# A Word in Your Ear

What a day! Who'd be a manager when you're obliged to work with such unprofessional and incompetent staff?
Having just finished yet another phone conversation with one of your managerial colleagues about a member of your sales staff, Ben, you've decided enough is enough. At tomorrow's scheduled monthly progress meeting with Ben you're going to get him to realise once and for all how he is regarded by others. You are also determined that you and he are going to agree a personal development plan with clear goals and actions for him to take over in the next few months.
The phone call was the fourth of the day about Ben and you need to decide how best to feed back the information so that Ben realises he needs to spend time developing his personal organisation and self-management skills.

The issues:
The first phone call came from a retailer with whom your Company does a lot of business. Apparently Ben told him that he had arrived at work late due to a domestic crisis involving his young son having to be taken to hospital. Crisis over, he had rushed to his office only to discover when he checked his desk diary that he should have stopped off at the retailer's to discuss the new line of cosmetics the Company is planning to launch next month.
One meeting missed. While the retailer sympathised with Ben's situation, he felt let down, particularly as Ben had not called to say he'd be late.

The second complaint had come from your boss, the marketing director. She had recounted to you almost verbatim what had taken place in her meeting with Ben earlier in the day:
"Come in Ben. I've had the store manager of Smith and Hopson on the phone. Apparently he was expecting you at 9.30 this morning. I've tried to make peace with him and to fix another meeting. You know he's being courted by our competitors at the moment. Why didn't you turn up?"
Ben had explained about his son and how the meeting had slipped his mind.
According to your boss, she then went on:
"Right then, let's get on with our meeting. We need to finalise the marketing campaign for the new cosmetics. What's your view about the proposals we received last week from the advertising agency?"
"Well," Ben had replied, "I guess they're not bad…actually I didn't think we were going to discuss them until later in the week. I've prepared a paper on the pricing strategy for these products. I thought today's meeting was called so that I could present my ideas on this."
"Well it wasn't, but we might as well tackle it as you've prepared a paper. Let's hear what you have to say"
Ben looked around her office. He had prepared some Powerpoint slides, but there wasn't a projector in the room. According to your boss he had then asked
"Can we go to the Boardroom, as I need a projector and screen?"
"We can, if the Chairman has finished his meeting there. Otherwise, you'll have to do without the slides – this is what comes of being disorganised."

The Chairman had finished with the Boardroom, so Ben was able to go ahead with his presentation. However he did not do well. He seemed rushed and irritated.
This had prompted your boss to call you. She felt something should be done about Ben.

Things did not improve as the day went on. In the afternoon, he only had to go to the weekly briefing session run by the managing director. This meeting usually took about 45 minutes and involved everyone listening to a prepared talk, and making notes on relevant items. According to your long-time friend and colleague, Marie, the chief accountant, Ben had commented to a few people prior to the start of the meeting "Here's to a nice quiet time while the MD drones on as usual" However, although the MD had started the meeting in his usual way, after a few minutes he stopped and said "Right as you will remember from last week, we agreed to turn this meeting around so that each of you will brief me on what's going on in your sections" Marie heard Ben whisper to one of his friends "Oh no! I missed last week's meeting and I haven't read the minutes, so I didn't know I had to speak." When it came to his turn he said "I'm afraid I haven't prepared anything, but I can give you a rough idea of what's going on…" He stumbled through his briefing, but was shown up by his colleagues who were all well-prepared. Some had produced written handouts and slides.

Your fourth phone call was from the MD's personal assistant. She wanted to fix a meeting between you and the MD for next week to discuss training and development and particular plans you have for your staff. No mention was made of Ben, but you realise that he is going to feature in the conversation. You are determined to nip this problem with Ben in the bud.

Task
1. As Ben's manager consider the strengths and weaknesses of his performance today, and think about how you will give him feedback in tomorrow's meeting with him.

2. Identify actions that you'd like to establish with him, and consider how these might be put into a performance improvement plan.