



10 PEOPLE TO WATCH OUT FOR IN BUSINESS

(They're out to get you!)

BY STAME REILLY

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⚠ WARNING ⚠

THIS WORK CONTAINS EXPLICIT LANGUAGE
AND IDEAS LIKELY TO OFFEND.

[Note to editor – isn't that the fucking point you pratt. Stame]



BY STAME REILLY

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Introduction

Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not all out to screw you. That's a healthy attitude to have in business. You should trust everyone – trust that, given half a chance, they'll dick you over.

OK, not everyone, some of my best mates were made in business (or in the pub after business hours where sadly I've also lost friends and damaged my career prospects irrevocably). But there is no doubt that there are people out there you should be very wary of and good old Stame is here to warn you about them. They're not always easy to spot and you can't identify them just by function, nationality or personal traits. So I cover all of these.

Here's my list:

1. **Americans, Australians and People from Yorkshire**
2. **HR managers (especially Organizational Development and Change Management people)**
3. **People in Advertising (and PR and Design and Promotions)**
4. **Short men**
5. **Finance Directors**
6. **Politicians**
7. **People in senior positions who don't have degrees**
8. **Certain kinds of women**
9. **Executive Coaches**
10. **Barons (heads of Divisions other than your own) and retailers**

This is not an exhaustive list but it is long enough so that by the time you work through it you will see danger lurking everywhere thus adding to your overall sense of paranoia. Which is just the way it should be.

I also have some further advice to offer regarding how you can protect yourself

from all of the above. Little strategies that make it harder for these people to put one over on you.

Now I admit my credentials regarding ‘*what it takes to succeed in business*’ are not strong as I didn’t. But think about it, people who have succeeded are not going to help you because they are successful. They have reached the magnanimous stage of their careers where all they really want now is popularity and love, which, being successful, is hard to come by.

As a mate of mine once said, “*When someone you know is really successful a little part of you dies*”. We hate successful people, especially if we’re British, and they know this, so they try to be nice and feign humility. “*If I have seen greatness it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants*” – yes you stood on them all right, trampled all over them in your effort to climb to the top the greasy pole. They were giants till you stood on their shoulders, now they’re just little short fuckers made smaller by the weight of your ambition.

No, you’ll get no sense out of those who’ve made it. If you want to know where the land mines are talk to someone who stood on one – but you can’t because they’re now spread all over the road. Well I stood on plenty of land mines but because it was in business the only consequence was my significant under-achievement (made all the more poignant by my undoubted potential). I am still alive to tell you where to tread carefully. Failure is a great tutor but it never looks good on a CV, which is a pity because the failures often have the best lessons for us.

So here is my latest offering – people to watch out for in business with the attention you normally reserve for muggers in a dark alley.

1. Americans, Aussies and Yorkshiremen

The real point I want to start with is that nationality and regionality are to be taken very seriously. Everybody carries nasty characteristics by dint of where they were born and brought up. Understand this and you are fore-warned and fore-armed. I will return to this point but since I specify certain nationalities (including Yorkshire which is a country in the eyes of the miserable arses that come from there) I will address each in turn and explain myself.

At this point people normally cover themselves by saying something along the lines of '*Of course not everyone from Lithuania is an unpleasant tosser, I do actually have a few valued Lithuanian friends*'. Well, I do have some really good American mates but I have no Australian friends or 'chums' from Yorkshire. I have worked with, and for, a few really decent Americans but I'd personally eviscerate myself before I'd ever work for someone from Australia or Yorkshire.

So let's start with the curates egg, the Americans, who are only wankers in part.

All Americans look and sound good in uniform. They are all born media trained, they can present, if not eloquently (face it, they can't speak English) then at least confidently and fluidly. In America you can get all the way through to tertiary education on multiple choice questions (4 wrong, one right answer, no ambiguity or intellectual debate) in an education system that believes in continual positive strokes and seven shades of wonderful. 5 year old Americans have to do '*Show and Tell*' so they are not only comfortable when presenting and arguing in business they are positively peachy keen.

The consequence of all this is that it is nigh on impossible to work out whether they are any good or not. I recall a time many years ago when I, and some colleagues, were welcoming a visitor from the US division of our

group. We spent two days with him and only at the end of those 2 days did it become apparent to us that, whilst affable in the extreme (if you can be extremely affable), he was a complete wanker who was about as bright as a 20 Watt bulb. But he sounded (and looked – thank you Brooks Brothers) really impressive.

People go on about how superficial Americans are – within 2 minutes they introduce you to someone else as their ‘*very good friend, Stame, from London, England*’ as opposed to London, Arkansas. Actually, I don’t mind that. I do a good line in superficial myself – I don’t care if you really don’t want me to have a nice day, I’m just happy if you say you do. What I cannot stand is their cringing sentimentality, “*God bless America, Land of the Twee*” and political correctness. “*Stame, I don’t think that joke about a gay, African American is appropriate*”. Of course you don’t you creationist bible-bashing hypocrite but you think homosexuality is a sin against god and you would hesitate to let an African American park your car let alone marry your daughter.

