

# 'WORKING RITE'

Working Rite

Everyone remembers their first boss



**Sandy Campbell offers employers and youngmen a route out of 'gobble-de-gook community regeneration projects' by reconnecting intergenerational trust.**



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## The key

Rory is just completing his first week at J&J locksmiths. "Gimme your house keys" says Stevie, his boss. "Right - what time does yer mum get back from work?" Rory remembers she's on late shift so it will be about 8 tonight. "OK. I'm keeping your keys. You make a copy and if they're no right, you'll be sitting on the doorstep for 3 hours till yer mum gets home."

Everyone remembers their first boss, and Stevie is making his mark with Rory. Here's a young lad who couldn't wait to get out of school. If truth be told he'd voted with his feet a long time ago. Dad's not around much these days and conversations with mum have degenerated into grunts and rows.

Fast forward just a couple of weeks and Rory has become a lad obsessed. Locks this and locks that. Every day he pins his mum down to listen of tales of the locks and the journeys he and Stevie are making all over town. Mum can't believe it. Locks may not have been his mum's first choice of conversation but she'll take that any day for the joy of having a relationship with her son again.

This is Leith. Rory has been placed with Stevie as part of the TOIL Project, which is run by Allan Nicol from the offices of Port of Leith Housing Association. Stevie heard about the scheme in the pub from Craig, a self employed Leith joiner. Craig has had 16 year old James with him for 3 months now. Stevie had seen the two of them around and was impressed at how the lad just seemed to get on with stuff and do what he was told. Craig told Stevie all about how the project works.

"The lad is with you for 6 months full time on the job. There's no college and no form filling. It's no free though. You pay £1 an hour for the lad and Port of Leith make his wages up to £100 a week. It's a good deal for the lad and a good deal for you. It's a chance to try before you buy and there's no promises - except that you'll give the laddie a fair chance to learn the basics and treat him well. You become a sort of role model for him. But dinnae worry, if he's cheeky or late or just no up to the mark you won't be stuck with him. First step - give Allan a ring and he'll come out to see you and explain everything. He does a check on your insurance and all the health and safety stuff. He knows what it's like being a self-employed tradesman. He'll make sure you get a laddie that suits you."

When travelling around the country promoting and setting up new projects following this model, people often say to me - "It's so simple. How come no-one's thought of it before?" And of course the answer is - they have! This is nothing new; it's called

re-inventing common sense. Finally, after years of doing gobble-de-gook community regeneration type jobs whose only end products were endless feasibility studies and preachy recommendations, I'm finally doing a job that my dad understands. As an apprentice trained decorator before the war I ask him if he remembers his first boss. A smile comes to his 93 year old face as fond memories pass before him. "The trouble is nowadays" he says, "The colleges teach the lads what they think they ought to know - not what they need to know".

Sure it's easy to take a swipe at training courses but they heard Tony Blair say 'education, education, education' and seized the opportunity. There are courses now for everything, what with colleges replacing industry as major employers. But it's not training certificates that employers are always looking for. In fact when was the last time you got a tradesman into your home and asked to see his City & Guilds before he started work?

So is this the language of 'regeneration'? Well I can switch language if you prefer. Work based mentoring for socially excluded educationally under achieving young people. Seeking to address the construction skill gap while closing the opportunity gap and meeting god knows how many social justice milestones. Better?

Language and procedures that assume failure drain the life out of our natural drive for connection. The tradesmen I come across want to help the lads. These men are employers who understand a good business deal. They don't need to be subjected to checks that assume the worst or lectured about exploitation.

I've seen tradesmen teach their lad to read, support him through girl friend trouble, advise him on handling his money, show immeasurable patience when teaching him a new skill, joke and



# re-inventing common sense

laugh and include him as part of a team. The result, in a matter of weeks, is a confident young man with a future. He may not have got bits of paper to prove it and his spelling is still probably well dodgy, but he's visibly on his way to becoming a young man of standing in his community.

And yes I am talking about boys and men. They're different you see. The maturing process is different. The physical signs of emerging manhood – facial hair and voice change – are minor compared to the transformation that happens for girls. No wonder boys feel the need to prove their manhood. Of course the TOIL project, and the others that have been set up following the same model, are open to girls. But it's lads who come forward. That's the way it is. Gender equality, in my opinion, should be about ensuring equal status rather than insisting that we all do the same things.

In fact I would go further. There is nothing wrong with all-male company, just as there is nothing wrong with all-female company. Young lads yearn for it. And here we get to the heart of one of the major problems in society. It's in the news every day – crisis amongst teenage lads and the need for role models. Recently the Reach Report was commissioned to research what teenage lads in the black community need. Shock and amazement – the finding was that they need more role models and mentors from their community.

The interesting question is – what kind of role models? The Reach report argues that it shouldn't be sportsmen and pop stars anymore – rather it should be doctors and lawyers. And here's where I beg to differ. I've got no problems with aspirations to the professions, but can't manual work be seen as a good job too? When Jesse Jackson was interviewed and asked for his response he put it perfectly. Why can't good men in their own communities



be the role models too? The most effective mentors are those that are nearest to the lad's own experience. That's why lads are drawn into gangs of their peers. But their peers won't provide them with crucial advice on how to be a man. Worldly wisdom won't be learned from the lyrics of 50 cent. It is older men from their own community who need to do the job. We must remove the barriers that prevent good men from playing a role in the lives of young lads.

The construction industry is the perfect setting. If others want to devote their energies to changing the gender balance in the trades, fine, but for the time being I'll take these good men as they are and recruit their help in redressing the maturity balance amongst today's young males. Just imagine the effect on society if there was a steady and noticeable change in the behaviour and maturity of 17 and 18 year old lads in working class communities right across Scotland.

It could happen. The TOIL model is now being rolled out under the banner of 'Working Rite'. Four more projects have already been set up using the same formula – in Govan, Perth and now across the border in Sheffield and Sunderland. In the SNP's Election Manifesto they made a commitment to "support the further development of work-based mentoring for young Scots, along the lines of the Working Rite model." Over the month of September we're meeting three ministers at Holyrood and are also in discussions with the civil servants.

Sure there is a long way to go, and Working Rite is not the answer to everything – but I can feel a change in the air. Maybe, just maybe, we are turning away from the target, training, monitoring, feasibility and evaluation driven quagmire and instead are beginning to trust in the worth of a relationship. After all, as we say to the tradesmen when they take on a lad: Everyone remembers their first boss. You will be remembered – that goes without saying. The real question is – how do you want to be remembered?

