



'Learning from life'

**A collection of short stories to
help you think & reflect**

By Nick Bishop

BEING THE VERY BEST OF YOU!

A collection of short stories to
make you think and reflect.

Being the very best version of you is possible.
But you have to be prepared to change, learn
from your own performance and reflect on what
'very best' means and demands.



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Introduction



Doing “Great things” is never simple. If it was that easy, we would all be doing great things all of the time, and by definition, they would no longer be “Great”.

It takes special people, aligned to special skills doing special things that really makes a difference...And in a way that differentiates...It’s the key to positioning the person and the skills on a different and far higher level from the rest.

Some of the skills people can already be blessed with, but other skills have to be learned, but the examples in the pages that follow can all be mastered, and in such a way that they become habit...The “New you”. But striving to be the very best that you can be, needs to be a daily belief.

The only one thing that anyone needs is “Attitude”...A “Can do” mentality.

An attitude that demands you to be the very best version of you that you possibly can, and one that makes a telling difference to others, all of the time.

The pages that follow are some of my own thinking and observations on a variety of situations, but ones that we can all relate to and then reflect on at a personal level.

Each story, has a learning page, time to reflect...Use as you wish.

One thing is for sure...Do all these things to the best of your ability and you will make a telling difference to both your own life, and all that you touch.

Your choice!

Enjoy...and be the best version of you that you can be!

Nick.

PS...I have made many mistakes in my life. It's not the mistake; it's what you do about them. Personally, I have made sure I find a way to bounce back and learn. It's what helps you to create new opportunities but to be better at them each time they arrive!

“Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time” Thomas. A .Edison

What creates “Great customer service”?



Whilst I find shopping a pastime that I would not want to be engaged in on a regular basis, it does allow me the chance to watch and engage in an activity that involves us all, and in which none of us are passive.

If you use the premise that we are all customers of each other in some shape or form, very often this is given minimal thought by many...And to their detriment.

I went into a small privately owned cafe on Saturday morning and received "Great customer service"...The young man that served me, was attentive, polite and made useful suggestions about the menu. A short while later, the owner appeared from the kitchen and I watched with interest as he engaged with customers in a professional, relaxed and friendly manner.

The two were not related yet both exhibited some of the essential skills that help to deliver "Great customer service"...Was it by chance, coincidence or a mentor relationship? Is creating a service culture top down leadership driven?

The following day, I visited a national chain cafe and the service offered was the exact reverse. Poor service, inattentive staff, poor listening skills.

Why was there such an evident difference...Can small be beautiful in the service offered? Does the leadership driven culture get watered down in layers of management?

While service should be the prime objective for all, how much is self-driven as opposed to management led?

Turn the page for your reflections...

Learnings and reflections

What creates “Great customer service”?



“I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel”. Maya Angelou

- Can bureaucracy get in the way of great service?
 - If so, what small steps can you make to change that?
- Do you take your lead from the hierarchy of the business?
- How do you ensure that your own teams exhibit the behaviours that you both want and expect?
- Does your own performance and behaviours cascade to those that you manage in a bigger way than you realise?
- Are you a role model all of the time?
 - If not, what do you need to change?
- What hinders both you and your teams delivering great service all of the time?
- What are the benefits to each of us on a personal level and to the business if we get it right all of the time?
- ***Remember, “you are the business”***

We should all aim to be the “Best version” of ourselves that we can be, all of the time.

Back on track and full steam ahead...A true journey



I was travelling back from London on the 14.40 Virgin train to Manchester on Tuesday of this week...Nothing unusual in that!

I settled myself into the pre-booked seat, and bang on time, the train slowly pushed off.

The polite chatter was interrupted by whom I assumed to be the "Head Guard" coming through on the intercom. Initially, I confess to not particularly listening but I suddenly became engrossed in the message. It was entertaining, humorous but still professional throughout. I looked around my carriage and saw others smiling with amusement...Our attention had been truly captured and personally, I became curious to meet the "man on the microphone "!

What also became apparent, was that I was not the only one to have tweeted about the highly accomplished announcement...Others too had used social media to praise "The voice of Virgin"

I got up and walked through the carriages until I found the person who had so engaged with his audience...We soon introduced each other, and I learned that his name was Damian.

He was in fact the Virgin employee with responsibility for selling refreshments from the "In train" bar area.

We gelled immediately, not difficult with his endearing approach. We chatted (when he was not busy serving his new fan club), and he told me more about himself.

It's fair to say that Damian, had lived life to the full and at one stage had been homeless, living rough on the streets. What impressed me the most was the pride that he took in his job...***Proud to wear the uniform and proud of the job.***

Interestingly, only the week previously, I had been in an NHS Hospital where a staff member had told me the exact same thing "Proud to wear the uniform". An expression that is sadly no longer the norm, but such a pleasure to hear.

I stayed with Damian throughout the one hour and forty minute journey. We talked and exchanged stories. A fellow passenger joined us and together we spoke of "how it's people" that make the difference.

The ability to interact, to be comfortable "just chatting", but likewise when to listen, or even say nothing.

Damian told me that he first picks up on customers three behind the one being served...Using "emotional intelligence", supported by his initial first greeting with them, he will know how to approach them...Far from a one approach relationship.

Damian knew his products well, what was on offer and what complimented each item...Yet he was not selling! Purely making the customer aware and providing choice.

As our conversation developed, I learned that there were no targets, and that Virgin was now recruiting on an individual's ability to "engage and interact". The key is understanding that with the right quality of service and customer engagement, that the sales would drive themselves.

So, congratulations to Virgin and in particular to Damian.

By coincidence when I got home and checked my emails, I had received a request to deliver a program in the UAE around "Sales through Service"...Perhaps I should take Damian!

But it made me reflect on the key elements and how to truly deliver that basic concept..."Sales through Service".

A butcher close to where I live has the phrase "Quality is our silent salesman" as the strap line on their delivery van.

So what are the key elements?

