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Workbook – Improve your effectiveness in the Workplace

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How to use this workbook

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this workbook!

This workbook contains a selection of areas to develop yourself. These are based upon a curated version of articles which people have found useful. For your benefit, I have put these together in one easy-to-access document for you to reference as you go through your own development journey.

This workbook particularly focuses on developing effectiveness within the workplace. As such, it looks at public speaking, influencing seniors and chairing inclusive meetings. It also has my own top books which have particularly influenced me.

At the end of each section, I have added a short worksheet. Here you can add some reflections and thoughts on the article you have read. If you prefer to type these out, you may also use the word version of the worksheet which is downloaded separately.

I hope you find this workbook useful. Feel free to pass this on to anyone you think might benefit from it. If you don't mind, I'd be really grateful if you could pass them to my website to subscribe themselves so that they can also benefit from my articles:

<https://tahmidchowdhury.co.uk/subscribe/>

If you have any questions, comments or feedback, get in touch with me at

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1. Top Books for self-development

Here are the first books I would recommend for personal growth. They particularly influenced me and are internationally renowned. I have also put them here as they are easier to read than some of the more dense, academic-type books. These are accessible, and incredibly informative.

Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance by Angela Duckworth

This book is excellent for better understanding what it takes to ‘make it’, setting out that one of the real key criterion for success is not being the smartest, but being the most committed. If you can continue with your goal when the chips are down, you are more likely to be successful (compared to your contemporaries who give up when the ‘going gets tough’). I would recommend this book for anyone, but especially those just starting out in their careers.

2. Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates us by Daniel Pink

When I was a first-time manager, this book was a gold-mine to understand how to motivate my employees. However, it was also a great way to learn about myself and my own motivations. Pink sets out the importance of internal or intrinsic motivators, which are greater drivers than external motivators (e.g. rewards, punishment). As part of these internal motivators, Pink sets out that people strive for three things especially: autonomy, mastery and purpose.

3. Quiet: The Power of introverts in a World That Can’t Stop Speaking by Susan Cain

As an introvert myself (one that enjoys the company of people, until I get tired!) this book is revelatory in highlighting the importance of skills that introverts bring to the table. In a world where often leaders are assumed to need to be extroverted to be ‘charismatic’, this book dispels that myth by highlighting that actually a large amount of senior leaders are introverts who adapt. This is a great book if you are someone who is seen as a ‘bit quiet’ or naturally more reflective in nature, as it brings to the fore your true worth in the modern world.

There are other influential books such as **Thinking, Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman** and **Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ by Daniel Goleman** which bring revolutionary concepts into the modern world on thinking and

intelligence. A word of note though that these two books are more dense so will require more time investment than the others I've listed above.

Reflections

What do I like about this article?

Is there anything I disagree with?

Has this article prompted any new ideas you have not had before?

Are there any actions I want to take as a result of reading this article?

Are there any challenges you foresee when using this information? If so, how might you overcome them?

Anything else?

2. What makes a good public speaker?

Public speaking is regularly highlighted as a key skill in the modern workplace. However, many people naturally find the whole prospect scary: what if you embarrass yourself in front of everyone including your boss in the front row!?

Throughout my university years I spent a long time practising public. This really helped with my own public speaking as it allowed me to practice and understand my own style. I remember when I first started, nervous to speak in front of a handful of people (I must confess I resorted to fairly cookie-cutter jokes with mediocre results!), though in the last few years I've been more than happy to crack jokes in front of a crowd of more than 1000. So how do you get from being worried to speak in front of a few to being the charming whizz at your all staff meeting?

Follow the basics

There are some basics that any good public speaker needs to adhere to no matter what their style. Rhythm is important, speaking fast can mean people can't follow, speaking too slow can make people lose interest. Think about what the audience is interested in hearing and build your content from there. Also, keep an eye on the time, you're probably not the only one speaking and going twenty minutes over is usually not looked upon too fondly! This may feel like quite a few things to keep in mind, but remember that you do all these things when you chat with anyone outside of a public-speaking context!

