

Preview Only

- // When can frustration be a stimulus to action?
- // How best can we address our frustrations and not be overwhelmed by them?
- // When is there a risk that we wallow in our own frustrations?
- // How might we enable teams to become more resilient having addressed their frustrations?

Frustration is one of the most frequently felt emotions in the workplace today. It comes in many forms and from many sources—bosses, colleagues, staff, clients, and from within yourself. If left to fester, frustration can quickly impair your ability to work and to lead, and potentially hijack the performance of your entire team and organisation.

100 Great Leading Through Frustration Ideas provides a practical framework for leading yourself and others through frustration. Starting from a simple five-step plan—Understand, Plan, Act, Observe and Reframe—this wise and wide-ranging guide shows you how to address your frustrations in a fresh and constructive way, and use them as a springboard to new breakthroughs.

DR PETER SHAW is a founding partner of Praesta Partners and works with individuals, teams and groups to enable them to grow their strengths and tackle demanding issues confidently. He has held a wide range of board-level posts covering finance, personnel, policy, communications and delivery, and worked in five UK Government Departments. He is the author of 28 influential books on leadership and a Visiting Professor at seven universities.

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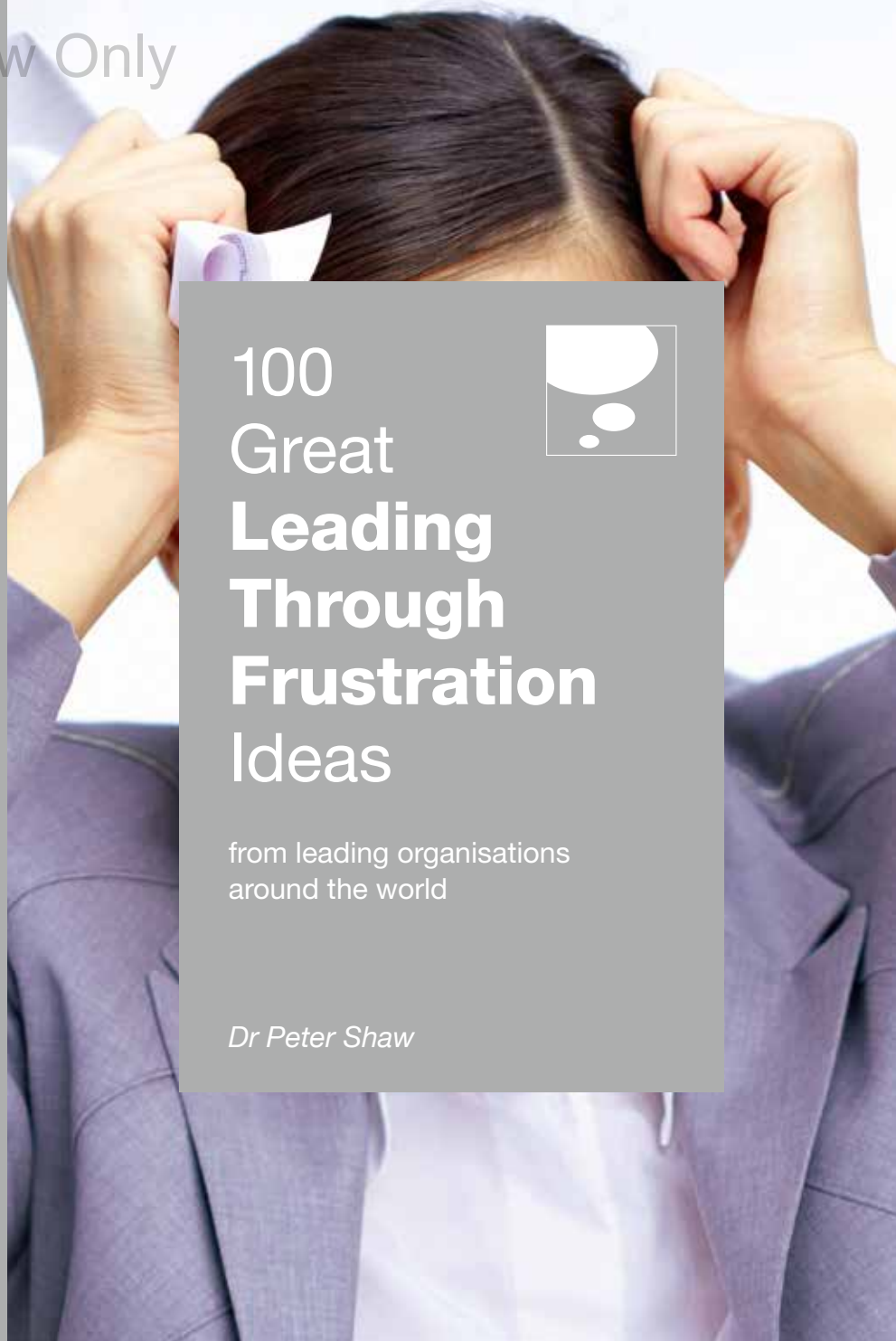