- It's an accepted fact that close to 70% of customers that take their business elsewhere do so because of poor service...And yet the crazy thing is that winning new business to replace the lost business is seven times more expensive!
- Even more alarming is that 95% of customers will give you a second chance...And to compound that, tend to become even more loyal, provided that you put things right and in a timely, professional, courteous and genuine style
- Giving great service should be one of life's pleasures...It's like a mirror, when you delight each customer the response that you will receive, will want you to repeat the behaviour, time after time. Just ask Damian!
- Use EI (Emotional Intelligence) to build rapport. It is accepted that 25% of customers will already think like you, but by evaluating the response of others and adapting your style, you will soon be on the same level as the other 75%!
- React to facts and feelings...Listen! One of the most undervalued skills...Hearing is not listening. Focus on your customer, make them feel special and give them your full attention!
- Ask "Open" questions and understand what the customer is "Not saying"...Decode the message...We buy on emotions!
- Trust is a vital part of the cycle. Sometimes we get seconds to build that relationship and create a feeling that makes us want to buy

Always remember Damian, he started to buy our emotions with his first announcement, and never ceased including his final announcement...His rhetorical question "I hope you have enjoyed your journey this afternoon", needed no answer.

We all dismounted from the train having been part of a true journey, both geographically, but also mentally. Damian reminded us of how it's possible to both turn your life around and get back on track, but equally of the true meaning of "Sales through Service".

Turn the page for your reflections...

Learnings and reflections

Back on track and full steam ahead...A true journey



“One of the things I learned the hard way was that it doesn't pay to get discouraged. Keeping busy and making optimism a way of life can restore your faith in yourself” Lucille Ball

- Think of the many times that you get the opportunity to interact with your customers, and consider if you use each opportunity to its fullest
- What more could you do, and what would be the benefits?
- Do you engage with your customers in such a way that they want to come back to you, time after time?
- How do you determine how best to interact with the variety of customers that you will meet?
- People buy from people. Are you the best version of “you” all of the time?
 - If not, how will you change that and what will be the benefits?
- ***Remember that adversity is only temporary, dusting yourself down and bouncing back from setbacks, differentiates winners from the rest***

We should all aim to be the “Best version” of ourselves that we can be, all of the time.

Three Pints of team spirit and a packet of crisps



Often when running workshops and the discussion gets to performance management (and in particular measuring performance); a divide becomes evident between management and those being measured. The topic can often stir emotions like no other!

Invariably, the discussion amongst those that are old enough to remember will recall the halcyon days when measures did not exist and the culture was very much of long visits to the nearest hostelry on a Friday lunch time...And soft drinks very much off the menu!

Younger members seem shocked that an era existed where a few pints or a large "Liebfraumilch" would be quaffed without the faintest thought of the afternoon ahead.

I generally bring the focus back on track and move on to discuss the merits of both, to allow the group to compare the modern day "measured approach" against the time when for an hour or two, work was forgotten and spirits lifted in more ways than one!

Performance measurement will always be met with a degree of cynicism by some as it exposes areas of shortfall that previously may have lain hidden. In a similar vein, the measurement, degree of stretch and communication of both targets and results may be delivered in a way that disengages as opposed to motivate.

Tuckman's "Forming, storming, norming, performing" model, is a popular model in demonstrating how teams come together, gel, bond, develop and perform. Decades ago, longevity of service with one employer was

the norm, whereas now, a typical stint with an employer is little more than two years.

The model is still significant fifty years on...It accepts that teams do not start off fully-formed and functioning, but grow through clearly defined stages from individuals to a solid and cohesive unit.

Ironically, the business requires teams to evolve and grow through the model at a fast pace, as until the final "performing" stage is met, a team is not functioning to its optimum level.

In years gone by, a team would disappear come Friday lunch, bond and chat over a few drinks, with newer and younger members adopted and unofficially mentored. The team would evolve and develop through the model as trust and friendships developed.

In the modern world, with attrition (higher) and length of service (lower), the team dynamics alter and the model becomes skewed.

There is nothing wrong with performance measures...In fact they are critical to the business. What is wrong is the communication and delivery of feedback in many instances. Likewise, a greater emphasis will rest with the person with responsibility for the team to ensure that the team works as one and that the movement through the model is successful and time efficient!

With a faster paced environment, SLA's in addition to KPI's, volatility amongst providers of any service/product, the ability to grow together as one team becomes more challenging.

In the modern world where time is in short supply, more novel ways will be needed to allow teams to evolve and develop, but in keeping with the needs of the business. Measures won't disappear, while opportunities to bond fully will reduce. Friendships become passing acquaintances...Does the model allow for this?

The modern manager needs to be a master of communication, measuring performance in a way that drives and motivates, and to be able to offer measures of the modern day "team spirit" to replace the ones now left on the bar!

Turn the page for your reflections...

Learnings and reflections

Three pints of team spirit and a packet of crisps



“The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.” Phil Jackson

- Do you get the balance right between “driving & measuring” performance and creating a winning mentality in your team?
- Tuckman’s model demonstrates how teams evolve...While there is no set rule on a timeframe for moving through the stages, clearly and providing that all stages are properly met, the quicker, the better. How do you create a dynamic within your team, to facilitate this?
- Reality says that you may on occasion slip back a stage or so...How will you recognise this and how will you correct?
- What methods do you use to create the bond within your team that allows them to work as “one”
- Do you have mentors within your team that newer and less experienced members can learn from?
 - How would you select them?
- ***Remember that high morale has to be worked on daily basis, it does not just happen***

We should all aim to be the “Best version” of ourselves that we can be, all of the time.

Feel the heat and “Just do it”!



I often relate experiences in a variety of disciplines to management skills. All are so obviously comparable.

Football management is one clear example. No surprise that Sir Alex Ferguson has delivered key note speeches to Harvard Students.

For me when I coach athletes, I need to convey a message that outlines the purpose behind any session, and in a way that all buy into and want to be a part of. Anything less and the training would not be at the intensity needed to make the desired improvements.

As a football referee, the man management of the players (and at grass roots levels the spectators), has to be delivered in such a way that decisions are bought into, even when not all are correct.

