

The best advice I ever received – Full transcripts

Air Chief Marshal Sir Brian Burridge is a career RAF officer and pilot. He has had a front-line command at every level in the RAF. Since July 2003 he has been the Commander-in-Chief of Strike Command which embraces the entire front-line of the RAF. He has also spent a number of years in the Ministry of Defence in policy posts. An alumni of the Cabinet Office Top Management Programme, he has an MBA from the Open University Business School and is also an Honorary Doctor of the Open University. He writes and lectures on strategic leadership and military command both in the UK and internationally. Recent publications include 'The Rollercoaster Ride of Strategic Leadership'.

I remember as a junior officer in a command position, vacillating about the appropriate punishment for one of my less well-disciplined airmen. He was a slovenly character with few redeeming features other than an oddly fierce pride in our squadron which manifested itself by his pulling out all the stops when the chips were down. But he had transgressed – again. How should he be punished? What did the 'system' expect? Surely the 'system' was watching my every move and what would 'it' think of me if went against the grain.

Away from base on a course, I revealed my dilemma to an experienced but not particularly senior commander. His advice was simple but telling. **Do what you think is right!**

That was more than 30 years ago. But I now realise that, having the moral courage to do what is in your soul which may go against the grain of the organisation, is fundamental to your intrinsic motivation as a leader. To go against your intuition and find that, actually, you had misjudged the system's expectations or that it had no expectations at all, undermines the faith in your own judgement. More importantly, if the situation created by your inferior decision becomes unravelled, you will never forgive yourself.

For me, this advice has, I hope, meant that I strive for fairness, that I ensure that my organisation's strategy, vision and values are well understood so that we can generate an environment within which empowerment can flourish and any sense of a blame culture can be eliminated.

David Bone

Having gained broad experience from a variety of Management positions across a wide spectrum of industries such as; Retail, Wines and Spirits Wholesale, The Music Industry and Commercial Training, David Bone joined Somar International as Marketing Director in January 2000 at the age of 39. In early 2004, David enjoyed promotion to the position of Managing Director, and is now working with his team to deliver a 5 year growth plan for the company. Whilst David feels that his varied experience has given him a strong basis for his leadership activity, he has recognised that he has not ever had any formal training on directing a company. In order to fully capitalise on his experience and to give more focus to his operational priorities, David is therefore currently completing his Chartered Director qualification with the IoD.

The best piece of personal advice that I ever received was from my parents who were a successful self-made business partnership. I was fortunate enough when I was younger to have a private education, and my parents were concerned that this would give me a somewhat distorted "superior" view of the world. To ensure that this did not occur I was given the following excellent piece of advice that I have used constantly both in business and social environments:

"Never judge a man (or woman) until you have walked a mile in his (or her) shoes" .

From a business perspective this has given me an open mind on, and a respect for individuals from all walks of life and from all backgrounds enabling me to recognise and utilise talent and skillsets to the benefit of any operation that I have been running. The sustainable success of most businesses comes from the strength of the team running the operation – the Manager's role is to play all of the members of that team to their strengths, and to eliminate potential weak areas in the operational structure, I feel that my initial "non-judgemental" approach has allowed me to identify those strengths, and to motivate individuals to apply them by way of showing respect for the talents that they possess.

From a social perspective it has given me very interesting and broad spectrum fuelled by a rich variety of friends and colleagues from all walks of life and all cultures.

David A. Runciman is a Fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and has spent much of his career in Asia dealing with all aspects of both the residential and commercial real estate markets. After a 35 year career in the property industry, 30 years of which were with the same firm, he retired in 2002 as Asia Pacific Chairman of CBRE - the world's largest property service. David oversaw the growth of the company in Asia from 4 professionals in 1977 to a company with over 2000 staff operating out of 54 offices throughout Asia at the end of 2002. He is now the chief Executive of Scottish and Oriental Estates, which is his own private investment company.

"The most valuable advice in life that I think I have ever received, as it applies to a business life, was given at a school speech day. The speech, given by Bill Slim who was responsible for the British Forces in Burma during the war addressed " leadership ". He was a really great man and responsible for reinstating morale to the British Troops when they were suffering consistent losses against the Japanese in the second world war. His book " Defeat into Victory " is a wonderful book full of sound advice as to how to deal with people. His tenet in the speech was the following: If you learn three things in life, these should be " **Stand up , own up , and shut up** " In other words if you have made a mistake, do not be afraid to tell your board or other employees you have done so, take ownership for it but do not then go into a long and drawn out saga about how the mistake arose - just move on .

The second, and very sage advice given to me by my late father, who was the General manager of the Bank of Scotland, is "**where there is a tip there is a tap.**" In other words where someone is heavily selling a deal there may be other than genuine reasons for them selling their stake in a company or stock. The moral being, do not take anything at face value and make sure your due diligence is thorough. This old adage has often given me pause for thought and has saved me from many times making bad investment decisions by a thorough examination of the motivations of a seller.

Lastly, the concept of fairness in business. Virtually all of the great Chinese billionaires that I have dealt with have been very straight forward in their business dealings, have paid our fees on time and expect, rightly, the highest probity standards. Those that have made the greatest money are often those who are prepared to leave money on the table for the next guy who comes along. In other words they do not extort the last penny from a deal but rather allow the " **smaller fish to benefit** ". My experience of a lifetime of doing business in China is that Confucianism is alive and well amongst the elder generation, but matters may be changing for the worse.

