

Sweating the small stuff



Solicitors should be careful not to catch 'Dontgiveupitis', warns **Richard Barr**



Richard Barr is a consultant with Scott-Moncrieff & Associates www.scomo.com

I had just spent twenty minutes looking for the missing carrot. I had only walked off to get a bucket, but by the time I returned it had gone. I looked high and low, but particularly low, as carrots, unlike pigs, have not yet been known to fly. I moved things around. I peered under objects. I looked inside bags and other containers. Still no carrot.

I now know why solicitors have negligence claims made against them. They suffer from a disease that is spreading among the legal profession.

'Dontgiveupitis' is a condition that prevents solicitors from progressing with their days because of a small impediment – like a missing carrot.

Now you might think that a carrot does not carry great importance in the legal universe. However, the absence of a carrot can impede all progress towards achieving greater things.

Self-help

From time to time I buy books,

usually at an airport on the way to some sunny destination, which promise to transform my life and show me all that I have been doing wrong while guiding me to a future full of wealth, happiness and lack of persecution by the English legal system.

I will read the first three pages before becoming exhausted by the effort of self-improvement. Then I either leave them behind or, if I do bring them back, I never open them again and, months or years later, they end up in a charity shop where some other unfortunate can go through the same process.

Despite my efforts, one of the books, *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*, ended up on my bookshelf. It is full of enlightening chapter titles, like 'Become a Less Aggressive Driver' (I refrained from shouting at the elderly lady who stepped in front of my car and confined my response to a Churchillian gesture).

Or, 'If Someone Throws You the Ball, You Don't Have to Catch it' (I have never caught a ball yet, and I am not going to change the habit of a lifetime).

And even, 'Spend a Moment, Every Day, Thinking of Someone to Love' (I have been thinking of loving Chris Grayling, the Lord Chancellor, but the effort nearly killed me).

This book, by the late Dr Richard Carlson, has apparently sold 25m copies. I am sorry to disappoint all 25m of you, but the reality, at least as far as solicitors are concerned, is



You cannot wrap a horse in a blanket and force the medication down its throat

that you should sweat the small stuff because if you don't, you cannot get on with the big stuff.

Staple jam

Take a small carrot-sized thing such as a stapler. I had been trying to send a spectacularly well-worded letter to my opponents, but, when I tried to pin all eight pages together, the staple only went through the first two. I tried again, and this time three staples came out together and jammed the machine.

An hour and 20 minutes later, and with the help of a large hammer and a chisel, I cleared the stapler, but once again it failed to penetrate the letter, the corner of which was by now beginning to resemble a sieve.

In despair, I threw the stapler at the wall and picked up a miniature one that was in a Christmas cracker. It worked perfectly.

Having thus sweated over that small stuff, I was able to continue with my important work of trying to tell a client I cared for her, and comply with

SRA guidance, and still make it understandable to a human being. That was until the broadband froze.

Now that gave me plenty to sweat about. I was soon shouting at a disembodied voice on the other side of the world. The voice told me that I would need to wait three days for an engineer, and it would cost me £160 if there was nothing wrong with the wiring. On the other hand, if I cared to switch off my router and turn it back on again, all might be well. A few minutes later, I was disappointed to find that it was.

Then my pen ran out. My printer jammed. My tea became cold. Several people rang my mobile to tell me that I could have all my debts written off. My dictating machine lost its memory. But I did find the carrot.

The horse is ill and it has to have a daily pill. You cannot wrap a horse in a blanket and force the medication down its throat; subterfuge is necessary. I use an electric drill to bore a hole in said carrot and insert the pill deep inside. If the horse does not eat its pill, it becomes more ill, so that was perfect justification for another well-spent 45 minutes.

Time spent on sweating the small stuff: six hours, 20 minutes. Time spent on productive work: 19 minutes. But what was produced in that time was pure gold, worth at least a ton of carrots. **SJ**