



## Start As You Mean To Go On

### setting precedents can add pressure to your life

Beginning something new can be a refreshing experience, especially when it is a matter of personal choice; and particularly if the prospect is exciting or different. Whether it be a job, a relationship, or simply an offer of help, there is a tendency to put in extra effort to make a good first impression. How does this have anything to do with Healthy Living? In a word, **pressure**. There is enough of that already going round; adding to it by setting precedents that are difficult or impossible to maintain just increases stress levels. In effect, what may seem like a good idea at the time can backfire causing more than a few problems later on.

Consider a simple example: your first day in a new job. It probably took some smart tactics to secure, what with dressing the part for the interview and saying all the right things; but it worked like a dream and you squeezed in ahead of the sixty other applicants. Always assuming the qualifications and skills claimed weren't exaggerated, there's no reason to assume the work will be beyond your capabilities. The thing to do now is impress. That will convince the bosses that they made the right decision, and hopefully secure your position for the future. So, you do everything that is asked of you, cheerfully and enthusiastically; and you go the extra yards to prove you are better than just average. At home that night you may feel pretty tired, which is understandable. First-day nerves played a part in this, not to mention the relentless way you drove yourself. Still, it was worth it - or was it? When you front up next day you will be expected to uphold those same standards, to work like a Trojan, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow... Could you keep to that pace, or will you have to shift back to normal cruise mode the same as your co-workers? And if the latter is the case, the reputation you have created is that of an inconsistent show-pony.

Here's a further thought: workplace attitudes. The management has rules which are plainly stated and easy to interpret; the workers have their own set, ways of doing things to their satisfaction, generally unspoken and not always obvious, especially not to new recruits. Like: not performing a routine task faster or better than everyone else because it makes them all look bad. Anyone breaking this traditional rule is likely to be told, probably in no uncertain terms. This presents them with an unenviable choice - slow down to keep the co-workers happy, or ignore their "friendly" advice and carry on as the super-hero to continue buttering up the bosses. Either way will be stressful for one reason or another; and before too long the initial shine of the job will have worn off and they will be looking for another.

Not everyone is an employee. When you have your own business, you are the one who decides how long the job is likely to take and how much to charge the client. Then there are tenders - virtually putting in a bid to win the contract. Whatever the situation, the business owner needs to sell wares or services, but not at a bargain price that will leave him or her out of pocket. Take this a little further and imagine what can happen when the word gets round - Celia is the cheapest dress-maker in town. This seamstress could be inundated with orders from customers expecting the same deal as the one who recommended them. If that price was merely a draw-card to encourage more business; and if any profit barely covered costs, Celia will either have to continue working for nothing, or upset a few people until everyone realises that the opening specials have finished and it's back to the real world. Celia's reality will probably be a few sleepless nights.

On a slightly different theme, personal relationships tend to develop similarly. There's that special someone you've seen from afar, or maybe it was love at first sight on the train station. Desperate to have them in your life, you invent some casual contact and deliver your best opening line. If it is favourably received, you're in with a chance. Now - don't mess it up! Those with plenty of

practice in these situations may stick with their usual plan, unless previous attempts have bombed out. In which case, a new strategy might make a difference. On the other hand, someone with limited or no experience of first dates will probably be winging it. Both will want to make a good impression. The danger comes in fabricating a false persona, one that can only be maintained with considerable effort. Over time the strain of deception becomes too much and the facade inevitably begins to crumble. And once the true nature of the suitor is revealed, there are no prizes for guessing the outcome.

Children are renowned for being cruel, particularly to other children. Students enrolling at a new school soon discover this, yet most are eventually accepted by their peers simply for being themselves. The odd few, however, believe it necessary to come up with something unique to win popularity. Kids love to laugh and have fun, so a girl or boy who acts the clown is wonderful entertainment value. They will go to great lengths to perfect the act over the years, not realising that the precedent they have worked so hard to maintain has evolved into a habit that is difficult to break. Not only that, but they reason that because everyone expects it of them, to suddenly switch to serious mode portrays them as a fraud. Then, along come the final exams and tom-foolery would seem to be the only subject in which they are likely to excel. Here endeth a very hard lesson.

I mentioned making an offer of help as being one of those feel-good-at-the-time acts that could create a stressful situation. Donations to charities can certainly turn out that way, particularly when finances take a turn for the worst. But kindness doesn't always have a dollar value. Years ago, a good friend of ours met a man with whom he got on well. They both worked on an oil exploration rig and, as fly-in fly-out was an accepted aspect of the job, when on a break the two oil men returned to their family homes in different countries - one in Australia, the other in New Zealand. "If you're ever in my neck of the woods," said the New Zealander, "Drop by and stay a while." Sometime later, after both had switched rigs and lost touch, our friend happened to visit New Zealand and decided to take his old mate up on his offer. Did I say, **mate**? The look that our friend received on the doorstep of his former work buddy was decidedly stony and made it pretty clear that the original invitation was never expected to be taken up. It was just hot air! Result - one broken friendship and proof that people should say what they mean and mean what they say, or suffer the consequences.

My final bit of advice may be hard for some to swallow, but I'll say it anyway - when there are no great expectations to live up to, life is far less stressful and you can enjoy moving forward in your own sweet time. So, never try to be anything more or less than the person you truly are and know you can be.

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