Is any of this dangerous in business? Yes, mindless confidence coming from someone whose true intellect is impossible to judge is very dangerous. And superficiality, tinged with gross hypocrisy, is a close cousin to profound disloyalty. Americans, some Americans, will be your best mate today and will help pull the trigger tomorrow. I saw that first hand when a couple of really quite talented American CEO’s of my acquaintance were given the bullet. Hardly a tear had been shed before all their former colleagues were jostling for position and expressing their long held, but previously unvoiced, opinions of the shortcomings of their erstwhile boss. Americans? I wouldn’t trust them as far as I could spit them but there are many exceptions to this so just be wary.

But when it comes to Aussies you need to be more than wary, you need to avoid them like a dose of the clap.

There are two kinds of Australians – bone idle, illiterate whingers and Rupert

Murdoch. The former are just irritating but thankfully they think there is no place on earth as good as their land down-under, '*girt by sea, of beauties rich and fair*' so they remain a long way away from where the rest of us live. But the really smart Aussies are different. They move abroad to further their business ambitions. They are very smart and totally ruthless, the most ruthless I have ever met. You could squeeze them dry and find not one ounce of truth. Don't just be wary, be really scared – they always win because they will do everything it takes to win and will never stop until they have won. You can see it in their depressingly successful sports teams. They are particularly scary because they can be very urbane, even downright friendly, a good guy to have a beer with, funny, straight-talking. Yes, but someone who will do or say anything to achieve their goals and will not bother to walk round, just straight through you, if you get in their way.

Talking of squeezing, if you took a South African and squeezed out every bit of generosity of spirit, wrung him so dry that not one scintilla of warmth or empathy could be found even using the Hubble telescope from one inch away, then and only then are you getting close to a Yorkshireman. They are quite simply dour, tight bastards who think anyone born outside Yorkshire is a smooth talking git out to get them. They are foul and if you are unlucky enough to ever find yourself working for, or with, one of them, just slit your wrist. If you end up on a project team with a Yorkshireman just remember Geoff Boycott – happy to see England lose at cricket as long as he maintained his personal batting average (and he knocked his wife about).

As I say, blood will out. There are just some nationalities you have to be wary of – it's OK, it's not racist, just realistic, especially as they really hate you too just because you're English/French/Whatever. It may surprise you to know that you should not be wary of Germans – no possible reason to like them but no need to be scared of them as long as they are in small groups. By the way, Germans hate to be interrupted in business meetings – they put all the verbs at the end of their sentences so a German finds it the height of rudeness if you don't let him finish because for all you know he either did, will, would or

didn't do what ever it was. My advice is of course to interrupt them at every opportunity – think of it as revenge for being at the wrong end of too many penalty shoot-outs.

Italians, Dutch, Swedes – all ghastly in their own way but not scary. Japanese, well they can be quite tricky, but Koreans are worse. My point is that in business, xenophobia is a healthy form of paranoia.

2. HR managers

It's a bit of a cliché to bad-mouth people in HR and point out they are all a waste of oxygen. Like all clichés it is of course true and becomes clichéd only because we all know it to be true and repeat it frequently.

You don't have to be a unique combination of ineffectual, self-important and rotten to the core to work in HR. So it remains one of the biggest coincidences in the universe that they all are.

Personally, I think there is a bit of Darwinianism going on here. I have never heard anyone, ever, at any stage before they start working in HR say that when they grow up and qualify they want to work in HR. I think that what happens is that just before the gene pool turns on them and makes it clear that they must wither on evolution's vine, or better still be culled, they take refuge in the HR department. "*Whatever you say, you know you need us so I will be safe here*". And the bitter truth is we do need them because, like sewage workers, they sort out all the shit the rest of us cannot be bothered with and often cause in the course of our everyday jobs – we do our jobs and we just can't help making smelly jobbies, like firing that pregnant woman, leaving HR to clean up the mess.

But the very fact that they luxuriate in the title '*Human Resources*' should make it very clear that they are to be handled with caution, the same kind of caution with which you'd handle a grenade with no pin. To them you are just organic assets and they care about you as much as they care about inorganic assets like the staplers or the company delivery van. Be wary, never befriend one (it makes it so awkward when they do your exit interview 6 months later) and never, ever, ever, under any circumstances, open up to one. Just accept them and what they do, thank the Lord you had sufficient talent not to work in HR and go about your business.

Moving on from the clichéd but self-evident truth that you should be wary of anyone with HR in their title, I want to highlight the unique danger of people who are specialists in ‘*Organizational Development and Change Management*’. Here is a dangerous cocktail if ever there was one. Take an HR person, mix in some true quackery in the form of pseudo scientific theories of organizational behaviour plus the inter-personal skills of an Albanian Pimp and then give them a mandate from the CEO to implement some departmental change. A really fucked up person with a gun – aaahhhhhh! Run for your lives!!!! But you can’t run, they will force you to sit in all-day workshops where they work through some wanky process they ripped off from last month’s McKinsey Quarterly and barely understood.

They are beyond ghastly but they have the ability to get their clutches into you and your team and just generally fuck everything up. Where there was order they bring chaos, where something worked just fine they introduce performance management. The only consolation is they seem to have troubled personal lives but this misery finds its outlet at work as they slice and dice your carefully built systems and processes so no-one has a clue what is going on and you are now all as fucked up as they are.

