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Tina Coulsting is an experienced media spokesperson, providing comment and analysis on professional verbal business communication, presentation and leadership.

ASK THE EXPERTS: Bristol Evening Post Business Pages

Find below a selection of questions and answers by Tina Coulsting, Director, Mentor Consultancy, that have appeared in the Ask the Experts column in Bristol Evening Post Business Pages. (Biography for Tina follows).

1 Q: I recently failed to get a promotion, which was frustrating and demoralizing because the feedback I got was that I'm really very good at my job. The issues seem to be around communication and the need to show leadership. My firm seem to favour loud jolly people but I'm not a naturally extrovert person – please help me, is there anything I can do to develop my skills in this area?

A: You don't have to be loud or particularly jolly to be seen as someone with leadership qualities. If you look around the majority of us are on the introverted side but that doesn't stop you commanding a presence. Take a pride in the fact that your expertise is a given and concentrate on building rapport with colleagues. Engage in small talk, say hello and ask people how they are or remember something about them that you can bring up in conversation. Be thoroughly prepared for meetings by rehearsing what you want to get across so that you can use such occasions to emit influence. When you speak do so with impact by maintaining good eye contact with others and using your hands to gesticulate with positive open gestures. Take a more assertive and pro-active approach to work. If you want to fast track development of these skills then ask HR to get you some one-to-one communication and presentation training from a reputable trainer.

2 Q: Although I'm the MD at my firm one of my Directors has been brave enough to tell me that I am over critical of people and that this leads to them feeling demoralised. I've decided to take this seriously because I had no idea that I was coming across like that and that it was having such a damaging effect. Do you have any tips on being more constructively critical?

A: Good for you for being positive and taking steps towards changing your behaviour. Having done so I am in no doubt you will succeed and see many benefits from it in terms of respect from colleagues and employees.

It is sometimes necessary to criticise others but if you can do it in a way that shows that you are trying to help them it is easier for them to swallow. Get them to talk about the situation e.g. "How did you feel that went?". Tell them what you want them to do differently in the form of advice rather than dwelling on what they are doing wrong. Be direct and assertive and specific in your approach. E.g. "I want you to do it this way from now on – because it will have more of a positive effect."

Treat the need to criticise as an important event to negotiate to not only alter someone's behaviour for the better but also to maintain or even build the respect that they have for you as a leader at the same time.

3 Q: I'm a senior partner in a Bristol based accountancy firm and I've been asked to go on a Business TV programme to comment on an issue within my area of expertise. I'm terrified! Please have you got any tips before I go like a lamb to the slaughter!

A: It's only natural to feel the way you do because being interviewed for TV, if you haven't done it before, is like no other two-way communication you will experience. My advice is – get media training quickly, but if it's too late for that then here are some useful rules to follow: Work out, in advance, what you want to say plus bite-sized ways of saying it. Preparation is the key to confidence. There won't be much time for preambles so be direct with your messages and leave out long explanations unless they become appropriate and there is time available. Don't be put off getting your messages across by questions that might not even make sense just find a way to talk about what you want to talk about. They won't mind as long as you are interesting. Match an upbeat message with a dynamic image and you will be very popular. Keep eye contact with the reporter and be enthusiastic and friendly and they will probably ask you back!

Q: How can I live up to my bosses' expectations of me? I've recently been promoted and I'm in a state of shock really. I'm a lot younger (26) than other managers and never expected to be in this position. I know I'm very good at my job but I feel completely out of my depth when it comes to **managing my new team and being assertive** in management meetings. Can you suggest anything?

A: Your cry for help is one that I hear from managers a great deal more experienced than yourself, so you are not alone.

The short answer is that you are a leader now – get used to it! You need to develop leadership skills fast and the quickest way is to go on a leadership and management course, so put in a request immediately.

In the meantime start to see yourself in a different light. You are good at what you do and therefore have a lot to give your team in terms of guidance. Listen to them, make them feel valued and adopt an assertive presence. Be clear about what you need to achieve and work towards that by keeping your team on board and motivated.

Avoid falling into the trap of doing everything yourself because it seems like the most straightforward route. Leadership requires constant negotiation with others so delegate with a bright and positive manner. Give praise where it is due – something we often forget – because it makes people feel good about themselves and in turn they will feel good about you.

