

working life

Cutting down on coffee

Work is... thirsty work, which is probably why most of us are hooked on drinking endless cups of tea or coffee during the day. The good news is that coffee and tea do count as part of an individual's daily fluid requirements and will not make them feel more dehydrated, as has been claimed in the past. However, the caffeine content of such drinks is a stimulant and too much of it can have negative effects, including headaches, irritability and restlessness. Water Wellpoint recommends that managers encourage their staff to alternate their normal coffee with a glass of water and warns that heavy caffeine use equates to 500mg to 600mg a day or about four to seven cups of coffee.



VIEWPOINT with...

PATRICK O'BRIEN FCMI,
MD of The Amanuenses Network Pte Ltd in Singapore

In these recessionary times, managers with a solid network of contacts are in a much stronger position to find a new job. For instance, around 60 per cent of managers rated networking as an important option when looking for career development opportunities, according to research conducted by NOP for the Chartered Management Institute.

Now that doesn't mean you must attend a networking event clutching a bunch of CVs under each arm. Rather, networking works best when treated as an investment decision, an activity we engage in now, to realise some desired returns in the future. It differs from job hunting following redundancy, which is by necessity, a more immediate and pressing activity, forcing us to spend every possible minute of our time mitigating a situation that has already, unfortunately, occurred.

When used effectively, networking is an immensely productive channel, opening up many new possibilities. Who you know does, of course, count but, in the context of job hunting, the real question you must ask yourself is 'where in my network do the best opportunities exist?'

Strong networks provide support in hard times

How strong and healthy is your network and do you know who your best contacts would be if you needed to exploit this asset to find a new job?

Most of us imagine that the people we know well will deliver the best opportunities. We believe that our closest friends and associates are the most likely to know about us; who we are, what we do, and what we want. Moreover, we feel that those closest to us are the ones that most of all want us to succeed, particularly when we are struggling with redundancy, for example.

However, in Granovetter's 1974 study entitled 'Getting a Job', the author counter-intuitively found that of all personal connections in our network, the strongest ones are often the least fruitful. In contrast, our occasional and rare

contacts are more likely to realise the most value.

Close friends share the same world as we do, occupying a similar space, with similar opportunities to those that we can already envisage. In contrast, new possibilities abound in abundance in the wider domain of occasional and rare connections.

Granovetter concluded that the "weak ties" in our network are often the most productive, as they occupy a brave new world that differs radically from our own.

However, that distant world of new possibilities often remains dormant, as people

'Great networkers manage their circle of contacts as an asset, keeping it under regular review'

- ◀ maintain a limited focus, restricting their network investments to activities involving only their close circle of contacts.

Networking, therefore, can work powerfully in helping to locate new career opportunities. But to be effective and make it work for you, you need to think about how big your network is, who exactly is in it and how you go about doing 'networking'.

Great networkers manage their circle of contacts as an asset, keeping it under regular review. All things being equal, paying attention to the growth in each of the following areas will help you in building a more productive networking asset:

- Scale – the size of your network
- Scope – the level of diversity within your network
- Maturity – the timeframe over which you have built up that network
- Investment – the level of help you have given to your network in the past
- Involvement – the amount of time you invest in maintaining that network

Intelligent networking needs a skill-set that builds pathways to a brighter future. This draws on a broader set of soft skills, such as the courage to connect, the relevance of rapport, the confidence to converse, the power to present, and a mindset to manage time.

Intelligent networkers also use smart social networking tools. For instance, the business oriented networking site www.linkedin.com, allows you to build and keep track of your network asset online, and provides a range of relevant metrics too.

Intelligent networkers are not passive bystanders, subdued and acted upon by their environment, but actors operating on their future careers. Rather than hold back to focus only on maintaining old, past dependencies, they constantly reach forward to build new, future capacities.

Above all else, networking is built on trust. So be mindful, respect your network by maintaining a positive outlook; give without need to receive, promise first and then deliver, and thank those who offer their faith, commitment and support in helping you.

Further information

Patrick O'Brien's company, The Amanuenses Network Pte Ltd, provides soft skills training in personal effectiveness and team productivity (www.amanuenses.net)

See article on page 24 about social networking. To find out about Chartered Management Institute events for members, taking place throughout the UK, visit www.managers.org.uk/events

References

Mark Granovetter, "Getting a Job: A Study of Contacts and Careers", 2d edition, 1995, ISBN: 9780226305813

NOP survey for the Chartered Management Institute, cited in *Professional Manager* (March 2006, p26)



letters and e-mails

LINK TO SOLUTIONS

We read with interest the article by Mark Prisk MP with regard to government-funded business support (Westminster Column, PM November 2008, headed 'The state system of business information and advice is at present confusing, wasteful and largely ineffective').

The points raised in the article have already been identified and addressed. On 23 October 2008 Lord Mandelson, the Business Secretary, launched Solutions for Business, a portfolio of 30 publicly-funded business support products accessible via Business Link.

Solutions for Business offers a streamlined package of support that is designed to be easy to access and simple to understand. The Government consulted widely and this was the model of support business wanted.

Experienced Business Link advisers, as impartial brokers to a range of public, private and third sector suppliers, will work with companies to identify their support needs before referral to suitable schemes.