You are relatively safe if the boss really hates HR as much as everyone else but for some strange reason they often don’t. Something weird happens in the transition from director to CEO. Up to this point he or she normally loathes HR as much as the rest of us but when they get to the very top they suddenly start to like and value the HR director. My theory is that as a CEO you can use HR to make difficult stuff happen. *“I don’t like Stame or his team and what they are doing – it would be messy to fire him so let’s just fuck him up a bit and set up an Organizational Development Review. You can put that miserable cow Cruella de Ville on it. Couple of months with her and he’ll either shape up or ship out.”*

You may laugh (you are allowed to laugh if you want) but this actually happened to me and it was no laughing matter. I decided that I had to nip this one in the bud and since the suggested project had not come directly from the

boss, he'd got the HR director to propose it to me quietly, I was able, equally quietly, to tell him to go fuck himself. She was coming nowhere near me or my team. Thankfully some more pressing organizational issue came up – we made some big acquisition and the HR director was deployed to manage the '*post merger integration process*' (ably assisted by said Cruella de Ville) which involved all the key people in the acquired company being replaced by our people in the true spirit of a merger.

Anyway, I digress. HR stands for '*Handle Remotely*' – in other words delegate any interaction with HR to some sucker who works for you.

3. People in Advertising

By the same freakish coincidence of nature whereby all ineffectual, self-important, rotten-to-the-core people end up in HR, all lying, smalmy, venal and morally corrupt people end up working as account managers in advertising agencies (or if they are less bright in PR or Design, and if pig-shit thick, in Promotions). No, I shall not vilify all people in advertising, only account managers – the client service people, the ‘suits’.

“Account managers are paid liars”. I was told this by an account manager, ex JWT, the ministry of advertising. When I quizzed him on this – never for a second wishing to contradict him, just understand the reason for this self-awareness – he explained. *“We were paid to sell shit to clients as ‘our considered recommendation based on great thought and deliberation’ whereas the truth was we knew it was shit but the creative director loved it so we had no choice”*.

And this is why I single out the account managers – they are really dangerous. That kind of moral corruption can fuck up brands and waste millions of shareholders’ money. And you know it’s true because you watch it on TV every night. *“What a crap ad – which witless, dickless client bought that?”*. Yes, well, which lying, smalmy git of an account manager sold it to them? Brand managers are not the cleverest of souls, they are easily bamboozled. The account managers know this and have a responsibility, you’d have thought, not to take candy from the baby and replace it with a shit dummy.

Don’t get me wrong, I loathe agency planners, about as useful as a chocolate kettle, but more time-wasting than pernicious. They have a degree from Oxbridge so indulge them a bit while they give you the pulse of the market, the consumer zeitgeist, based on 2 focus groups in Uxbridge the night before. They’re harmless, they only aid and abet. It’s the account managers who suck it up, smile winsomely and sell you complete crap.

Some of these account managers are such good snake oil salesmen that they go on to be the head of the ad agency. Then they become very dangerous because they get the ear of the CEO and fill it with all kinds of nonsense. Or worse, they listen to his hair-brained ideas, ideas he hasn't had the courage to voice to his marketing director directly up 'til now. But then Maurice or Nigel, the head of Willy, Nilly & Wanky Agency (notice they always use ampersands like a firm of Dickensian solicitors) tells him it is a wonderfully insightful thought, and the next thing you know you've lost half your budget to develop the boss' idea.

They are a particular breed these ad boys. With slightly more work ethic (not much mind) and a head for figures they'd be working in the city selling you bundles of toxic debt dressed up as '*highly attractive derivatives*'. In fact if they had realized how much money these city boys go on to make they would have leapt at this career path.

Account managers – you can tell they're lying when you see their lips move. You can tell they're lying through their teeth when they start sentences with "*In all honesty*". Don't trust them in business although it's OK to socialize with them especially if they can get you tickets to the cup final.

4. Short Men

I realize that following a warning about people in advertising with one about short men that a certain short but very senior person in advertising– and his lawyers – might think I mean Sir M, CEO of you-know-who. Well I don't and I wish to make it quite clear that any reference or association or allusion, whether implied or inferred, to the aforementioned or indeed any senior but vertically challenged head of a major global communications group, is purely coincidental and if not so taken must at the very least be regarded as, notwithstanding this caveat, only intended to be humorous in the spirit of fair comment, and I apologize, without reservation, in advance, for any offence, intentional, unintentional or by any other means for any such comments.

[Note to editor – won't this legal guff look a bit odd? Stame]

Anyway, short fuckers are exactly that – short fuckers. They grew up self-conscious about their height (and any other corresponding deficiencies), were doubtless bullied in the playground, turned down by tall girls at the school disco, made to shop at GAP kids well in to their teens and generally subjected to the kind of adolescent humiliation that gives one a certain grudge against the world. Consequently they grow up as little Naploleans, hungry for power and world domination.

They make lousy bosses, ruthless negotiators and therefore very successful CEO's. They say you need an edge to get on business – well short men have the edge of a highly honed samurai sword. Be very careful here because on the way up they can be friendly and gregarious. They have to be, they're short fuckers, who's going to pay any attention to them? But give them the slightest bit of power and they will abuse it and you. This is especially true if you happen to be tall yourself.