Q: I'm a marketing and sales manager for a local IT solutions company. I came from the software development side and as result I feel very comfortable demonstrating and talking to clients about our products. However my boss has taken me aside recently saying he wants me to be more proactive on the sales side especially in meetings with clients. The problem is that I feel slightly averse to be seen as a pushy salesman and am not sure how to be like that any way – any advise?

A: Brian, I understand because I meet many people like you in my work. It's a common trait to hate the idea of putting ourselves forward too much. Try taking a different psychological approach to this though. As an expert at what you do you will recognise just what your client needs and if they get what they need to solve their IT issues then they will be delighted. You never have to be dishonest just research your clients needs well in advance so that you can show them very clearly how you can help them with confidence. They will be interested in three things if the product is right – quality, delivery time and budget. So reassure them on all three counts and they will be more than interested in ordering from you rather than your competitor.

Q: I have just been promoted to Director level at my firm in Bristol and I would really like to find out how to be better at **delegating jobs**. As a woman I feel I have spent a lot of time trying to prove myself and tend to take on too much. It just doesn't seem right asking other people to do things? Anne

A: Delegating is an issue for lots of people but it's time for you to get over it because otherwise you are not going to be able to carry out your new and important role efficiently. When bosses don't delegate it is not only you that suffers eventually but everyone around you too.

Most of us get no real training for leadership and feel uneasy about managing others so go on a course. In the meantime I've got two words for you – authority and warmth. Your team will enjoy being trusted with extra responsibility as long as they are approached in the right way. Ask in a direct, respectful and positive way. It's only if you are aggressive, defensive, tentative or grovelling that you will get a problem. Be clear about what the task is and when you want it done by. Encourage others by making yourself available if they need advice and give thanks on completion and praise where it is due – people like to feel valued. The way we feel about work often depends on the quality of our relationships and how others communicate with us not on the actual work we have to do. So, delegate away in a confident but friendly way.

Q: I'm getting a new PA and I'd really like some tips on building a positive relationship with her. I never felt comfortable with the person who has been my PA till now and don't want to repeat mistakes I've made in the past.

A: This is a very good question to ask because behind every successful businessperson there is usually a successful and happy PA so you are wise to want to nurture as positive relationship as possible.

It is key to communicate well with your new PA. Be clear from the outset about how you like to work and find out how they like to work. Discuss tasks in as much depth as is needed.

Decide who is going to keep your diary, them or you. It should never be both of you and if you do make appointments or if anything else urgent comes up then tell them immediately.

If your PA likes to go to lunch at a regular time then keep that time sacrosanct.

Most PAs don't mind making tea or coffee but don't take them for granted and thank them for doing so. When it comes to other peripheral tasks like fetching dry cleaning? – Don't go there.

Let your PA know that her work is valued by you and encourage them to develop their range of skills and to take opportunities that come along. Generally behave in an empathetic way and maintain professionalism by not passing on your irritations or stress to them.

Q: I want to try and **change the culture of meetings** in my company. Far too much time is wasted in them, nothing seems to get sorted out and people generally seem to find them a demoralising experience. Could you sum up a way to transform the process?

A: Meetings need a chairperson who is going to show leadership and move things along to achieve its objectives. Participants should be invited on a basis of their focus and ability to move the objectives forward. They should be sent a clear agenda and brief on what they need to prepare beforehand.

Issue a decree that every person should turn up bang on time and turn off their mobiles on arrival. Be clear about when the meeting will end and what you have to achieve in that time.

As chair you can set the atmosphere for the meeting by giving a cheerful welcome, making introductions, bringing wafflers to a friendly halt and encouraging those with something useful to say.

Promote positive communication in your company so that participants in meetings are focussed, attentive and contribute constructively. For example, push people to make recommendations rather than merely criticise. Make it clear that those who yawn and doodle have been noticed and that their influence is negative.

Get one person to take notes or minutes on action points and send them to everyone as soon as possible. Be sure to follow up to ensure that the actions decided upon are carried out.

Q: I'm the **Managing Director of a design and print firm** and am aware that I could be doing a great deal more **networking** to build business. The trouble is that I loath going to local business forums and the like because I find the process so excruciating. How can I become more comfortable at networking events?

A: You and me both! In my experience the fear comes from the idea of having to sell yourself – but you don't have to do that.