I once attended a seminar delivered by Helen Sharman, the first Britain in space and the first woman to visit the Mir space station. She spoke of the absolute trust that she had to have in her colleagues, of the absolute accuracy that all messages required. Anything less would mean failure and worse still loss of all lives.

I have an existing relationship with the Marriott Hotel Group, but yesterday I spent some time talking with David Cura, General Manager of Heathcote & Co, and also with one of his chefs.

We take things for granted when we eat out...We turn up, choose our order, eat our food, pay the bill and make our way home.

Rarely do we consider the complexities and management skills needed to run a busy restaurant. Our experience tends to be confined to the interaction with the "front of house" staff, who engage with us, but who also need to be knowledgeable, personable and with strong interpersonal skills...

But for me it's in the kitchen where the heat is truly felt and good management skills are critical to the success of the restaurant or perhaps more importantly, the business.

The bigger kitchens will have a management structure where communication under pressure is critical to the success of the operation. No sending of emails in this role! The communication has to encapsulate key elements and from both sides:

- Concise delivery and checking that the message is understood by all parties
- The recipients need to realise that listening is different to hearing!
- The need to articulate in such a way that there is no confusion and that team members feel both motivated and inspired to deliver the outcomes necessary

Teams need to work closely together, front of house understanding the menus in a way that they can explain when asked the "design" of any dish, relay messages to the kitchen and vice versa, while having an idea of time scales and possible wait times. Accuracy of information is paramount.

Leaders need to lead, taking a watch over everything to make sure that time scales are met and that staff are delivering against all needs...This while reacting to a variety of situations that need instant decision making.

Trust is vital. Although the consequences may not be as life threatening as faced by Helen Sharman while in space, each role is inter dependant on each other, and any part that goes wrong will impact all.

While the dishes prepared need to represent the description from the menu, this is a profession where team members need to feel empowered, creative and through feedback received, both proud of their creations but also willing to learn while developing new skills. Attention to detail is also critical, likewise time management and organisational skills. Multi-tasking is a key element as diners have no consciousness of the variety of orders being taken at any moment in time.

Finally, while good management is vital, there are two parts that stand out. The need to be both coach and mentor. Much of the learning will take place "on the job", which means that the skills in both these areas will be severely put to the test. Communication, articulation and the ability to inspire the chefs to deliver the finest cuisine within time scales will be needed from start to finish.

Finally, when your dish arrives, it needs to come with a smile that is as welcoming as the food in front of you.

Feel the heat and just do it!

Managing under pressure is never so apparent than the demands placed on restaurant staff.

Turn the page for your reflections...

Learnings and reflections

Feel the heat and “just do it”!



“Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence wins championships.” Michael Jordan

- Every time you communicate, there is a message...You either communicate a piece of information or ask for information back
 - How do you determine the impact needed from your communication?
 - How do you know that the information has been correctly imparted?
 - If the information and correctness of reply is critical, how do you both validate the understanding and correctness of both reply and actions needed?
 - How do you achieve “buy-in”?
- What impact does body language have to your message?
- When you receive information, how strong are your listening skills?
- What are the effects of hearing & not listening, both on the person communicating and also on the one receiving?
- Do you choose a communication style which is clear, precise and understandable (without ambiguity)?
- Do you create a position of trust in your communication so that others know exactly what to do and without worry?
- ***Remember that people will read what you say more than what they hear!***

We should all aim to be the “Best version” of ourselves that we can be, all of the time.

Why Performance Management often fails to achieve its objectives



The mere use of the phrase can have a myriad of meanings.

In their "CIPD" textbook, Armstrong and Baron define performance management as 'a process which contributes to the effective management of individuals and teams in order to achieve high levels of organisational performance'

For many employees the answer may be something like...

"It's making sure we hit target or go on to a performance plan"

Sad but true.

If I had the chance to define performance management, it might read something like...

"Aligning both staff and company ***"values and vision"*** while empowering staff to deliver optimum levels of performance in line with the company plan"

The inference is that the culture and fit has to be right for both parties...The direction that the business is heading and a "values ethic" supported and delivered by each person top to bottom. Only when ***"values and vision"*** are aligned does performance truly begin.

Staff need to be empowered in such a way that they know exactly what is expected of them, the effect that their contribution has on the business and receive timely feedback that helps to improve the individuals' contribution.

Success needs rewarding but praise has to be genuine, sincere and timely.

I am regularly surprised, or that should perhaps read "I am no longer surprised" when I hear team members admitting that they have no idea of what their target is, or similarly if they are actually on target.

Targets need to be stimulating, exciting and agreed by both parties...A bit of stretch but achievable and communicated at all times...The culture should be one of "a great place to work", where the staff feel valued and want to be part of a successful organisation.

Staff attrition rates are often a sign that performance management is not being utilised correctly. Even where jobs are sometimes tedious, every effort has to be made to create a culture where the staff feel valued.

The Seattle Pike Place Fish Market amplifies how jobs which on face value may appear unappealing can actually deliver such fun and where customers flock to in order to share the experience.

Talking to a pal of mine recently, I learned that they had not lost a member of staff in close to ten years. They employ over 30 staff and year on year have seen growth of between 5 and 20%. And the secret...

“Valuing your staff, rewarding your staff, empowering your teams to reach their own potential and creating the right environment both physically and mentally”.

Performance Management means many things but for too many, it is numbers and not people based.

Turn the page for your reflections...

Learnings and reflections

Why Performance Management often fails to achieve its objectives



“In business, words are words; explanations are explanations, promises are promises, but only performance is reality” Harold S. Geneen

- Are you happy with the way that you manage your “direct reports” performance?
 - What improvements could be made?
- How do you facilitate performance in such a way that your teams share your “values & vision” and those of the organisation?
- Do you create an “empowered” work place?
 - How could that be improved and to what benefit?
- How do you provide performance feedback?
 - In doing so, how do you ensure that your teams understand exactly which targets are vital to the business, that they know exactly how their contribution effects the business, and that they are committed to make that happen?
- ***Remember, that your role is to develop “best performance” in a way that stimulates, develops people, and that creates best results***

We should all aim to be the “Best version” of ourselves that we can be, all of the time.