I am often accused of being male-biased to the point of misogyny – mostly by stroppy blonde tarts who miss the fucking point. But it's not true and to

prove it let me offer this special piece of advice, about fucking, to all you women. Short men didn't get a lot of action when they were growing up and they try to make amends for this by shagging everything in sight when they get older and into a position of power. They often succeed in this quest because a lot of you girls seem to go for this power thing (I wouldn't know about this personally but so it would appear by the number of short bosses who shag their secretaries). Ugly blokes do the same thing – they use the allure of their power to bed all the women they were denied when they were butt-ugly nobodies – look at David Blunkett. So ladies, be very careful of short men with big titles in business. They are only after you for one thing unlike the rest of us who love you for your mind and your companionship. We respect you as co-workers and if you do fancy a shag we will respect you no less (rather more actually).

Short Men with financial backgrounds are a particular threat – a double whammy so to speak. Again I am concerned that given Sir M's height and financial background people may jump to conclusions here and assume, quite wrongly, that Stame has him in mind. This is quite untrue. Stame has never met Sir M although he knows people who have (met in the same way the Titanic met the ice berg). He is a formidable businessman with an impressive track record and as such there will always be those who will harbour resentment towards him, having come off second best. Stame would just like to say that, as far as he can tell from those who know him well, his intelligence and dynamism is matched only by his charm and generosity. He is not tall – in fact his nickname among some is rumoured to be 21/6 i.e. the shortest knight of the year – but Stame fully accepts him to be an exception to this rule, nothing less than a role model in business.

[Note to editor – change back to the first person otherwise it will be obvious I did not write this bit, Stame]

I feel the urge to point out that I am in fact 6 feet 6 inches. Women have sometimes asked me whether everything is in proportion and I always use the cricketer, Joel Garner's reply to this cheeky question. "*If it was darling, I'd be 8 foot 10*". Unlike him I'd be lying.

5. Finance Directors

Ah, Finance Directors – it is just as clichéd to say all Finance Directors (FD's) are nasty little shits as it is to say all HR Directors are ineffectual, self-important, twats etc. Just as clichéd, just as true.

Let's move beyond the obvious here, which is that Finance Directors are only interested in money, and that never makes for a warm, loveable nature. Let's start with the late, great Professor Peter Doyle. It was Prof. Doyle who pointed out that every decision in business had a cost and a benefit and that FD's have a particular advantage over marketing in this respect. Any marketing decision involving investment in brands has a clear and obvious cost in terms of profit and cash flow, one that is felt immediately. Hopefully, if the money is invested wisely – and I'll accept it often isn't – the benefits in terms of higher market share or the ability to command a price premium are felt in the medium to long term.

For FD's it is precisely the other way round. Most of their decisions – to cut costs or working capital – have immediately positive benefits in terms of profit and cash. The potential negatives – reduction in quality and out of stocks – are felt only in the longer term. So FD's have a distinct advantage and therefore a natural tendency to be Scrooges.

But more than this, they see it as their unique role in life to be cynics, pessimists and nay-sayers. Their job is to point out the downside risks, the impact on current results, the opportunity costs. Cutting costs, deferring capital investment, reducing marketing budgets will always look good in the short term. And most of the investors in the business – venal little brokers and pension fund managers – only care about the short term because that is how their bonuses get paid.

The FD's naturally uncharitable nature has short term advantages and plays well with the investors. They are encouraged to be negative and miserable. But there is more. They also have governance on their side. Any other divisional director

relies on his colleagues for support and co-operation and therefore has to invest something in terms of personal relationships to obtain this. Not the FD – he has Corporate Governance behind him. The company is required by law to comply in terms of financial probity, risk analysis and disclosure and this trump card allows the interfering little bastards to stick their nose in wherever they want. They are effectively – very effectively – the government and shareholder appointed chief sneak.

If they are wrong to black hat some investment proposal or other they can still claim they were only doing their job. If an investment is successful there will always be an element of luck and lots of variables. No-one is going to go back and point the finger at them for being a dissenting voice. If it fails they are heroes. So there is no incentive for them to be supportive or positive and every incentive to be gloomy and doomy.

I hope you would agree this is all soundly argued, an intellectually robust support for the assertion that all FD's are miserable gits. But let's look at the empirical evidence – look around at your contemporaries at University. Which ones went on to be FD's? Did you like them? Of course you didn't, they were all dull and sober (in every sense). Do you have any really close mates who are FD's? I thought not. They all dress smartly and badly, nothing looks worse than a FD wearing jeans; they are earnest and boring; they are all tight. They are the bastards who suspiciously play below their handicap at golf because they play '*percentage golf*'. They never know any decent jokes. Their kids are just as awful – always getting top marks at school while still finding time to play violin in the school orchestra.

And lots of FD's go on to become non-executive directors. They score these nicely paid sinecures because the executive board is scared stiff of all the governance issues. Former FD's pack out the remuneration committees and audit committees and generally continue their lifelong mission to take all the fun out of business.

Watch out for FD's – they are never your friend. They're nobody's friend.

6. Politicians

No I don't mean real politicians although feel free to loathe them too, be my guest. I mean the politicians in business. They share one common characteristic – they put their own personal advancement ahead of the best interests of the company the way Al Capone put racketeering ahead of paying taxes. That's why we call them politicians because like the ones in Parliament or Congress it is “*Me First, Country Second*”. In the case of the elected officials they dress up this self-serving ambition as aligned to the country's interests. “*Only if we are in power will the country be in good hands. Therefore we can say or do anything to ensure this happens*” is their argument and many go so far as to truly believe this. It helps them get elected.

