

The interview

Director of People Resolutions, specialists in managing workplace conflict, and co-founder of EAP provider ICAS, **Linda Hoskinson** is qualified internationally as a Certified Employee Assistance Professional, was the first president of the EAP Association in the UK, and chaired the first committee for the publication of UK EAP standards

What has been your greatest personal or professional achievement and why?

Setting up two related but separate businesses for the workplace – in Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) and conflict management.

At the time I began this, some 25 years ago, the workplace was not really benefiting from professional input from counsellors, mediators, social workers, occupational health and vocational rehabilitation in the way it is doing today, hence the sense of achievement in making a contribution.

Why did you choose the workplace as your preferred therapeutic sector?

I was already operating as a human resources specialist, but for a multinational organisation (ICI) with exciting and progressive people policies. This gave me scope to innovate.

When the world of EAPs was then opened up to me through meeting key people, I realised I could make a real difference to productivity as well as the quality of people's daily working lives, by linking the therapeutic sector with the HR function.

What advice would you give to trainee workplace counsellors?

Establish the typical differences between counselling services and EAPs and be very clear which you are operating within. You need to be an expert about boundaries to work in an EAP since your links with the organisation are strong and proactive and yet you will be protecting the privacy of each individual employee-client.

How might you champion the cause for, or increase uptake of, workplace counselling?

We should champion those services that are designed to have the greatest positive impact on productivity. The benefits to individuals will follow.

The services with the highest impact and utilisation are proactive. They don't wait until someone

finally becomes aware that they may benefit from assistance, perhaps a little late in the day. They operate the concept of 'active case-finding'. They run campaigns ('call us if you answer "yes" to any three of these depression indicators'), events ('come and hear how the service is improving decision-making, how we help with financial worries, childcare, divorce etc'), and training sessions so that managers know when and how to nudge any employees towards the EAP if their performance is slipping – often a sign that personal matters are getting in the way.

What or who inspires you?

Apart from Nelson Mandela, of course, it has to be 'magical mediators'. The well-trained and experienced ones often come with a range of additional therapeutic skills, but their main contributions are wrapped in cheerful optimism, complete focus on more than one party and an infectious and positive approach. I have seen them use their amazing skills to achieve astounding results in double-quick time.

If you could make one new law, what would it be?

All imports to the UK to be checked to ensure they are 'fair trade'. This would force us all to ensure we are not supporting, as we are at the moment, child labour, mistreatment of employees, lower than 'living wages', intimidation, violence and murder.



Who would be your ideal lunch guest and why?

Joanna Lumley – I hear she is charming, worldly and fun.

What's the first thing you'd do if you won the lottery?

Tell my son it is a mistake, so he doesn't stop what he is doing. Then I would create an exemplary care home for older people using all the most up-to-date knowledge. I would demonstrate the value of replicating this throughout the UK... and then book myself a place – hopefully for a lot later!

Complete the sentence: 'I didn't get to where I am today without...'

...surrounding myself with experts in a whole host of professional spheres. It always pays to assign the best specialist to the team, and it creates role models for those gaining experience.

What's your favourite book and why?

For the moment it is *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid. It is short and beautifully written, and it gets under your skin cleverly. As the thriller draws to a close, you realise you have painlessly gained a solid 'understanding' of the cultural issues that can divide East and West.

I'd also choose *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr Seuss because at last I now have a grandchild to share the fun of all this with!

In the movie about you, who would play you?

Meryl Streep. I trust her to do her best with the material available – well, at least to think about it carefully, first!

Who is the person you'd least like to be stuck in a lift with?

Colin Firth – I'd probably forget about the need to get help!

‘If I won the lottery I would buy an ancient bonsai tree from the Chinese garden in Singapore’

What is your personal ambition for the future?

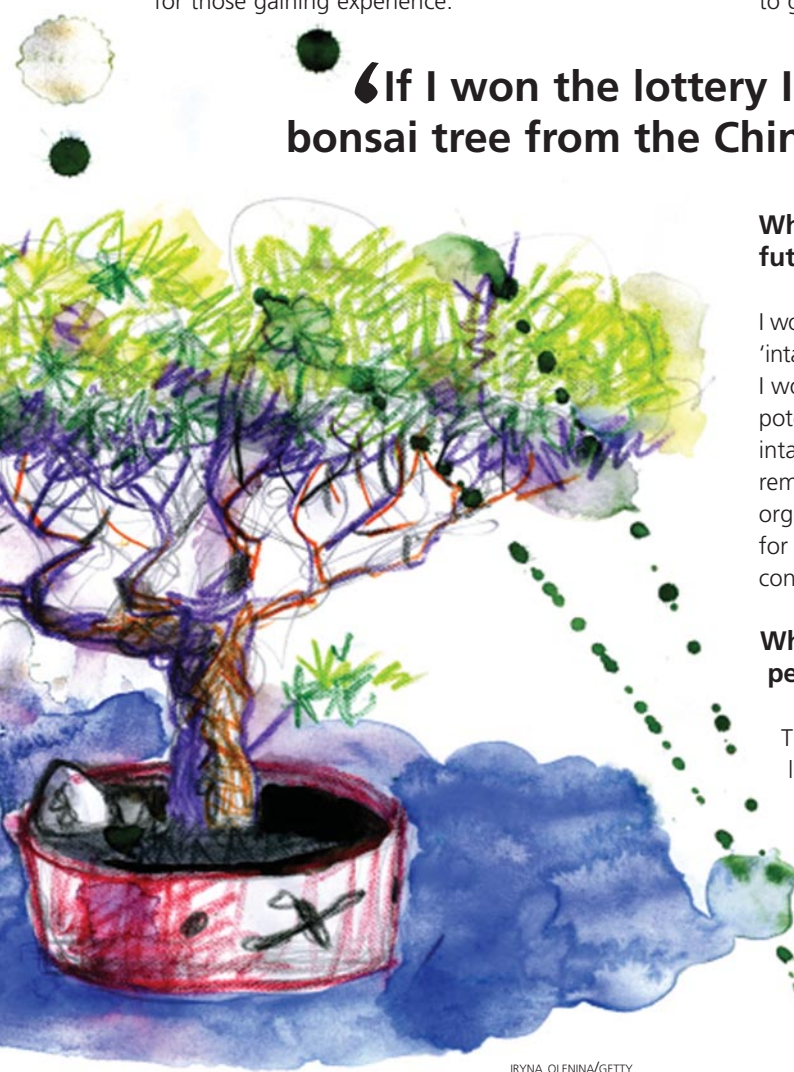
I would like to show 'once and for all' how important 'intangibles' at work provide a return on investment. I would begin with EAPs with their huge unrealised potential in the UK. Then I would ensure that other intangibles are incorporated in annual reports to remove some of the guesswork about an organisation's worth. This would include analytics for such things as employee engagement, culture, conflict, and people as assets and risks.

What surprises you most about younger people?

Their ability to communicate at the 'speed of light' and their relative disregard for their own privacy.

What do you do for relaxation?

Trees – I am a member of a bonsai club, love trees and visit arboretums. I would use some lottery money to choose an ancient bonsai tree from the Chinese Garden in Singapore.



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