

The Baobab Centre
Inspiring potential and growth



May Newsletter 2008

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North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service and their association with The Baobab Centre

North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service's association with The Baobab Centre began in 2004 with a small number of managers attending one to one coaching sessions. These managers were often working in difficult situations that challenged the range of experience and development they had previously received. Following on from this initial contact The Baobab Centre were asked to deliver the excellent "Motivational Styles" workshop to a wider group of managers. This event was very well received by those taking part and led to the development of a positive working relationship that continues to grow.

Four years further down the line and The Baobab Centre now provide a wide range of services to the North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Services (NYFRS) such as:

- Counselling for staff, including those suffering from symptoms of stress, which has resulted in staff returning to work much earlier than had previously been envisaged. In some cases counselling has enabled staff to remain at work.
- Mediation in workplace disputes between individuals providing independent advice.
- Coaching for middle managers enabling them to be more effective in their role both now and in the future.

"The centre has helped me a great deal in understanding how discussions and working relationships really work. A more detailed understanding of transactional analysis has proved of great benefit to me and more importantly the people who work with me." Middle manager.

- Facilitating team development days for both senior management teams and departmental teams.
- Bespoke development for managers dealing with unusual or unique situations that don't require full development courses.

Most recently The Baobab Centre was instrumental in intervening in long-standing problematic working relationships. This group of individuals were brought together for a bespoke development day. The staff attending were at first sceptical and defensive but throughout the day the skills of the facilitators brought the issues to the surface, challenged the behaviours, and

set boundaries to allow the staff to come to terms with events and move forward to resolve the issues. Such was the success of these days and the issues that were raised by the staff that The Baobab Centre is providing two further follow-up sessions to develop the staff to meet the needs of the individuals and the organisation.

"I feel that most if not all people found the day useful, hopefully people (I know I do) will now be able to see how they relate to others and change ways that are not helpful, this of course will be of great benefit to the organisation as it will result in a happier (less bitchy) environment with fewer psychological games!"

The Baobab Centre adds real value to NYFRS in a number of ways. The staff who have worked with the centre are happier, more engaged and more effective. The management of cases handled by The Baobab Centre is a confidential relationship between the member of staff and the centre with information provided to management only on a consensual basis. This builds trust between the NYFRS, its staff and The Baobab Centre.

The Baobab Centre's professionalism and awareness of the need for NYFRS to provide Best Value in the use of public funds ensures that budget management meetings are open, transparent and constructive. The investment in staff development and counselling gives NYFRS effective, engaged staff who value the support that has been provided through The Baobab Centre. Long may our association continue.

Jez Rushworth
Group Manager

Intelligent, but doesn't quite "get it".

Have you experienced anyone in your workplace who fits this description – 'intelligent, but doesn't quite "get it"'? Perhaps this person seems overly pedantic or sticks to rules and regulations without contextualising the situation. Or, do you sometimes feel that you can do your job well, but you don't quite fit in and you don't quite know why? It is possible that you, if you feel this way, or your employee might have Asperger Syndrome (AS) or experience similar difficulties; difficulties, which actually can be made easier to cope with if you and those around you understand the condition?

Below are some possible identifiers of someone who has AS*. These are only indicators and it is important to stress that an individual may exhibit some of these traits and not have AS and that each individual with AS will experience different elements of these indicators and in different combinations. It is probable, however, that they will experience an element from each of the three categories:

Communication

Difficulties in -

- engaging in or understanding 'small talk';
- understanding body language and facial expressions;
- understanding sarcasm, jokes, irony (those with AS might have a tendency to be very literal in their understanding);
- understanding verbal communication without corresponding verbal cues, for example: notes, diagrams.

Social understanding

Some people with AS could have some difficulty with the kind of social understanding that many others may take for granted, for example:

- experiencing empathy and understanding others;
- keeping eye contact;
- speaking untruths in order not to offend;
- understanding personal space;
- understanding social rules which are not based upon logic;
- understanding the complexities of inter-personal relationships.

