from the author's years of development. A valuable stimulus for both "dipping in" or in-depth reading!

Further details of these books are available on the website

www.the-integrated-triangle.com

which gives a cross link to amazon.com