

WORKING LIVES

JENNY ROGERS ON THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS



A crazily affluent friend takes delivery of a Burberry handbag for which there has allegedly been a three-month waiting list. The price is roughly the same as the average British worker's monthly salary. Meanwhile, a coaching client gets the job of his dreams after manoeuvring for it for two years.

What happens? The friend reports that after two days of hungrily stroking the bag and displaying it to people, most of whom have no clue what they are looking at, she feels oddly disenchanted and is considering returning it. The coaching client rings me six months later to say that after a few days of euphoric triumph and a blisteringly enjoyable start to the job, he feels strangely empty – and I hear the hollowness in his voice.

Popular books on happiness make the same points but about societies. Oliver James's book *Affluenza* argues we judge each other and ourselves by how we look, what we wear and what we earn without becoming any happier. Many "happiness economists" have claimed the wealthiest nations are no happier than the poorest.

Back at the individual level, I am alert to looming signs of trouble in clients who package all their hopes into one future achievement. Typically this client will imply that if only they could get that promotion or pay increase, or pass an exam, all their problems would be solved. Invariably such clients discover that not only has success brought problems of its own, but that also all their other problems remain the same: the mouthy teenage children, the less than happy marriage, the worries about ageing parents. And there is always someone who earns more, looks more glamorous and has more influence.

It often seems the very qualities that give people their driving ambition are the ones that prevent them enjoying success. I have heard many such clients

describe the sour sense of disappointment in their current role and, even worse, a feeling that all their past achievements are equally worthless. There was general astonishment, though no experienced coach would have registered surprise, when Lord Stevenson, chair of HBOS and one of the most successful and prominent business leaders in the world, confessed in October 2007 to the bleakness that descended on him in the middle of obvious success, working but getting no pleasure from it.

Although I have no formal religious beliefs myself, I am struck by the wisdom of so many great religions which emphasise the importance of giving more and expecting less, of living in the moment rather than

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pinning hopes on the future, and of living simply and keeping your mind in neutral. All also say that happiness cannot be pursued as an end in itself.

No one has written more movingly and simply about this than Viktor Frankl in his wonderful book *Man's Search for Meaning*. Frankl survived the holocaust and founded a successful school of psychotherapy. His central argument is that humans must have some purpose greater than mere self-promotion: "Happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself."

Jenny Rogers is an executive coach and director of Management Futures.



RECRUITMENT

Tipped for the top

A tailored assessment toolkit is helping one trust assess leadership qualities, especially when making senior appointments. Madeleine Owen reports



Countless initiatives facing the NHS place ever more pressure on its workforce to deliver better services with greater flexibility and choice for patients. Making this happen when resources are tight is a huge challenge, particularly for those in influential senior positions, both clinical and managerial.

Trafford primary care trust in Manchester believes that in making significant changes to employment processes and embracing principles of occupational psychology, it has a renewed confidence in its ability to rise to this challenge.

"A good place to start is recruiting people with the skills and qualities to lead others effectively," says Trafford PCT human resources director Claire Scrafton. "Like most organisations and businesses, the NHS has traditionally promoted on

the basis of technical or professional competence, without really acknowledging the importance of good leadership, or even understanding what it looks like.

"But increasingly the NHS is recognising that it takes certain qualities to effectively galvanise a group of people around one shared vision of excellence."

Fifteen such attributes are defined in the NHS leadership qualities framework. Many managers will be familiar with this, as it has already resulted in organisations such as Trafford PCT rolling out a 360-degree feedback programme for all senior staff. But skills are still developing in using this framework effectively in order to spot leaders who possess these qualities before appointing them to critical senior roles.

Talent spotting

At a time when PCTs are moving towards new ways of working with world class commissioning, Trafford has been redesigning its services and roles in both the commissioning and provider arms of the organisation.

This has led to an ambitious recruitment programme to attract the best talent to new roles and to strengthen leadership.

The PCT has worked with human resources consultants Wickland Westcott to deliver a leadership assessment toolkit. This has enabled recruiting managers at Trafford, in partnership with their colleagues in HR, to construct and run assessment processes to identify candidates who possess key leadership qualities.

Underpinned by the principles of



HEALTHY BUILDINGS

The HS/Sustainable Healthcare Buildings forum in London on 11 September will discuss investment in this important area.

www.hsj-sustainablebuildings.co.uk



STAFF ABSENCE

In one primary care trust, a study of line managers' differing understanding of staff sickness helped to change their approach and drive down absence rates.

[Working Lives online: best practice section](#)



EQUAL PAY

A legal case tested whether a woman could use her successor in the job she had left as a comparator for an equal pay claim – she could not.

[Working Lives online: best practice section](#)

occupational psychology, the toolkit outlines best practice guidelines for conducting an accurate and fair recruitment process. In particular, it focuses on the techniques for observing whether a candidate demonstrates the qualities from the leadership framework.

This allows the PCT to be more certain of the candidate's ability to lead effectively.

Shortlisted candidates are invited to take part in an assessment process at a special centre. This includes tailored simulation exercises such as role playing or case studies and interviews to measure the qualities from the framework. It also uses a range of psychometric ability tests and a personality questionnaire.

With the candidate's qualities being measured more than once across a range of activities, the PCT firmly believes it is the most accurate predictor of future performance currently available. The trust has committed to using assessment centres for all band 7 roles and above, both clinical and non-clinical.

The assessment process can be run with a group of candidates completing the activities simultaneously or during a one-to-one session. Critically, the toolkit enables managers to assess the candidate's leadership qualities and skills, and complements the usual CV and experience-based interviews.

The combination of these approaches allows all avenues to be explored with potential appointees.

The toolkit commissioned by Trafford contains the following:

- best practice advice and guidance on constructing and running an assessment process;
- guidelines on objective assessment techniques, which enable PCT staff to carry out the assessments themselves;
- tips on providing feedback to candidates;
- pointers on using the output of the assessment for development planning and management of the successful candidate;
- the tools of assessment (probably the most important part of the toolkit).

Wickland Westcott constructed assessment exercises and interview questions to identify whether people possess the leadership qualities defined in the framework. These include people-management role playing; a detailed case study and presentation exercise; a choice of scenario based interview questions and a bank of competency based interview questions.

Managers trained to use the toolkit can select the qualities they are looking for in the vacancy in question, select the tools and techniques to measure those criteria and manage a professional assessment process to identify the right candidate.

Standard practice

Assessment centres are now becoming standard practice across Trafford PCT and managers are seeing many benefits. Importantly, in the short term the trust has been able to reduce its dependency on consultancy services.

Ms Scrafton adds: "The training provided to our managers in running assessment centres has equipped the PCT with the skills in-house to deliver robust selection processes that, as a model employer, we can be proud of."

"They have also given the PCT's workforce rich information about personal strengths and development needs, which can be used by managers for new team start-ups, team-building events and individual career development activity."

"In addition, the data will inform talent and succession plans as part of the 2008-09 operating framework and also [contribute to] our organisational development plan for world class commissioning."

As a result of using the toolkit, Trafford PCT can recruit and develop people to secure a pipeline of talent. Staff will not only have the experience, track record and professional competence to do a good job, but they will also possess the leadership qualities important for addressing the challenges facing the NHS. ● *Madeleine Owen is an occupational psychologist for Wickland Westcott, www.wickland-westcott.co.uk*