Business politicians are not elected – they are promoted. They indulge in no self-delusion – they know that they are better off if they are in power and only this matters to them. Since they are not elected but instead promoted they are top class brown nosers – they have their snouts so far up the boss' nought they can tickle his tonsils with their nostrils. But not all bosses are stupid so the politicians understand that they must ensure some degree of track record including always being on the right side of a decision. They understand information is power and set about acquiring and leveraging it to their advantage. They invest a lot of time in personal relationships across the business, they build alliances and trade their information and support. They offer favours and they call them in at the moment of greatest advantage.

They never put their neck on the line – they don't go out on a stump let alone a limb in any business debate. They are very measured in meetings, you will see them looking around the room, sensing which way the discussion is going, sniffing the wind, picking their moment. At the right time they will offer a comment or ask a question designed to catch someone out – this is when they use the information that they have so carefully acquired. Always the motive is the same – it is pure – ‘*how can I manoeuvre this to my advantage*’. They have not one ounce of integrity or interest in the success of the business. They only care

about how they are perceived and how quickly they can advance.

I really like them, in fact I admit, I envy them. I stuck my balls on the line so often it bordered on indecent exposure. My gob was always open and at least one of my feet was in it. My timing was as good as Hitler's – "*We're winning on the Western Front, let's have a go at the Russkies now winter is coming*". I shared George Dubya's ability to foster strong alliances (No, Blair fostered the alliance with Bush not Bush with Blair because of course Blair defines the ruthless, self-serving politician). In short I was useless at the politics and was rather jealous of the people who were good at it.

I have no problem with politicians, they can be really useful to you, at least they can if you are smarter than me. You want something, they want something – that is the basis of a good relationship irrespective of each others' motivation (and of course you could be just as ambitious as them).

The one's to be careful of are the dishonest politicians. The ones who pretend they are not politicians. The ones who claim '*they hate politics*'. An honest politician – the guys who make no secret of their ambition – are relatively straight-forward to deal with. It is the clever little toads who do just enough to demonstrate that they are prepared to subvert their own best interests for the good of the business, who are much more subtle in their brown-nosing, they are the ones to really watch out for. And of course they are the hardest to spot. They go along to get along. They disguise their political nature under the banner of consensus management and a respect for proper process. The boss really likes them because he helped create all the process, and gaining a consensus prevents him having to stick his neck out and actually make a decision.

If I look back I can recall, on the one hand, all the out and out politicians who made no secret of their thirst for power and willingness to do anything to get it, and, on the other hand, the really sneaky little fuckers who pretended they were a team player when they were anything but. The latter were the worst by far. My advice – trust nobody.

7. People in senior positions who don't have degrees

I thought it would be worth following up the warning about the dishonest – highly disguised – politicians with a warning about a group who are very easy to spot. They will happily identify themselves. They hold senior jobs and at some point they will tell you “*Of course I didn't go to university*”. At this point you know that if you did, you need to be very, very careful. They resent you deeply and will make it their goal, their mission, to prove that they are a lot smarter than you.

Having no university degree is a close cousin to being short. It is something they have come to regret and for which they feel they have been ridiculed (although these slights are probably more imaginary than real). If you have no degree in business you think other people look down their noses at you. This gives you an edge and if you are bright – bright enough to have gone to university – you will succeed. But however successful you become you will still carry that chip on your shoulder. You will still feel the need to stick it to the poncy bastards with their fancy Oxbridge degrees, to put one over on them. If you make a mistake they will rub it in – “*they didn't teach you that at university did they, eh?*”.

As a matter of interest why didn't they go to university? It seems stupid to miss out on 3 years of minimal studying and copious quantities of drinking and rutting. Could your parents not afford to send you? Well add that to the list of chips on your shoulder. God, don't tell me you were blue collar.

Were you a greedy impatient bastard who wanted to get straight into a paying job and buy your first Ford Escort? Equally stupid – start as a graduate and you can afford an MG.

Did you get your girlfriend up the duff? Shows loyalty and a sense of duty but a poor grasp of contraception. Are you still married to her? Shame.

Or were your school grades not good enough? Is that because you were a poor student and got flustered in exams? Or is it because you were just not that bright? Is that it – well don't feel bad because the dirty truth is that being very smart and being successful in business are not correlated. Some might argue they are inversely correlated – the smarter you are the more you struggle. Really smart people see too many options. The not so bright, but in other ways very effective, people see just enough options and have the guts to pick one and get on with it. Admirable quality in business.

Anyway – it doesn't matter. Whatever reason lies behind the lack of letters after their name, they will make life difficult for you if you happened to have graduated 'cum laude'.

8. Certain kinds of women

I know all you girls think I am a male chauvinist pig – I always refer to the boss as ‘he’. I make the odd sexist joke (apparently the only painful part of a man getting a sex change is when they stretch your mouth and rip out your brain). The last section assumed that it is only senior men who may not have degrees (funny kind of chauvinism that is, and by the way, in my experience, it is – girls always seem to get great grades and go on to university).