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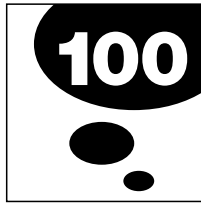


from leading organisations
around the world

Dr Peter Shaw



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GREAT LEADING THROUGH FRUSTRATION IDEAS

Dr Peter Shaw

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Dedicated to all those who have lived through
frustration and retained the capacity
to laugh at themselves

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	x
Foreword by Duncan Selbie	xii
Introduction	xiv

Section A: A five-point plan for leading through frustration

1 Understand	2
2 Plan	4
3 Act	6
4 Observe	8
5 Reframe	10

Section B: Understand

6 What are the reasons for your frustration?	13
7 When are you the cause of frustration in others?	15
8 How best have you handled frustration in the past?	17
9 What aspects of your personality magnify the frustration effect?	19
10 When is there a risk of you enjoying being frustrated?	22

Section C: Plan

11 Discriminate between the frustrations you can do something about and those outside of your control	25
12 Think through which frustrations need to be addressed first	28
13 Recognise when shared frustration is leading to unhelpful groupthink	31
14 Decide on the steps to address particular frustrations	34
15 Take time out to put frustrations into perspective	37

For Review Only

Section D: Act

- | | | |
|----|---|----|
| 16 | Recognise when frustration can lead to positive change | 41 |
| 17 | Accept that some frustrations won't go away and have to be lived with | 44 |
| 18 | Recognise that you need to be in the right frame of mind before you can act effectively | 47 |
| 19 | Recognise when you have been able to take forward positive steps | 49 |
| 20 | Know who are your allies and supporters | 51 |

Section E: Observe

- | | | |
|----|--|----|
| 21 | Observe how others handle similar frustrations to yours | 54 |
| 22 | Recognise how the way you handle frustration affects others | 56 |
| 23 | Be mindful of the difference between constructive frustration and resentment | 59 |
| 24 | Watch if you project your frustrations onto others | 62 |
| 25 | See the pattern of your reactions to frustration as a helpful insight | 64 |

Section F: Reframe

- | | | |
|----|--|----|
| 26 | Believe that good can come out of any situation | 67 |
| 27 | Be as dispassionate as possible about issues causing you frustration | 69 |
| 28 | Block out interfering noises in your head | 71 |
| 29 | Believe that a step forward is a step forward, however small it is | 74 |
| 30 | See continuous learning as never-ending | 77 |

For Review Only

Section G: Internal frustrations

31	Disappointment	81
32	Reluctance	83
33	Resentment	85
34	Pessimism	87
35	Over-optimism	89
36	Anxiety	91
37	Physical pain or disability	93
38	Anger	95
39	Feeling stuck	97
40	Feeling misunderstood	99
41	Living with past misjudgements	101
42	Feeling undervalued	104
43	Self-criticism	106
44	Lack of self-belief	108
45	Imposter syndrome	110

Section H: Frustrations caused by others

46	Responsibility without authority	113
47	Rejection	116
48	Feeling bullied	118
49	Sadness	121
50	Stress	123
51	Reputation	125
52	Feeling let down	128
53	Discrimination	131
54	Prejudice	134
55	Ageism	137
56	Favouritism to others	140

For Review Only

57	Mixed messages	143
58	Broken promises	146
59	Changed assumptions	149
60	Being misrepresented	151
61	An outdated reputation	153
62	Lack of alignment	156
63	Being ignored	158
64	Losing your job	160
65	Continuous criticism	165

Section I: Handling frustrations with specific people

66	Your boss	166
67	Senior leadership	168
68	Colleagues	170
69	Your staff	172
70	Clients and customers	174
71	Sponsors	176
72	Critics	179
73	Turncoats	181
74	Family members	184
75	Your children	186

Section J: Handling frustrations with policies and processes

76	Technology that does not do what you want it to do	189
77	Sporadic Wi-Fi connections	191
78	International time zone differences	193
79	Different interpretation of rules in different contexts	196
80	Different accepted levels of behaviour	198