Attitude is the key to individual success



Your *attitude*,
not your *aptitude*,
will determine your *altitude*.
Zig Ziglar

Ever since I started playing team sports, at school and then into my adult life, I have always been interested in attitude...In what makes a winner, the standard take of 90% attitude and 10% aptitude, of how amazing things are done by ordinary people, and what stops more people from doing amazing things.

- The first flight by man in 1903
- The first ascent of Everest in 1953
- Breaking the "Four-minute mile" in 1954
- The first man on the moon in 1968

One story, always touches a place in my heart and from an unknown author...Enjoy, and make sure you become the best version of you possible!

Attitude will shape everything that you touch and do...

John is the kind of guy you love to hate. He is always in a good mood and always has something positive to say.

When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, "If I were any better, I would be twins!"

He was a natural motivator. If an employee was having a bad day, John was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation.

Seeing this style really made me curious, so one day I went up and asked him, "I don't get it! You can't be a positive person all of the time... How do you do it?"

He replied, "Each morning I wake up and say to myself, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or ... you can choose to be in a bad mood. I choose to be in a good mood."

Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or...I can choose to learn from it.

I choose to learn from it. Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or... I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life."

"Yeah, right, it's not that easy," I protested. "Yes, it is," he said. "Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people affect your mood. You choose to be in a good mood or bad mood. The bottom line: It's your choice how you live your life."

I reflected on what he said.

Soon hereafter, I left the Tower Industry to start my own business. We lost touch, but I often thought about him when I made a choice about life instead of reacting to it.

Several years later, I heard that he was involved in a serious accident, falling some 60 feet from a communications tower.

After 18 hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, he was released from the hospital with rods placed in his back.

I saw him about six months after the accident. When I asked him how he was, he replied...

"If I were any better, I'd be twins...Want to see my scars?"

I declined to see his wounds, but I did ask him what had gone through his mind as the accident took place.

"The first thing that went through my mind was the well-being of my soon-to-be born daughter," he replied. "Then, as I lay on the ground, I remembered that I had two choices: I could choose to live or...I could choose to die. I chose to live."

"Weren't you scared? Did you lose consciousness?" I asked. He continued, "The paramedics were great. They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the operating theatre and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes, I read 'he's a dead man'. I knew I needed to take action."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"Well, there was a big burly nurse shouting questions at me," said John. "She asked if I was allergic to anything. 'Yes, I replied.' The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply. I took a deep breath and yelled, 'Gravity'." Over their laughter, I told them, "I am choosing to live. Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead." He lived, thanks to the skill of his doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude.

I learned from him that every day we have the choice to live fully. Attitude, after all, is everything.

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."
Matthew, 6:34".

After all today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday!

You have two choices. Be brave! ...This story always gets me thinking!

Turn the page for your reflections...

Learnings and reflections

Attitude is the key to individual success



“Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever”. Mahatma Gandhi

- How do you manage yourself in such a way that you create a personal “can do attitude”?
- What effect does or would this have on others?
- Do you have clear goals that you buy into and that provide you “drive and motivation” on a daily basis?
- How do you help to develop this mentality into others
 - How would this positively affect the business?
- How do you treat adversity?
- How do you help your teams through difficult periods within the business?
- What do you do on a regular basis to ensure that you create a culture where your teams embrace each and every new challenge?
- ***Remember, you are the version of “YOU” that you choose to be.***

We should all aim to be the “Best version” of ourselves that we can be, all of the time.

When Service needs to be a culture and guaranteed to
make you smile!



I had heard of a new Indian Restaurant opening in the area and the feedback had been highly positive.

I telephoned to make a reservation and left a message on the answer phone.

A little while later, I received a call back from a very courteous gentleman called "Saleep", who was both attentive and very welcoming...He also explained that he would be there to greet me on the night. Minutes after putting the phone down, Saleep also sent me a personalised text to say that he was looking forward to meeting with me. By now, I was eagerly looking forward to my culinary experience!

That same day, one of my sons had been trying to arrange a student overdraft with his bank. He visited his own branch which seemed a sensible first step. They could not help and he was told to visit another branch where his application could be processed...OK, not what he wanted to hear but progress.

Upon arrival at the designated branch, he asked for help but was told that he had been incorrectly advised and that he needed to make an on-line application. If not bad enough, the lady then told Oliver how "rushed off her feet" she was and that "he had no idea what was expected of her by the Bank"!

The simple request for a student overdraft could not get any worse.

Message to Bank...

“Please carry out your duties with good grace, courtesy, accuracy of information, and above all not relating to your own internal issues”.

Returning to my culinary experience, I was greeted like a Prince and throughout the evening could not have asked for any better service...attentive, polite, courteous, knowledgeable, charming, professional...Add to that a great meal and a fantastic experience.

I was particularly drawn to one thing in the booklet style menu...It read:

“Our motto is to keep our guests happy, and therefore our slogan is ...”We serve happiness”. Our team was carefully selected with every team member handpicked on the basis of his or her positive attitude, skills and personality. We strongly believe in giving new talent an opportunity to get exposure in our industry and therefore we also have “amateur newcomers” as part of our team and we will work closely with them to help shape their careers.

Our management understands the importance of giving back to society and through various initiatives we are supporting street children, orphans and senior citizens of Mumbai and India to help them build a better life”.

Words can be cheap, but action will always be the key differentiator.

It was apparent that the staff revelled in their work, and made sure that each customer was treated as an individual.

On a busy Friday night, serving quality food, and all cooked to order is not an easy task.

Doing it with such good grace and in a manner that the customer is left feeling totally pampered is a lesson for many, but particularly to the Bank with whom my son had the misfortune to deal with.

- Service needs to be ingrained in the company culture
- It has to be part of the core values
- It applies to all
- It has to be done because it is the only option
- It should be a pleasure for both provider and the recipient
- It must transcend all barriers

Make sure you find new ways to delight your customers all the time. If you don't others will.

