

TPM⁴Schools Newsletter

Autumn 2016

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Visit our website at: **www.tpm4.com**

You can't do everything!

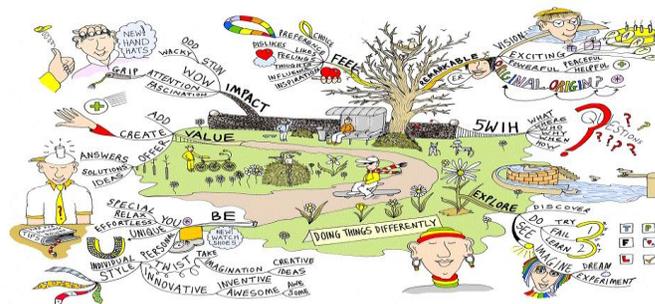
Some of you may have seen that wonderful Ealing black comedy starring Alec Guinness, Kind Hearts and Coronets. It is a story of how Louis, the 10th Duke of Chalfont played by Sir Alec Guinness, acceded to the title by "eliminating" others who were in front of him.

The only living person who knows the story is Sibelia who is married, but falls in love with Louis but although she has promised to tell no-one, when he spurns her she decides to tell all! However, the day before his execution she decides to recount her confession and his sentence is set aside. Whilst in prison Louis writes down the incredible story which is portrayed in the film by flashbacks. The film ends with Louis being released from prison only to realise that he has left the manuscript of his life story in his cell which will ultimately condemn him.

Whilst most of us never find ourselves in Louis' position, we do quite often find ourselves challenged with so many different things that 'we have to do' and at times can be overwhelmed by them. The pressures on all professionals and in particular head teachers can be onerous. I have met so many heads over the years who have become weighed down and occasionally destroyed by the sheer number of things that they have to manage and end up focusing all the difficulties facing their school on themselves when actually the task they were being asked to do was impossible.

We need to make it clear that the role of the person who heads the schools is in the name - it is head teacher. Over the last twenty-five years we have loaded so much bureaucracy onto these people that they have become more like Chief Executives. Fundamentally good schools require good teachers and good leadership requires a good head teacher.

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School portal update

For the last three months we have been adding all your reactive invoices to the school portal and we hope that you have been enjoying the benefits of storing and accessing all your invoices from one location. We have received very favourable feedback on the school portal system, with only a tiny percentage of our schools reporting any access difficulties. We have either resolved these ourselves or arranged for our IT partners to resolve anything more technical.

The portal also helps us to help you! For example, we are frequently inundated with contractors chasing payment. We always try to deal with these with the least possible impact on schools but invariably we have no option other than to contact you. We know this can be time consuming for you but just one small action when accessing your invoices can virtually eliminate this.

When downloading your invoices for payment, please help us by recording either a payment date, or a date that you arranged payment, against each invoice. We can then inform contractors when they contact us without having to trouble you.

Access to your school portal is via our website www.tpm4.com where you will also find guidance on using the portal. If you experience any access difficulties, please contact Nicole for assistance on 01254 958850.

There are a number of examples of non-teachers being appointed to lead schools, in particular Academies, and with very few exceptions, it has been a disaster. Good education establishments require leadership and people that are good at doing what they are there to do, i.e. teach and educate. I don't have the answer on how to relieve pressure from head teachers other than to say that DBE Services and other organisations with which I am involved, are seeking to do as much as we can to provide support.

When people become head teachers, or take on any role managing an organisation, it is very easy to lose perspective. The focus is on you and the expectations of the community is huge. It is easy to forget that in that role, we are simply privileged guardians for a small part of history. The past knew nothing of us and the future will usually soon forget us no matter what we achieve. Leaders are challenged to build on the good work that has gone before them or, in some cases, to sort out the problems that were left behind and to do the best for the organisation and themselves. Nobody can ask for more.