Devise two or three succinct sentences about what you do and rehearse them so that even when your guard is down you can trot them out. This will always give you a confident start with someone new. The key is to be enthusiastic because this gets others enthusiastic.

If you are making the approach then simply introduce yourself with a shake of the hand. They should tell you their name, so repeat it and ask about their line of business. Give the person your full attention with full eye-contact.

The best way to make a friend at these events is to make them feel comfortable so get them talking by asking questions – you can have your say later. Listen attentively and never underestimate the power of small talk for building rapport.

Move on to the next person with confidence. It's a network event so they won't be offended. Give them a card if this seems appropriate.

When and if you spot a potential customer do not hold back – ask for a meeting and get your diary out.

Be friendly; let's not be too earnest about the whole process!

Q: I work in an office with a number of other staff and managers. Unfortunately the latest addition to the staff has a serious **hygiene problem**. I understand that our managers have written to the offender pointing out the problem of his body odour. The letter has not had any effect and the managers have now turned their back on the problem. What options do my colleagues and I have to solve the problem?

A: The first thing to say is that the offending smelly person is probably the most distressed out of all of you. I strongly suggest that your managers find a leadership skills course to go on because they have not dealt with this situation well.

The chances are that someone who is neglecting their personal hygiene is having problems either with work or in their personal lives so a caring approach is needed. It is best if someone more senior takes them aside discreetly and asks them if there is something wrong.

A letter is just going to alienate your colleague even more – put yourself in their shoes, how would you feel?

This is a difficult and sensitive issue and I believe all managers should have access to training so that they can learn to deal with situations like this.

Q: I'm a **director of finance in my company** and I've been told that I've got to make my annual **presentation** of the figures more accessible this year. Where do I start?

A: Think about what your main message is. Has the company done well or does it need to improve on sales? Think about the audience. It will probably be everyone from the MD to the secretaries so keep your presentation jargon free and try to engage every person there. If the figures are good make them feel good and celebrate the fact. If they are not, then find a way of making it clear that things need to get better without making everyone feel horribly uncomfortable. You are in a huge position to have a positive influence so you can be encouraging what ever your message.

Most people will just want a basic picture of how things are going, so keep your points simple. You can give very complicated statistics and figures out in text form if required. Deliver your presentation with passion – this is the best way to get people to listen.

Q: I've got to tell two of my **staff** that they are going to have to be made **redundant**. I'm terrified of the fall out. What can I do?

A: Making people redundant is never an easy job especially when you know them well. The key is to make the recipients of the news understand that it is not their fault. Make it clear that they have been valued members of staff and that their positions have been lost through a purely business decision. Do this face to face and never through a written communication. If you are sincere in your approach and explain as much as you can about why the decision has been made then your staff will probably accept it even though they will not be happy about it. You have no need to feel guilty so just repeat the message and don't get dragged into having to justify the reasons.

Q: I feel that my **staff** are a bit **demoralised** at the moment for various reasons and would like to find a way of change this. I'm due to make a **presentation** to the whole company as part of an annual event. What can I do or say to try and motivate them?

A: You don't say what the problems are at your company but one thing I know is that if staff are demoralised it is usually because they are uncertain about their future in some way. This is when we need to call on strong leadership.

You clearly care about the situation so you must make that clear to your staff in the presentation. Employees need to feel valued – so tell them that they are valued. Tell them your vision for the future of the company and make it clear that you want them to be part of it. If you need greater productivity then the best way to get it through building up their loyalty by being honest and open with them. They need to trust in you as someone that is doing all the right things to make the business run effectively.

Prepare your presentation well and rehearse it so that you feel confident on the day. Deliver it with energy to have as much impact as possible and use positive language throughout.

Q: I've recently observed that our **receptionist is rude** and defensive to a large number of callers and not just on unwanted calls. What can I do about it? She's been with us for several months and has clearly been getting away with this behaviour unchecked.

A: Speak to her immediately. Tell her that you want her to improve her communication with callers – and it doesn't matter if they are clients or sales people. Let her understand that she is the first face of your company and that you want every one spoken to politely who ever they are.

You will have to set an example here and get the message across that this is a verbal warning in a respectful manner. Encourage her to develop her skills rather than criticise her and emphasise that her job is really important because the way she answers the phone affects your reputation. You may offer to send her on a communications skills course.

If she doesn't improve give a written warning so that if you don't get the receptionist your company needs then you do not have to wait to sack her.