Public Speaking is a skill, and like any skill you will get better with practice

No one was born able to ride a bicycle perfectly, and likewise no one learnt to speak publicly instantly either. Public speaking is a skill, and like most skills you only get good at them if you practice. So take the opportunity to practice where you can, even by starting small. Here are some simple ways you can practice speaking before jumping into the real thing:

- Practice in front of a mirror, or in front of close friends
- Imitate standing at the front of a room with your notes the day before and visualise how you will be speaking to the audience in front of you
- Start small, e.g. presenting at your mini team meeting or huddle.
- Attend public speaking workshops to practice

Starting small can allow you to improve bit by bit. Remember, those people giving Ted Talks weren't magically born with the gift of public speaking, rather they got their by practice.

Bring your own personality and style into what you do, rather than looking for a template to imitate.

Whilst there are many useful tips that can be learnt by watching others, remember it's you speaking not them. In a world where expressing yourself and your own individuality is being valued more than ever, you will get limited value emulating the first video you find of a tall guy with glasses and a neutral accent if that doesn't really fit your description.

Instead, look at what your strengths are when speaking more broadly – are you quick on your feet and good at moving around the conversation or are you more thoughtful and deliberate when you speak? Use these strengths and build on them. To me, public speaking is about taking what you normally do, and refine it for a crowd. It is not about suddenly speaking the Queen's English and waving your hands around because that's what other people do. Understand your own way of speaking and make small tweaks. Don't start from scratch.

Public speaking as a chance to express yourself and give your opinion

The idea that the spotlight is on you can be daunting. Instead, think of this being the chance for you to express yourself, and give your own opinion on the matter. In my mind, public speaking is responding to 'what do you think?', so take the opportunity to give your thoughts!

People don't remember so much as what you said, rather they remember how you made them feel. This is your opportunity to give your own point of view based upon your own feeling and emotions, and by doing so making your audience feel something: are you looking to inspire, excite, sadden, shock? Emotions are more memorable than a long list of bullet points.

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3. Tips on how to influence seniors

Have you wanted to press ahead on a certain project or direction? In the modern workplace, you often don't get very far unless you get agreement from your seniors. We have all experienced the disappointment of having that 'great idea' only to not get it passed our seniors. So how can we learn from this experience to get a more optimal outcome? As a D&I lead I regularly work with senior leaders to positively influence change, however I don't get very far unless I make my work relevant to them! Here are some of my top tips:

1. Understand what your senior leadership priorities are, and learn to fit your projects within them.

You work within a team where your manager, or manager's manager who has wider oversight. That means they should have an understanding of what you do and how it ties into the wider picture, right?

Unfortunately it's not quite so simple. Senior leaders have to balance different priorities, so whilst something may seem very important to you, this might be far lower down in the priority list for them. For example, you may want to get a quick HR decision agreed to set how you or your team is organised, however they may be in the midst of agreeing the details of a key priority project whilst balancing this with wider team expectations. As such, your request will probably not be the most urgent.

So rather than going all guns blazing when they have plenty on their plate, consider waiting for an optimal time to pose the question, or better yet, frame this in terms of their wider priorities – have they previously committed to inclusive practices? Set out your ask within the wider decisions that they have previously made to make the decision far easier for them and more relevant to their wider decision making.

2. Demonstrate your competence and establish trust

The higher you go up the leadership chain, the higher importance on your senior leaders ability to successfully delegate. You want to make it as easy as possible for them to agree with your recommendations that they can be confident are well-judged.

So how do you get to the point where you are trusted by your seniors? By demonstrating your value. Ensure you are doing work to a good quality and showing your positive impact where possible. Better yet, demonstrate that you have done the hard graft and used evidence to come to a proposed solution (showing numbers always helps convince

people!). Doing this makes a big difference compared to coming to your senior leaders asking what to do. This will set a positive dynamic where they can take your advice rather than feeling they need to direct you.

