

# Fly on the Wall



Fly suffers from a touch of pathological didacticism. Put differently, he enjoys teaching, particularly when it involves listening to himself saying all sorts of clever-sounding things and fancying the devastating impression these have on the impressionable young mind. Training the young'uns should, accordingly, be right up his alley. And so, in some ways, it is.

There are a few obstacles. First, the practice of law, like the rearing of children, is one of those crafts that entail adamant notions amongst all practitioners about how they should be done, coupled with a complete absence of any consensus on that score. Second, Fly has little difficulty imagining he knows well enough what is what, as they say, but tends to get nervous when there is a demand that he reduce this to intelligible and usefully digestible words.

It's a bit like when Mommy said it was such a lovely drawing, but what exactly was it? Third, Fly, like so many others, is fantastically keen to do all sorts of noble, or enlightening, or elevated things in principle, but when principle translates into deadlines or real hours, Fly often wonders whence this keenness should spring, and why it should not more often remain cloistered in splendid principle instead of being flung about with such reckless abandon.

That said, Fly does believe this training lark is a good thing to do, and does derive pleasure from doing it – there's no real stopping that pathology, deep down. So, to work. Those who devised the didactic programme that is Advocacy Training have addressed obstacles one and two above by writing in stone a thing they call The Method. Its principal merit lies in its being The Method, rather than in the undeniable soundness of its precepts on all occasions, and for all occasions.

It does not, of course, address obstacle number three, but then, it was not designed to, and nothing really can. For those, like Fly, who enjoy these sorts of things, and deem them important, Fly thought he might provide the heads up.

The Method requires the ability to shock a candidate with a verbatim rendition of some or other cunningly identified and buzzworded syndrome of imperfection that

acts as an illustrative manifestation of The Headnote. The Headnote, in turn, is a sexy and very short phrase or word to describe what may plausibly pass for a didactically significant aspect of a performance that could be meaningfully addressed with name-calling. If your candidate young'un unsportingly refuses to provide fodder for a Headnote within less than a few minutes of performing, the frantic search for The Headnote may vie, with increasing anxiety, with the need to keep up the verbatim record in case some part of it might ultimately serve as the material (The Headnote once detected) for The Playback.

The Playback is, well, the playback – ie acting out the insightfully detected flaw without pejorative mocking (the adjective not being wholly tautologous here, as acting out a flaw must of needs be mocking, and there are none as prone to detect mocking as those whose ostensible flaws are being acted out). The Playback Must Be Accurate. Should it fail to be, then, like Little Suzie who had to wake up, your reputation is shot. Hence the value in finding The Headnote in something early on in the performance – it reduces considerably the likelihood of an inaccurate Playback (not to mention bringing to an early end the need for recording potential material for it). The didactic hunger is fed on the Rationale and the Solution, essentially and respectively, sounding wise about why the Headnote is important and what to do to ensure that next time there's a different Headnote.

Bear in mind that the energy expended by the trainer on identifying The Headnote may well leave tantalising holes in the scarce resource of reason, rendering the Rationale or the Solution reviewable under PAJA for displaying a lack of any rational connection with The Headnote. If so, the trainer's salvation is that the candidate is likely to be so impressed with the elegance of having his or her ills described in a single word or phrase, and still trying so desperately to find the logical link between any recognisable portions of The Playback and this memorable word or phrase, as to be oblivious to any such deficiencies in the lesson. What does he or she know anyway?

If, by some quirk of gentle fate, the

trainer has not by this stage lost all semblance of credibility, he or she is then compelled to try really hard to achieve this by subjecting all participants and observers to the degradation of The Demonstration. This is supposed to be a performance (only a cameo, mind) that illustrates how The Playback would have been different but for The Headnote, given the searing insights of The Rationale and The Solution. Unfortunately, it often tends to be nothing of the sort, or at least much less than that.

Since The Method brooks no woolly qualities like qualification, proviso and nuance, the actor in the throes of The Demonstration is often embarrassed at the apparent authority with which The Truth is being laid down, which embarrassment does little to improve the performance or authority of The Demonstration. The other trainers, incorrigible counsel through and through, privately wonder whether too much harm is not being done in the shameless furthering of some or other perniciously incorrect doctrine. This tends at times to tempt the performer to mouth all manner of apologies during and after the performance, and then, suddenly gripped with nuanced insight, to put a completely different spin on the lesson.

The fact that this is anathema to The Method increases the embarrassment, which in turn spawns further apologies. At least the candidate at this point may be amused, if the shame or anger (depending on predisposition and the level of presumption or competence) of having had his or her prepared performance pierced with rapier-like perspicacity has thawed sufficiently to allow for humour.

Should, however, such amusement bear the flickering hallmarks of insight, gained from this process in one not wholly fathomable way or another, then feel content that you have done A Good Thing.

Rest content too that, like cross-examination, a tool that often strikes one as very roughly hewn from and for what a clever fellow has called the crooked timber of humanity, The Method does seem to be known for getting the job done, and must accordingly rank among those things you don't fix because they ain't broke. 🦋