Q. I run a small architects practice and spend a lot of time tendering for new clients and work. We seem to do well at getting our proposals through to the presentation stage but don't seem to be able to take our pitches all the way and actually win.

A. On average the number of new accounts won through pitching is one in four so you need to invest time and energy in the process if you want to be in with a better chance.

If you've been invited to pitch then your credentials are not really in question but you've got to stand out from the other companies presenting.

You need to build rapport with the client by addressing their needs, interests and concerns closely. Make sure you give the client what they want and rehearse your presentation to perfection. You need to work as a team and everyone must know exactly what they are going to say and how to support their colleagues. Above all give your team time to prepare for the pitch.

Q: Since getting promoted into a senior position at my firm **I now have a PA**. This sounds great but I'm finding the relationship uncomfortable and would like some tips on how to handle it. For example she offers to make my coffee every morning but I'm embarrassed that someone as intelligent as her should do this and I end up making it myself which not only wastes my time but also seems to make her upset as well. I thought I was behaving in an egalitarian way but **communication** has become strained. What can I do to improve things?

A: The way you feel about your relationship to your PA is very common. It's clear you have the best of intentions but instead you are undermining your PA's power! Staff like to have clarity in their roles and a PAs role will usually be to support you so that you can do your job effectively.

Coffee won't be in her job description but I'm sure your PA is willing to take rough with the smooth as long as she feels happy and respected in her job. You can show how you respect her by praising things she does well and discussing ways she might be given more responsibility.

Arrange to have a review session with her and tell her how much you value her work and all the things she is doing well. Be up front about the fact you feel like you've been treading on her toes a bit and why. Agree with her ways of working together that are going to suit both of you.

Q: As a **senior partner for an accountancy firm** I'm used to making presentations but I'm floundering a bit on how to make a **presentation** that involves asking the audience to give money to the charity we support. Any tips?

A: Be direct. Start off by saying 'I'm here this evening to ask you for money...'. Don't try to hide the fact that you are there to ask your audience for money. People like to be charitable but because there are so many charities you have to inspire them so that they give to yours. Give them a good reason to listen in a positive way E.g instead of saying 'these people have

nowhere to live' say 'with the money we raise tonight we are going to ensure that these people have somewhere to live'.

Motivate them by saying how much you are hoping to raise and what it will go to do.

Deliver your talk with enthusiasm, keep it light and make the audience feel comfortable about giving, even if it is a small amount. Make sure they know how to make a donation and make yourself available to talk about it with people at the end.

Q: I've been using **PowerPoint** for doing presentations to staff for a while now but I never get the feeling that people really enjoy them. I've read recently that PowerPoint is going out of fashion but I'm not sure how I would manage without slides to read from.

A: I don't know how to break this to you gently but if you are reading from your slides this would indicate to me that you produce your slides for yourself and not for your audience. I strongly recommend you shift your approach to making presentations by letting the audience see more of your Power and not your technology's! Concentrate on having more personal impact and cut back competition from the big bright screen by only using slides that illustrate or reinforce what you want to say.

Yes, this does mean you have to take more time to prepare and rehearse but if you concentrate on how to get your messages across with enthusiasm your presentations will be a lot more popular.

By the way most people are not trained to stand up and talk in front of others. It's a very unnatural thing to do but one you can get very good at if you are committed to the idea – so go on a presentation training course.

Q: I'm the **HR Manager for a law firm** in Bristol and I feel strongly that the presentation skills of many of the lawyers, leaves a lot to be desired. In some cases I know that clients have been put off by them. The problem is that they all think they are brilliant and I'm concerned that if I suggest a coaching session they may take offence. How can I put this to them without them rejecting the idea?

A: Hi Jane, This is a common issue with people who consider themselves experts in their field – which they are. The thing is that most experts do not have a level of communication skills to match their expertise. This is not their fault because most of us develop our personal presentation style on the job and never get any official training or feedback on how to improve.

Lawyers have excellent analytical brains but often fail to make what they say accessible or impactful. In short they fail to inspire – like many business presentations I see. Tell them that you want to organise some coaching that will develop their already good presentation skills to a level of excellence that guarantees to inspire. Then make sure you find the right trainers who can do this.