Turn the page for your reflections...

Learnings and reflections

When Service needs to be a culture and guaranteed to make you smile!



“Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning”. Bill Gates

- When was the last time that you took a step back from the day to day business to ensure that bureaucracy does not overtake the customer needs?
- What processes and procedures do you have in place that could prevent a total “customer experience”?
- Are all of your processes totally “customer centric”?
 - If not, why not?
- Do your teams have sufficient autonomy to both enrich their own roles but also to deliver great customer service?
- Do you engender an ethos that allows and develops a mentality amongst your teams where they all have a passion to deliver “great customer service”?
- Do you listen to your customers to ensure that you deliver against what is important to them, and have the flexibility to adapt and change to a range of requirements?
 - Are complaints used as a learning opportunity both for the future but additionally to improve “brand loyalty”?
- ***Remember that “service” is remembered for longer than “price”, and is far more spoken about!***

We should all aim to be the “Best version” of ourselves that we can be, all of the time.

Courtship, engagement, marriage and divorce.



Sadly it's an all too familiar story in the modern world.

High hopes, the laws of attraction, the coming together and the fall out.

The initial excitement of the potential for a successful relationship...Exploring that opportunity, and finding out more about each other...Realising that there is potential in this new relationship...The formal proposal of putting the relationship into a binding agreement...Properly working together on shared goals...Success being achieved together...Boredom setting in...Looking outside the relationship for something new...Courting a potential new partner...The request to formally end the relationship...The fallout...And the start of a new relationship.

My thread relates to the employee: employer relationship and not any other that you may have been thinking!

So where does it all go wrong!

There are some circumstances where the relationship ceases because the ambition and needs of one side cannot be met and better opportunities lie outside the existing arrangement.

While sadness may still be apparent to both parties, this can sometimes be a mutual and more harmonious break up...

But too often, the fall out is more long and tortured...

- Latest UK statistics for marriage break up stands at 42%
- A 2012 "Forbes" survey indicated that only 19% of staff were happy in their jobs
- The "HR Expert" suggests a labour turnover figure of 15.6% and much higher in some sectors
- A staggering 131 million days were lost due to sickness absences in the UK in 2013

Where does it go wrong?

Why does it change from winning smiles to blank expressions?

We all need jobs and ideally a career to fulfil a number of needs. To survive and provide for, to stimulate and challenge ourselves, a feeling of worth and the opportunity to feel part of a successful organisation.

It's also part of our intrinsic needs to feel valued and to be part of a team: Studies have shown that in City centres, as unemployment grows, street gangs increase. The team culture that can be found while in employment has to be found elsewhere.

In terms of employee engagement, unless values and vision are aligned, the employer will never achieve the best return from their staff engagement.

As every new relationship starts, both sides hope for a long and mutually satisfying relationship.

- The engagement of "one to ones"
- The opportunity for the relationship to develop and have the responsibility for looking after others!
- The opportunity for the relationship to grow into something bigger & better for all parties

Sadly, once the gloss has gone the communication lessens, both sides forget to provide honest feedback and forget to set challenging yet exciting goals about how to keep the relationship strong and vibrant.

Neither party wanted this...The engagement and subsequent relationship was never intended to end in tears.

We forget doing the basics...Strong communication, of revisiting each other's needs and creating new challenges which in turn stimulate the relationship.

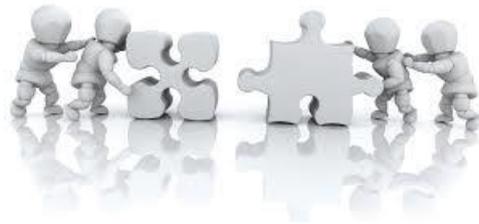
Both in marriage and employment, there are many similar traits.

Ignore them at your peril...It need not all end in tears!

Turn the page for your reflections...

Learnings and reflections

Courtship, engagement, marriage and divorce



“Your number one customers are your people. Look after employees first and then customers last.” Ian Hutchinson

- Do all of your staff have a clear outline of what is required from them upon both joining the organisation/team and as their role develops?
- Do you have a recognised coaching system in place?
- For whose purpose are the “121” sessions?
 - Who does more of the talking?
 - Is feedback readily available and both ways?
 - How do you check to ensure that sessions are correctly carried out in your teams?
- Do you have an appraisal system that is respected by all involved...(appraiser/appraisee) etc ?
- Are future opportunities available to all?
- Do you listen to and take on board staff feedback?
- Do staff truly believe that they can make a difference?
- If you worked for yourself, how many of your own team would you employ? ...The answer should be ***ALL***.
 - If not, what do you intend doing about this?
- ***Remember to treat every interaction as both memorable and “special”...Work on your employee engagement***

We should all aim to be the “Best version” of ourselves that we can be, all of the time.

Why visualisation is so important in success



As my sons progressed through junior club football, I was the dad that always volunteered to referee when needed...On muddy park pitches in Stockport, this was not uncommon!

As the seasons progressed, it seemed natural to attend an FA Refereeing course, qualify and wear the black outfit proudly sporting the "Cheshire FA badge".

I always like a challenge, to strive to be the best version of me that I can be, to try to be the perfect referee and getting every decision right. Surely that's what we all aim for...Perfection, and under pressure managing twenty-two testosterone fuelled youths not forgetting their parents on the side lines. I was lucky, I had a mentor that I could talk to about decisions that I had made over the weekend: Trevor Massey, a then Premiership Linesman and with an FA Cup final to his name.

I would always get a call by the Thursday night to tell me where I was refereeing...And that's when I started.

I would start to picture myself walking onto the pitch, inspecting the goal nets, a light warm up, the shrill call of the whistle for the captains to join me in the centre circle...Handshakes, choosing my words to encourage the captains and through them their teams to play to their best abilities, but within the spirit of the game.

I pictured the smiles as I engaged with the players, as I was appreciated for the decisions made under pressure. The respect for a referee that was "calling it right"...Until the final whistle, when the players would

approach me with hands held out..."Great game ref". The more I pictured it, the more it happened.