3. Remember that senior leaders are humans too!

We often exalt senior leaders as mythical beings that are beyond us mere mortals. In reality, seniors live and breath just as we do. It's important to remember that, particularly if you feel a bit nervous pitching something to them! As such, wider communication and influencing basics like establishing rapport still apply. Like any human, seniors respond positively to someone who is pleasant – there is no harm and saying hello and asking how they are to establish rapport.

Don't forget, your senior leader will have their own individual interests that you can use to tie into and build a connection. For example, does your boss have a technology background and is enthused by innovation? Try tying in these elements when speaking with them to get yourself some additional brownie points. Like any human being, building a connection with your seniors will make them more favourable to your views.

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4. How to chair inclusive meetings

We spend an incredibly high amount of times in meetings. We've all been in meetings that have been poorly organised and dragged on for far too long. However, there comes a point where the tables turn and it is now your responsibility to organise a meeting. So how can we break the cycle, and make meetings inclusive to the whole team? Here are some of my top tips.

Before the meeting

The key to an inclusive meeting is usually the preparation. After all, if you are sticking this in a time which does not actually work for most people (or indeed you've forgotten to even invite them) you are unlikely to get the full engagement you desire.

Things to consider:

- Is your invite list correct?
- Have an agenda, and ensure people can add points to an agenda
- Is the date/time of the meeting one that is inclusive. E.g. avoiding school run times
- Have papers been sent ahead of time?

During the meeting

Within the meeting, as the chair it is your role to effectively facilitate the discussion. It is important to avoid abusing your chairing privileges which allow you to come in whenever you want, as this quickly leads to you dominating the conversation. Rather, if you do want to comment, perhaps open up the floor for discussion first before giving your comment.

As the chair is often the most senior person in the room, if they speak first they are likely to stifle any discussion as more junior members of the team are less likely to want to disagree with what you say.

Things to consider:

- Try and make space for introductions – it makes any meeting far more human!!
- Steer away from one / two people dominating the conversation (and avoid being one of those people yourself!). Agendas help with this.
- Use your ability as chair to ask others whether they would like to come in.
- Give moments of pause to allow people to think within presentations etc.
- Keep to time! If possible, invite reflections on the meeting at the end.

After the meeting

Whilst the meeting may be over, your job may not necessarily be done. Following up after the meeting can ensure everyone is clear with the tasks agreed, as well as a great opportunity to pick more informal feedback from colleagues about how the meeting went.

Things to consider

- Send up follow-ups, actions, read-outs etc. Invite individuals to comment / dispute the write-up
- Check-in with individuals on how they found your chairing style and whether they got what they wanted for in the meeting

Finally, other things you may want to think about is having a rotating chair system, as well as a standing agenda point to review the meeting at the end. These both help increase engagement and give the team a greater sense of ownership over the meeting.

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5. Concluding thoughts

I hope you have found this workbook helpful. If you've completed the questions, it may be an idea to revisit this in a month's time to see whether they have had an effect. If they have, then great! I'm happy that this may have helped you. If they haven't, have a think about what prevented you from doing so – perhaps you were too busy, or when you tried some other issue came up.

I created this workbook with the hope that it will prompt positive change. Sometimes the answers are quite simple – i.e. shifting one or two small behaviours. Sometimes, they are more complex, and trying something new raises more questions.

If that is the case, I encourage you to try new things until you find something that works. You can follow what I write, or equally find a new source of inspiration from someone else. If you would like me to respond to a situation you are facing, feel free to drop me a line at tahmid@chowdhury.co.uk, I always welcome new ideas for articles.

I am also a qualified coach, where I work with clients to overcome their challenges through ongoing support. I work with those who are genuinely committed to change through the medium to long term. I prefer holistic change rather than quick fixes, as such I work with clients who are genuinely willing to commit to development that might at times be uncomfortable and difficult. I do this as I believe this is what is required for us to truly learn, whilst shorter relationships tend to be shallow in impact.

If this is something you might be interested in, get in touch with me at tahmid@chowdhury.co.uk