Q: I've built up my **soft furnishings company** from scratch and now employ 9 people. I love what I do but I don't think I'll ever get used to managing staff. I dread review meetings or having to correct others' mistakes. In short I can't face conflict of any kind with them. How can I keep on enjoying what I do without constantly feeling uncomfortable about the way I come across as a boss?

A: You are not alone! Being good at your job is one thing, being good at managing people is another and something for which most of us get no real training.

Firstly it helps to develop a loyal work force so that you have the minimum of hassles with them. The way you do this is by behaving like a leader. You need to be clear about what you want in every situation and to be able to communicate in a way that motivates.

To do this your personal presentation style must be one that combines authority with warmth. Employees want to be able to trust you and have confidence in you. So you must show confidence in yourself and your ideas and vision.

Tell them that they are valued by you and invite ideas from them on operational issues. Encourage responsibility amongst staff by giving extra training or advise when things go wrong rather than criticising for making mistakes.

Without you they do not have jobs, so be fair to your business as well as being fair to employees when making financial decisions.

Q: As **office manager at a Bristol based Public Relations company** I've been asked to manage our cleaning contract. Our cleaner is a one-man band and pretty good on the whole. However, if I ever have to pick him up on anything and write a note I get a surly note back. The cleaning has got worse recently but I feel timid about sorting it out. Tina – any advice?

A: Ensuring that the cleaning is done well is an important responsibility so you need to manage him like any other employee. If he is not working to your satisfaction then spell out how you would like things done rather than criticise him. E.g. *Please ensure that the kitchen floor is cleaned well this week.* Don't let things linger on. If the cleaning continues to disappoint, send him a written and final warning. If there is no change then you will have to give him his marching orders. Of course you have to have an alternative cleaner lined up so make sure you have done your research in advance so that you can bring in another should it come to it.

Managing awkward people is never easy but you have to do what is right for the business – and you don't want the staff working in squalor. It certainly does not help to avoid situations like this so nip things in the bud with a communication style that is assertive but respectful.

Q I'm MD for a software solutions company that is part of a larger group. I asked my marketing manager to organise an away day recently but it was a disaster – the atmosphere was terrible. The thing is I think it might have been down to me and not her. I'm ex-army and I think I might be intimidating my staff. Any advice?

A: I wonder if there is something of the command and obey leader about you, given your background. Think about what it takes to be a more facilitative leader – someone who guides, encourages and fosters positive relationships around them. You need a certain amount of 'emotional intelligence', which means two things, self-awareness and social awareness. You have clearly become self-aware about how your behaviour might be affecting your staff in which case it is time to stand back and examine what is happening for them. Listen well and address the concerns and issues of your team. One sure fire way of improving matters is to tell

them they are valued. Give individuals your full attention. Encourage them to develop their skills rather than criticising them. Read and learn more about good communication.

Q: I have just been promoted to Director level at my firm in Bristol and I would really like to find out how to be better at delegating jobs. As a woman I feel I have spent a lot of time trying to prove my self and tend to take on too much. It just doesn't seem right asking other people to do things? Anne

A: Delegating is an issue for lots of people but it's time for you to get over it because otherwise you are not going to be able to carry out your new and important role efficiently. When bosses don't delegate it is not only you that suffers eventually but everyone around you too.

Most of us get no real training for leadership and feel uneasy about managing others so go on a course. In the meantime I've got two words for you – authority and warmth. Your team will enjoy being trusted with extra responsibility as long as they are approached in the right way. Ask in a direct, respectful and positive way. It's only if you are aggressive, defensive, tentative or grovelling that you will get a problem. Be clear about what the task is and when you want it done by. Encourage others by making yourself available if they need advice and give thanks on completion and praise where it is due – people like to feel valued. The way we feel about work often depends on the quality of our relationships and how others communicate with us not on the actual work we have to do. So, delegate away in a confident but friendly way.

Q: I'm a **marketing manager** for one of the big banks and my question is about **presentations**. Everyone says I'm very good at them and that I make people laugh. I am quite comfortable about standing and talking to others but the bit I hate is working out what to say. It takes me ages and lots of anxiety. Any advice?

A: You are lucky to feel comfortable about the standing up and talking because most people don't. When you prepare your presentation think about who the audience is and put yourself in their shoes to work out what is going to really interest them. Then be sure that you know what your main message is – not as easy as it sounds sometimes so take time on this. Then find an angle to present your message that is going to appeal to the audience you have already profiled – highlight benefits too. This should come at the start and remember your presentation is for them, not you, so give them something useful as well as entertaining.