Flexibility of thought

Flexibility of thought is the ability to hazard

a guess at the unknown, to cope with the unexpected, to act upon a whim. The sense of security brought on by the known can lead to the following:

- becoming obsessed with an interest, place or person;
- becoming anxious by change, spontaneity and unplanned events;
- experiencing difficulties in coping with the unknown (new people, new places, new situations);
- experiencing difficulties in remembering sequences without prompts, such as: diary, personal planner, alarm;
- experiencing difficulties in comprehending abstract concepts (e.g., 'formality', 'spontaneity', 'fun', 'anxiety');
- reluctance to use own initiative.

The results of having to deal with some of the above hurdles is that people with AS or similar characteristics can sometimes appear abrupt, absent-minded, aggressive, anxious, disorganised, eccentric, lost in their own world, rude, self-centred or thoughtless. As a consequence, some employees with AS, or similar, can experience a greater incidence of complaints and disciplinary procedures which could be a mystery to them, thus adding to their difficulties.

Whether a person actually has a diagnosis of AS or experiences the same hurdles, the most difficult aspect of this way of being is the lack of understanding of the people around them. AS is a lifelong condition and although people with AS might have some learning difficulties, such as dyslexia or dyspraxia, they are often of average or above average intelligence. Asperger Syndrome itself is not a learning disability,

*based on various research carried out by Simon Baron-Cohen, Uta Frith, Judith Gould, Francesca Happé and Lorna Wing.

Intelligent, but doesn't quite "get it". Asperger Syndrome continued

although it can present obstacles to aspects of social and communication learning. The difficulties lie in the lack of understanding the social nuances of communication and behaviour, dealing with unknown situations and people, problems in thinking through sequences of consequences or actions, inability in forming overarching concepts from detailed information, inability to see things from another's perspective, and dealing with sensory differences.

AS affects every individual differently. Every individual with AS has their own personality, their own strengths and weaknesses and they have their own difficulties to overcome – just like everyone else.

Like anyone, those with AS can have particular strengths and qualities and it is important to look at some of the attributes which someone with AS could bring to the workplace. These can be as follows:

- excellent memory;
- precision and attention to detail;
- mathematical and technical skills;
- a preference for following instructions and abiding by rules;
- sticking to structured programmes;
- direct, open and honest;
- discriminatory sense of hearing, vision, smell, taste and touch (People with AS can be either hyper-sensitive or hypo-sensitive. If they are hyper-sensitive then the senses can be more honed than usual and, therefore, sounds can seem louder, lights brighter, smells and tastes stronger; and touch keener; thus, the person can receive environmental information at a much greater intensity. If they are hypo-sensitive, they cannot process sensory input as effectively);
- reproduction, imitation and mimicry;
- high level of vocabulary; and
- dealing with projects which have a clear beginning, middle and end.

This means people with AS thrive in jobs which require precision and detail, such as accountancy, computing, engineering and architecture to name but a few. Because

of the mathematical nature of music, they can also be quite musical. In addition, they can blossom in environments which provide clear structures and parameters and few unknowns.

What can be practically done to help these employees, who are quite often excellent at the technical component of their jobs? There are some suggestions on the page opposite.

With these strategies, hurdles can be overcome, anxieties and resultant absenteeism can be reduced and management time can be focused more on enabling and empowering the individual rather than disciplining them.

You will have noticed that this article has been written in a more bulleted form than a prosaic one. This is to make it easier for people with Asperger Syndrome to read if they happen to find a mass of words difficult to process. This is an example of a small and simple strategy that can be incorporated in every day working life to enable an employee with AS to give of their best.

If you feel that you have an employee who fits into this category, or if you feel that you might be experiencing some of these difficulties, it is important to seek support and information. The Baobab Centre would be pleased to discuss any issues you might have on this or related matters. Manar Matusiak, one of the Baobab Centre team, has worked in providing services for young people with Autistic Spectrum Disorders for the past 12 years and helped to set up the first transitional residential service for adolescents with autism in the north of England 7 years ago. Asperger Syndrome is classed as an Autistic Spectrum Condition, although it only affects higher-functioning individuals, as previously mentioned. More recently Manar has worked as Director of Personal and Professional Development for an organisation providing specialist care and education with a staff group of approximately 1,000, ensuring that staff who deal with the Autistic Spectrum have a clear understanding of the condition and that they have a clear knowledge of how to reduce the high anxieties that can ensue.