Well I’ll have you know Stame really rates women in business – back in the days when I used to get to decide these things I’d always favour appointing a woman. Smarter, more conscientious and loyal, and of course the ability to multi-task (they can shop and talk on their cell phones – just kidding).

But there are certain kinds of women one encounters in business that are very tricky and frankly not much fun to work with or for – especially not for. They are characterized by two things:

- No sense of humour
- A need to compensate for being a woman to the point of denial

They end up being just too ‘*business-like*’. Everything is treated sooo seriously. They overdo the rational arguments. They want to be seen to be tough and decisive so they are – very – which is misguided on their part. There is a lot of grey in business – it is rarely black and white and a key component is passion. Passion doesn’t come from logic it comes from an irrational determination to make something work. The reason a man never asks for directions is because he is determined – irrationally – to find the place on his own. He is determined to ‘win’. In business there is no such thing as clear directions. A desire to win and a degree of self-reliance is not such a bad trait.

OK, we’re warmed up now so let’s get into the real issue. Certain kinds of women want to compete on equal terms with men. They want ‘*sex*’ to have nothing to do

with it. This is silly and unrealistic. Sex always comes in to it. Men think about sex on average every 3 minutes. If you are the only woman in a meeting that lasts an hour – well, you do the maths. Apart from the absolute mingers, I have never worked with a woman that I have not at least once contemplated naked (in other words I think about them being naked, not me being naked when I think about them, you know what I mean). It's only idle musing, my track record is pretty good in this regard i.e. I never got my honey were I got my money, well almost never. But you think about it – you are aware that this is a woman and you are a man, there is at least a theoretical possibility of swopping bodily fluids. It's a boring bit of the meeting so your mind starts to wander – how big are the tits under that blouse? OK, shoot me, hang me up for being honest. But you know it's true. Women are the opposite sex – sexuality comes in to it.

The best women in business understand this. They accept their sexuality, they don't flaunt it but they flirt a little. And why not? Business is about winning and in order to win you have to be self-aware and use every advantage you have. Tall men use the fact that they are tall – short men gain an edge by being short. The odds are never even.

Certain kind of women keep this buried – they want to win despite being a woman. They want to overcome the odds. Stupid – play the odds. Don't compensate for being a woman – be a woman. We love you, we were brought up to respect you (most of us). It doesn't diminish you to acknowledge your sexuality and even use it on occasions.

But certain women don't want to be seen as either a woman or in any way frivolous. And that is so dull. Smart, sexy (the two are linked) women who can laugh at themselves are a powerful force. Certain kinds of earnest, hard, repressed women are bad news.

A lot of women have told me that the worst bosses they have had have been women, certain kinds of women. I rest my case.

9. Executive Coaches

It has become fashionable in recent years to give senior executives access to an *'Executive Coach'*. These are experienced – and highly paid – business psychologists who help the executive develop a higher degree of self-awareness and thus be more effective managers and leaders. They allow their clients to understand their strengths and weaknesses – to polish the former and work on strategies to compensate for the latter.

It make sense. Even Tiger Woods occasionally uses a golf coach, so it is no admission of failure to accept the help of a business coach if, like Tiger, you want to *'work on your game and hit the ball real well'*.

Well actually, yes it is and it's a waste of fucking time as well. In fact it is more than just a waste of time – it's dangerous.

Just think this through a little. In some very rare circumstances the firm does generally hold you in very high regard – they see you as the Tiger Woods of business – and they want to invest time and money in making you even better. This must be regarded as rare – as rare as rocking horse pooh and unicorns and warm, generous people from Yorkshire. Of course they don't. They have identified some flaws and they want you to work on them before they will promote you. So don't be flattered – be concerned. What sometimes happens is that your boss went though this experience himself (alright, *'or herself'*, but that's the last time) and through something akin to the Stockholm Syndrome is now beholden to this executive coach and wants all his direct reports to suffer the way he suffered. But ask yourself – did it do him any good? No. So will it do you any good? No.

It will fuck you up is what it will do. This executive coach will do a 360 degree assessment which can include close members of your family as well as everyone you work with and for. This feedback is given anonymously (although it is remarkably easy to figure out who said what). Under the

shroud of anonymity anyone who has got it in for you, or is simply envious, will dish the dirt. This is given a heavy dose of top-spin by the coach so that it becomes a really unpleasant experience. Like rehab, the first part of the process is to get you to admit you have problems, except unlike rehab, these are very exaggerated problems.

So now you know everyone thinks you are a cunt albeit with some redeeming virtues. Next the coach sets to work on polishing what you are good at and in the process undermines your by now fragile self-esteem. “*But I thought that was one of my real strengths*” – yes, but there is always room to improve. Then they highlight your weaknesses – in fact they get you to highlight them, which is even more painful. Armed with your tearful mea culpa’s they start working on coping strategies.

You didn’t need any of this. You needed some degree of self-awareness but not to the point of self-consciousness. And remember this is not done – like Tiger – in between tournaments. This is done mid-way through the British Open. To switch sporting analogies, you’ve got your head under your own bonnet in the middle of a Formula One race. Why? because while all this helpful coaching is going on you still have to do your day job. You still have to face all those people who you now know think you are ‘*very opinionated on occasions and apt to make rash decisions*’. This is apt to make one a bit dithery.