For Review Only

Section K: Leading through frustrations caused by specific prompts

81	Social media campaigns	201
82	Gossip	203
83	Changing fashions	205
84	Political decisions by others	208
85	Misleading communications	210
86	Emotional outbursts	212
87	Frenzy for action	214
88	The unexpected	217
89	Discourtesy and rudeness	219
90	An outburst of hate	221

Section L: Keeping cool through frustration

91	Learn how best to put events into perspective	224
92	Be compassionate to yourself and others	226
93	Recognise who cares about your well-being	228
94	Remember that others may be even more frustrated than you	230
95	Know how best you 'let off steam'	232
96	Know how to relax and what refreshes your thinking	234
97	Park a frustration for a period and then return to it	236
98	Remember those who have kept their cool through bigger frustrations than yours	239
99	Say 'Hallelujah anyway'	241
100	Remember that there is a new day tomorrow	243
	Books and booklets by Peter Shaw	246
	About the author	248



UNDERSTAND

WE NEED TO TAKE TIME to understand rather than rush to act.

The idea

Why might we be feeling frustrated? What has happened that has created a climate of frustration? Why is there an undercurrent of frustration that is sapping the energy and resolve of a team? Why is my first reaction frustration when I think about my work?

When frustration begins to eat us up, or detrimentally affect the way individuals or a team operates, the first step is to seek to understand what is going on. There may be obvious reasons for the frustration that everyone involved recognises. There might be a complex set of interactions that cause frustration to some and not to others.

How best can we stand back and observe and understand a situation rather than becoming totally immersed in it or overwhelmed by it? A starting point is to seek to understand the underlying reasons for our own frustration, alongside the cause of frustration in others. It is helpful to reflect on how we have handled frustrations in the past and what we have learnt from those experiences: perhaps we handle frustrations very differently now compared to the past.

It can be relevant to appreciate what aspects of your personality magnify the frustration effect. Life experience may have taught you how best to handle situations where your personal character or vulnerabilities mean that frustration can quickly escalate. Perhaps there is a risk of you enjoying being frustrated sometimes, if that allows you to feel a victim or elicits the sympathy you think you deserve.

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Barbara could feel indignant with frustration. Sometimes she felt that no one took her seriously. She deliberately delegated significant responsibilities to others but became inwardly frustrated if they did not act precisely in the way she had hoped. Barbara's family teased her that she liked to be in control; she recognised this characteristic in herself.

In the past, Barbara had become frustrated if colleagues did not follow her instructions precisely. She had trained herself to be much less expectant that they would do exactly as she wanted. She had learnt how to stand back from this initial frustrated reaction. There had been moments when she had relished her own frustration when others made decisions she did not agree with. Over time she had become better at understanding her own frustrations and explained to herself what was creating this frustration.

In practice

- Be as dispassionate as possible in identifying the underlying reasons for your frustrations.
- Recognise when you can be the cause of frustration in others through the way you act.
- Build on learning from how you have handled frustrations in the past.
- Be honest to yourself about the aspects of your personality that tend to exacerbate feeling being frustrated.
- Acknowledge when there is a risk of wallowing in your own frustration.



PLAN

PUTTING TOGETHER A PLAN is rarely wasted, although it might need to be regularly adapted.

The idea

When we feel the victim of our own frustrations or we see others gripped by frustration, we need to feel that we can move on from being captive to frustration. Once we understand the reasons for our frustration, there is the prospect of putting together a plan to address those frustrations. The starting point is discriminating between the frustrations we can do something about and those that are outside our control.

When we are at risk of feeling overwhelmed by frustrations it can help to think through which frustrations need to be addressed first. They may appear of equal difficulty, but they can normally be ranked in some order. Which frustration do we need to address first in order to progress in handling other frustrations? Sometimes we need to address our own frustrations first before we can satisfactorily tackle others' frustrations. Sometimes progress has to be made addressing the frustrations of our staff or partner groups before there is any prospect of addressing our own frustrations.

A starting point in planning to address frustrations involves recognising when shared frustrations can lead to unhelpful groupthink or to magnifying a relatively minor problem into an apparent crisis. Effective planning involves a combination of taking time to interrogate frustrations in order to put them into perspective, and then to decide on steps needed to address sequentially particular

For Review Only

frustrations. There is always a risk of jumping from understanding to acting, with the consequence of well-meaning but uncoordinated actions that may succeed only in replacing one frustration with another.

