Finding Your Campfire

A Remote Working Survival Guide

By Julian Stodd

SEA SALT LEARNING ⚓

FINDING YOUR CAMPFIRE
A Program For Newly Remote Teams

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Finding Your Campfire
A Remote Working Survival Guide

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PART 1:
EXPLORATION

INTRODUCTION

This short book is a survival guide for individuals, teams, and organisations thrust into a new way of remote working by the global coronavirus pandemic.

It is not intended as a set of instructions, or a clear set of answers, but rather as a map with certain landmarks highlighted to indicate that we should take time to visit them on the journey.

It is intended to give you a lens through which to see this challenge, and to take practical action.

On this journey we will look at three things:

1. *The Individual Journey into Remote Work* - how we can set ourselves up to thrive

2. *The Leadership Perspective* - how we lead, and are led in, virtual teams

3. *The Cultural Experience* - how our culture stretches into remote spaces, and how we find trust

The metaphor for this book is an expedition: we look at what we need to pack, we think about navigation and how we find our way, we consider where and how to set up the campsite and build the fire, and finally, we sit around the fire and share our stories of the day.

Much of what I say in this work will be obvious, and I encourage you to ignore those things you already know or can figure out for yourself.

But one message I want to carry on this expedition is important for us all: as we find our way, as we thrive, for what may be a long haul, remember that not everyone is as safe as you are: some people carry extra weight, some will fall silent, and some will fail.

Our responsibility is not to make it to the destination alone, but rather to ensure that everyone makes it.

Our responsibility is not to make the journey at any cost, but to ensure that the cost is fairly shared, and paid responsibly.

At the end of this, we will have to ask ourselves if we have carried forward the culture that we deserve, or have built the culture to which we aspire.

We are going on a journey: it's time to pack your bag, look at the map, and think about the campfire we will build when we get to the end of the day.

INTO THE WILDERNESS

The move to remote working is a journey into the wilderness for many global organisations.

They may have had pockets of remote work, instances when people were home-based, or planned for occasional disruption, but the office has always been the centre, and remote work an aberration or anomaly. Until now.

In the first days of remote working, we tend to focus on connectivity and technology, but once the new reality sinks in, especially if this is our reality for a while, we see broad secondary effects:

- People become isolated
- Boundaries are lost
- Spaces are blurred
- Voices are silent or silenced
- Culture fragments
- Productivity falls
- Trust fails

We also see other, more noticeable and positive aspects:

- Some voices are loud and thrive
- Some people are liberated by the adventure
- Some natural leaders will emerge, as well as social storytellers and community health specialists
- We find hope in strange places

It is unlikely that work will ever be the same again: once normality is broken, we build something new out of the mosaic pieces.

Treat this time as a new normal: if we operate as if it is exceptional, we will become more exhausted and fail. Set yourself up for the long haul, and don't assume that the only thing that has changed is the location.

We are in the wilderness, and can only thrive if we learn to be together apart.
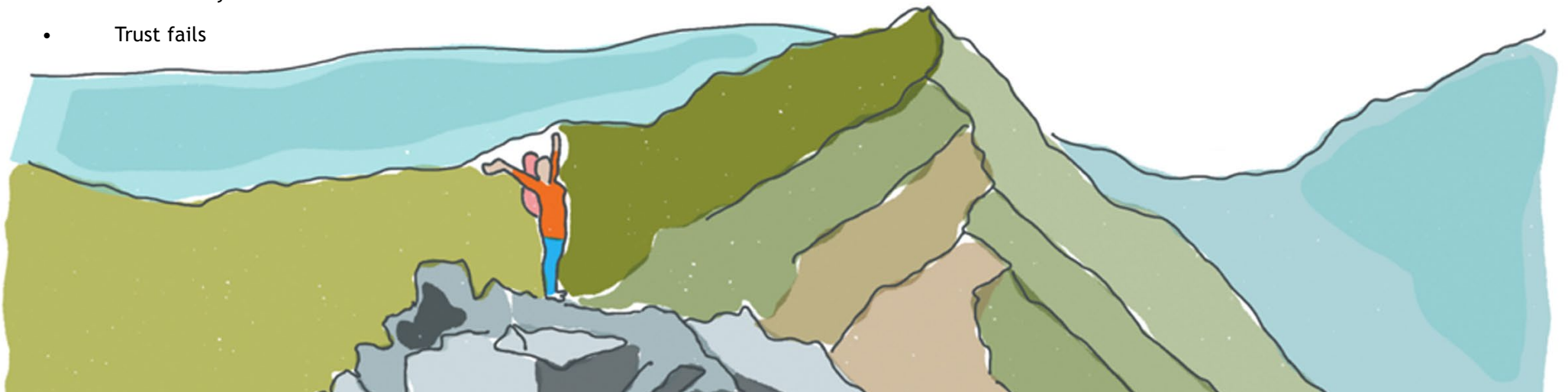
EXPEDITION NOTES

I normally preface my work by saying that we should each explore our own 'Landscape of Curiosity': my answers will not be your answers, my truth is not yours. And I typically try to avoid giving advice.

But in this instance, I am breaking that rule, and in every section I will be including an Expedition Note: 'what you need to do', or a key thing to think about. Please throw these away, cross them out, or adapt them as you see fit. At the very least, I hope they can act as kindling for your fire.

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PART 2:
PACKING YOUR BACKPACK

The weight of the move to remote working will be carried by us all, as individuals: organisations will see an impact in terms of productivity and profit, but the emotional and social cost will be carried by the team.

As we set off from the office, with laptop tucked under one arm, and our pot plant held in the other, in this section we will explore the foundations of successful remote working.

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CREATING YOUR SPACE

But now all that has gone: and without deliberate effort, we may end up swamped in a grey space where nothing is truly 'offline', and everything tastes of work.

The risk of this is that there is no 'up' and no 'down' – we just grind away and forget which day it is.

Where Not to Work - spaces to play

EXPEDITION NOTES

WITHOUT AN OFFICE, WE MUST CREATE OUR SPACES FOR WORK, TO AVOID WORKING IN OUR SPACES TO PLAY.

One of the most important things for us to do is to create our space: space for work, and space for home. We must separate our spaces.

Offices are curated spaces, which separate space by power, and function. When you 'join' an organisation, you are typically 'given' a 'space' to work in. And you pretty quickly learn which spaces you cannot work in (e.g., the Boardroom or CEO's office). I once worked at a bank where I got told off for using the Chief Executive's toilet.

So it stands to reason that as you work remotely, you may wish to do the same yourself: give yourself your working spaces, and choose spaces in which work is forbidden.

When work happens in the office, and family and Netflix happen at home, our lives are segregated, and aside from emails on our phone, it's reasonably easy to maintain a perspective and separation.

The Importance of Separation – no sofa surfing

Having an office and a home is one way of separating the spaces – geographically. But when we are all remote working, geography is not an option. So what will we have instead?

Start by creating separate spaces: for example, if you are working at your dining table, choose a chair and place to work. But make it different from the chair and space that you sit in for dinner. Create separation.

Of course, our home spaces are small, so we cannot physically separate them very much at all, so some of the separation will take place in other ways:

- *We can separate space by **naming** it*

- *We can separate space by **time***

- *We can separate space by **artefacts***

- *We can separate space by **ownership** and **control***

- *We can separate space by **membership***

For example, I am writing this from *'The Lab'*. The Lab is not a high-tech, white-floored space for which I need to don a lab coat to enter. It's just an Ercol dining chair at an oak desk. But when I say to my family, or to my Sea Salt Crew Mates, that I am 'going to the Lab', they understand that it means I am working. So work rules apply. This space is separated by name.

Similarly, you could separate things by time: so maybe 12.00–13.00 is always lunch break, so the kitchen table becomes the canteen.

Separation by artefacts is crucial, and can best be summarised by your laptop cable: when you are working, have your laptop and papers out, and when you are done for the day, physically remove them, box them up, and put them out of sight. Don't leave your laptop on the bed, on the kitchen surface, or next to the TV. Separate your space. Perhaps you even have a 'work mug' and a home one. Use artefacts to separate space, and keep some artefacts purely for your 'social life': for me, it's the sofa. No sofa surfing!

You can give your children control or ownership of their school desk or space, and you can create separated spaces that require membership to enter. For example, one friend has created 'Security Badges' for the whole family, and they wear these to enter what used to be the dining room but is now the school/office.

All of these are small things, but small things are what create culture, tempo, and momentum. And stick to them rigorously. Separation of space may keep us sane.
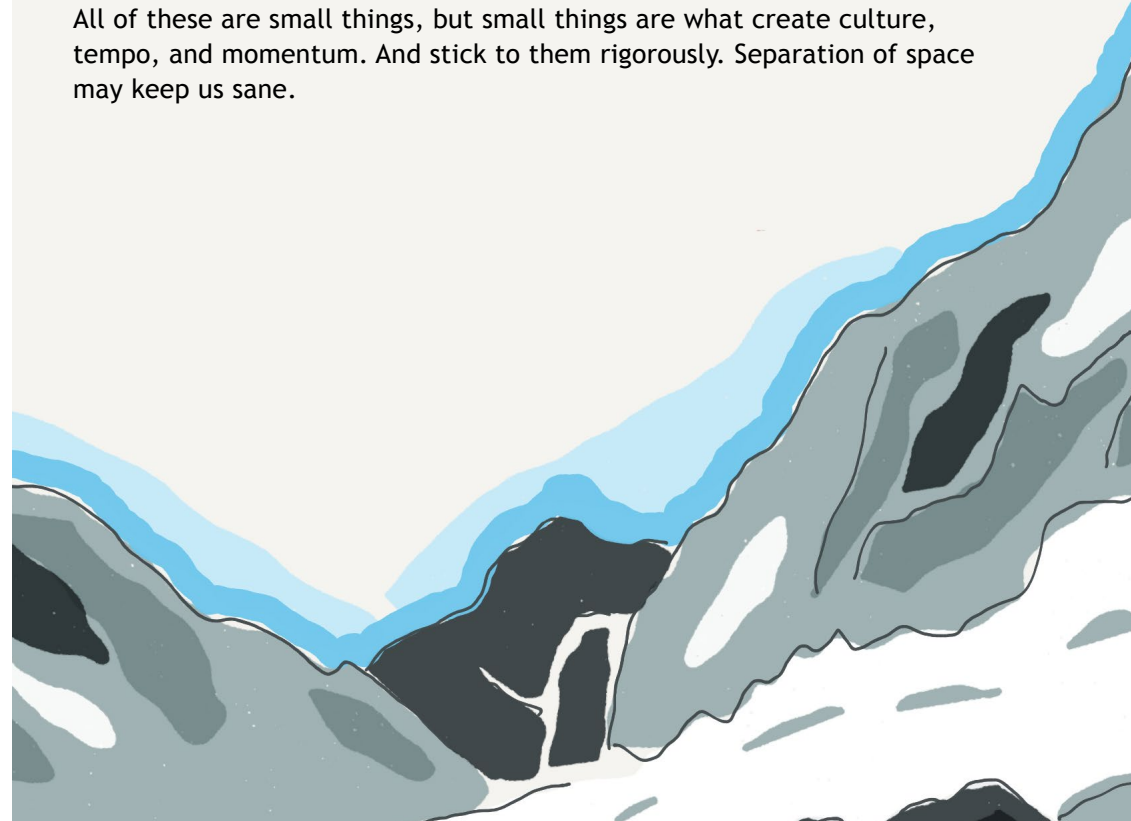
Make Sure *Your* Boots Fit –
no compromise from Day 1

Working from bed? Perched at the corner of the kitchen counter? Make no compromises from Day 1, because before you know it, it's day 100, and your back hurts.

This is the time to sort out those niggles: printer being temperamental? The light too dim? Reflections on your screen? The wrong headset? Sort it out now to give yourself the best setup for success!

If your boots don't fit, they start to rub, form a blister, and ultimately a callous. The issue is friction and space, and the time to solve it is at the start.

EXPEDITION NOTES

WE HAVE BEEN THROWN INTO THIS SPACE, BUT THIS IS THE TIME TO PAUSE, REFLECT, AND RESET: AT THE START OF THE EXPEDITION, MAKE SURE THAT YOUR BOOTS FIT.

Celebrate the Space – Sunny days in Amsterdam

I've spent some time living in Amsterdam. I first moved there one February, when it's invariably windy, rainy, and cold. So for several months, my experience of the city involved having breakfast, then cycling out to a cafe to have my morning coffee.

I would do some work and then perhaps ride around some of the canals, enjoying the experience of thinking, writing, and working in such a beautiful place – especially when spring finally arrived.

When we had our first really sunny day, something amazing happened. As soon as the sun came out, I would notice doors being flung open and people moving out to sit on their front steps, on park benches, on the side of the canals, carrying their laptops and continuing to work.

It's not at all unusual to see students shifting the sofa out onto the street to sit there and study in the sun. If there was one thing I learned about Amsterdam, it's that they will not let a sunny day go to waste. And there's probably something valuable to learn from that.

So if you have outdoor space, consider how you can use it.

