

## Featured Facilitator: Making finance training fun!



**Cherry Birch**

I am honoured to be featured in this edition. Having worked with AIM since 2005, I am sure I am known to many of you. You may have encountered me "popping up" on a range of programs around AIM. While my original training was as a Chartered Accountant, I also have over 15 years of leadership and management development experience obtained in the United Kingdom, South East Asia as well as Australia.

One of the areas I am passionate about is *making finance training fun!* My observation is that there always seems to be higher "no show rate" on finance programs than on, say, *The New Manager*. I imagine participants waking up on the morning of the course, realising that they are due to attend two days of finance training and deciding they do not feel well! I may not be right, but let's face it - finance is a dry subject.

For many years, I misguidedly thought that all senior managers understood the basics of finance. It was while I was working as a tutor at Sundridge Park Management Centre in the UK, that reality dawned. I was asked to run a half-day session on our most senior program, the Senior Executive Program, entitled *Strategic Finance*. When my colleague briefed me, his instructions were - cover the basics. At first I thought he was joking, but it became clear he was not.

So I followed his brief. And when I'd finished the class, a senior executive sheepishly said to me, "Do you know that is the first time I have ever understood that stuff?", I was blown away. Prior to this, I had been a partner in a London firm of Chartered Accountants and so I'd always dealt with senior executives in the finance area. It never occurred to me just how many people reach senior positions in companies without any formal finance training. These days, I never assume! I am also very careful to avoid anyone losing face - one of my rules - *There is no such thing as a stupid question!*

So how do I attempt to make it fun? Let me share two different approaches:

1. On *Fundamentals of Finance*, the participants work in teams of three throughout the one day program and they play a computerised board game in the afternoon, competing against one another. They just love this game! We start in the morning with analysing Nick's personal finance situation. Nick, a 34 year old male (played not so convincingly by myself!) comes along to the course to ask the participants' help since he has financial problems - he seems to have no money left at the end of each month and he also seems to be in debt! If I tell you that I try to weave into the story line, threats of knee capping and a potential Swedish blonde as a flatmate, I hope you can tell we do have some fun!

The use of the team approach helps to break down nervousness among participants of being tested or exposed and embarrassed by their lack of knowledge. The emphasis is on making the learning interactive and fun. The aim is not to cover as much as possible in the time, but to get them to understand fully some of the major concepts and to leave the course wanting to learn more.

2. On *Finance for Non-Finance Managers*, the course design is more traditional and there is a lot to cover in the two days. So to break it up and keep everyone awake, I have collected every joke that exists about accountants (based on the fact that I am normally the only accountant in the room!). I have put these jokes in a riddle format and I get participants to take it in turns to read one, but stop before the punch line. If someone guesses the punch line, they get to set off a party popper (The Sodexo team love me!). If not, which is more common, they have to blow a party whistle! Whilst the quality of the jokes is questionable (I am always looking for new material), this approach does usually get a few laughs!

Q. What did the terrorist who hijacked a plane full of accountants threaten to do if his demands weren't met?

A. Release one every hour.

And to end on a positive note...

Q: Why are they putting the accountants at the bottom of the ocean?

A: They found out that deep down they're really not so bad.

## Introducing IT

It's been a very busy time in the IT department, with several major projects happening in the first quarter of this year.

Firstly, we replaced the entire computer server infrastructure with a new 'virtualised' environment, which gives us greater flexibility for future service growth. This also gives us the ability to have a 'live' disaster recovery site which the business can migrate to easily, in the event of a major outage (e.g. fire, flood) at Management House.

Next, we replaced all the workstations with new Dell PCs and Notebooks, a major undertaking as we had about 80 units to replace.

Lastly, and most importantly, we have commenced work on the website redevelopment project. The result of this will be a new AIM VT website that not only has a new look and feel, but will give our Members, participants and other stakeholders a more interactive and engaging experience. The new site will also be better integrated to iMIS, AIM's database system, which will in turn provide better internal efficiencies.

We will keep you updated as we move through the project.

**David Humphreys AIMM, Manager IT**



**David Humphreys, Manager IT**



**Dan Redman (left) & Christian Cranfield (right)**

## Eggcellent!



AIM now has a monthly Eggcellent Award for a deserving staff member. The recipient of the award nominates the following month's winner. Dan Redman (below), winner of the first award, presents the Egg to Athena from Finance.