Barbara used to get very frustrated by her inability to plan ahead. This frustration with herself and her colleagues seemed to grip her and disable her thinking. Having understood more about what caused her frustration, Barbara recognised that she needed to take some small steps to address those frustrations. She had to de-escalate the risk of calamity in her mind. Planning a few practical steps to ease her frustrations did not come easily to her, but she knew she had to put a convincing plan in place that would feel robust enough to move forward. Barbara recognised that she needed an approach to creating a plan, and then a means of standing back to assess what would enable that plan to be effective.

In practice

- Be deliberate in differentiating between frustrations you can do something about and those outside your control.
- Differentiate between those frustrations that need to be addressed first and those that can wait.
- Be mindful whether your planning needs to take account of the risk of unhelpful groupthink.
- Decide on the necessary sequence of steps to address particular frustrations.
- Plan to take time out to assess frustrations and your progress in addressing them.



ACT

LEADING THROUGH FRUSTRATION will require action that is focused and is not divided between too many fronts at the same time.

The idea

When we feel burdened by frustration, we can feel a victim of circumstance and unable to take meaningful actions to address complicated situations. There might be surges of energy and an impulse to act to demonstrate that we have addressed our frustration. When we see the possibility of action, there is a danger that we act in haste and regret at leisure. Action that is sustainable needs to be deliberate, focused and measured. Action that is part of a plan is more likely to combine effectively with other actions rather than being a random initiative.

Sustainable action can start from recognising when frustration can release energy that leads to positive, sustained change. Action can flow when we accept that some frustrations have to be lived with and involve making the best of a sub-optimal situation. The overwhelming requirement is to be in the right frame of mind prior to taking action. When clear understanding has led to a thought-through plan and a positive frame of mind, there is a reasonable prospect that you will have the fortitude and resilience to move through your frustration into a state where there is a clearer equilibrium.

An action is far more likely to be sustained when you log the progress made and recognise what is likely to work well or less well. When you have supporters and allies, your ability to act effectively through frustration will be greatly enhanced.

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Barbara felt the frustration about the apparent complacency of some colleagues building up in her mind so that she was almost demonising them. She knew she had to understand what was happening both to her colleagues and herself. She could see in her mind's eye a plan that would build a stronger sense of shared endeavour. She had to decide whether to let her frustration continue to fuel indifference towards her colleagues, or whether she could turn that frustration into decisive steps.

Barbara recognised that she had to take the initiative to build momentum for a way forward that would benefit all the different groups in the organisation. But she had to get into a frame of mind where she believed the attitudes of her colleagues could be changed, with their curiosity stimulated about finding new solutions to vexatious problems.

In practice

- Allow your frustration to lead to concerted action.
- Be deliberate in how you live with frustrations that are not going to go away.
- Be conscious about steering yourself into the right frame of mind so that you act in constructive and not negative ways.
- Log progress made and keep building on successful action.
- Act in consort with your allies and supporters.



SELF-CRITICISM

SELF-CRITICISM IS VALUABLE WITHIN limits, but potentially destructive when given a free rein.

The idea

Good leaders will regularly review what they could do differently next time. They are continually exploring how they have impacted particular situations and in what way they might use their experience and insight in more constructive ways. A valuable way of focusing on continuous improvement is to ask yourself at the end of a week: what two things did I learn this week and what two things might I do differently next week?

Self-criticism carries the risk that we beat ourselves up. We can be our own worst enemy in castigating ourselves for our errors. Excessive self-criticism can get in the way of learning and developing. If we say to ourselves that we are never going to be able to handle a particular situation well, we create a self-fulfilling prophecy about our apparent incompetence.

Relentless self-criticism is exhausting for ourselves and others. Those who love us may eventually become exhausted, bored or overwhelmed by the self-criticism. Ultimately they may have little choice other than to leave us to wallow in our own self-destructive absorption.

Reducing the frustration resulting from self-criticism requires putting self-criticism in a wider context. It can be helpful to sit in a chair and allow yourself to be self-critical, then move to a different chair, where you describe your qualities and the progress you have

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made. This physical movement from one chair to another can help you see both the learning that can come out of the self-criticism and the wider application of your qualities.

Juliette was at risk of beating herself up at the accountancy practice where she was a senior partner because it was not as financially strong as it used to be. She was very self-critical about some of the decisions she had made about people, strategy and marketing. She forced herself to recognise that the decisions she had taken had increased the quality of the work of the practice and ensured that its back office support was much more efficient.