While we may be restricted in how far we can go for a walk, it may be possible to make phone calls or even have meetings in the garden whilst walking, or even just sat on the stairs, or in a different place. It may sound extreme to put so much thought into the separation of spaces, but it's valuable for our wellbeing.

EXPEDITION NOTES

WHILST SOME ASPECT OF REMOTE WORK MAY BE RESTRICTIVE, IT ALSO PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES, AND A REMINDER TO NEVER LET A SUNNY DAY GO TO WASTE.

Sanctified Space – email free zones & the gin bench

Work is like syrup: if you spill it, it does not run fast like water, but if you leave it, it gradually spreads around until everything you touch is sticky. And then it takes ages to clean it off.

Work tends to permeate every space: whilst not all of us will end up answering emails on the toilet, or FaceTiming the boss from bed, it's a good idea to set up your own sanctified space – sacred space where work cannot go. For me, it's the bedroom (which is technology free), but it could be anywhere.

Without sanctified space, we don't just lose time, we lose boundaries, so when we should be focused on our children, partner, or Tom Cruise, we end up distracted, with our head in the wrong zone.

Some sanctified spaces are important, and none more so than the Gin Bench.

I built the Gin Bench last year. At a scrapyard, I found the cast iron ends of an old railway bench, which I rescued. I then bought some English oak from a local tree surgeon. Two weeks later, and after endless sanding and sawing through iron-hard wood, I'd fashioned the Gin Bench.

In case it's not clear, the Gin Bench is not a space for work – it's a space for a G&T after work.

Now, gin may not be your thing, but perhaps it's a herbal tea stool, or even a 'sitting on a Sunday morning with a cup of coffee and a magazine' window seat. The point is, try to sanctify some spaces for specific and special activities.

Again, I know that this is hard in a small space: I am fortunate to have a garden, but the separation of spaces, the creation of sanctuaries, is not simply about space, as much as it is about intent.

TIME AND BOUNDARIES

EXPEDITION NOTES

TIME IS SPENT OR STOLEN: SET YOUR BOUNDARIES WITH HARD TIME.
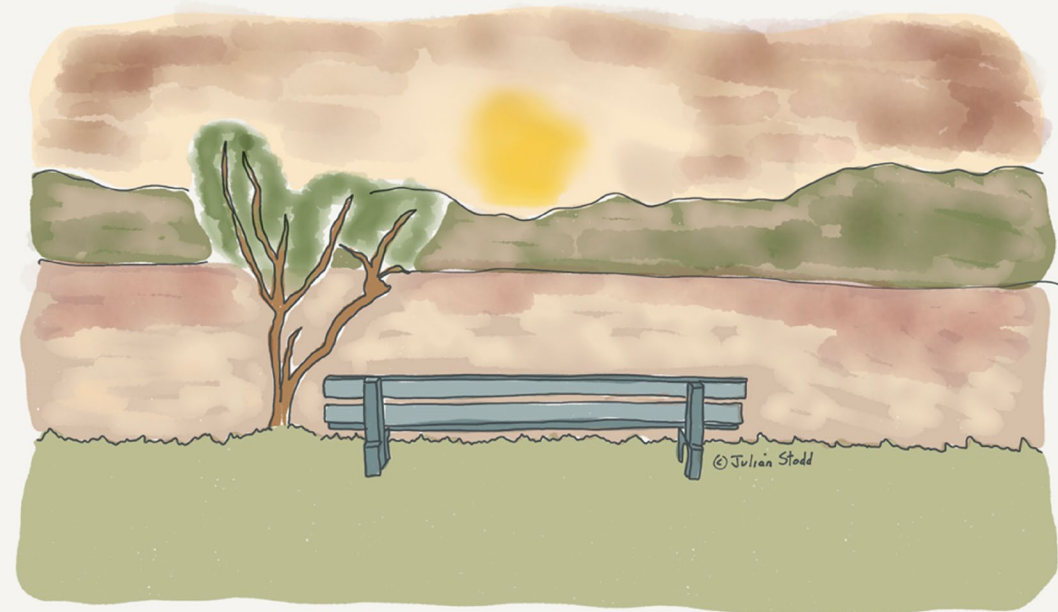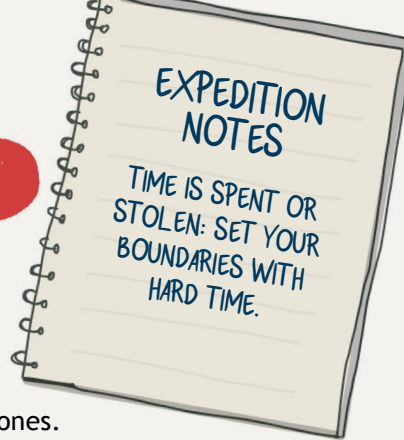
Working Hours – start and end times

Set yourself some hard boundaries, as well as soft ones. The most important is your 'end of day'. Mess about all you like during 'work time': you can miss your coffee break, you can watch Neighbours, you can be wildly productive, or stuck on endless Zoom meetings, but whatever you do, give yourself a hard end point, even if it is late in the evening.

We are tackling our workdays in shifts: with an 11-month-old to look after, and two full-time adults, we are trying to fit an extra day into the time available, and clearly no manner of maths will fix that problem.

So we stretch the day: we start at 08.00, and it's laptops down at 20.00. Sometimes, the balance of work falls my way, sometimes I do less and have more family time, but the end point is hard – no laptops at dinner. This means that some days I win, and some days I lose, but I do at least stay in sight of sanity most of the time.

See, there's a funny thing about time: time is spent, or time is stolen. If you don't actively hold it, then it will run away from you. So set your boundaries with hard time.

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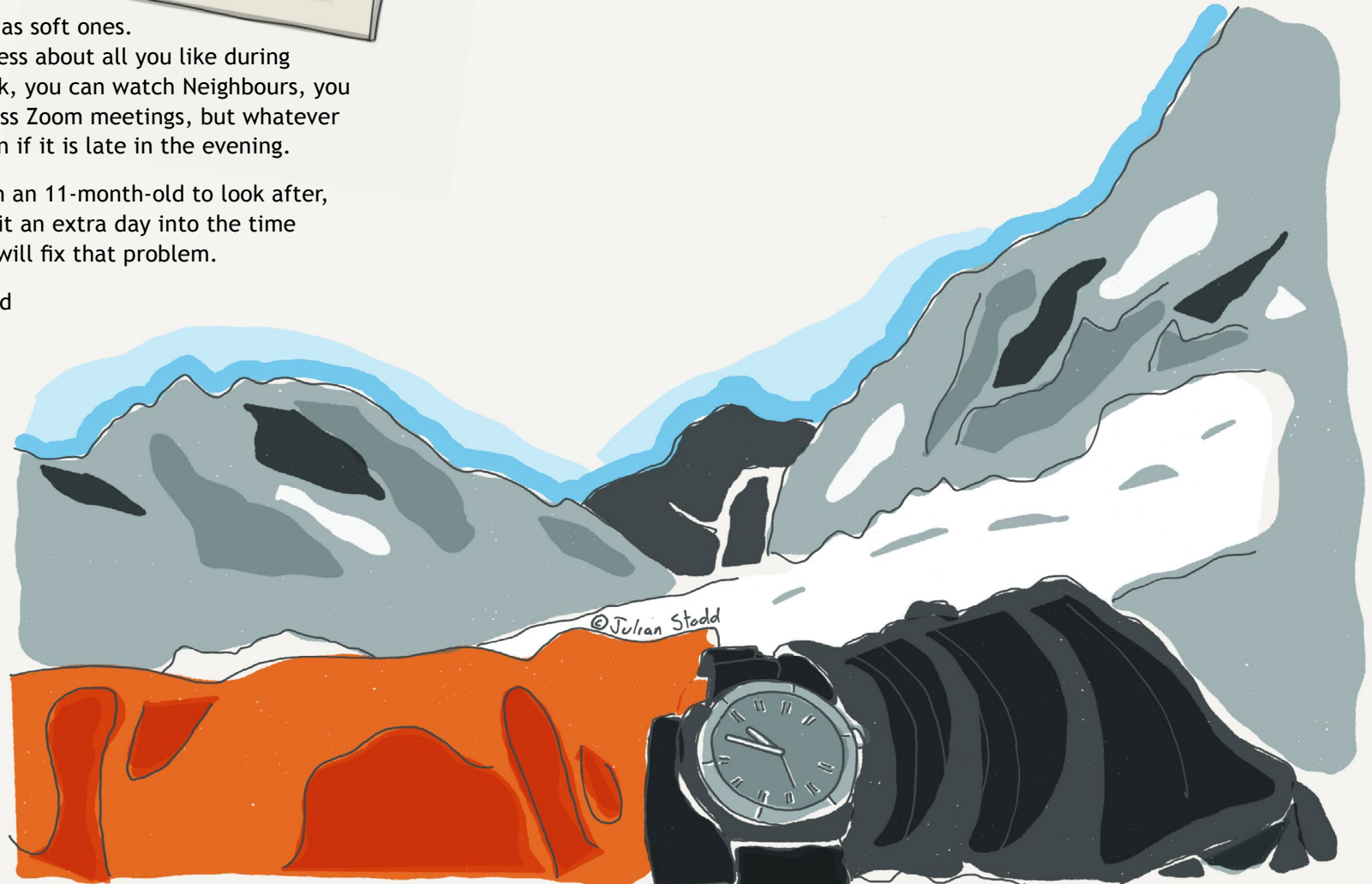
Coffee Club – dedicated daily socialising

Culture is a funny thing: it's a fabric that is stitched out of a social thread. And if we neglect the thread, then the fabric will fall apart.

In the office, we easily build our social connections, and almost out of necessity – through the kitchen, the corridor, and the canteen, we find each other. But as we are dispersed and remote, we may need to engineer that social time, we may need to create space for weaving the social fabric.

Try building in a fifteen-minute daily coffee break, which you take online: maybe it's fifteen minutes before you start work, or mid-morning, and maybe it's a defined group, or an open invitation. But use this time to talk about family, about challenges, about your personal story – not about work.

It's easy to imagine that 'purposeful' is what we do at work, and 'purposeless' has no place in that space. But of course, without purposeless social connection, we lack the coherent communities that allow us to perform.

Sometimes, you have to invest in the social fabric before you need it for warmth.

EXPEDITION NOTES

CONSIDER CREATING SPACE FOR YOUR MORNING COFFEE AS A 'PURPOSELESS' TIME.

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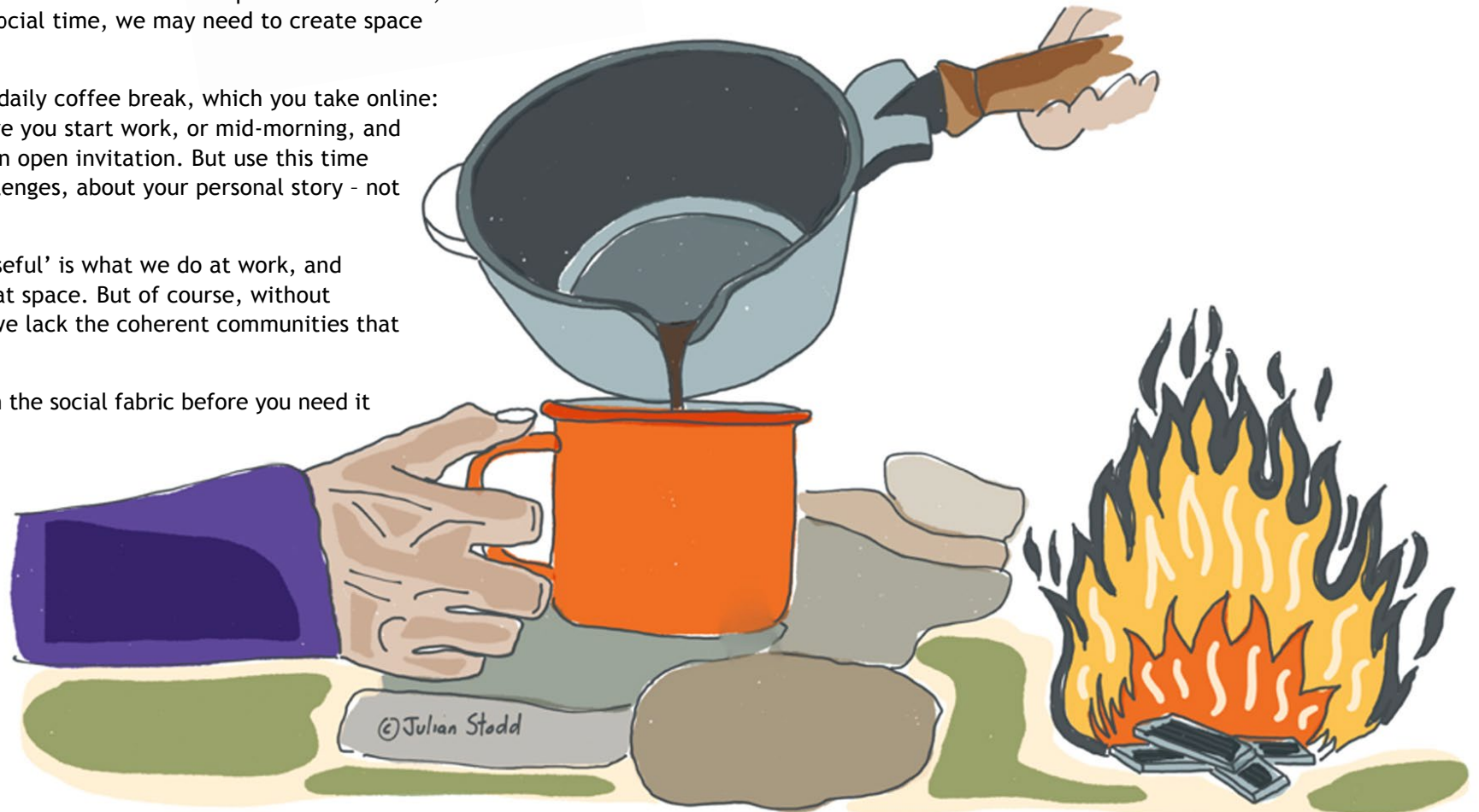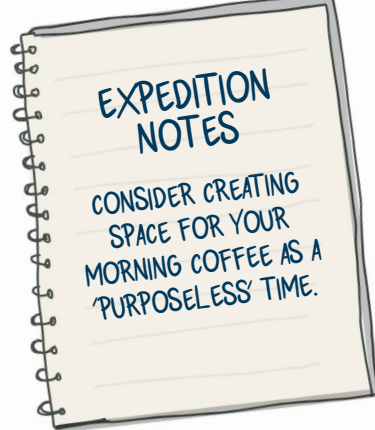
Fuzzy Time - reclaiming blurred transitions

My day ends up full of fuzzy time: when we switch our shifts, when we prepare lunch, when Amazon is delivering.