Q: I want to be more influential within my company. Is there anything I can do or am I doomed to being ignored and passed over for promotion?

A: There's loads you can do. First thing: adopt a completely positive outlook and start greeting everyone you meet in a bright and breezy way – especially anyone you may have built up little resentments towards. Let it all go. Do small talk, it builds rapport slowly but surely. Now get yourself noticed a bit more by getting yourself heard. Prepare for meetings, offer to chair them even. Think your ideas through well and be ready to put them forward. Bosses like to see someone who is enthusiastic and has recommendations to make about taking the business forward. If you haven't done so, go on a good presentation training day.

1 Q How can I live up to my bosses' expectations of me? I've recently been promoted and I'm in a state of shock really. I'm a lot younger (26) than other managers and never expected to be

in this position. I know I'm very good at my job but I feel completely out of my depth when it comes to managing my new team and being assertive in management meetings. Can you suggest anything?

A: Your cry for help is one that I hear from managers a great deal more experienced than yourself, so you are not alone. The short answer is that you are a leader now – get used to it! You need to develop leadership skills fast and the quickest way is to go on a leadership and management course, so put in a request immediately. In the meantime start to see yourself in a different light. You are good at what you do and therefore have a lot to give your team in terms of guidance. Listen to them, make them feel valued and adopt an assertive presence. Be clear about what you need to achieve and work towards that by keeping your team on board and motivated. Avoid falling into the trap of doing everything yourself because it seems like the most straightforward route. Leadership requires constant negotiation with others so delegate with a bright and positive manner. Give praise where it is due – something we often forget – because it makes people feel good about them selves and in turn they will feel good about you.

2 Q: I'm a marketing and sales manager for a local IT solutions company. I came from the software development side and as result I feel very comfortable demonstrating and talking to clients about our products. However my boss has taken me aside recently saying he wants me to be more proactive on the sales side especially in meetings with clients. The problem is that I feel slightly averse to be seen as a pushy salesman and am not sure how to be like that any way – any advise?

A: Brian, I understand because I meet many people like you in my work. It's a common trait to hate the idea of putting ourselves forward too much. Try taking a different psychological approach to this though. As an expert at what you do you will recognise just what your client needs and if they get what they need to solve their IT issues then they will be delighted. You never have to be dishonest just research your clients needs well in advance so that you can show them very clearly how you can help them with confidence. They will be interested in three things if the product is right – quality, delivery time and budget. So reassure them on all three counts and they will be more than interested in ordering from you rather than your competitor.

3 Q: I'm now a partner in my law firm which is great except that there have been heavy hints dropped to the effect that I should smarten up my image. I hate the idea of conforming and believe that clients like to meet someone with a bit of individuality. What do you think? I wear button down collar shirts and a tie (reluctantly) corduroy jackets and chino trousers. My classes are 'reactolite' so I get accused of wearing sunglasses in doors. Charlie

A: Charlie, if hints have been dropped then it's probably for a very good reason. You are clearly good at your job but perhaps the other partners are concerned about the client facing aspect of your work.

Research suggests that 40% of the impact we have on others comes through the way we look, so when we communicate the impression we give must balance what we have to say and how we say it.

In your line of work clients need to have absolute confidence in you so the way you dress is going to influence that.

Here are some suggestions: First ditch the glasses for a really decent pair of designer frames. To communicate well with others you need to maintain good eye contact with them. If they can't see your eyes then they will not trust you fully because it can make you seem a bit 'shady'.

You can maintain your individuality and look extremely smart by going out and buying an expensive designer suit, or two, in a classic but young style – e.g. A Hugo Boss with 3 buttons and no vents. Buy expensive shirts too – they can be colourful as long as they are immaculate. The same goes for ties.

Try getting shirts that you can wear that look good without a tie, for days when you are not seeing clients. I believe your colleagues will be impressed and so will you!

1 Q: My architects firm is now 50 strong and our computer network and systems become more and more important. I employ an excellent IT man but a lot of the staff don't get on with him. They say that he blinds them with science and is defensive in his attitude. This leads to misunderstandings and stressed architects – any suggestions about what I can do about it?