By the time you get offered executive coaching your strengths and weaknesses are ingrained – there is not much you can do about them and it does NOT help to know their root causes. Just some healthy self-awareness and a ‘*just get on with life*’ attitude will do. The best strategy, if you are offered executive coaching, is to sound really enthusiastic and keep finding reasons to put it off. With a bit of luck you’ll get promoted in the meantime and the issue will go away.

By the way, Roger Federer does not have a tennis coach, Michael Schumacher did not have a driving instructor and neither does Tiger Woods have a regular golf coach.

10. Barons and Retailers

This should be two sections – one for Barons and one for retailers – but I have lumped them together because I think the worst Barons behave a lot like retailers and vica versa. It's a power thing.

Baron is the term used to refer to heads of divisions of big multi-nationals. They report in to the CEO but if they are any good – that is to say if they hit their numbers consistently – they report to nobody but themselves. They are, as the name implies, Barons of their own fiefdoms. Within those fiefdoms they are effectively the 'Boss' so you might think they are no better and no worse than any other boss but it's not true. They are worse. Their power derives from retaining absolute control of every operational aspect of their division so they can guarantee they hit or beat their targets. They tend to be micro-managers and control freaks and thus they make for very tough bosses. If they see you as a trusted lieutenant then you are fine, you are 'on-side' and whilst they will be hard, they will be fair and loyal. Let them down and they will come down on you like ten tons of very sharp bricks. They are the on the front-line of the war, failure is not an option, fit in or fuck off.

Of course there are exceptions but they are rare. A relaxed, hands-off, pleasant-natured, nurturing Baron is as rare as an affable War Lord.

If you are a tough, commercial, get-it-done kind of guy you may find this to be no problem. You can handle tough bosses, you might even like them, in which case you are probably on your way to being a Baron yourself. If you are intellectual, thoughtful and reasonable you will find life less comfortable.

But the true cuntfulness (a rare apology for this crudity but no other word adequately describes it) of a Baron is reserved, generally, for anyone outside their division and specifically '*people from Head Office*'. If you work in the centre of the multi-national, if you are a '*staffy*', descriptions like Baron or War Lord

will make absolute sense to you. They don't just regard you as not on the same team, they see you as the enemy. They will afford you no respect, they will forbid their people to co-operate or even see you. I have heard of several instances where Barons have banned people from the centre even visiting their division or country/region. To them you are just an interfering, time wasting, ineffectual wanker who has no grasp of the real world. They may tolerate a state visit from the CEO (and be nice to you if your are in his retinue) but otherwise just fuck off. Barons rule. They hold the power based on their commercial success and no-one, not even the CEO, can really touch them. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Which is why retailers are just as bad. They share the same fixation with operational results as the Baron. In retail the tills never lie. It is highly competitive and you have to watch and mange every aspect of the business, squeeze every cent out the system, to stay competitive. Retail is not just detail it is a hard, grinding slog where missing a target is not an option. So they too make very tough bosses and colleagues (ask the Marketers in a retailer how well they get on with the boys in Buying). But when it comes to dealing with suppliers they are nothing less than brutal.

I, of course, have in mind the grocery retailers in particular. This is the biggest, most competitive, toughest area of retail. Their brutality and ruthlessness towards suppliers is legendary. It's a bit more sophisticated these days but there is still a tendency for retailers to have started on the shop floor. Yes, you guessed it – often they don't have degrees, they graduated from the university of life, so they have the extra dimension of resentment towards suppliers who did manage to pass the odd exam in tertiary education. I suppose by the law of averages one or two will be short and come from Yorkshire, which is almost the perfect storm.

It is popular among suppliers/manufacturers to refer to the retail trade as '*trade partners*', which is a bit like calling a Baron a '*colleague*'. They are not your partners, they see the relationship as very clear cut. They have the power in a win/lose game. The more they can leverage that power and screw concessions

out of *'partners'* the more they win and the suppliers lose. They love it when a supplier comes along *'in the spirit of partnership'* with a detailed presentation about the market and the purchase trends. They use all this information and put it to good effect both to screw better terms from you and then to improve their own label offering, which screws you some more. Suckers! They don't give a fuck these days because their loyalty cards have armed them with more data than the supplier ever has at their disposal. They are also massive, following a bit of consolidation and a lot of organic growth where only the meanest and leanest have survived. Tesco and Walmart are humungous operations – they are as much your *'trade partner'* as Lichtenstein is a trading partner of the USA.

In my day, retailers at Tesco and the like were truly awful. They wore cheap suits, white socks with black shoes and shirts with gold bars through the collar. They all seemed to have strong regional accents and a loose grasp of English.

Conjugate the verb *'Done good'*

- I done good
- You done good
- The boy Rooney done good

They reminded me a lot of managers of 3rd Division Football clubs. They were sharp and highly numerate but as sophisticated as a badgers bum. Having grown to be much bigger businesses these days they are more sophisticated and able to attract a higher caliber of manager – some with degrees even. But they are still nasty.

Barons and retailers – mean, tough and scary. I once had the pleasure, as a *'staffy'* from the centre, of dealing with a Baron who had grown up in a retail environment. My doctor tells me I will never have more children but he has managed to sew my bollocks back on.