If you are co-working at home, consider being deliberate about how you can reclaim this time: for example, we try to be deliberate about who is making lunch each day, and recognise that the other person can continue to work through that period. Decide who will take deliveries, and don't immediately open them: save the excitement of those new coffee filters for small talk at dinner.

Of course, I have just said that you should build in purposeless time ... the coffee club ... so you could use this fuzzy time for that.

But maybe, if you are deliberate about it, you can reclaim half an hour a day, and who does not want that half hour?

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Graceful Acceptance – anchor wellbeing to reality (or 'why we all fail, but fail to realise we are winning')

I am fortunate in that I have always worked 'remotely', in some form or other. I lack much routine, and almost never have the same type of day twice in a row. But I can share one thing with you: I have more days of failure than winning.

Often, I distract myself with trivia, I procrastinate, and I delay. Sometimes, I put things off for so long that they just drop off the end of the desk, or compost themselves under a pile of old paperwork.

Fortunately, the odd day works out brilliantly: I can be extremely productive sometimes, and prodigious in my output – until I lapse into another day of delay and defeat.

The trick is to have graceful acceptance: we are all human, but also dream of beauty and perfection. The only thing within your control is where you anchor your wellbeing.

If you anchor it to perfection, then you may find yourself forever reflecting on lost time, and worrying about your amplifying inbox and workload.

Instead, work hard, and gracefully accept those days when you trip. I once spent a whole day distracted by a Star Wars game to the point where my thumbs hurt at the end of it.

Anchor your wellbeing to what you will achieve today, and respect your own failure when things go adrift. Otherwise, you will carry an albatross around your neck.

EXPEDITION NOTES

IF YOU ANCHOR YOUR WELLBEING TO A FICTION, YOU WILL END UP BREATHLESS AND AFRAID: ACCEPT THAT WE ARE ALL HUMAN, AND ANCHOR YOUR WELLBEING TO TOMORROW, NOT YESTERDAY.

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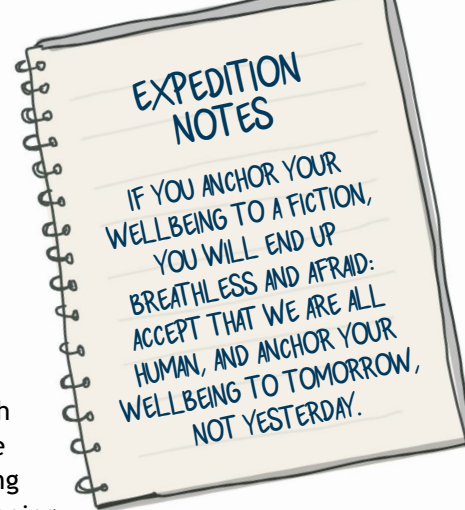
ENERGY AND MOMENTUM

The Journey to Work - starting fresh

Don't lurch from bed into the shower, then grab coffee and start work: commute into your own living room, even if only in the smallest way.

Perhaps you can take the rubbish out every day. Or walk around the block. Wheel yourself down the corridor. Or even just run down the stairs to the front door: the separation is as much mental as physical.

The walk to work is about starting fresh, getting some oxygen into your brain, and reinforcing that separation.

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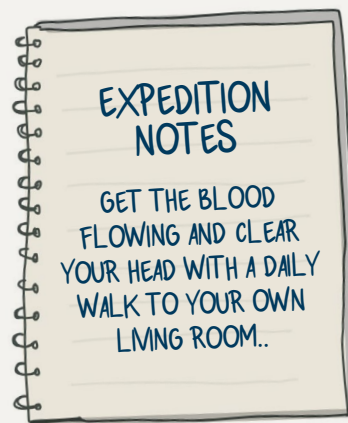
Climbing Alone – internal vs external moderation

In my broader work around Social Leadership, I consider the ways our impact is felt within a broader system.

I do this by considering Social Leadership as taking place within a forest ecosystem: the forest is not just made up of trees and shrubs, but also rivers, hillsides, grassland, and scrub. It is the rainclouds, the wind, the sun and the shadows. And every day, you impact this ecosystem, adding something to it, and taking something out of it.

Every day, we degrade, and enhance, the ecosystem of Social Leadership.

So consider where your energy sits each day. Some people pour energy into a system. They are able to climb alone, inspiring or nudging others, and seeming to act entirely independently. They seem to be self-starting and self-sustaining, although the likelihood is that they draw their energy from a different space.

For those of us who are merely human, some days we are able to bring energy, but sometimes we drain it from the system. Sometimes I help others, and sometimes I need them.

Be mindful of this, partly so you can attend to the health of the system, and partly so you can attend to your own wellbeing. If you find yourself constantly in deficit, you are draining yourself, and it's time to Pause – Refresh – Renew.

EXPEDITION NOTES

CONSIDER WHERE YOUR ENERGY COMES FROM: WHEN ARE YOU DRAWING UPON THE SYSTEM, AND WHEN ARE YOU CONTRIBUTING TO IT?

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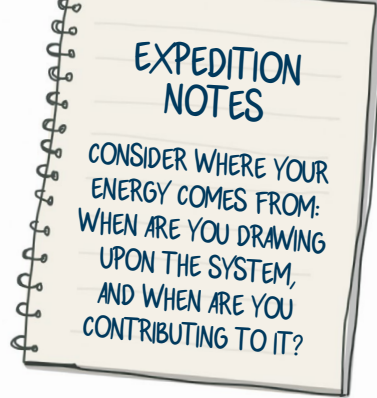
Purposeless Activity - the random nudge (and just what is the role of leadership anyway?)

A Social Leader will recognise that when they hear loud voices, when they hear a dominant story, and when they feel momentum, that is when they must look into the silence and seek out quiet, or silenced, voices.

One simple thing to do is to consider your whole team: who have you not heard from directly this week? In some small way, make sure you touch everyone at least once, but not just in a task-based or purposeful way. Sometimes it's enough to ask a question, or check in to learn more about someone.

For example: ask someone to describe their breakfast routine, and then share yours. It's a great way to learn about each other's everyday reality: who makes the tea, what time do the children get up, and who does the dishes?

Or nudge someone about your favourite Netflix show, or to ask about the garden.

This is not about creating noise within the system, but rather about being intentional and deliberate in how we tackle the crisis as a team, not a group of individuals.

EXPEDITION NOTES

WHEN YOU HEAR NOISE, REACH OUT INTO THE SILENCE.
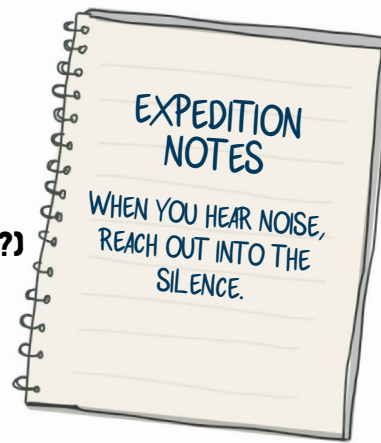
CARING FOR EACH OTHER
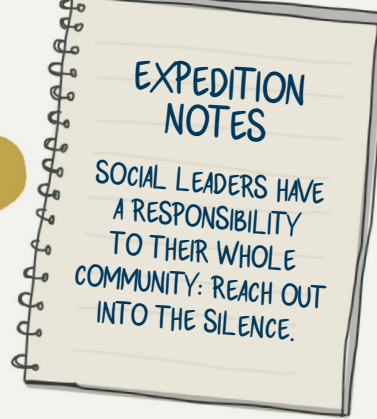
Silent Voices - who can't you hear?

Within any system, we find loud voices, which
can carry the dominant story: voices that others aggregate around,
stories that are amplified. These may be stories of confidence and success.

But a Social Leader is able to move beyond the noise, to stand outside at the
edge of the campsite, looking at those people gathered around the fire, and
then listen to the silence.

Think of your whole team, the wider community, and who you have
not heard from this week: then reach out into the silence.

When the Adrenaline Wears Off – it's all fun till it ain't

When things are new, we rattle through: we make do and mend, we draw upon our reserves, we clear a corner of the table and have a go. But running on batteries won't keep us going forever.

Right now we are tackling the logistical aspects of the journey, making sure everyone is set up with technology, that everyone can communicate, but in three weeks' time, or three months', some people will be sinking.

Every day, we must ask if we are running in credit, or at a deficit, and every week, we must find space and time for shared storytelling: not just stories of success, but stories of fear and failure too.

When the adrenaline wears off, some people will be shivering on the hillside: a good expedition leader ensures they check in with everyone, and do so for the long haul.

EXPEDITION NOTES

THE JOURNEY INTO THE WILDERNESS REPRESENTS CHANGE, WHICH IS ENGAGING. BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE ADRENALINE WEARS OFF?
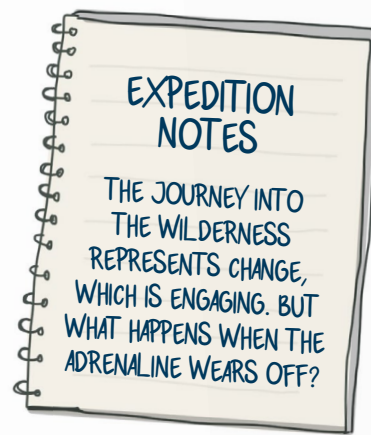
Uncertainty and Doubt - sharing when you don't want to

We have grown up in systems that encourage us to project success, to see uncertainty as weakness, and to view doubt as indecision.

But why would anyone have all the answers? Indeed, a rush to 'make sense' of things too fast is a key component of failure, when our initial assumptions turn out to be invalid, but we are trapped in stories of our own writing.

So ensure that you share your uncertainty and doubt: not to add noise to a whole system, but perhaps in individual conversations, or at certain times.

It does two things: firstly, the trait that we most value in leaders is authenticity, and an authentic leader can share their uncertainty. And secondly, if you do so, you may create the conditions for others to do so too: you lead by example, and have the humility to listen to the fears that others share.

Then find ways to pull them into a shared story that you can own together.

Remember: creating space to hear uncertainty can come with high reputation or social consequence for some people, especially those who are more junior. So work to create safe spaces for them.
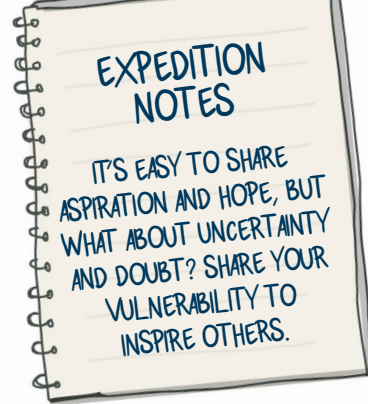
Respecting Failure and Moving On - when you trip

At the end of the week, when we look around and recognise those who have succeeded, we should also recognise, with respect, those who have struggled.

Similarly, in our own story, we should recognise when we trip, but not anchor our story to those moments. Some days will run away from you, and for many of us, we cannot do as much as we did before our added responsibilities of family, community, and care were so ramped up.

So cast recognition and respect around your team, and into your own story, but do so with kindness, and recognise that failure is just as valid an outcome.

Then move on from it.

EXPEDITION NOTES

OUR LEADERS IN THIS WILDERNESS SHOULD NOT JUST RESPECT VISIBLE SUCCESS AND ACHIEVEMENT, BUT ALSO HONEST FAILURE.

