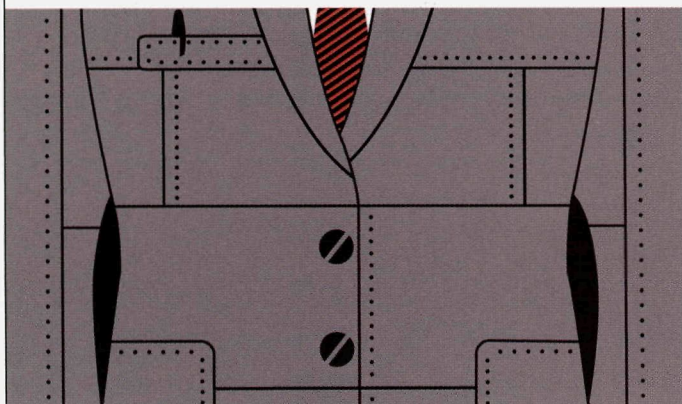


WORDS-WORTH ROBUST

You are in 'robust' health; your company has a 'robust' balance-sheet; you hope for 'robust' growth in the economy; you have 'robust' systems in place to grow with it; you have a 'robust' management style; occasionally you resort to 'robust' language. Clearly, a most useful word. 'Robust' means strong, sturdy or healthy. We find it in English as early as the late 15th century, used about people, their bodies and their dispositions. Later on, it was applied to building materials, voices, foodstuffs – especially wine – and immaterial things like thoughts, emotions and humour. In our own time it has been extended to refer to statistics and to computer systems that are reliable. But it can also mean coarse, rough and rude: hence that robust language. The word came into English from medieval French, but its source is the Latin adjective *robustus*, itself derived from a noun, *robur*, which meant strength but also 'oak tree'. To be 'robust', then, is to have the good qualities of a tree: strength, but also hardiness and durability. All virtues worth cultivating.



Thomas Phillips

SUFFERING FROM... FRIENDLY WORLD SYNDROME?

This might sound like a positive ailment to be suffering from, but it's not. George Gerbner first coined the term 'mean world syndrome' to describe how watching violent films on television skews our thinking, making us believe the world is a much nastier place than it is.

'Friendly world syndrome' is the opposite disorder. It is the result of all these exciting tweets and Facebook 'likes' about drunken nights out and parties attended. They give the impression that everyone is having a much better time than you are, and that they are far more popular. As no one ever reports boring news (not even at the water-cooler or in-house coffee bar), the net effect is that we feel our lives are dull and lonely in comparison. This leads to a general sense of

isolation and despair. The answer is either: get a more exciting life, or just make one up, like everyone else does.

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CAREER MASTERCLASS BE A TOP COACH



Prioritise. When deadlines loom, coaching is all too easy to postpone. Don't. Find a format that works for you (weekly check-ins over breakfast, Skype chats while you travel) and commit.

Start strong. Don't waste your first session on niceties. Ask your team to bring a list of things they want to achieve and how they think you can help. This is coaching, not a coffee morning.

Educate. At first, coaching (that is, apprenticeships) involved telling trainees exactly what to do. Today, we ask questions to guide people to answers. But the ideal is a mix. For example, if you're setting goals, ask them what exceptional performance looks like and share what you think they could achieve.

Build trust. Coaching relationships rarely work without it. Highlight shared interests, show you appreciate them, be consistent, and don't ever breach their confidence.

Craft their dream job. We're more productive when doing tasks that play to our strengths. Find out what they relish, then delegate accordingly. If you can't change their role, change their perception by showing how tasks fit with their long-term goals.

Keep them motivated. Are there tasks they just can't learn to love? Show them how they link to the company's goals: 'I know you hate data analysis but we're moving towards a more data-driven approach; you're making yourself indispensable.'

Give them the inside track. From the CEO's pet projects to the resource controller's sweet spots, show your protégés how to impress those who matter most, and keep your ear to the ground about the impact they're having.

Get real. If you know they want to leave, do what you can to prepare them for their next step. It's better they're engaged in their final months than mentally checking out.

Swallow your pride. If things aren't working, have an honest chat then help in the one way you can: find them a new coach.

The Mind Gym: Relationships is published by Little, Brown at £12.99 – www.themindgym.com/books

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