Hopefully when the time comes to move on we can leave a basis for others to follow and help the organisation grow. We are simply workers on a project which we can never see completed and we will never know the effects on it from many other influences over which we have no control. We need to accept that we can't do everything. Once you can accept that, it is quite liberating because it means you can do the things you can do well and not be weighed down by the things you can't do. It is having the ability to pick the things that you need to do, add to those the things you want to do and only do other things if you think it might prevent you from doing the former.

Thirty years ago this summer I left the Civil Service. My last boss was an Air Commodore who always had a pristine clear desk because he worked on the principle that the first time something lands on your desk, you can throw it in the bin because if it is important it will come back. I have heard a million arguments why that is no longer true in the world of today but when I think of the piles of papers that we leave to be sorted out over the summer or at a later date, that had never been touched or ultimately ended up in the bin, I am not convinced that very much has changed and, if it has, it's not for the better.

I hope very much that in this coming Autumn term not only will you be able to meet the challenges but also identify the things that you are simply not going to do and therefore release yourself from worrying about them. You have become a head teacher because you are good at what you do - never forget that. What you have been appointed to do is in the job title - Head Teacher.

I hope you have a very prosperous and happy Autumn Term. If I, or DBE Services, can help in any way you only have to ask.

Best wishes
Peter

Schools working together either in Academy Chains or in Federations

Where schools in TPM work together on a formal basis, we are able to reduce the management fee for the whole group by 50%. This is in recognition of the fact that our point of contact for the group is usually a single person. However, we can only do this when we know that schools are working in that way.

We are very rarely informed when schools enter into formal relationships with other schools and therefore we are not in any position to make any changes to the management fee when it comes due for renewal. If you are working in a formal way with another school, please let us know so that we can make the necessary adjustments.

By the same token, if schools you are working with are not in the TPM Scheme, we would very much like the opportunity to talk to them about the possibility of them joining. This would reduce the management fee for the whole group.

For further information, please contact Peter at peter@dbeservices.co.uk



If you have recently welcomed new staff to your school e.g. Head Teacher, Business Manager or Site Supervisor, please remember to let us have their name and contact details as soon as possible. Please email info@dbeservices.co.uk

Keep up to date with all the news and developments and access your school portal through the TPM website:

www.TPM4.com

Health & safety - Everybody's responsibility

Governors, Heads and Directors cannot avoid their responsibilities for keeping the buildings they manage safe. They carry the ultimate responsibility for Health & Safety provision. A great deal of the day to day health and safety management in a school is simply good common sense. It is also essential that those responsible for managing Health & Safety understand what the National Health Service drums into all its staff, that if it's not written down it didn't happen. Good record keeping is an essential part of good Health & Safety management. We often visit schools where regular checks are being carried out but nobody is recording them. Whilst doing something is better than doing nothing, if you have an inspection or something happens the lack of records will be a major issue for you.

It is also important that those who use your school buildings be they teachers, pupils, parents, hirers or whoever, understand that Health & Safety is not somebody else's responsibility, it is a shared responsibility and we are "our brothers'/sisters' keepers". Most accidents happen because people are not thinking or they do something stupid. I don't subscribe to the view that there is no such thing as an accident. We often hear that when people fall or trip, what they have fallen over has been there for days and no-one has done something about it. It is everybody's responsibility to walk around with their eyes open and either act to correct or report anything that they think could be a Health & Safety issue.

In our experience and talking to people in schools, a great deal of Health & Safety training seems to be based on fear. We have a lot of anecdotal evidence that trainers begin by showing a slide of the head teacher behind bars. The reality is that there are very, very few prosecutions and of those, the number in schools is really small. Of course when it does happen it's because there has been an incident which has probably affected somebody's life and the prosecution may well affect others. It is therefore essential to ensure that you do everything to minimise that possibility. Health & Safety should be a way of life not a black cloud hanging over you.

We are able to offer you practical Health & Safety guidance and support should you require it and we promise we will do it not by telling you the worst case scenario but encourage you to be a beacon of best practice in a proportionate and reasonable way.