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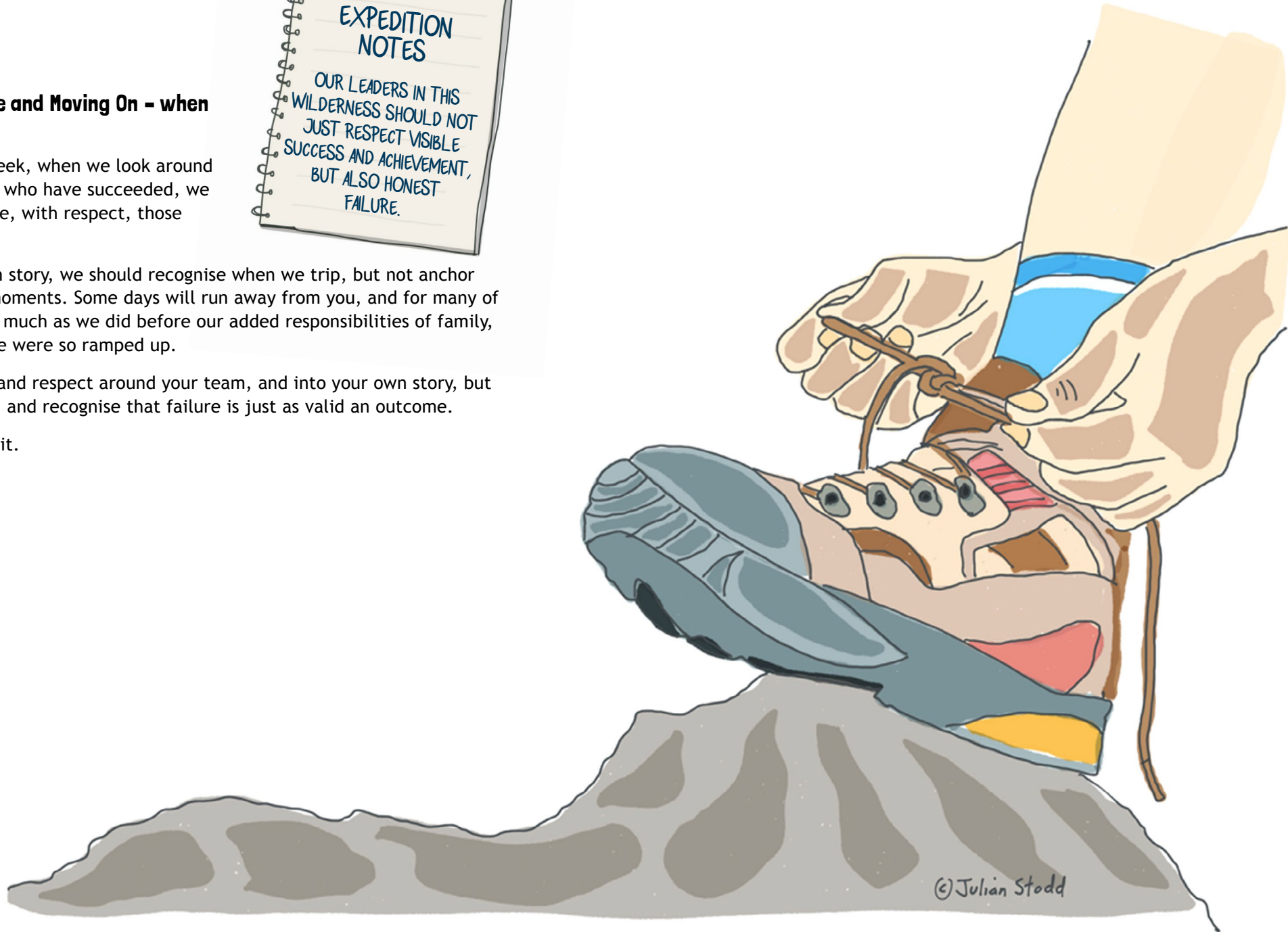
WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

Create Your Space and Sanctify It - separation is key

Start Each Day Fresh - walking and working

Sustainability is Key - seek out silent voices

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PART 3:

LEADING THE EXPEDITION

OVERVIEW

Formal leaders are responsible for output and productivity, and the allocation and management of tasks. But beyond that, we are all Social Leaders within our systems: Social Leaders hold a reputation-based authority, and help their systems and communities to thrive. They lead with humility and kindness, and fight for what is right, not just doing what is easy.

In this section, we will explore what it means to lead the expedition into the wilderness of remote work.

This section is for formal leaders, who wish to care for their community, and for the rest of us as community members, who wish to carry our communities forward with kindness and pride.

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LEADING BEYOND THE SYSTEM

What is an Office? What Lies Beyond? Where are we now?

EXPEDITION NOTES

WHEN WE LEFT THE OFFICE, WE LEFT BEHIND MORE THAN JUST SPACE: WE MUST CONSIDER HOW CULTURE, TEAMS, AND SAFETY ARE CARRIED WITH US, AND BY US, INTO THE WILDERNESS.

We understand the office well: it's a structured space, where we have a place: almost the first thing we do when we join an organisation is to learn 'here is your space, here is your desk, here is your place within the whole'. Physically, offices separate space for work from that for play. And when we were in the office, we could look out of the window at the wilderness.

But now we have left the building: we have moved, en masse, into that wilderness, and we have left behind more than just the subdivision of space.

We have also left behind the associations of space and power, of community and safety, of culture and teams – not all of it, and not deliberately, but it turns out that more is anchored to the artefact of the office than we may have realised.
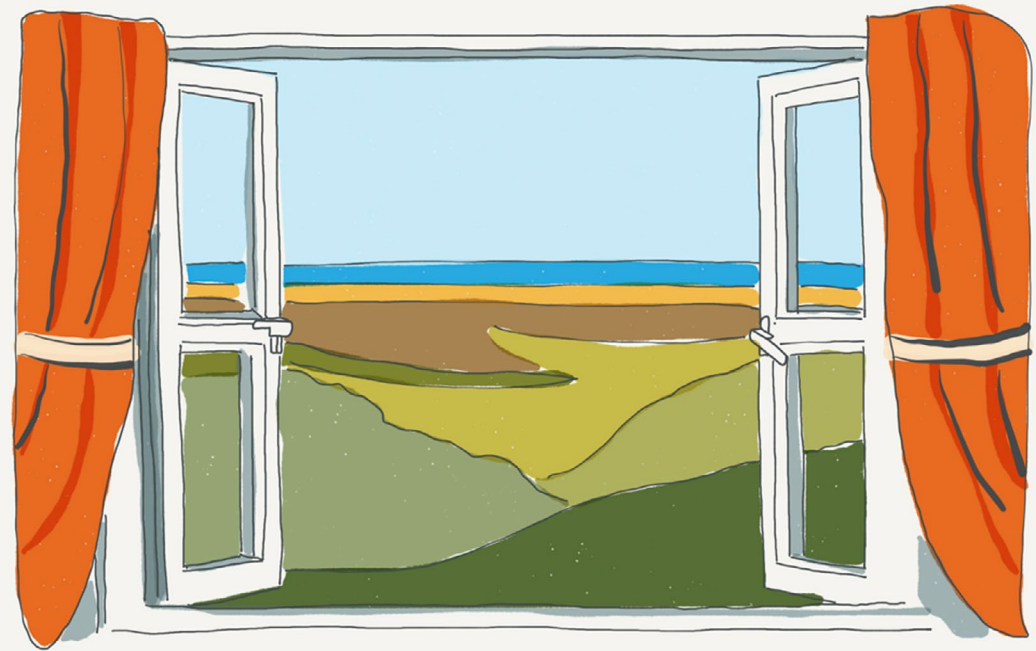
Formal vs Social Power – the leadership you earn

We hold two types of power: the formal power that is given to us alongside our job title and role, at the discretion of the organisation, and held within hierarchy, and our Social Authority, which is the reputation-based power awarded to us by our community, dependent upon authentic action over time.

Hierarchical authority, that formal power, is what is most visible in the office, but what we really rely on to be effective is typically the permission and consensus, the support and enablement, of others, in a more social space. We rely on waves of support and consensus. And this is what Social Leadership is about: the ways that we curate our reputation, earn Social Authority, and hence are able to lead beyond the system.

In the wilderness, we need to lead within displaced communities, we need to lead by permission, and we take on a significant responsibility.

Not everyone will thrive, and Social Leaders have a responsibility to the whole system, not simply to those parts of it that they agree with or like.

Social Leaders listen in the silence, and reach out to help others to find their voice.

But, of course, if you have read this, you will understand that Social Leadership is not simply for formal leaders: our hierarchical bosses can earn it, but so too can anyone else. Social Leadership is a democratised form of power that can be claimed or earned, but never bought or demanded.

If you wish to lead the expedition, you do not have to do it from the front, with formal power. In some way, we can lead from anywhere, through our authentic actions.

Social Leaders ensure that everyone makes it through the journey.
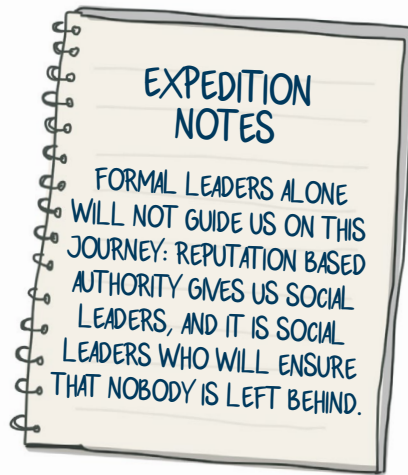
The Violence of Stories – why good people do harm

Stories are the basic mechanism by which we transmit cultural knowledge, and form the basic building blocks of our tribal social structure. Some stories are stories of consensus, stories that we gather behind, believe in, or even worship, whilst others are stories of opposition and dissent, stories that deny the reality or truth of others.

But both types of story are told by good people: just people whose local ideas of good may be different.

It's worth noting that most social authority is borne out of coherent and consensus groups, the groups that award you that power, but that Social Leadership should be carried beyond those spaces: our responsibility is not just to those people we like and trust, but to the system as a whole.

As we lie dispersed in the wilderness, we should remember that good people do violence with good stories, but that the violence lies outside their group or reality.

Our responsibility is to be aware of our context: when you hear a story that is dominant, when you hear a story everywhere, perhaps a story of success, then consider whose voice is left out. Whose voice is drowned out by the noise, and how much does our good story silence them?

For example: as the group finds success, does it silence the voice of the new parents who are holding a story of struggle and exhaustion?

EXPEDITION NOTES

GOOD PEOPLE DO GOOD. BUT GOOD PEOPLE ALSO DO HARM. AND BOTH OF THOSE THINGS ARE CARRIED IN THE STORIES THAT WE TELL.

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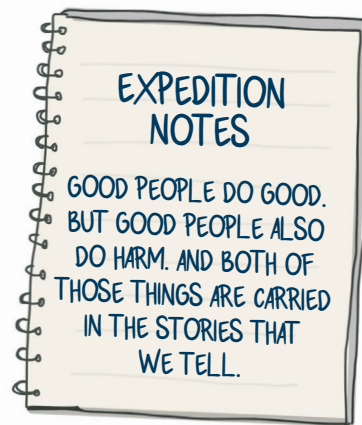
SOCIAL CURRENCIES: GRATITUDE AND DOUBT
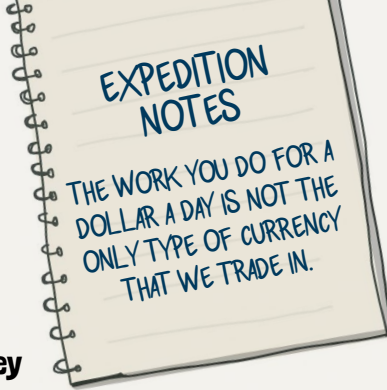
The Triangle of Formal Work: time - utility - money

How do organisations work? One way to understand them is to consider two types of currency: one is formal, and one is social. One is money, and the other is ... well, a range of things: trust, reputation, pride ... currencies of gratitude.

As we move into the wilderness, the currency of money still holds true, but we may be spending more of the social currencies and, if we are not careful, become overdrawn.

Historically, organisations bought your time for money, and asked you to bring your utility: if you can dig a hole, then I will pay you a dollar an hour to dig a hole for me, for eight hours a day. Some interpretation of that is how organisations operate: they collect together a diverse group of people with assorted utilities, and pay them for their time.

As we examined earlier, in the current context, time can become more fluid, and less evenly distributed: those with commitments for care, for community, may have less of it for work. So do we pay them less? Or do we recognise that there is more to work than time and money?

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The Social Currencies: gratitude, pride, trust etc.

Social Currencies are earned within social systems, and also spent within them: trust is earned through authentic action over time, pride is found in the achievements of others who we trust, and gratitude is sprinkled through the system according to the actions we take.

EXPEDITION NOTES

MONEY BUYS UTILITY, BUT UTILITY IS NOT EVERYTHING THAT WE NEED.

These are not the only social currencies: I suspect there are many of them, but they differ from formal ones in a number of ways.

Firstly, they are traded invisibly: I may award you reputation or gratitude, but nobody else can see that.

They are traded outside the wall of the organisation, so I may ask you for help, even though we do not work together, and if you give it to me, I may award you reputation.