Juliette accepted that her self-criticism was excessive, but she still felt in the grip of it and found it hard to cast off. She recognised that she needed the affirmation of her colleagues in order to put her self-criticism in context. Thankfully, the other partners recognised the positive actions she had taken and were appreciative in acknowledging the value of her leadership.

In practice

- See self-criticism as an important part of development.
- Be aware of the risk of self-criticism turning into self-flagellation.
- Always set personal criticism alongside affirmation of progress made.
- See some frustration flowing from self-criticism as generating the commitment to change.
- Walk away from self-criticism when it begins to feel unrelenting.



LACK OF SELF-BELIEF

SELF-BELIEF IS THE ANTIDOTE to excessive humility.

The idea

We do not want to appear aggressive or overbearing. We observe others who seem full of their own importance and authority. We do not want to mirror their behaviours. We want to shape our own self-belief and action in a way that is responsible and effective in drawing out the best in others and not squashing them.

We recognise the importance of self-belief in the children in our lives so that they are confident entering different situations and are able to contribute with a diverse group of contemporaries. We observe how some people through lack of self-belief close themselves off and become isolated. Their sense of self-belief rapidly diminishes and their confidence collapses. We notice how someone's self-belief dissipates if they have a long-term illness. Observing people afflicted by a lack of self-belief can be a warning to us to hold on to a proper sense of self-belief and self-worth for the sake of our own well-being and mental health.

We may notice situations where a lack of self-belief can hit us starkly. We recognise that we need to prepare for those situations carefully. With some individuals, we might feel tongue-tied and unable to be at our best. Frustration about being in their presence sets off an inability to express our views coherently. We are at risk of feeling completely overawed by people who want to engage with us and hear our perspective.

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Rosemary was fine in front of a classroom of noisy children. She was confident, engaging and effective in this context. The children were learning well through her enthusiastic, thoughtful teaching. But when Rosemary stood in front of a group of adults, her confidence dropped through the floor. She was not self-conscious in a classroom of children as her confidence flowed naturally through what she did; but facing a sea of adults set off deep-seated unease about whether they would take her seriously. This inhibition had held her back from applying for senior posts at schools when all the other indicators were positive about the likelihood of success.

Rosemary knew she had to tackle this hesitancy and deliberately put herself in situations where she would be leading conversations with 10 or 12 adults. She had practised this approach in her church, getting used to being a leader of a home group. Rosemary sought to build up confidence and self-belief so she could come over authentically with a group of parents. She offered to lead a session with parents about reading with their children; this worked well and gave her a new level of confidence.

In practice

- In which situations is your self-belief at its strongest and why?
- Are you able to anticipate when a drop in your self-belief is about to happen?
- Who can you work with to help you address frustration that can flow from a lack of self-belief in some situations?
- What small steps can you take to address your role in situations where your self-belief is at risk?



LEARN HOW BEST TO PUT EVENTS INTO PERSPECTIVE

IT CAN BE HELPFUL to look back and reflect from a wider perspective on the relative importance of an event.

The idea

Sometimes we can be completely preoccupied with an immediate issue. We are thrown into disarray by an unexpected event. We are either stunned into inactivity, or go into overdrive, magnifying the destructive consequences of a localised incident. It is so easy to turn a setback into a major crisis. With the benefit of hindsight, many doom-laden events have passed without huge consequence. As we look back, we can see we have built them up out of proportion and wasted a lot of emotional energy.

On the other hand, there are occasions when we do not fully appreciate the significance of particular events. I have led workshops where there has been a breakthrough. A new level of mutual understanding has been reached. Competitors have suddenly accepted that they can achieve far more together than in opposition to each other. One of my tasks when I coach teams is to create a context where there can be breakthroughs, with participants then accepting that they are going to look to the future with a very different perspective and a new level of mutual understanding.

It is important for the team members to see the wider context and not just be dominated by the immediate tactical considerations. When aggravation is building up because of very different viewpoints, it

For Review Only

helps if that growing aggravation can be viewed as an indicator of a deeper issue that needs to be resolved about longer-term objectives and how people work together effectively.

Marcia used to get very het up when the Executive Team questioned the analysis in her proposals. She felt intimidated and sometimes even bullied. A good friend encouraged her to think about the pluses about this questioning. It demonstrated that the Executive Team was interested in her area and wanted to ensure it operated successfully. Marcia was reluctant to accept this constructive interpretation of an interrogation she did not enjoy.