But then one day, it all changed.

It was a normal week, no call to referee, enough referees for the game's...A weekend off. A chance to watch my lads playing...I switched off, no refereeing for me on Sunday!

But that all changed...

Some two minutes before kick-off and no referee. The Managers discussed and they had the perfect solution. I was stood on the touchline and my kit was in the car. A mad dash to change, referees outfit on and a race back to the pitch. Barely time for any pre-match preparation, straight to the centre circle, a blow on the whistle and the game is under way...But this was different, the game was passing me by, I was in a different zone, "great call ref" became "what's going on ref". It was a different me refereeing today.

But what was different...It was still me refereeing?

I was unprepared, I had not mentally prepared, my routine of visualisation, and of picturing my success was missing. Suddenly, I was losing the game.

I do self- analyse, and while I was not poor, I was a long way off my best.

The difference... ***VISUALISATION (or lack of).***

No Thursday call, no mental preparation, no visualisation. I could not create the picture quickly enough in my own mind of me, my success and how well I was going to referee.

It was the biggest example in my life of why visualisation, is one of the most powerful tools in creating your own success.

Turn the page for your reflections...

Learnings and reflections

Why visualisation is so important in success



“Our way of thinking creates good or bad outcomes.” Stephen Richards

- Do you mentally prepare for events?
- If not, what do you need to do, and what would be the benefits?
- Do you visualise future events and actions to prepare yourself?
- Why is visualisation so important?
 - What difference does it/could it make to you?
- If you do not create goals for yourself and self-actualise, do you intend starting?
- Will you need help, and where will you get this?
- If you already understand and practice visualisation, can you help others?
- ***Remember that “Positive word pictures” help to create the right levels of performance***

We should all aim to be the “Best version” of ourselves that we can be, all of the time.

No matter what the discipline, it starts with the mind



All of the things that we do in life cross over in the use of our mind...For me, it's sport and business. Some years ago I wrote the article below for a UK Running Magazine.

The same process applies to everything that we do.

Its race day, but are you prepared?

It's easy, isn't it? You train, you put in the miles and you fine tune according to the race that you have entered...Ready to go!

Race day arrives and your body is prepared...Reflecting on the adage "10% ability and 90% attitude" suggests that there might be one big area overlooked.

While natural ability and a thorough training schedule is clearly a prerequisite, the difference between great and good...good and average is down to you in a far bigger way than you might have previously imagined.

Any training programme undertaken is to prepare your body for the rigors and demands that a race will entail. Your training conditions your

body so that come race day it is prepared for the speed of a 5K or the stamina required by a marathon.

You may have packed your bag the night before and picked your favourite vest and shorts to wear...Picked your lucky socks, perhaps some gels and a change of clothes...Nothing left to chance, or is there?

While we will always prepare our bodies, we far too often overlook how we prepare our minds (the 90%)...And as a consequence we waste the opportunities to be our very best. We have conditioned our bodies, our hearts and lungs, but have failed to condition our thinking. Conditioning draws on previous experiences hence the need to modify our training for specific races.

It is our mental conditioning that drives our beliefs (about any situation) which in turn create our attitude to situations that we face. Our attitude determines how we feel, our emotions ...And it is from here that we generate behaviours and performance....Performance on race day!

So we need to start with our conditioning...How we think about ourselves. Our minds are fed from our sub conscious which purely retains all manner of previous experiences...But the key is that it **does not** differentiate between fact and fiction, only experiences. So when we allow ourselves to be effected by a negative chain of events, the sub conscious will retain without question for the next time a similar situation occurs...A bad race or a poor training performance.

Fact or fiction, the subconscious does not differentiate...But we can change the way we think!

We can condition our thinking. The more we stop listening to negative stimuli but replace with positive words and thinking, the more our conditioning will adapt and change for the better. Start by thinking about the many positive results you have had ...A great performance, a personal best, the feelings that you enjoyed as a result!

Use strong and expressive words and repeat them to yourself as you reflect on the performance. By doing so, you are leaving these thoughts in your sub conscious for the next time you need to draw upon them come race day.

Its 90% attitude and there are ways to train the mind...Time you started!

Turn the page for your reflections...

Learnings and reflections

No matter what the discipline, it starts with the mind



“Success will be within your reach only when you start reaching out for it.” Stephen Richards

- Where do you currently see yourself in the 90:10 scale...Attitude V Aptitude?
- How will you make positive changes to that?
 - What will be the benefits?
- What is your current view of yourself...Do you mentally picture yourself in the right “light and image”?
 - How do you plan to change that?
- When and how are you going to change your internal thinking?
- What will you put in place to create and maintain the new “self-image” of you?
- ***Remember...”Fail to prepare...Prepare to fail”***

We should all aim to be the “Best version” of ourselves that we can be, all of the time.

Abdication, inspiration or interference...Three types of delegation



In theory, delegation is a simple matter...Without giving the entire dictionary definition; at its most basic we can call it "the passing of work from one person to another". Simple, or perhaps not?

Let's consider three words...

- Abdication
- Inspiration
- Interference

Abdication is perhaps the worst form, as those responsible and who believe they have delegated, have in fact lacked any of the classic skills of leadership, missed out on the chance to develop their teams, while at the same time demoralising and at worst, have put the business at risk.

The ability to delegate well will inspire others, in turn creating an empowered organisation, far better suited to meet the demands of the modern business world...Also creating additional leaders who develop more of a "can do" attitude. Done well, delegation will also aid both "succession planning" and also "talent management".

Interference, also comes into play. A shame, as initially the intention may have been right and perhaps the basic elements of delegation used, but here a lack of trust or an inability to "let go", will mean that the person to whom the task has been delegated will feel undervalued, undermined and at worst bullied.

Some organisations preach delegation/empowerment, but when things go wrong, fail to create a true "learning experience" instead create a "blame" culture.

Sir Richard Branson is a great example of exciting people's minds with ideas and then allowing them to run with them.

I once asked a pal of mine who rose to become "CEO of The Guardian Regional Press" how he got to that position...And his answer?