And Social Currencies are not awarded for money, and indeed may actively be degraded by it. If I try to pay you to trust me, the outcome will likely be a lack of trust.

Social Currencies are earned within a system through our actions. Similarly, they are traded within the system, invisibly. But they absolutely impact the system: high-trust systems operate differently from low-trust ones. Systems with an active reputation economy are more connected and effective than those without.

In our new world, dispersed and alone, the currencies that hold us together most strongly will be social, and our leaders had better learn how to earn them, because not everything can be achieved with money alone. Money buys utility, but it is the Social Currencies that earn our invested engagement and trust.
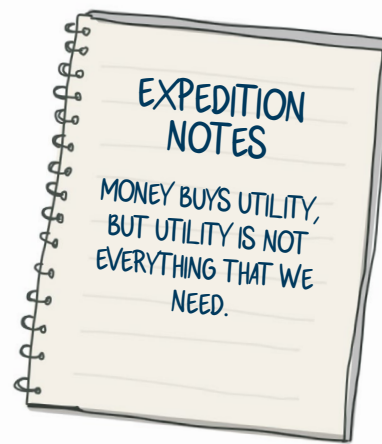
Where is the Central Bank?
Ownership of currency

There is one other key thing to understand about Social Currencies: whilst the organisation is the central banker of money, it is the community that acts as the central bank of trust.

If you go to your boss and ask for a thirty per cent pay rise, you are extremely unlikely to be granted it, but if you act in the right way with your community, you may be awarded a significant amount of reputation or pride, or trust and energy.

Indeed, not only does the Community moderate the award of Social Currency, the organisation can do nothing at all to stop it. Trying to block reputation or gratitude often only amplifies it.

The best way to look on it is like this: organisations can trade in both financial and social currencies, but they only get to control one of them.

EXPEDITION NOTES

ORGANISATIONS CONTROL THE MONEY, BUT SOCIAL CURRENCIES WORK DIFFERENTLY.

Authenticity: earning Social Currencies

EXPEDITION NOTES

THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT PEOPLE LOOK FOR IN SOCIAL LEADERSHIP IS AUTHENTICITY OF ACTION.

In our own research, all around the world, there is a consistent view that Social Authority is linked to authenticity of action. People describe that action taken over time is what counts, although they also describe how a small action in one moment can lead to enduring trust.

What is authenticity? That's harder to say: we all seem to know it when we smell it, but find it hard to define it.

When I asked people to draw it on a graffiti wall, and analysed the images, they were typically images of growth: flowers, roots, trees, as well as shooting stars, and rockets. So, apparently, authenticity has roots, and can fly.

A more pragmatic explanation may be that authenticity is the judgement of your community, and lies in how your actions match up to your words. So to be authentic is something that is very much under our control.

As we disperse into the wilderness, especially if this dispersal runs on over time, the authenticity of action will count for a lot. So it's worth remembering one thing: Social Leaders do what is right, not just what is easy.

If you can ensure you care for your community, if you stand up for what is right, it is likely that you will earn the reputation that you deserve. But if you fail to do so, then you will also earn a reputation that you deserve. Just decide what flavour you want.
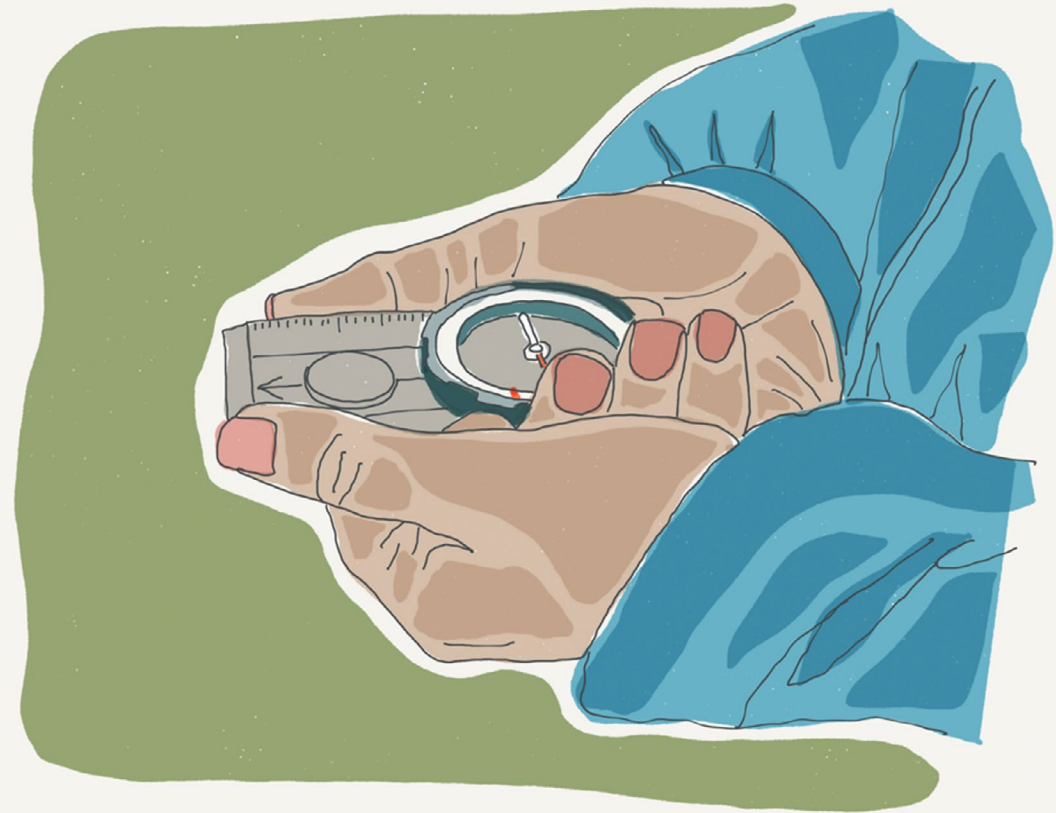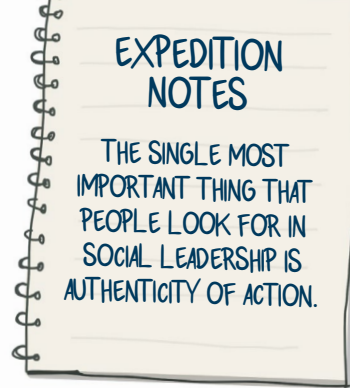
CREATING THE SPACE

With Technology, For Community – holding space open

In the early days in the wilderness, we tend to focus on the technology of connectivity, but what we really need is a community.

Technology brings us together, but it is the way we are with each other when we are together that counts: so in this sense, technology is the foundation, but the conversations count.

As leaders, we have a dual responsibility here: people may be excluded because they lack the right technology or lack the ability to use it. And people may be excluded even with the right technology if they are not connected to the right communities.
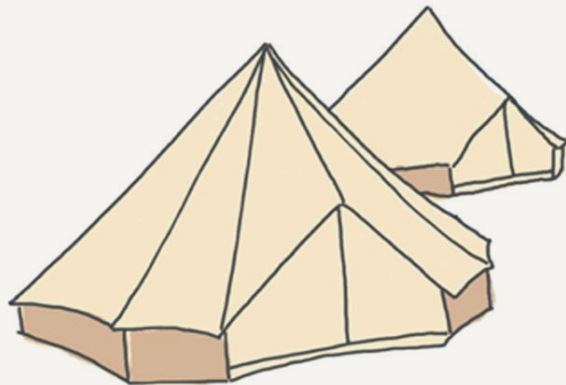
The ability to use technology does not simply mean knowing which buttons to press: it also relates to the conventions, grammar, and established norms of behaviour. To thrive, we need to understand how these work: do you swear, should you share, do you put your video on? Conventions, or what we may call 'cultural grammar', is something we typically pick up by chance, but as a Social Leader, we may choose to help articulate this intrinsic knowledge: make the implicit explicit, reducing the chances of stumbling.

Our role as Social Leaders is to create the space for a community to emerge, ensuring that everyone understands that cultural grammar is a part.
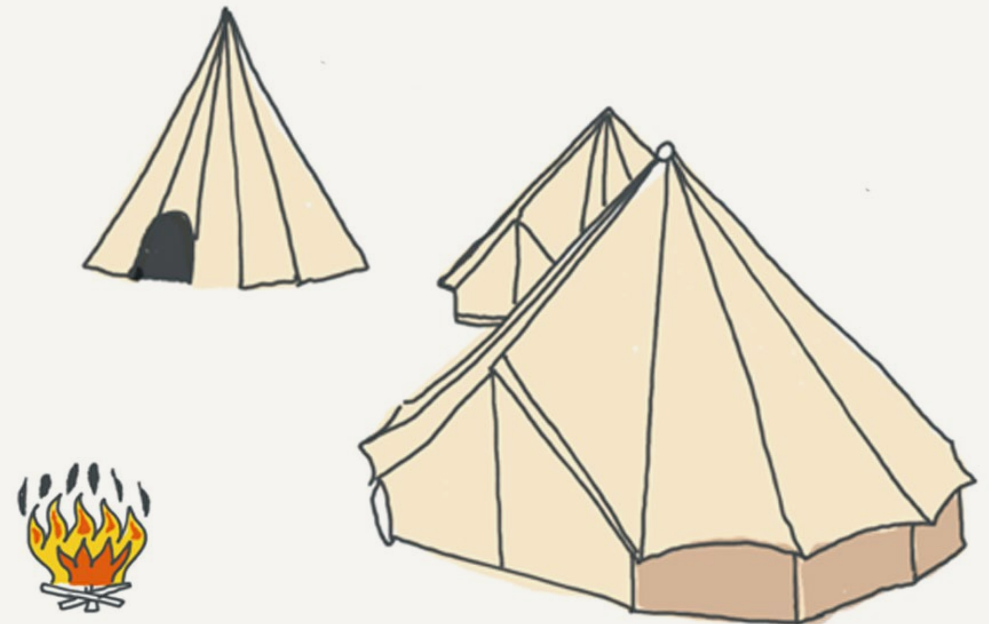
Brick vs Home – how 'spaces' become 'places'

As we considered earlier, without conscious separation, everything blurs into one. As we help our community to navigate this move to remote work, we should remember two things.

Firstly, everyone is making their own camp, alone in the woods: we should support them with both practical, physical assets and through the emotional journey of creating separate space, and being 'together apart'.

Secondly, from our separate camps, we will come together in our shared spaces in a new and emergent 'place' – not the office, but something new.

We will need to work out what language and rules apply here: what do we carry forwards from the office, and what will we invent anew, or borrow?

Bricks make a building, but family makes a home. Steel and glass make an office, but people make a community.

Your role is not an architectural one, to create physical space, but rather more like that of a gardener, creating fertile soil, from which a community may spring.

You can give people spaces, but only the community can make it a place that they hang out in.

EXPEDITION NOTES

YOUR HOME IS A PLACE, AND THE OFFICE USED TO BE A PLACE, BUT WHERE ARE YOU WORKING NOW?

(C) Julian Stodd

Plan vs Emergent – relinquishing control

Formal office environments are exceptionally good at identifying and mitigating risk. But right now, as we find our new normal, we need experimentation, and risk is the fuel to drive it – not stupid risk, but the risk of asking 'what if we try this' and the humility to ask 'what if we stopped doing this'.

Plan for success, but be open to emergent ideas: control those things that must be controlled, but relinquish everything else that you can.

No organisation that I know expends as much energy and effort on deconstructing processes, systems, and control as it does on codifying these things into rules. View this time as an opportunity to take a shortcut through much of that.

EXPEDITION NOTES

THIS IS A TIME TO EXPERIMENT AND LEARN: RELINQUISH CONTROL. YOU CAN MAKE IT SAFE LATER IF NEEDED.
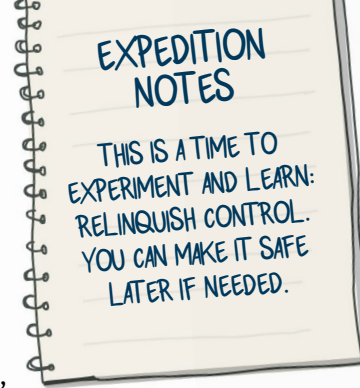
Diverse Ecosystems – our many places

It's clear from our research that people inhabit many different spaces, facilitated by many different technologies: it is not our job to try to own them all or even to know them all.

I sometimes describe the role of leaders in social spaces as owning a field – not just any field: it's the field in which the festival will take place. It's a space for sharing, gathering, and then leaving – not a workspace necessarily, but a community one.

If we are tempted to own all the spaces, we make them formal, but that is not the win. The win is in allowing people to curate a diverse ecosystem of spaces, but to know where to gather for the festivities: so focus your efforts on creating the best space that you can, in which you can celebrate and welcome your community. Whether that occurs daily or weekly, it's a space to share and celebrate.

EXPEDITION NOTES

WE HAD ONE OFFICE, BUT MANY SOCIAL SPACES. BE OPEN TO ALL, AND WAIT TO BE INVITED TO MANY.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

EXPEDITION NOTES

IN THE WILDERNESS, WE RELY ON EACH OTHER: SOCIAL CAPITAL IS THE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND THIS NEW CONTEXT, AND THE SKILLS TO THRIVE.

