

Preface

It was the American actor W.C. Fields who allegedly coined the phrase, ‘never work with children or animals’, something that has remained a sobering, all too often, truism to this day. And, of course, it depends on your gullibility, or let’s just say the attraction of the new fad of *fake news*, as whether or not you believed whether he actually said that (he was rumoured, like the film-maker Sam Goldwyn, to employ an army of gag writers).

Whatever the truth, there is another truism we may want to take on board, depending on how logical, gripping, educational, entertaining or informative that you find the next hundred or so pages, that you should never, ever agree to co-write anything. I’ve been a solo writer for my whole life (authored 50+ books, thousands of articles studies and research papers, without resorting to a co-writer). So why, at an age when my 70th birthday beckons, should I break the rule that has kept me gainfully employed since I first wrote for my local newspaper at the tender age of 16?

To compound the felony, if you look at the cover, you’ll see we have erred thrice, and opted for not one but three co-authors.

Worse still take a look at the contents pages at the front, and you'll see we have included others, Belgians, Dutch, Finns, Germans, Swiss, even the odd Brit feeling the breeze of Brexit on their creative, furrowed brows, aided by the Americans still woozy from Trump's Tweets adding to the digital din.

Yes, we have committed the ultimate publishing sin and produced a book that involves the many. All our efforts in pursuit of that elusive phrase. The all too difficult to define—the 'Digital Age'.

Like all good ideas, it started with a meeting of the FutureWork Forum. A group of 30 or so professionals who come together several times each year to discuss the emerging issues of the world of work and the workplace and how we as individuals or organizations fit into it. For the past 20 or so years, we've produced some good studies, hosted a score of conferences and offered our opinions to corporations, international organizations and governments.

This time we went a stage further and opted to 'do' a book—pooling the collective wisdom of the FutureWork Forum partners (the title we have grandly bestowed upon ourselves). At first, it was a bit of fun. It was our Austrian/American partner, Peter Vogel, whose work and worries about the increasing digital pressure in our organizations first came to our attention. From that early start, the enthusiasm of our publisher, Stephen Partridge, drove us forward and we soon had our ringmaster in place. Peter Thomson became the *de facto* whip-cracker-in-chief, chivvying us ever onward, cheered from the sidelines by everyone who added to the mix. Michael Devlin, Peter Thomson and I had a mad 2-day editorial scramble in Brussels to pull together strands from the Partners. This was followed by another meeting in London where we were joined by Richard Savage, Michael Staunton and Andrew Chadwick. Richard and Michael have followed up energetically to put the final manuscript to bed.

And the result? Should we have done it? Well it's not perfect, but it does achieve one great thing. It shows what a lot of trouble we are in. This Digital Age ain't that fun to be in. Yes, we would have liked to solve the problem of digital overload (provide the silver bullet), but we missed by a mile.

However, we are very proud of one thing. We took on a task that seemed crazy and we made it. We haven't found all the answers, but we have stated the case, we know where the booby traps in your business are, even if we can't seize the smoking gun. There is so much value in this book, but it needs to be read with your eyes open (and preferably your phone and email switched off). If you read it, it will reward you with an insight into the huge challenges facing the workplace and the world of work today. Read properly, it should point you to some answers. More importantly, it should act as a guide as to what to do next.

What it has proved beyond all doubt is that the power of collaboration is alive and well and the power of our FutureWork Forum colleagues' collective thoughts and actions has prevailed. And there wasn't an animal or a child in sight, either!!

I'd like to thank for their huge enthusiasm, Peter Vogel, Göran Hultin, Richard Savage, Michael Staunton, Alain Haut, Ben Emmens, Cliff Dennett Jim Ware, Susan Stucky, Matthiass Mölleney, Sunnie Groeneveld, Andrew Chadwick, Larissa Hämisegger, Michael Devlin and Peter Thomson.

I hope it makes you think, makes you act and helps you free yourself of the bits, bytes and chains from the digital slavery we have brought upon ourselves.

Thanks again to Peter Thomson and Richard Savage, two great editors, with a true sense of style.

Lymington, Hampshire
October 2017

Mike Johnson

Conquering Digital Overload

Leadership strategies that build engaging work cultures

Thomson, P.; Johnson, M.; Devlin, J.M. (Eds.)

2018, XX, 192 p. 1 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-63798-3