Marcia recognised that she needed to strengthen the team and thought the Executive Team members would be dismissive of this request. The opposite was the case, as they recognised that her project was of particular importance to the organisation. A couple of the Executive Team members suggested some highly regarded individuals from their areas as potential candidates to work in Marcia's team. This generosity enabled Marcia to recognise that she was held in high esteem and need not be frustrated about how she was viewed by the Executive Team.

In practice

- Recognise when the passage of a few days puts an apparently big incident into a different perspective.
- Recall how some events of minor significance have been breakthroughs and led to a key change of direction.
- Practise looking back on a week to see how best you put various events into perspective.



BE COMPASSIONATE TO YOURSELF AND OTHERS

WHEN FRUSTRATION BURSTS OUT, seek to be compassionate to yourself and not add fuel to the frustration.

The idea

When a team reviewed how they worked together, one of their conclusions was that the team's members needed to be more compassionate to each other and to themselves. The team members set high expectations, both for themselves and for each member of the team. There was a relentless focus on raising performance. This emphasis on making a difference in society was why members of the team were hugely committed to their work. But their conversations could become intense and their expectations of each other highly demanding.

The team explored what it would be like if they were more compassionate to each other. They did not want to drop their standards. They believed it was right that discussions were challenging, with the focus on continuous improvement, but that did not mean they had to be relentlessly robust with each other. They were never rude or angry to each other—they recognised the dangers of intemperate behaviour, but there was a relentlessness about the demands they put on each other, even though they were for the best of reasons.

The team decided that being compassionate to each other involved understanding even more clearly the underlying concerns of individual members. It meant recognising when someone was addressing an overlay of issues where they would benefit from practical encouragement and support. Being compassionate with each

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other was not about being soft—but it was about being considerate, thoughtful and showing practical kindness.

When you feel frustrated, what does it mean to be compassionate to yourself? It might mean creating a bit of space to think, or taking some physical exercise, or negotiating a change of deadline so that your ‘to do’ list becomes more manageable. It might mean saying no to certain requests.

Marcia was conscious of the pressures on the Executive Team and why they were putting demands on her. She had tended to view them as blinkered and at risk of being unrealistic. She decided that she could view them in a different way and see them as needing compassion rather than disdain. For Marcia, compassion was about an attitude of mind and about practical steps. She decided that she would seek to build a stronger personal relationship with some of the team and find out more about what they were interested in. She sought to discover what made them laugh and what helped them relax and look at issues in a less forensic way. She discovered that a couple of them could be teased, and would respond using metaphors to illustrate situations they were facing rather than just tables and facts.

In practice

- See the exercise of compassion as a sign of strength and not weakness.
- Exercise compassion alongside hard-nosed realism.
- See practical acts of kindness as akin to oiling the gears to enable them to work smoothly.
- Know in what ways you need to be kind to yourself and be willing to exercise that compassion.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PETER SHAW has coached individuals, senior teams and groups across six continents. He is a Visiting Professor of Leadership Development at Huddersfield, Chester, De Montfort, and Surrey Universities, and is a Professorial Fellow at St John's College, Durham University. He has been a member of the Visiting Professorial Faculty at Regent College, Vancouver since 2008. He has been a Visiting Professor at the Judicial College in Melbourne, and at the Vancouver School of Theology. He has written 28 books on aspects of leadership; some have been translated into seven different languages.

Peter's first career was in the UK Government, where he worked in five Government Departments and held three Director General posts. Peter has been a member of governing bodies in higher and further education. He is a licensed lay minister (Reader) in the Anglican Church and plays an active role in the Church of England at parish, diocesan and national levels. He is a Lay Canon of Guildford Cathedral and Chair of Guildford Cathedral Council.

Peter holds a doctorate in Leadership Development from Chester University. He was awarded an honorary doctorate at Durham University for 'outstanding service to public life', and an honorary doctorate by Huddersfield University for his contribution to leadership and management.

In his coaching work Peter draws from his wide experience both as a leader and as a coach to leaders in many different contexts. He seeks to bring insights into his coaching work with individuals and teams that are underpinned by his Christian faith and understanding. His focus is about enabling individuals and teams to step up in their effectiveness so that they have a clear vision about what they are seeking to do, apply the values that are most important to them, know how to bring a distinctive value added and recognise their sources of vitality.

Peter finds time to reflect when on long-distance walks, of which he has done 30. Recent ones include the Machu Picchu trail, the Lady Anne Way, the Weardale Way, the Cotswolds Way, the Peak District Limestone Way, the Nidderdale Way, and the North Yorkshire Moors Inn Way.