Our Ability to Survive and Thrive – for you, for others

Throughout our childhood, we learn to be high-functioning social creatures: we learn to fight, to love, to help and to obstruct. We learn to be stubborn and kind. We learn to be part of systems: to find our place, and our power. When we move into online spaces, where identity is more fluid, and communication often asynchronous, we have to learn this all over again.

We can call this competency 'Social Capital', and we need high levels of it ourselves, and the ability to develop it in others.

A Social Leader, carrying a whole community forward through the wilderness, needs to have the right skills to maintain their safety: as you Pause – Refresh – Renew, consider what you need to learn yourself. If you cannot swim, you cannot save anyone.

But beyond that, we must support others: helping them to engage, helping them to stay safe whilst we do so.

Sometimes, we imagine our challenge is to generate engagement, but it can be more than that: sometimes, we have to help people to take their foot off the pedal, to throttle things back a little. Energy can be burnt too fast, and people can share too much. If they fail to maintain separation, they can become increasingly manic.

A core skill for Social Leaders is to attend to their own Social Capital, and to spend it wisely with others, helping everyone to stay safe.

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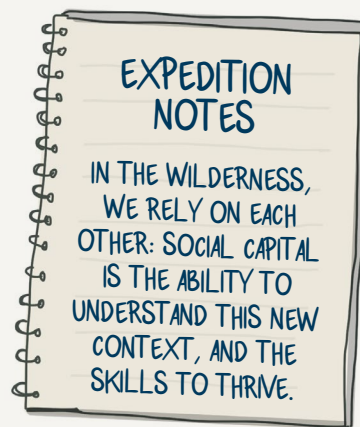
Giving Too Little, Giving Too Much – how to stay safe

Trading in Social Capital comes at a cost, so we
must always consider if we are giving too little,
or giving too much: nobody can be a machine forever,
so this self-awareness and self-care is important – all the more so because
our ability to invest or save is rarely aligned to the demands that fall upon us:
sometimes, we feel that others need our energy when we have none to give,
and we have to find a way to manage that tension.

Ultimately, if you cannot look after yourself, you will be unable to lead the
expedition: a Social Leader does not have to climb higher and faster than others.
Instead, they have to help everyone to climb safely.

EXPEDITION NOTES

IF WE UNDERSTAND SOCIAL CAPITAL, WE MUST CONSIDER WHEN WE ARE OUTWARD FACING, INVESTING IT, AND INWARD FACING, MAKING OURSELVES SAFE.

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Social Leaders Do What's Right – not just what's easy

Organisations are, in general, good places to be, and to work. But sometimes, those good outcomes come at an uneven cost, or sometimes the people who pay the price have no voice. As a Social Leader, you have a responsibility to the Organisation (which it earns) but also to your community (which you earn). And when push comes to shove, you must do what is right, and establishing what is right is partly about your internal ethical compass, and partly about your 'sense-making' conversation within your community.

EXPEDITION NOTES

SOCIAL LEADERS FIGHT FOR FAIRNESS: AT TIMES, THIS TAKES YOU INTO CONFLICT WITH THE ORGANISATION, OR WITH OTHERS. ARE YOU WILLING TO PAY THE PRICE?
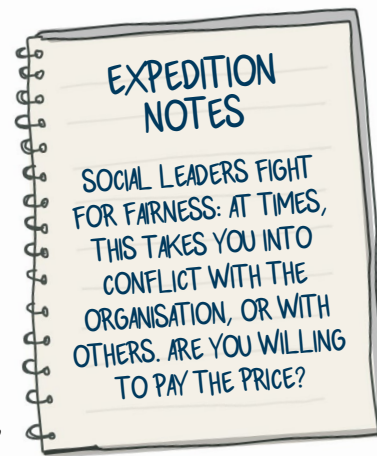
Part of Social Leadership is understanding social movements: how stories become loud within a system. Sometimes, we have to be the lone voice that stands up against that dominant narrative.

For example: many organisations are trying to make fair decisions about their employees, but they are also trying to save money and remain safe. Perhaps we have to help them to make sustainable, but fair, choices.

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Who Is Left Behind? silent failure

Without any doubt, the move to home working, our journey into the wilderness, will cause people to fail: the burdens placed upon us are unequally carried, and it is possible that those with commitments to family as carers and parents, those struggling with their mental health or physical disability, those who are lonely and afraid, and those in parts of the world with different levels of support, healthcare, or restrictions may fail silently.

Our responsibility is to check in, at least weekly, with everyone, not just those who are singing and shouting.

We must curate those opportunities to come together, but be mindful of who is not there.

EXPEDITION NOTES

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY IN LEADING THE EXPEDITION IS NOT JUST TO THOSE WHO FOLLOW YOU, BUT TO THOSE WHO FALL BEHIND.

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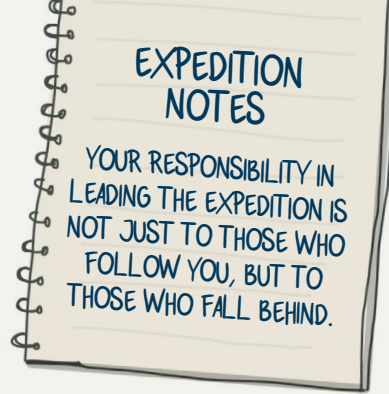
RECOGNITION AND RESPECT

Individual vs Public - where to say 'thanks'

As leaders, one of the greatest responsibilities and pleasures is to thank those who succeed, who carry us forward. But at this time, we should ensure we also thank those who fail, or those who are unable to achieve as much. We should thank them for the energy they invest, we should thank them for caring for their relatives, we should thank them for being part of our culture and for grounding us in a truth of their reality.

Overall, our organisations must adapt to understand that their purpose is no longer just to make money, or be productive, but also to be part of the community that they are born from and borne by.

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Awarding Recognition and Respect – for success or effort

Leadership is not about pushing a car up a hill: it's about inspiring and supporting a group of people who will willingly pull it, with everyone carrying their fair share of the weight.

We must be deliberate and considerate in how we award our recognition and respect on this journey: recognise success, and respect the effort. So recalibrate your guidelines to accommodate the reality of our teams: everyone will be working to the best of their ability, if we help them to do so, but the best of their ability may be unevenly distributed in terms of time spent, or outcome achieved.

Respecting Failure – loudly respecting humanity

We are used to our leadership operating within the walls and context of the office and organisation, but perhaps in the context of this crisis, it should operate outwards and into our communities.

We should use our leadership to respect humanity: those people volunteering in their community, those caring, those sharing. We can readdress our view of culture to include a broader community component: those who help their community, their country, our society to be better. Those who do not wait to be asked, but who reach out to carry part of the weight.

Better still, we can create opportunity for them to do so, through volunteering programmes, or hyper-local opportunities to engage. Organisations can provide time, resources, and permission.

And recognise failure loudly: those people who say they cannot cope, partake, or help should also be respected. Some people are already carrying heavy weights, not all of which are visible.

EXPEDITION NOTES

OUR RESPONSIBILITY NOW REACHES BEYOND THE ORGANISATION: RESPECT HUMANITY WITHIN THE COMMUNITY.
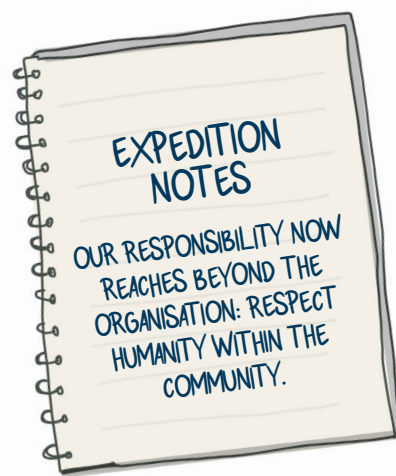
Story Listening – without the need to respond or own

As everyone is camped out in their own tent, #TogetherApart, they are living their own story. As expedition leaders, part of what we must do is to listen to their personal narratives: stories of fear or the future, small stories, or parts of a larger tale. But we must do so without looking to respond, to colonise, to accept, or deny. Rather, we should do so with gratitude that they are investing the trust in us to share them.

And you know what? If we listen, with humility, we may learn something for ourselves.

The personal, authentic stories that other people share can help us to calibrate and contextualise our own narrative. So listen with the humility of a Social Leader, and only respond to say thank you.
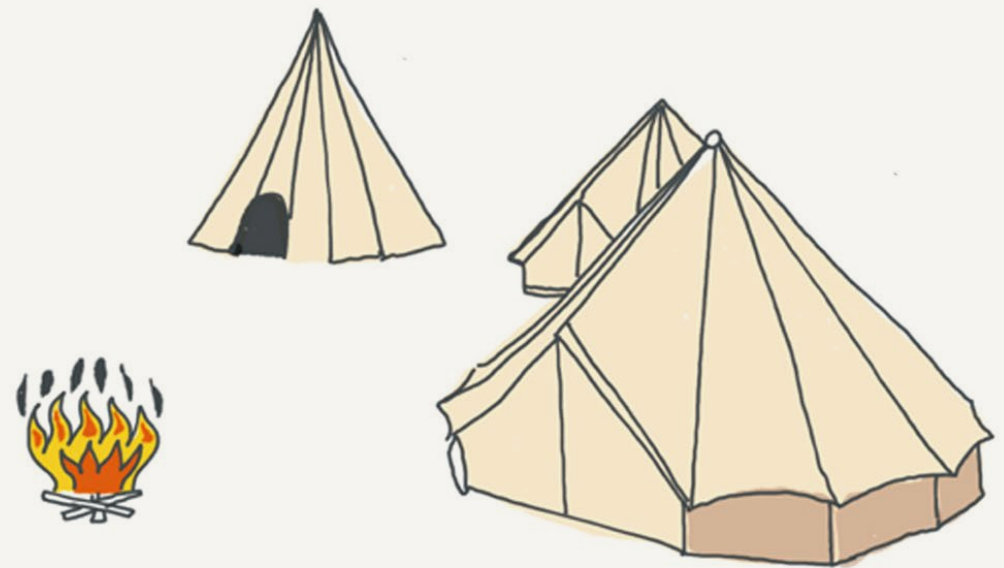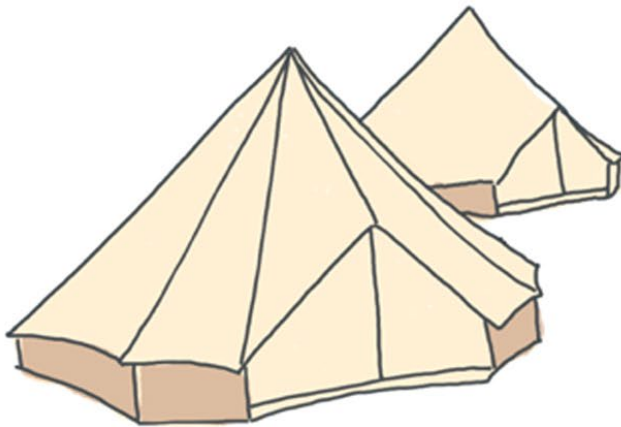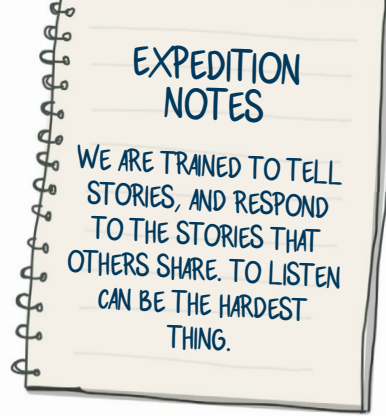
WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

Earn Social Authority – take action and pioneer fairness

Develop Yourself – support others, seek out silence

Learn to Listen – recognise your role as a storyteller

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PART 4:
BEING TOGETHER APART

OVERVIEW

So far, we have considered the journey that we make as individuals, to set up our campsite, separate our spaces, and manage our energy and time. We have looked at what it means to be a leader of this expedition. But in this section, we will consider the team: how we will carry forward culture, create our shared spaces, hold each other safely, and operate in a space of trust and kindness.

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CREATING THE CAMPSITE

Pause, Refresh, Renew: fuel and oxygen

The first few weeks and months of remote work can be taken up in a blur of activity: first, we focus on logistics and practical aspects, and then we are caught up in just doing the work. But it's important to Pause – Refresh – Renew.

Our campfire burns because we have fuel, and oxygen to feed the flames: in our rush into the wilderness, we may focus on the fuel, but the oxygen is the oxygen of community, and it needs careful nurturing and attention.

Pause: schedule and take time to create your story of your move to remote work. Be unafraid to document how you feel, how your energy flows, ebbs, and wanes. Share your hopes and fears for yourself and others.

Refresh: think about the oxygen. What do you need to learn, how will you take care of yourself: your mental health, your balance, your exercise routine, your family, and your wellbeing? Set yourself boundaries of time, and targets of achievement, in other areas. Now is the time to pick up Duolingo, clear the greenhouse, read that book, or call that friend. Refresh your mindset, and develop new skills: the chances are that the old ones are going out of date.