Contrary to the suggestion in the article, Business Link enjoys outstanding customer satisfaction levels. The results report 92 per cent of customers said they would use the service again and 97 per cent said they would recommend Business Link if asked.

By 2010 the Business Link website, www.businesslink.gov.uk, will be the main site for all business information from government, giving the type of information Mark recommends.

We meet many businesses in the course of our work and we recognise that making sure the

Business Link service and Solutions for Business package remain customer focused and quality controlled is vital. To this end, a strong management mechanism has been put in place at national and regional level. The business community is part of this process.

Martin Temple, Chair of the Business Support Simplification Programme (BSSP) Transition Board

James E Brathwaite CBE, Chair, South East England Development Agency

SAVINGS AND JSA

I am an adviser at my local Citizens Advice Bureau as well as a member of the Institute and spotted something in January's Money Box article that passes on something which appears misleading to readers about Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA).

The last sentence reads: "The direct.gov.uk website states that if you have savings over £16,000 you probably won't qualify".

Checking on the government website, it does say this but, although it is easily misread, it is only in connection with 'income-based' JSA. If someone has paid sufficient National Insurance contributions to qualify for 'contribution-based' JSA, their savings do not affect their allowance.

The Citizens Advice website (http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/index/life/benefits/benefits_for_people_looking_for_work.htm) makes it clearer that "Contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance is not affected by any savings you have".

Richard Bull MCMI Epsom

For More Amanuenses Soft Skills Articles, Click Here

$$(n \times R) + (x \times H) + (x \times T) + ny(H + T) + Wz(P - n)$$

MONEY BOX

The real cost of redundancy is estimated to be £16,375 per employee laid off, says the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

It is urging employers to plan for recovery by retaining people, rather than downsizing and risking long-term damage to their business. It's created a

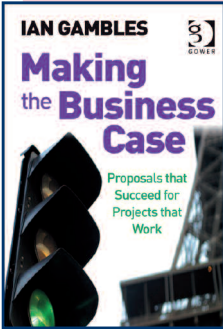
formula to help employers work out the cost, as follows:

Real cost of redundancy = $(n \times R) + (x \times H) + (x \times T) + ny(H + T) + Wz(P - n)$

Where:

- n = number of people made redundant
- R = redundancy payments
- x = number of people subsequently hired
- H = hiring costs
- T = induction/training cost
- y = percentage quitting post redundancy
- W = average monthly staff salary
- z = percentage reduction in output per worker caused by lower morale
- P = number of people employed prior to redundancies

PRECIOUS GUIDE TO MAKING BUSINESS CASE



Author Ian Gambles has written a concise and essential guide to *Making the Business Case*, published by Gower Publishing, price £25 (ISBN 978-0-566-08745-5, 198 pages).

The book is described as a "jewel" and essential reading for managers tasked with making business cases, senior managers who need to understand and test them and project managers who are responsible for delivering whatever is agreed on.

We have got six copies of the book to give

away in our easy-to-enter competition. The book is illustrated throughout with practical examples drawn from real cases and includes reflective exercises at the end of each chapter to help readers consolidate what they have learned.

Ian Gambles says making a good business case is so much more than simply justifying a decision. "A well-written and well-researched business case will secure funding; make sure any project stays on the right side of regulation; mobilize support for the cause; provide the platform for managing the project; and provide the benchmark against which to measure progress."

All you have to do for a chance to win a

copy of *Making the Business Case*, published by Gower Publishing, is correctly answer the following question:

Name one of the benefits of producing a well-written and well-researched business case

Answer on a postcard please to: PM/Business Case Competition, Chartered Management Institute, 2 Savoy Court, Strand, London WC2R 0EZ. The closing date for entries is Tuesday 31 March 2009.

The book is available to buy online from Gower Publishing – www.gowerpublishing.com – with a 10 per cent discount on the recommended retail price.

COMPETITION WINNERS

Congratulations to L. Roberts of Forest Town, the winner of the two-night Taster Break at Ragdale Hall Health Hydro (PM November). The correct answer to the question regarding the monetary value of Ragdale Hall gift vouchers is: £100, £50 and £25.

Congratulations to the winners of the competition to win copies of *Future Files: The 5 trends that will shape the next 50 years* by Richard Wilson, published by Nicholas Brealey (PM November): Dorothy Francis, Leicester; Fiona Wellman, Knutsford; Peter Wong, London; Keith Appleyard, Brighton; Mark Clenshaw, Claygate; Robert Allison, Glasgow; J Craigen, Edinburgh; Michael Coleman, Winchester; Dr J L Fistein, Rampton; Lindsey Lavender, Yardley; Sally Knox, Longhoughton. The correct answers included phone boxes, ashtrays, landline telephones and saying 'thank you'.

What's hot in the office

Doing your bit for local schools

For the cost of your daily or Sunday newspaper you could help the readers of tomorrow. *The Sunday Times* and *The Times* are running their Books for Schools campaign again and urging businesses to ask staff to collect tokens and donate them to their local school.

The tokens can be exchanged by schools for free books of their choice from a catalogue of 170 titles for age groups from three to 14 years. The Books for Schools campaign is running in both newspapers from 19 April to 11 July. For further information about the scheme, visit www.freebooks-forschools.co.uk. A similar campaign ran for five years from 1999 and during that time over 6.6m books were put on the shelves of schools in the UK at no cost to the schools themselves.