Quotes v Estimates

All our contractors will provide quotes free of charge and we are very happy to arrange them for you for any project up to £2000. Above that value we will need to discuss how the project is being specified so that quotes can be compared on a like for like basis and when the work goes ahead you know exactly what is, and is not, included.

Increasingly we are being asked to acquire quotes for work which is very speculative and in reality schools are really asking for costing to see if they might be able to afford the work. We understand this especially when money is so tight. If you are seeking an estimate to allow you to decide if you have the funds to do the work, we are happy to provide you with one but it is unfair to expect contractors to spend the time producing a detailed quote if it is such an enquiry.

Contractors expect to provide many quotes which will not be taken up for various reasons but in the last two years we have seen the quote acceptance level fall from over 30% to below 10% almost entirely due to restricted availability of funds. At this level of acceptance, providing quotes free of charge will eventually become uneconomic for contractors.

From September whenever you ask for a quote we will ascertain if it is a detailed quote for proposed work or an estimate for potential work.

If, having got the estimate, you are able to fund the work, we will then get detailed quotes.



We will provide a quote for significant remedial works identified during a service, or during a reactive call-out.

Dictum Meum Pactum

This is the motto of the London Stock exchange and the basis on which it has operated for over 300 years - “My word is my bond”. Whatever we may think of the financial sector it is not a bad motto for society. It is the basis on which DBE Services carries out most of its work.

We do not ask schools to sign contracts or enter into long complicated agreements. We simply agree to support you and you agree to a selection of services and the related costs. When schools ring us and ask for some help, we do log the conversation but rarely ask for written confirmation and act on the conversation in good faith. Recently this, in a small but not insignificant number of cases, has caused us and our contractors some issues.

If you accept a quote, we raise an order for the contractor on the basis of your authority. If you then later decide you don't want the work after all, you may find that the contractor has purchased parts which cannot be returned or, they may be charged to return them. It is only fair that you meet any expense the contractor cannot recover having acted on your instructions. Similarly, the same principle must apply if you invite consultants to do work for you on the basis there is no charge unless the work happens. If at a subsequent time you then decide to get somebody else to carry out the work, there will be costs for the time the consultant has spent developing the project.

Trying to cancel a commitment by claiming, as one school asserted, that the person authorising the job request did not have the authority to commission the work, is not acceptable to us and I am sure to the majority of our schools. Perhaps you will forgive us for adding to *Dictum Meum Pactum*, *Nullus liber prandia* (No free dinners!)



How often do we need to have it serviced?

DBE Services can provide qualified and experienced people to do almost anything at any time but the decision on all matters relating to your school ultimately rests with the Head Teacher and the Governors. Most heads and governors are not building management experts so they need to take advice.

Many things relating to the management of the school building rely on the interpretation of guidance and we know that many schools find it easiest to take the advice provided by the Local Authority. However, when faced with significant cost implications as a result, schools often turn to us for further advice. One of the challenges we face, is to unpick the sometimes over use of words like statutory and essential, as applied by some authorities, which has often lead to a multiplicity of sometimes confusing advice.

If school funds were plentiful it would perhaps be simplest just to do everything once a year so you know it's done, when it is going to happen and you don't have to interpret any guidance. However, in the current climate proportionate advice is becoming very important in order to ensure compliance within limited funds.

To demonstrate how guidance can differ, take Portable Appliance Testing (PAT). Traditionally PAT testing took place every year as did fixed appliance testing. Neighbouring Local Authorities in the North West offer very different guidance on these matters. Some continue to advise that they should be done annually. Others recommend that PAT testing need not be done annually but could be done every two or three years. Some authorities advise that fixed appliance testing could simply be done at the same time as the five-year fixed wiring test. Similar advice variations also exist with legionella testing and servicing TMVs for example.

We understand how difficult it is to know what to do and who to listen to. At DBE Services, we will always seek to give you advice based on need, proportionality and reasonableness and we are always happy to support you with any issue raised by other agencies. We take our advice from various sources as well as analysis of guidance from the Health & Safety Executive and other professional bodies. This enables us to provide up to date information and guidance to individual schools and always bespoke to your needs.