Renew: it's ok to reinvent yourself as we reinvent work. I don't mean a new haircut and back story, but rather renew your commitment to yourself and others. Be more mindful of what actions you take, and which actions take you. How much are you really in control of work, or a victim of circumstance?

Being busy is easy: any idiot can be busy. But being productive, purposeful, and balanced, that is much harder. Renew yourself by lifting yourself out of your everyday reality, and look down upon it. What do you control, and what has you in its grip?

Kindling and Carrying the Weight – shared ownership

To build our fire, we need firewood and oxygen, but to get it started, we need kindling. All of this fuel needs to be carried to the campsite, but not everyone can carry the same weight. Someone needs to clear a space, to build the hearth and surround it with rocks, someone must drag over a log to sit on, and fill the pot to boil water over the heat. Someone must keep the matches dry.

All of these jobs must be done, but not everyone can do everything. And yet the weight must be carried.

If you do not carry some, then I must carry it all. And if I do not carry any, then I am relying on you to keep us both safe. And if neither of us lift a thing, then we will have no fire.

Community works in the same way: if we rely on others to be kind, hard-working, empathic, and fair, then we abrogate our responsibility: we must all carry the weight, to the best of our ability.

And the thing about the heaviest weights of all is that they are carried more effectively if carried together.

So ask the question: what can I take off your back? Which part of this weight may I bear for you?

But be unafraid to say: this is too much, I cannot carry it, who can help me out?

Social Leadership is not about carrying the whole weight: it's about ensuring the weight is carried fairly, and always seeking to take the weight off someone else's back, whilst being unafraid to ask for help with your burden.

EXPEDITION NOTES

NOT EVERYONE CAN CARRY THE SAME WEIGHT, BUT THE ENTIRE WEIGHT HAS TO BE CARRIED.

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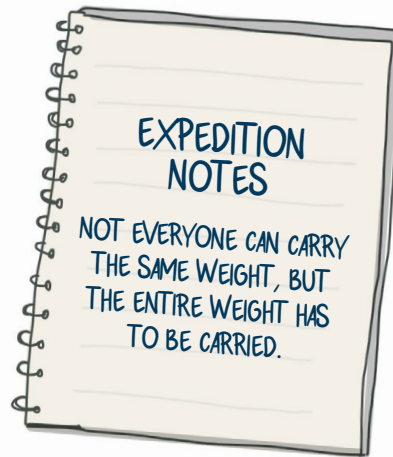
Being Together Apart – community spirit

Our aim is not to survive, but to thrive: this transition should not be about trying to salvage something from the ruin of the office, but rather about pioneering a new route, an opportunity to create a new and better type of work. Better for each of us, better for all of us together, better for the organisation, better for the environment, and better for society – an opportunity to begin anew.

EXPEDITION NOTES

WORK IS NOT ABOUT SURVIVING: HOW WILL WE CARRY OUR SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY, AND WHERE WILL WE GO NEXT?

The crisis has thrown us out of the building, but we do not need to live in crisis.

The question is whether we just hang on to the old or build the new.

Being together apart is about finding new ways of being: a new community with a new spirit. Not the old one on a field trip, but a new one that lives in the wilderness.

In time, we may well have an office again: but there is no reason for us to migrate back to old behaviours, old ways of being, old ways of working.

Remember: our organisations as they exist today are largely the legacy of our industrial past – entities of system, process, power, and control. But we can build a new type of organisation: one of creativity and fairness, productivity and adaptability, hand in hand with our communities. Balanced: internally and in society.

This crisis can be a chapter point or a turning point. We can find new ways to be together apart, and build the community with the spirit to invent ourselves again. We can make this the start of an adventure, not an interlude..

Your Survival Skills

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Social Age
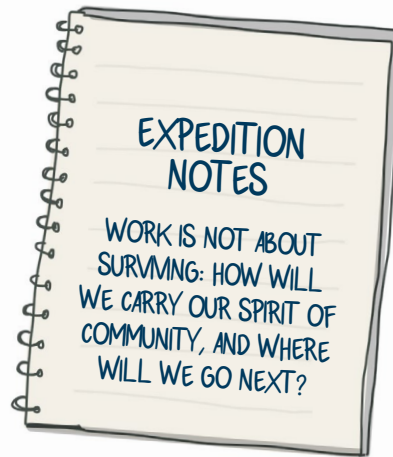
MEMBERSHIP AND BELONGING

What is Membership? how we join teams

In my own research into communities, membership, and belonging, people describe quite clearly that they have different levels of cultural alignment: there is a type of primary culture that is formed in hours to days, based at a local level, with those people we see every day and come to trust and befriend. And then there is at least one more level of culture, a secondary culture, which is more global, complex and represents geopolitical power and influence. Many people never achieve this. And in our new ways of working, out in the wilderness, we must ask how we help people to achieve the former.

Life goes on: people join, move, and leave, and we must pay attention to how they 'join' a team, or become part of our culture. Consider what membership means to you, and how you found it. Then, actively consider how we can help people to do so in our new, virtual, online, dispersed state.

It's likely that we will need to dedicate considerable time and effort not to 'induction', but to 'interconnection', helping people in a structured way to forge the interpersonal and trust-based relationships that come more easily when we are together, and may be lost when we are apart.

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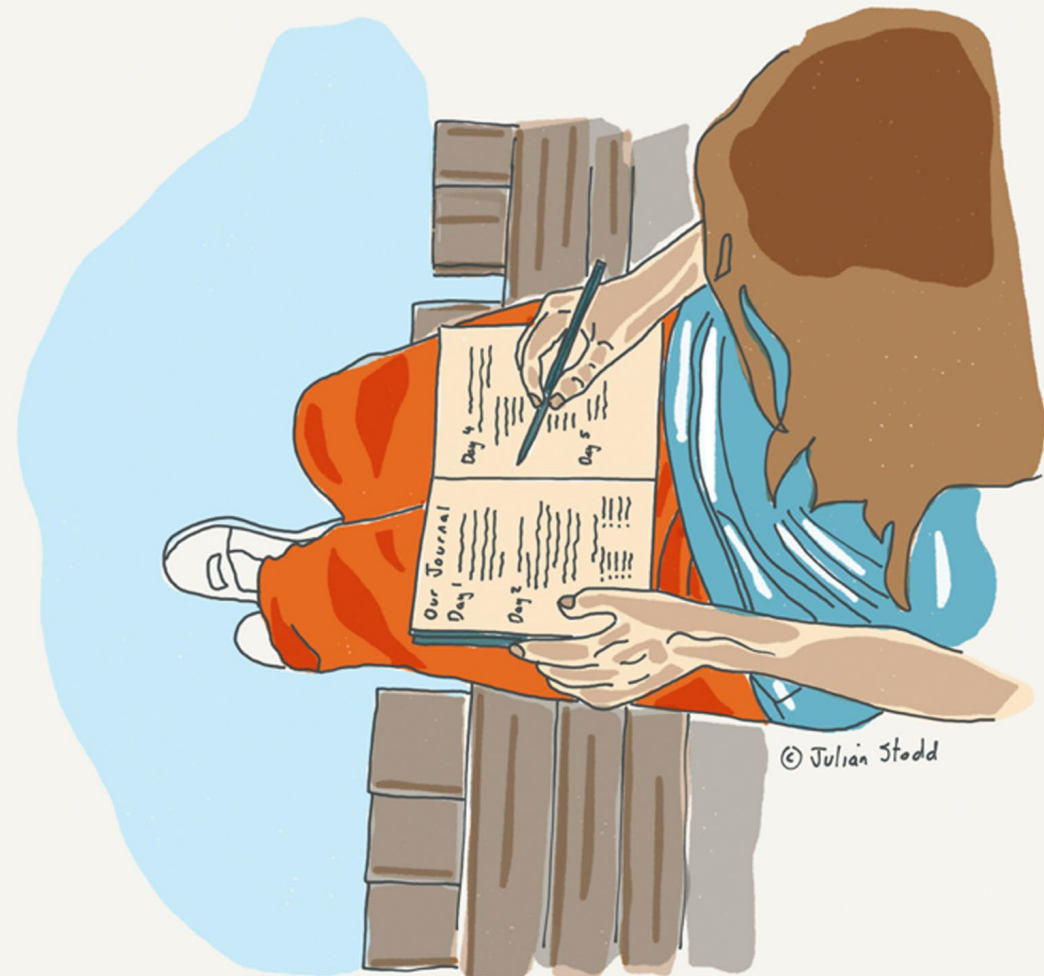
Culture: 'primary' and 'secondary' culture

In the short term, people need a primary connection, but it is the secondary aspect of culture that can hold the dispersed and complex relationships that enable us to build social movements for change, and find access to the tacit and tribal wisdom of the broader community.

We will need to create structured access to seniority: it's unlikely that the most senior boss will bump into you in the corridor now, or that you can rely on charismatic traits to stand out in that Zoom meeting. And in any event, are we just trying to help the charismatic?

We need senior leaders to sponsor and take part in (for story listening, not storytelling) community spaces: small groups, and opportunities for junior people to test ideas, build connections, and share uncertainty or vision. In the office, these meetings may have happened by chance: here, we need to make the chance.

EXPEDITION NOTES

AS WE SAW IN THE LAST SECTION, WE 'BELONG' TO AT LEAST TWO LAYERS OF CULTURE, BUT HOW WILL WE HELP PEOPLE NAVIGATE BETWEEN THE TWO?
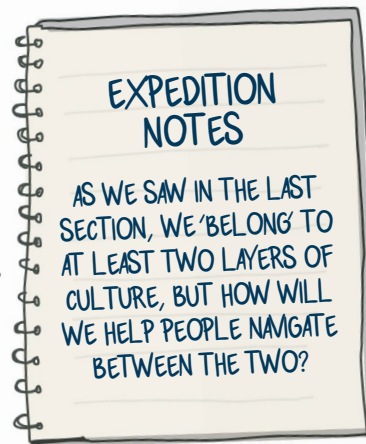
How Do You Know You Belong? What holds us together?

Our legal contract gives us a place and a space in the office, and in the hierarchy: it defines how you belong to a legal entity. But your contract does not hold your friendships, rivalries, tribes, or trust.

Ask yourself: how do you know if you belong? Is it possible to turn up to work, but not belong? Can you be a leader, but not belong? And indeed, can you 'belong', but not be employed? When you leave work, when your contract expires, do you cease to belong to your team, your tribe, your network?

In the context of the Social Age, belonging is a strange thing, and as we disperse into the wilderness, what will hold us together?

Technology? Technology can connect us, but does connection make us belong?

Optimism, hope, and leadership? They can paint a vision, but can they make us belong?

Personal relationships, shared stories, experience? These things form part of our sense of belonging, but ask yourself how you will, individually and collectively, stay together through the initial challenge, through the long haul.

Consider the importance of shared experience, of downtime, of purposeless opportunities to interact and play – the importance of the shared Social Currencies we discussed earlier. Consider the ways in which leaders create spaces to which we may belong, but also recognise that it is people who make connections.

Perhaps our individual responsibility is to have open structured spaces and opportunities for people to forge these connections. And to check in with people: do they feel that they belong, and what do they feel that they belong to?

EXPEDITION NOTES

HOW WILL WE KNOW IF WE BELONG, AND WHAT IS THE RISK IF WE DON'T? WE MUST CREATE STRUCTURED WAYS TO EXPLORE THIS QUESTION.

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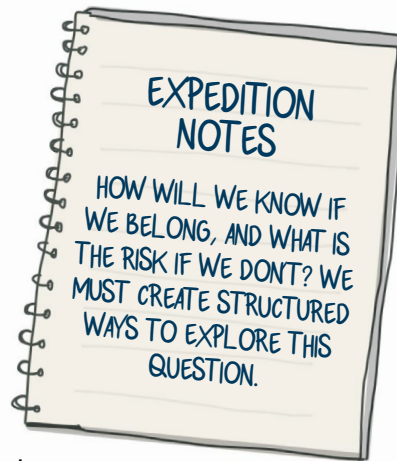
Forces of Exclusion: social consequence, difference, and dissent

As we think about 'being together apart', it's worth noting that many things can keep us apart, not just distance. We can be excluded for being different, or for failing to subscribe to a dominant narrative of the group around us. We can experience social consequence for failing to conform to social norms, and for the ways that we act, believe, think, or do.
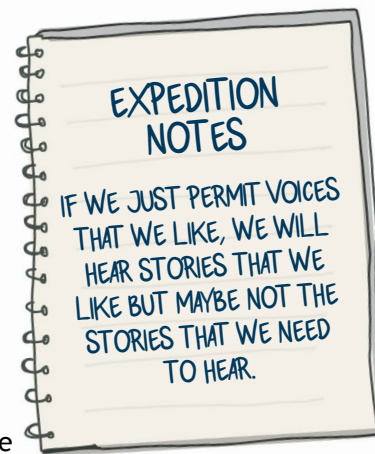
Forces of exclusion are, in a social world, everywhere, and they are not just held by bad people: all of us belong to communities that are, to a greater or lesser extent, entities of exclusion. They only exist because some people are not in them.