A: You said that your IT man is excellent at what he does so clearly his expertise is not in question and that is a message you must get over to him. Another is that his colleagues can't respect that expertise unless he relays it in their language. Your letter mentioned presentations on new software that tend to be baffling. It may be a good idea to send him on a communication or presentation course because he must learn to understand those he is supporting, and what their needs are, in order to get information about software and systems across with clarity. It is common for technical experts to want to show off their knowledge to gain kudos and this is often done out of insecurity – there is always so much more to learn! But what really gains them love and affection is empowering those around them. So empower **him** first by letting him know how much you value his input and his expertise within your company and tell him you want to help him develop his communication so that he can inspire the other employees who rely on him.

2 Q I've recently been made Sales Manager at my firm, a foreign property development company based near Bristol. I've worked there for two years so I really know what I'm talking about and have natural rapport with customers. However the presentations I am giving, based on our marketing department's PowerPoint production, have been crashing big time and I'm losing a lot of confidence over it. I'm confused and would like some advise.

A: Alison, I think you know what's going wrong here. Enthusiasm plus ensuring that you target each audience or customer specifically is what sells and it sounds like your natural exuberance is being stymied by having to present other people's material. This is something that is not just difficult it actually rarely works – because you can't be yourself. You have to make your presentations your own so that you can exude the confidence you need to ensure that your clients have confidence in you.

You don't have to throw marketing's presentation out altogether but go and see them and explain how you would like to change it to suit each occasion. If you don't know how to use PowerPoint yet then learn – it doesn't take long and this will allow you to take control more.

And a last piece of advice – make sure the PowerPoint presentation works for you and you are not a slave to it. In other words develop your skills so that you can be an excellent presenter even if the worse should happen and your laptop failed one day.

3 Q: I head up the interactive and digital side of a South West based production company that has around 20 creative and interesting employees. However, one of the graphic designers is a pain. Everything seems to be an effort for him and he's incredibly negative. I'm convinced he's got a drug problem but just don't know how to approach him about his behaviour. Any advice?

A: A tricky one this because if he is on drugs he's going to need some support but you are not absolutely certain that he is so let's talk about his behaviour first.

Often when employees behave in such a way it's because they are not happy at work for some reason. You need him to be productive member of the team and it helps everyone if communication is kept open and positive – so you have to talk to him about his conduct.

Take him for a coffee and ask him if everything is okay with him – say you've observed that he doesn't seem too happy. Pursue the matter sensitively without accusing or criticising him. Instead you can say things like “when you are like that, it makes other people feel bad”. Listen to his answers carefully and show that you understand what he's saying. Ask him what might be done to improve the situation. You must be clear, though, about what you want from him and use the word **I** to reinforce that e.g. “I want you to...”

Depending on what his performance has been like you may want to give him a verbal warning at this stage – this can be the jolt some people need to see that they need to make changes. If it turns out that drugs is the problem then find out about support and counselling straight away.

Biography follows.

Tina Coulsting, BA, MA, PGCE Co-Director of Mentor Consultancy

Media Spokesperson

Tina Coulsting is an experienced media spokesperson, providing comment and analysis on professional verbal business communications and issues of topical interest.

Tina is available for interview or to provide comment on the following key areas:



- Leadership and the importance of successful communications
- The art of public speaking
- Presentation skills and the psychology of presentations
- People in the public eye – how do they 'perform'?
- Effective communications in the workplace
- Cultural change and the role of communications
- Management development

If you would like to organise an interview with Tina Coulsting or request a quote or comment, please contact her on 0117 9237933 or email tina@mentorltd.co.uk

Biography

Tina Coulsting is co-director at Mentor and a specialist in presentation skills and communication skills.

Tina formerly taught media and presentation at the University of the West of England in Bristol where she also co-managed a media unit. Having already worked as a video producer, she moved into multimedia and became involved with training in the field of communication through designing multi-media and computer based courseware.

Tina developed her special area of interest, communication of science, as an integral member of a team delivering an innovative award, which promoted the public understanding of science. She was also an editor of Wavelength the Science and Culture magazine.

Work in this field led Tina to develop an expertise in the area of the teaching and learning of transferable skills and particularly communication skills.

She has applied this expertise to management development programmes and set up Mentor Consultancy in 1998 with co-director Magnus Carter. Since then, she has worked with many of Mentor's corporate clients on presentation and communication skills programmes and is particularly renowned for her work on pitch presentations, conference rehearsals and personal development for leadership.