"I was never all that good at anything, but always seemed to know the right people for each job".

No one person can do everything, but the key is knowing the best person for each brief, understanding how to delegate and in a way that both inspires and empowers.

Harvard identified a management/organisational style many years ago
...**ACE!**

Align (values and vision), **Challenge** (an environment that allows this), **Evaluate** (the best way forward) ...This was perhaps the first definition of an empowered culture.

Another great way of both leading and delegating is to excite members of your team with ideas in such a way that they firstly want to run with them, but also upon completion of the task, believe that the idea was

their own in the first place! People should also get the credit for the work done.

So how can you make an instant difference?

- Remember that delegation carried out well, is an incredibly effective form of coaching.
- Be selective on what can be, but likewise what should not be delegated
- Invest time in explaining what you want doing, invite questions and check understanding...The time invested will provide longer term rewards.
- Pick the right person to delegate to, and based on their own unique skills. Don't have your favourites, or delegate too much to one person
- Provide realistic time scales and support if needed
- Give genuine feedback on completion and praise when due!

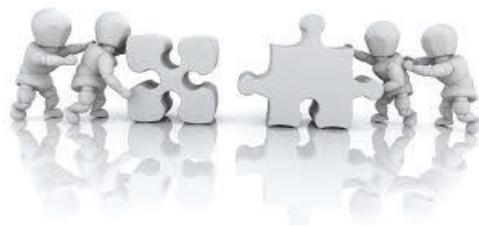
Delegation should be an enriching experience for both parties, and to the benefit of all. If it was so simple, there would not be such a mass of books on the subject...Do the basics well, and you will start to see differences.

"Surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don't interfere as long as the policy you've decided upon is being carried out" Ronald Reagan

Turn the page for your reflections...

Learnings and reflections

Abdication, inspiration or interference...Three types of delegation



"As a leader...your principal job is to create an operating environment where others can do great things." Richard Teerlink

- How well do you delegate?
- How do you measure the success of your delegation, and/or gauge feedback?
- Do you delegate to empower or to abdicate?
- Do you give clear instructions and use words to “inspire”
- Are you equitable to whom you delegate (equal share)?
- Do you follow up as appropriate, or are you in danger of interfering?
- Are there improvements that you can make?
- ***Remember, “Empowerment”, when used correctly, is one of the greatest tools for creating a winning culture.***

We should all aim to be the “Best version” of ourselves that we can be, all of the time.

Optimist or Pessimist...Let your mind decide



The pessimist complains about the wind.
The optimist expects it to change.
The leader adjusts the sail.
-John Maxwell

Are you an optimist or a pessimist?

- How can you tell?
- What impact does it have on you?
- How does it affect the team that you work in or manage?

Take a look at the simple statements below and consider how either you or individuals within your team view events.

When bad things happen.

The Pessimist...

Isolate/Temporary/Some accountability

The Optimist...

Globalize/Forever/Their Fault

When good things happen.

The Pessimist

Isolate/Temporary/No responsibility

The Optimist...

Globalize/Forever/I caused it!

Some thoughts to reflect on...

- An optimist sees a doughnut, a pessimist sees the hole
- When an optimist sees an oyster, he thinks 'pearls', a pessimist thinks 'food poisoning'
- An optimist sees a cathedral, a pessimist sees a gargoyle
- An optimist thinks life can't get any better, a pessimist fears that he's right
- An optimist invented the aircraft, a pessimist invented the parachute

Some simple facts...

In one medical study of elderly people, research showed that perception of their own health was more important to their longevity than the physical health itself.

The immune systems of pessimists function less well than those of optimists

Optimists have greater life expectancy than pessimists

People enjoy being with optimists more than pessimists. How do we know? It's pretty apparent that people enjoy being in the company of others that help to make them feel positive and bright ...A colleague telling you that it's a bad day and getting worse is unlikely to improve your day!

In his book “learned optimism” Martin Seligman talks about the work his team did into research of American Presidents: 27 out of 29 winners of the presidential race were graded as having a more optimistic outlook than their electoral opponent.

Pessimists give up more easily than optimists: why carry on if you were expecting to fail?

Strong optimists press on and on until they achieve their goal: something that they always expected and more than likely had a powerful mental picture of exactly what it would be like.

"Some folks go through life pleased that the glass is half full. Others spend a lifetime lamenting that it's half-empty. The truth is: There is a glass with a certain volume of liquid in it. From there, it's up to you!" --Dr. James S. Vuocolo

"Optimists are right. So are pessimists. It's up to you to choose which you will be." --Harvey Mackay

" One of the things I learned the hard way was that it does not pay to get discouraged. Keeping busy and making optimism a way of life can restore your faith in yourself." --Lucille Ball

So remember...

It takes no more effort to have a positive outlook than a negative outlook yet the results are proven to be remarkably different.

We are able to change our mood both in the short term and in the longer term to make lasting change.

How much more success: be that health, happiness in business, sporting life or anything of your choice, if you choose the positive outlook?

How much more success will managers achieve for themselves, their teams and the business if they can coach their teams to share the same passions, visions and attitudes?

When will you start? It could be the best thing you ever did!

Learnings and reflections

Optimist or Pessimist...Let your mind decide



“A pessimist is one who makes difficulties of his opportunities and an optimist is one who makes opportunities of his difficulties”. **Harry S Truman**

- Are you an optimist or pessimist?
- Which would you prefer to be and why?
- Reflect on the many benefits of being an optimist
- Consider how the many benefits of being an optimist can make positive changes to your life
- Does your own “self-talk” impact on this?
- Do you mix with optimists?
- What can happen if you spend too much time with pessimists?
- ***Remember, optimists achieve and enjoy more in life by purely having a more positive outlook***

We should all aim to be the “Best version” of ourselves that we can be, all of the time.

What is the limit of human potential?



It seems sensible to finish this short book with the ultimate question...And one that we need to challenge ourselves with from time to time. I don't intend have no intention of starting this article with "Whatever you believe" etc...But I may do later!