Tool	Example	Benefit
Planners Planning software	Diary Calendar PDAs Mobile phone reminders	Help to reduce anxieties brought on by not knowing what has been planned or when events are taking place
Lists	To do lists Shopping lists Daily task lists Aide-memoires Written instructions Written directions	Help to remind of tasks to be completed and in which sequence
Timers	Alarms on watches, mobile phones Egg timers etc	Help to indicate when things start and when they end. This is particularly helpful if a person has difficulty stopping before a project or task has been fully completed
Training in communication	Understanding body language Understanding social communication, e.g., the differences of communicating in a meeting and at a party Understanding how to 'soften' factual information/ communication, e.g., opening and closing of conversations, emails, letters etc.	Enhances 2-way communication Helps social integration
Training for others to enable them to become aware of difficulties	Home Work Community	Helps reduce anxieties brought on by others' ignorance of difficulties Helps social integration
Training in understanding others		Helps to reduce anxieties brought on by not understanding others Helps social integration
Training in overcoming anxieties	Stress management Dealing with unplanned events Dealing with emergencies How to avoid and what to do about sensory overload	Helps to reduce anxieties
Training in transferring learning from one context to another		Helps reduce anxieties brought on by previously unexperienced situations

People with Asperger Syndrome can bring richness to our lives by helping those of us who have not got AS to see the world from a different perspective. They can help us to understand how many experiences we take for granted and how many strategies

we naturally draw upon to reduce our own anxieties. They can help us to think more carefully about how we communicate. Learning some basics about Asperger Syndrome is as beneficial to those with AS as those without.

Suggested further reading

Attwood, T; 2006. *The complete guide to Asperger's syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Bogdashina, O; 2005. *Theory of mind and the triad of perspectives on autism and Asperger syndrome: a view from the bridge*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Edmonds, G and Beardon, L (Ed); 2008. *Asperger Syndrome and Employment. Adults Speak Out about Asperger Syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Gillberg, C; 2002. *A guide to Asperger syndrome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

References

Baron-Cohen, S; 1995. *Mindblindness*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.

Frith, U; 1989. *'Autism': Explaining the enigma*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Happé, F; 1999; Autism: cognitive deficit or cognitive style? *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 3,6:216-222.

Wing, L and Gould, J; 1979. Severe impairments of social interaction and associated abnormalities in children. Epidemiology and classification. *Journal of Autism and Childhood Schizophrenia*. 9: 11-29.

PARENTING SKILLS STOP PRESS

The parenting skills workshop will take place on **Friday 20th June 2008** at The Holiday Inn, York. Please call soon on 01904 422733 if you are interested in attending.

Customer service skills

It only takes seconds for us to form an impression of another person, and if that person is working for your organisation, invariably that impression will be transferred to your organisation.

Increased awareness means consumers are beginning to change their expectations of customer service and in many instances demand higher standards.

Reports of negative experiences are being exchanged across the media as companies come under greater scrutiny to deliver quality products, quality care, quality!

"Technology is aiding the uprising, empowering consumers to do much more to make themselves heard" p. 40 BusinessWeek, March 2008.

Good customer service not only impacts positively on sales but it also improves the experience employees have at work. These improved experiences enrich your organisation. Think back to the last time you gave or received excellent customer service? Let that experience tell you why this is important.

Our customer service course builds confidence in customer service representatives who can then impact positively on the organisation.

We aim to work through customer service resistance, acknowledge the emotions of the customer exchange and help you improve how your organisation is experienced from within and without.

Our course is delivered by specialists in relational dynamics and with experience in retail and senior management.

This course is offered as a day workshop: 9.30 - 4.30 pm.

Course fees: £130 for an individual or if a group of 8-15 books the course the fee is £945, both prices inclusive of VAT.