Pauline Wiseman is Head of Human Resource Operations at Honda (UK) where she is responsible for the employment and development of the 600 associates based at Langley, Berkshire, employed in the sales and distribution of Honda cars, motorcycles and power equipment and for the European Head Office. She has responsibility for European Management Development at Honda and sits on the Global HR Forum. Pauline also leads the Honda Institute, a bespoke training and development facility for the 10,000 people working in Honda Dealerships across the UK.

A graduate of Dundee University, Pauline has held a range of motor industry roles. Positions at Honda include Dealer Development Manager from 1993 to 1995; Head of Finance from 1995 to 1998; creating and launching The Honda Institute in 1999 and she moved into her current role in 2002. She is a fellow of the CIPD and is a regular speaker at their conferences.

When I was 7 years old I was given an autograph book as a present. International celebrities were not plentiful in the suburbs of Belfast in the early 70's – and so it fell to my family and friends to fill the pages with their wit and wisdom.

Amongst the usual poems and limericks, my father wrote in the corner of a page near the back of the book;

'Proclaim publicly, reprove privately'

At the time this gift was of little interest to me, I didn't understand the words and they didn't even rhyme.

Over the years this phrase has become increasingly meaningful to me, in the context of management, business relationships, personal relationships and motherhood.

In my early career I found it easy to discern which managers gave me constructive feedback for my benefit and development, rather than for their own purposes of looking good or clever – by the environment in which they chose to deliver it. It was also interesting to observe the impact that these practices had over time on the reputation held by those managers – with or without their awareness!

When I took on teams of my own, I revisited my father's advice and sought open group opportunities to share good news about individual and team successes. Three things struck me;

1. It is actually those people who claim to be the most embarrassed by public accolade, who are likely to have been starved of this kind of positive feedback and therefore on whom it has the greatest positive impact.
2. Provided that positive feedback is genuine, it has a motivational effect on everyone - not just those directly responsible. People think ...'next time I'll make sure it's me!'
3. Proclaiming publicly and reproving privately are just as essential with peers – no one tolerates for long the colleague who scores cheap shots in meetings and is reticent to recognise another's successes.

On the other side of the coin, criticism is generally better delivered in private, not least because we do not have the entire picture on every occasion, and are less likely to be enlightened by an individual who has just been publicly trounced. Secondly, for criticism to be constructive it must be coupled with some good coaching and guidance, neither of which can be done in public. Thirdly, for a leader to develop his or her people, a relationship of trust needs to exist, and this is the responsibility of the leader. I have met many managers who regularly deliver public dressing-downs and I have met many managers whose people have genuine trust in them and respect for them – I haven't met any where both apply!

Clearly there are exceptions to every rule – where a team is underperforming this must be addressed to the team in total, not by individual. It can also be very inspirational for a 'call to arms' message to be received by a group with some tough words. – in these circumstances, however, an individual should only be singled out for positive reasons, not for negative ones.

The advice given to me has been enhanced over the years as I have been lucky enough to work with and observe some excellent leaders who invariably follow this practice as second nature. Our Managing Director has a way of informally referring to the strengths and achievements of individuals during general discussions where others are present, or even at 'round the desk' chats. I have seen this build the self respect and personal motivation of many associates almost visibly. Conversely, opportunities for improvement are not ignored! But where they refer to one individual, they are addressed one-to-one.

No one is suggesting we engage in back-slapping sessions for the sake of it – but there are always positives to find, and people will reach for the next challenge more enthusiastically in an environment of confidence and reinforcement.....engines are best tuned behind the scenes!!

In its simplest form, the advice given to me represents basic good manners – but there is nothing basic about how, sincerely applied, it can develop a positive and affirming business culture.

I have seven year old of my own now. Sadly I lost my father before she was born, but because of him, I never underestimate the potential impact of what we teach her and the example we set.

Roger Cawse joined a High Street bank straight from school in 1966. His first management appointment was as lecturer at the bank's management training centre in 1972 aged 22. He then went on to become Head of Banking Services 1982-86, Profit Improvement Unit Manager 1986-1991 (based at Head Office in Lombard Street, London) and currently is the Chief Executive of the Exeter Friendly Society in Devon. He is also a Justice of the Peace, and is currently studying for an MA in Leadership at Exeter. Due to complete, early 2006.

As a 16-year old bank clerk, one of my jobs was to reconcile the bank account of the branch at which I worked (all bank branches have their own accounts, or at least they did in 1966!). One particular day I had difficulty doing this, so I went to my Manager and asked him if he had any idea why. He looked me directly in the eyes and said "**Yes. Human error,** (short pause for effect) **probably yours.**" It transpired that he was right. His subsequent advice that whenever I get a problem I should always ask first if it's of my own making has served me well over the following four decades.

Jay Tayler-Webb is managing director of South West business consulting company, J T-W Consulting Ltd and non-executive director of Signpost Services Ltd, a £17m turnover construction company. A business consultant with considerable hands-on experience in a variety of organisations, in humble as well as management positions, he has risen to challenges ranging from UK-Middle East trucking as an owner-driver, through management in large organisations such as Lep Transport and Schenkers, to company directorships, taking in building construction, engineering, metallurgy, hospitality, electronics, freight forwarding, acoustic engineering, agriculture, education, earthmoving, legal services and manufacturing along the way.

The best advice I ever received was "**never risk your own money when you can risk someone else's**". It was proffered by an executive director of a UK/global over dinner. I have almost completely failed to follow his advice, which is probably why he's a millionaire and I'm not",