So there you have it. 10 of the worst types of people in business, the ones you have to watch out for and, if possible, avoid altogether. But what if you can't avoid them, what if the twists and turns of your career progression brings you inescapably into their orbit? My final section offers some self-preservation advice.

How to stop the buggers grinding you down

The trick lies in two words – adaptive and unpredictable.

It really helps if you can adapt your game. This does not mean being obsequious, it means being a bit of a chameleon. I won't work through all 10 of my *'people to watch out for'* but let's take a few. If you are with a Yorkshireman make a big thing about having lunch at some grotty pub with words like "*I'm not paying fancy prices for poncy restaurant food, lets just have a pint and a decent steak sandwich*". Make a point of insisting everyone pays their own share and deduct a bit for the fact that you didn't have the soup to start. If they are tight then you must be tighter.

If you are with the people from HR, speak their language. Discuss the finer points of succession planning and make sure you get your appraisals in ahead of time. Just play the game.

If you are with a short person make sure you sit more often than you stand. Treat *'certain kinds of women'* with excessive coolness and rationality – and never get caught looking at their tits. Learn what discounted cash flow is and how to calculate it so you can talk to the FD. Include analysis of the payback in your proposal. If there is a major acquisition project, volunteer to be on the team to do the marketing due diligence and be very pessimistic about the target company's growth prospects.

When it comes to the Barons, don't treat them like a colleague, treat them like a boss. Don't ask for their support or co-operation – don't even waste your breath trying to persuade them to do anything for you. Join their team on secondment and do the work yourself – be a direct report not a '*staffy*' and while you are, make sure you come in below budget and ahead of target.

Lawrence Olivier used to do this. The world's greatest ham actor used to adapt his personality and even his accent according to whomever he was talking to. If in polite society, he would play the refined gent. If with the arty farty set, he'd play the luvvie thespian. And if among the filthy unwashed he'd feign a cockney accent and talk about football.

If Larry/Sir Lawrence can do it, so can you. The ability to act is a useful one in business. If you can get good at it you can even do mindless enthusiasm which will give you an in with the marketers.

So that is adaptability – what about unpredictability? The ghastliness of the people I have warned you about will be greatly tempered if you keep them guessing about yourself and act sufficiently out of character to keep them on the wrong foot. If they are an Aussie and you are English they will expect you to be an arrogant pom. If they are a Baron and you work in the centre they will expect you to be a useless twat who sees the world from the window of a first class hotel. They will all form an opinion of who you are and how you are supposed to behave. Disappoint them and behave unexpectedly out of character on selected occasions. Don't do weird, just don't do stereotypically predictable.

Whilst useless at most other things this last aspect, unpredictability, has always come easily to me. When I first started work we used to have to park our cars in the multi-storey car park next to the office. The early birds got the spots on the lower floors and the really late people had to park on the very top floor, which was open, so everybody could see you arriving late. After a while it became obvious to me that most people ended up on the same floor every day – they were creatures of habit. I made a point of never arriving at the same time – and

therefore parking on the same floor – two days in a row. I was generally an early bird but at least once a week I would be the last one to arrive with a spot in the open air. Over the years I have observed that in regular meetings people will sit in the same chair even though there is no seating plan. I always make sure I sit in different seats.

These are just little things but for me they are symbolic. *“Don’t think you can put me in a box – I can surprise you”*. Unpredictability in the way you behave and react to situations is a powerful weapon. If overdone it can make you untrustworthy but in just the right proportion it can make you interesting and it may just put the shits in business off their game. The words you want to hear are *“You’re not the typical pom/marketer/staffy/man etc are you?”* and you want to hear them said with a note of respect and intrigue.

I know this may sound contradictory – adapt and be like them but behave unpredictably. Actually it’s not. You can both adapt your game and refuse to conform to their view of you by occasionally acting out of character. In fact the one can achieve the other – as a typical southerner with a degree you can surprise the short FD from Yorkshire who graduated from the school of life with honours, by suggesting you *“go down t’ pub”* (choose an oldy worldly one with very low ceilings so they look tall and you look stupid) and then proceeding to ridicule people with MBA’s and declaring any consultant, especially marketing consultants, to be a waste of time and money. You will simultaneously astonish and endear yourself to them.

I hope this advice works for you and I wish you every success in your career. Not everyone in business is out to get you but if this has served to help you keep up your guard it may protect you from the few who are. In any event I’d welcome any comments and advice you may have to offer and if at any point I have caused offence please accept my sincere apologies.

Aha – gotcha! I couldn’t give a fuck about you or your career. They are all out to get you – I made this clear at the outset. As for your comments, stuff them up

your arse. Do you really think I – or anyone else – gives a shit what you think? I wrote this not because I care what happens to you or want to help you in any way. I don't even know you. I wrote it purely because it is highly enjoyable to put down in writing what I really think about:

- Americans, Australians and People from Yorkshire
- HR managers (especially Organizational Development and Change Management people)
- People in Advertising (and PR and Design and Promotions)
- Short men
- Finance Directors
- Politicians
- People in senior jobs who don't have degrees
- Certain kinds of women
- Executive Coaches
- Barons (heads of Divisions other than your own) and retailers

Up yours (not mine),

Stame Reilly

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