Wills and legacies

Following the work we have been doing in and around the issue of death, we have come around to thinking about our Wills and using legacies. A Will is the document that will instruct or guide your family and friends how to administer your estate, money and possessions after you die. If you do not have a Will there are legal rules which will determine how your money, property and possessions will be allocated to your family, which may not be as you would like, so writing your Will is important.

If you are living with a partner but you are not married nor are in a registered civil partnership your partner may not inherit from you unless there is a Will. Therefore, the death of one partner may create serious financial problems for the remaining partner.

If you have children, you should make a Will so that arrangements for the children can be made if either one or both parents die. Otherwise, their guardianship may have to be decided through social services.

If your circumstances change, it is important that you make a Will to ensure that your money and possessions are distributed according to your wishes. For example, if you have separated and your ex-partner now lives with someone else, you may want to change your Will. If you are recently married or entered into a registered civil partnership, this may make any previous Will you have made invalid. (Information derived from www.adviceguide.org.uk).

A legacy is a gift you make in your Will to leave to a charity or organisation of your choosing. It is similar to naming anyone else in your will.

Recently, we have received queries from clients who have wanted to leave a gift to The Baobab Centre.

Have you thought about making a legacy in your Will and would you consider The Baobab Centre for a legacy? If you would, then we can offer various routes that your donation could take: -

- funding for bursaries for individuals to access therapy or coaching;
- funding for furtherance of education in therapy or relational management issues; or
- continuance of the work of The Baobab Centre with organisations and individuals.

There are three main ways that a legacy can be set up.

Residual – you may choose to leave whatever is left over once all your other legacies have been made and all costs met. This is the residue of your estate.

Specific – this is when you choose to leave a specific item such as a painting, books, jewellery, an area of land or even your home.

Pecuniary – this is when you leave a specific sum of money. (Retrieved from www.adviceguide.org.uk)

If this has made you think about your Will then we have achieved our first aim. At The Baobab Centre we see the Will as a living document that informs our relationships in life and death.

If this has encouraged you to consider a legacy to us, or indeed another organisation, then we have achieved our second aim. A legacy can help organisations further their work where no other funding may be available. It remains as a gift into life as well as recognition and support from you to that organisation.

If you have any questions about a legacy to us then please get in touch. If you are thinking about making a legacy to another organisation look at their website as most organisations have a process for doing so.

For more information on making your Will you can either contact a solicitor or visit www.adviceguide.org.uk.

If reading about this has encouraged you to think about other issues to do with death and dying, please contact us for further information about our residential workshop.

WORKSHOPS WORKSHOPS WORKSHOPS WORKSHOPS WORKSHOP

The Baobab Centre currently offer's tailored workshops on ***parenting skills, managing stress, understanding bullying, team dynamics, team resilience, change management, managing difficult people and situations, understanding interpersonal relationships, developing listening skills, improving customer service skills.***

We are always developing our training programme. If there is a topic which you are interested in but is not in this list, please call us and let us talk about developing something specifically for your needs.

And this month's P.S. from Gayle-Anne...

In anticipation of a bright spring and summer we have extended our May issue this year to include more informative pieces for you to ponder and absorb.

We are also delighted to include a piece from one of the organisations with whom we work. Delighted because it is lovely to hear back from the people we engage with and because we value the feedback whenever we can get it. We also hope that it may help any of you who may be thinking of contacting us to see what we can do. We are very grateful to the author.

The piece we offer on Autism is written by Manar, who has 12 years of experience working in the field and she offers great passion and enthusiasm to help people understand each other better when autism may be a factor. Manar is keen to talk to anyone for whom this article may have touched a chord.

The customer service workshop is our latest offering and we hope that it will be useful to a range of organisations that have customer contact - yes of course, that is all of us! This workshop is designed to meet a full range of needs.

Please also don't forget that our parenting skills workshop has now been set for 20 June, we still have a couple of places left so if you are interested please do get in touch as soon as you can.

We look forward to bringing some growth to you and your business this spring.

Gayle-Anne

Gayle-Anne Drury

Knowledge is like a garden; if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested.

African Proverb