The thought is often with me. Whatever the discipline its people that make things happen. In sport faster, further, higher. Within the world of business, speed to deliver, systems that provide better data, etc.

I read an article recently regarding Jos Buttler and his recent one day innings while playing for England against Pakistan. Jos got to his 100 from 46 balls. Incidentally Jos has the two other fastest centuries by an English batsman in the one day game...But this one being the quickest.

The fastest on record is by South African AB de Villiers, his century coming from 31 balls.

The article questioned if a 17 ball century could ever be achieved...That's scoring a six from each delivery. Batsman are more powerful, bats are heavier, shots are more inventive...The application of their talent in new and different ways evolves.

For this we need to reflect on the chapter title...

“What is the limit of human potential”?

I have just read a book by Ed Caesar "Two Hours"...The quest to run the impossible marathon. The current World Record being 2:02:57 and set by Dennis Kimetto of Kenya. It's come down in time some 16 minutes in 60 years. Running a marathon is a great example. Two hours and a few minutes of pain with the human mind cogitating as each step is taken.

The consistent theme is the ability for humans to find new ways of creating those marginal gains. A 0.1% shaving here and a 0.1% shaving there. Hours spent developing new ideals. Training methods, improved technical aspects in sporting kit.

Teams supporting individuals...Formula One.

The CEO and board of Directors.

A marketing team dreaming up the next "Ad Campaign" to surpass all previous ones.

An album outselling all others.

Always teams supporting one another and often one individual. Selfless and dedicated in their striving to be the best.

Returning to my question...What is the limit of human potential!? I can't give you the answer. I never will be able to. Records will still be broken when I am long gone.

Perhaps it's easier to ask yourself "What is the limit of your potential?" For that I do need to return to a quote.

"Man, alone, has the power to transform his thoughts into physical reality; man, alone, can dream and make his dreams come true".

Napoleon Hill (1883-1970), one of America's earliest motivational authors who wrote the book "Think and Grow Rich".

Learnings and reflections

What is the limit of human potential?



The will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential... these are the keys that will unlock the door to personal excellence. **Confucius**

- We have one opportunity at life...Why would we not strive to stretch ourselves in all that we do?
- Far better to have tried and failed than to have never known what might have been possible
- While we consider some challenges too testing, others will just go and prove us all wrong
- The difference between those that can and those that can't, or those that do and those that don't is just inches. The size of their heart
- Great success follows many attempts and sometimes failures
- ***Remember, records are only temporary...Just waiting to be broken***

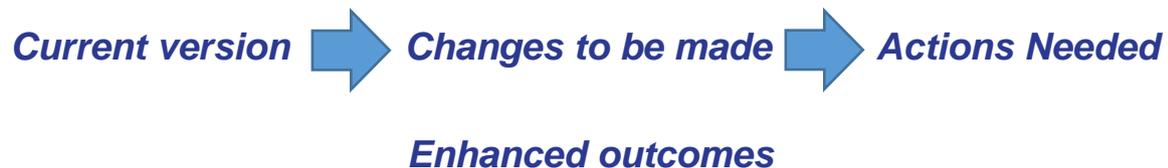
We should all aim to be the “Best version” of ourselves that we can be, all of the time.

What happens next?



We get choices in life, but whatever we choose will have outcomes.

Every one of us can make improvements in both our performance and behaviour. We can choose to make those changes...But we also need to determine what outcomes we want.



What is important is creating vivid pictures of the enhanced outcomes in such a way that we strive to make those changes. We create goals which provide the drive, determination and motivation to become that new and improved person.

Everything that you have read in the previous pages are reflections of the behaviours needed to become that better person.

We get choices in life, but you owe it to yourself to be the best version of you possible. With the right attitude, everything you set out to achieve can, with hard work, determination and resolve become reality...And in doing so, have a profound effect of you and all that you touch...Good Luck!

About Nick Bishop



Having spent close to 15 years managing teams of up to 250 in leading blue chip companies, Nick has a real understanding of the needs of business but equally importantly of the demands that is placed on individuals. The people management has always been the buzz for Nick, constantly trying to find better ways to manage, coach and inspire his teams to greater levels of success.

Nick has delivered programmes both within the UK and overseas and has helped to develop the BPO sector in Botswana over a period spanning two years.

UK clients include NHS Direct, Bank of Scotland, DWP, Argos and a range of local councils.

Nick has been asked to speak at a number of events and conferences including local government forums and Contact Centre bodies where he has a strong CRM background.

His passion for excellence has a very strong impact on those that he works with.

For the last four years, Nick has been a judge at the UK and Overseas Customer Service Training awards, and was both a Judge and a presenter at the 2015 “WOW” Awards in London.

On request, workshops can be delivered covering key aspects and learnings from these short stories; alternatively, Nick is available for public speaking where he has a rich and engaging delivery style.

Nick consults with us here at Solution Focused, delivering our key flagship Solution Focused Leader Programme whilst heading up our Solution Focused Customer Service Programme. (www.solution-focused.co.uk)

As well as being a key deliverer, Nick has a strategic role within the business managing new business generation.

Nick also consults with Brand Addition developing a Global CRM Sales Strategy (www.brandaddition.com)

Overseas, Nick delivers programs with the Business Management Training Group (www.bmtg.org) and The Knowledge Brokers (www.theknowledgebrokers.com)

About Solution Focused



Solution Focused (UK) Ltd was founded by John Bullock, John specialises in award winning pragmatic personal impact, leadership, business improvement and change programmes.

In addition to John's 23 years in industry, he is also academically qualified, holding a Post Graduate qualification in 'Solution Focused Thinking and Coaching.'

The Solution Focused approach...

The Solution Focused approach has been developed over many years and is based on Solution Focused brief therapy.

This approach aims to help understand and change an individual's thinking, engaging their powerful emotions to adopt new and improved solution focused actions & behaviours. This helps the individual, group or organisation to achieve maximum success.

Solution Focused (UK) Ltd equips individuals and organisations with the knowledge, tools and techniques to become more productive and generate the required results.

Further information can be found by visiting www.solution-focused.co.uk