

# Succeed

## A funny story a day keeps work relations sunny

How to keep your staff happy and busy

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GENGHIS Khan had it relatively easy. He must have been the first person to quote "My way or the highway", or something similar. An offering of the highway would have been generous. It was usually the highwayman's rope.

We can all be grateful that leadership has moved on from the equivalent of the Kalashnikov to persuasiveness by discussion

and management by motivation. For those who do not think so, look around. If your staff members are leaving in droves, it will not be only for the money. In a more affluent world, other considerations are equally, often more, important.

The business world is full of novel ideas. Many are old systems brushed up by new technology and given high-sounding names and (dreaded) acronyms. Nothing wrong with that. Some of the original teaching and managing methods were

excellent. One of the best, from more than 2,000 years ago, is storytelling.

From childhood, everyone has enjoyed a good story. The elements of uncertainty, the unknown, conspiracy, intrigue, fear, tension, success and happily-ever-after all make what we might call today a complete "deliverable" — something that makes us think by keeping our attention and posing a question we simply have to address. I told a lot of stories when I was building my businesses: Sad stories, serious stories but, mostly, amusing stories.

Keeping your audience waiting for the punch line is as much a pleasure for them as it is for you. So, I am delighted that storytelling has been rediscovered as a great means of communication. Why has it reemerged now?

We have made training too theoretical, too procedural, too systematised. We have become *kiasu* about not leaving anything open to misinterpretation,

to the point where we often no longer communicate meaningfully at all. Half the messages I see are simply not understood by the recipients. Quite a few, I suspect, are not even understood by the senders. So, what are the elements of a good training story?

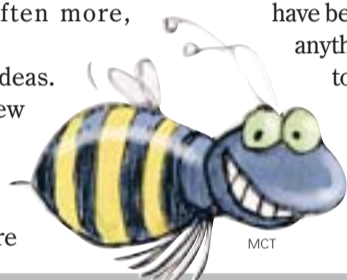
The purpose is paramount. A story told just for laughs may be suitable for the dinner table, but is it instructive? It must be relevant. The experienced storyteller knows how to adapt a story he has heard to a situation. An example is the angry remark by the two fish swimming into a concrete wall. That can be used in many frustrating situations.

A story must have substance; the one I have just quoted is too short for most purposes. Attention is achieved by tension; tension takes time. Finally, a story must pose the listener a question, so he gets a chance to contribute.

Does a story have to be true? No. The two fish didn't say, "Dam", I promise you. Indeed, the more bizarre a story, the more memorable it is. The parables were highly imaginative stories but most were not true. However, I would argue they are the most effective stories ever told — not just because of their moral message but because they made the listener think. They said what you needed to know and no more.

If every manager could tell one good, purposeful story a day, his relations with his staff will be transformed. If, at the same time, he made them laugh, they would work even harder for him.

*John Bittleston mentors people in business, career and their personal lives at [www.TerrificMentors.com](http://www.TerrificMentors.com)*



### quiztime

Resolving conflict at work

#### JASON CHUA ASKS:

You can't please everybody. So, is it worthwhile to channel your energies to resolving conflicts, or should you just learn to live with them and not take things personally?



#### TALULA CARTWRIGHT REPLIES:

For your sake and for the benefit of your organisation, it is better to address the conflict than to work around it or hope it goes away. It can be useful to see the other person as a partner and not an adversary. Each has a different view based on such aspects as values, one's management style and power in the organisation. Building awareness of and accepting the differences are good first steps in managing conflict. Making the situation more comfortable and alleviating personal and political animosity will help move the conflict towards resolution — that will bring the best results to your organisation and build the relationships you need to be an effective leader.

## High-tech Mumbai institute here pushes the right buttons

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THERE are niche schools, and then there are niche schools. When it comes to offering something different on the education menu, the S P Jain Centre of Management is one school that's redefining the boundaries.

Just over a year since opening its doors here, this top Indian business management school has already reached maximum capacity, with 380 full-time and part-time students enrolled on its Master's degree courses.

Its pioneer intake of 260 full-time Master of Business Administration (MBA) students graduated recently.

Getting a coveted place in the Mumbai-based school is far from easy, said its president Nitish Jain, because only one out of every 20 applications is successful. None of the current students is Singaporean.

"Our brand is well-known outside Singapore, and we attract students from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, among many other countries. They come for the Singapore experience, and to be part of the vibrancy here," he said.

The full-time global MBA programme requires students to spend six months each in S P Jain's Dubai and Singapore campuses.

A total of six specialisations are offered: Investment banking, wealth management, retail management, services marketing and management, information technology management, and global logistics management.

Singaporean students — a group whom Mr Jain would welcome with open arms to "add to the diversity" — still largely prefer to apply to the local universities because of familiarity, he said.

It was the Economic Development Board that actively wooed S P Jain over six months in 2005 to set up a campus, and the green light was finally given in December that year.

S P Jain is the first Indian and the fourth international institute to be granted university status here, after the University of Chicago School of Business, Insead of France and the now-defunct University of

This remote-learning takes place occasionally, when S P Jain chooses to tap its extensive network of adjunct professors around the world.

Currently, the school employs 70 full-time faculty members on both its Singapore and Dubai campuses.

All lectures, including face-to-face conversations, are recorded and uploaded onto an electronic library for access by students and faculty members.

"We have to be realistic. Students will not be able to pay attention all the time, so this is a good way for them to revisit the lesson and see what they missed. This is also an opportunity for the staff to review their class, and look for areas for improvement," said Mr Jain.

One of its MBA students, Ms Tamanna Usman, 29, who is about to complete her course by the end of the year, enrolled at S P Jain because of the "unique chance" to study in both Dubai and Singapore.

"I now have experience in two strong cities with international exposure. It will look good on my resume when I look for a job," she said. Already, she has no plans to go back to her home country India, deciding instead, to live and work in Singapore after graduation.

Looking ahead, Mr Jain said the centre was poised to expand further in the coming years. The management is weighing two options: Build another campus here and grow its brand in one base or set up in another country and diversify further.

"Both are do-able, and we will have to discuss them and strike a balance between the academic and practical aspects. Right now, we are very happy where we are and the support from the Government has been exceptional," he said.

### schoolbuzz

#### S P Jain Centre of Management

Students won't be able to pay attention all the time, so this is a good way for them to revisit the lesson and see what they missed.

— President Nitish Jain, on the lectures being recorded for later review by both students and staff

New South Wales Asia.

Home for S P Jain in Singapore is a 3ha campus at a former dental hospital in Hyderabad Road, off Alexandra Road. Mr Jain said the school prided itself on being technology-savvy and, as he gave this reporter a tour, it was clear it lived up to those expectations.

Take a peek into any classroom and you might spot a number of cameras perched on the walls. A student can tap on a button in front of him and the camera instantly zooms in on him, allowing for "face-to-face" interaction with, say, a professor conducting a class in New York City.

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