Organisations often say that diversity makes them stronger, and then they proceed to persecute or assassinate any voices that fail to conform to their established norms. Part of this is about being safe, and part of it is about control: if the story did not come from here, it is risky.

Social Leadership is about a willingness to listen to stories of difference and dissent, not with a sense of fear that they will pollute or corrupt us, but rather to learn from them, and learn how to better articulate our broad differences.

It is the diversity of thinking within our organisations that will allow them to mutate, and mutation is at the heart of adaptation: so as we are apart, consider how we are held together, not simply by conformity, similarity, and agreement, but across our divisions, diversity, and confusion.

We must actively develop diverse communities to ensure that we can be together – apart, but inclusive.

EXPEDITION NOTES

IF WE JUST PERMIT VOICES THAT WE LIKE, WE WILL HEAR STORIES THAT WE LIKE BUT MAYBE NOT THE STORIES THAT WE NEED TO HEAR.

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RITUALS AND ARTEFACTS

What Have We Lost While Remote? greeting, badges, and coffee cups

We fill our lives with things, but do not always appreciate how much these things hold power: objects are made of atoms and molecules, processed by industry, but the meaning they hold is not baked in by chemistry – rather, it is imbued socially. So my iPhone is my phone because of the ownership and value I imbue into it. And my morning coffee mug is my mug because of the history I carry within it.

Indeed, our 'home' is only a 'home' because of the value we put into it, and the stories that are based within it, and similarly it is only the activity and meaning that we imbue into an office that makes it an office.

This may feel rather like philosophy in a time of crisis, until we stop to think about what we have lost.

The office was not just a place: it was a collection of artefacts, surrounded by and woven into rituals. And in those rituals, it created social cohesion and effect.

Our badges represented power, our coffee cups make the office 'ours', and the rituals of greeting, the in jokes, the lunchtime routines, they provided scaffolding and structure to our days.

By going remote, we have lost more than just a place to work: in the section on 'Packing your Backpack', we considered the separation of space and sanctifying areas. But we should go further and consider what new artefacts we will create, the meaning we will weave into them, and the rituals of our new online world.

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EXPEDITION NOTES

SCRIPT AND PLAY WITH YOUR RITUALS: IN NEW SPACES WE NEED NEW WAYS TO BEHAVE.

Remote Rituals: co-create your new rituals, and have fun

Successful remote teams learn to have fun fast: they create new rituals of welcome, of engagement, of gratitude, even of disagreement, which become the social norms of the groups.

I'll give you an example: my own Sea Salt Learning Crew has always worked remotely, spread around the world. In the early days, one of our Crew Mates, Valerie, introduced us to a ritual for recognition, for when you are muted on a Zoom call. She rubbed her hands above her head, whilst we all looked at her in confusion. She had to explain what the ritual meant, but once she had done so, we adopted it at speed. Now we use it all the time: not everyone can speak on a call at once, but when someone has done something great, one of my Crew Mates will start the 'applause' and we will all join in, silently. From the outside, I'm sure we look like idiots, but it brings us together.

Now, you don't need to rub your hands, but it's worth noting that Valerie picked that ritual up from a Spanish group she worked with, and we carried it forward into groups of which she is not part. Rituals can spread (although they can, of course, act as mechanisms of exclusion if we are not careful to teach them as part of our rituals of membership and induction).

Play with creating rituals: for birthdays, for gratitude, to get heard, to agree or disagree. In new spaces, try things out, and see what sticks.

The last few weeks of speaking to teams who are new to Zoom has made me realise how much we have done to become efficient and effective through sign language and choreography. Don't leave this to chance.

EXPEDITION
NOTES

TAKE THE TIME FOR SMALL
AND SAFE STORIES: THEY
CREATE THE SOCIAL FABRIC
THAT ALLOWS US TO
DIFFER SAFELY.

Talking About the Weather: small and safe stories

One ritual you may be familiar with is the sharing of small and safe stories: we typically do this when we meet for the first time. Talking about the weather rarely gets you into trouble (and for us Brits, it's a national pastime).

But we do it for a reason: small stories help us to become safe with each other, to establish commonality with little chance of conflict. If we started out talking about religion and politics, it would be a riskier business.

When our time is marked out in purposeful meetings, it's important to build in the time and opportunity, in both individual meetings and across the week, to share small stories. They may seem trivial, but they are typically authentic, and help to stitch our social fabric. You cannot be serious and purposeful all the time.
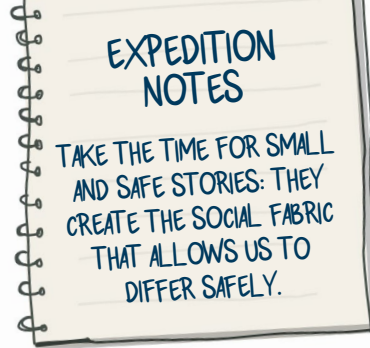
SENSE-MAKING AND SHARED STORYTELLING

Our Sense-making Ability: creating 'meaning' from 'knowledge'

EXPEDITION NOTES

COMMUNITIES ARE 'SENSE-MAKING' ENTITIES: EARN THE RIGHT TO HEAR THE WISDOM THEY FIND.

Our duty to care for our community is not simply a selfless act: in the context of the Social Age, we rely on our communities for sense-making, the act of creating 'meaning' from 'knowledge'. Essentially, knowledge is what we learn within formal education or communication systems, but both individually and together, we synthesise 'meaning' from that: we position it within the context of our everyday reality, and those things we already know.

For example: the organisation gives us knowledge about a formal change programme (the move to remote) and provides the structural details of the change, but it is you, and your friends and colleagues, who create the meaning that surround this: what it means to you.

Many organisations are deeply interested in this sense-making ability of communities: using communities of practice to realise innovation and new ways of working. But if we really want access to this tribal knowledge, we must earn it.

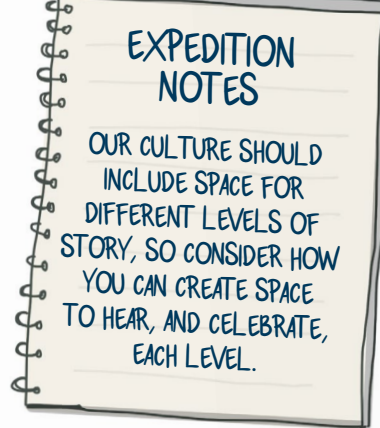Again, this relates to our intent: are we simply surviving, or are we using this time as the sandbox to build tomorrow's organisation? If it is the latter, then in this move to remote, we should nurture the diversity of connection and community that will foster more effective sense-making, as well as earning the authentic leadership that will allow us to hear the stories that are written.

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Layers of Storytelling – 'personal' vs 'co-created' stories

As we make our way through the wilderness, and construct our new reality, we write a personal story as we go. And together, as our teams reconnect, they write a shared narrative.

You can create space and opportunity to hear both of these: consider time for the sharing of personal stories – stories of work and adaptation, stories of family and local community, stories of hopes and fears. This does not need to be an overly structured thing, but it's also not part of a daily team meeting. Perhaps it's part of your work to take these individual stories and weave them into your broader shared team narrative: and when new people join your team, perhaps this journal is where they learn about you all on a personal level.

EXPEDITION
NOTES

CONSIDER HOW YOU WILL
MEMORIALISE THIS TIME:
WILL IT BE A STORY OF
SURVIVAL, OR A JOURNEY
OF DISCOVERY?

Expedition Journal – taking time around the campfire

I started this section, on being together apart, by considering the campfire: we each build our individual space, our camp, but your role, as a Social Leader, is to help to clear the space for the campfire, and to ensure we each carry the weight we are able to as we gather the firewood and light the kindling.

When you are around the campfire, you can share your individual stories, and write your team narrative.

These are exceptional times, so consider where your Expedition Journal will sit: you may make this a real activity, to run a weekly session in which you capture where you are on this journey. Or perhaps it's a more personal story. But do consider writing it.

Organisations tell grand stories of hope and aspiration: so how will they recount this chapter?

Will the lens through which we view this time be simply one of business continuity, unemployment, productivity, and economics? Or will it be a lens of culture, community, and care?

It is within your power to influence this narrative, and to decide how this story will ultimately be recounted: will this be an experience that draws us closer together, or simply an event that we survive before we fall apart?

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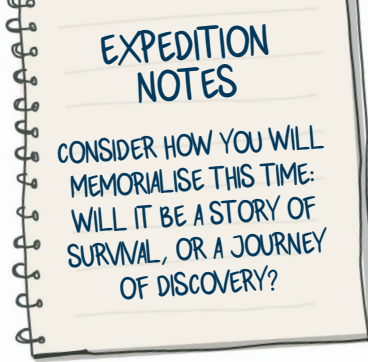
TRUST AND BEING TOGETHER APART

How Trust Grows - authentic action over time

I wanted to finish this section by talking about trust: as we are dispersed, how will trust hold us together? Because one thing is certain: without trust, our culture fragments.

But trust is a funny thing: it is not like floodwater, rising equally in one plane, affecting those in the valleys before those on the hills. Instead, it clusters and clumps, forming an uneven plane in which there are big cracks and voids. And into these crevasses we can fall and become lost.

In my own research into this Landscape of Trust, one theme is clear: trust grows through an authenticity of action over time.

Perhaps this is the self-levelling we should be doing on a daily basis: are we acting with clarity, with consistency, are we listening as much as talking, are we sharing vulnerability as much as strength, are we building Social Capital in others, and listening out for the silences?

As part of your personal narrative through the wilderness, recognise when you are being battered by the wind, and when you are creating space for shelter for others.

EXPEDITION NOTES

TRUST HOLDS US TOGETHER, EVEN WHEN WE ARE APART.

EXPEDITION NOTES

TRUST GROWS SLOWLY BUT FRACTURES FAST: WE MUST TEND TO THE SOIL, OR DIAGNOSE THE CONDITION.

How Trust Breaks - violent stories and tending the soil

Trust typically grows slowly but fractures fast, and one way that this fracture occurs is through violent stories, stories that are projected onto us. As we become dispersed, it is ever easier for stories of violence to spread: stories about who is working hard or working less, about who is adapting and who is stuck in the past – stories about who is 'with us' and who is not.

In general, it is easier to maintain the trust that we have earned rather than have to build it again anew: indeed, in our own research, whilst some people say that trust can be rebuilt, for others, once fractured, it is gone forever.

The exodus into the wilderness provides many opportunities for this fracturing to occur: either through international action or, more likely, because we cease to nurture and value it.

It's likely that our global culture will be more fragmented and held in local units, and likely that we will lose some of the ad hoc connection that comes from wandering through a place, so we must act like farmers tending to the soil.

The farmer does not construct the crops, but rather tends to the soil, which is, itself, a complex ecosystem. By tending to the soil, and careful observation and reaction, they are rewarded by the harvest.

Perhaps we should consider the type of Social Leader we will be: will you be a farmer, creating conditions, or a doctor, diagnosing disease, or a technician, meddling in the details?

Experience Counts – create opportunity to build

Our experience of culture is primarily built through our lived experience. Through these times, create opportunities for culture to be built and built again.

If you do nothing else, attend to spaces: create opportunities to connect that are purposeful, within the task streams of work, and that are purposeless, to tend to the social fabric.

EXPEDITION NOTES

CULTURE IS EXPERIENTIAL AND CO-CREATED, SO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER AND PROVIDE THE SPACE FOR EXPERIENCE.

You cannot impose a culture onto others, you cannot buy it, and you cannot gift it. Instead, you have to live it. Create opportunity with your tribe, your community, and across your organisation, to take part in this activity: write your shared stories, and ensure that everyone has a voice.

(C) Julian Stodd

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

Light the Campfire - dedicate space and time

Carry the Firewood - curation of stories

Write the Journal - narrate your shared journey

Earn Trust - be authentic, share doubt

PART 5:
INTO THE WILDERNESS

DEPARTURE

We have been cast into the wilderness, but have two choices ahead of us.

We can view this time as a crisis, an aberration, a risk to be managed, and a story to put behind us as quickly as possible.

Or we can view this as an unprecedented opportunity to discard the structures and constraint of the past, to play in this sandbox, and to use it as an opportunity to invest in the culture, people, teams, and community that will launch us out of this time and into a new chapter of productivity, beyond the office.

We can either come out of this experience impoverished, morally bankrupt, and fighting to regain lost stature, or we can come out of it bonded by trust, through shared experience, and having mastered the art of being together apart.

The office as a space was really only ever a legacy of the industrial revolution, when mastery of resources, centralised planning, and systems of conformity and control were the route to success. But for decades, we have operated in new domains: extended value chains, distributed supply chains, the knowledge economy, the gig economy, the rise of social communities, evolved models of environmental and social conscience, and a fractured social contract leading to short tenure and diversified careers.

Almost nothing of the Industrial Age, in terms of organisational design or leadership, remains relevant in the context of the Social Age, and the way we weather this time will both be judged and be the foundation of our future opportunity.

In one fell swoop, we have been separated from a legacy that both endowed us with potential but damned us to constraint.

And we will be judged in two ways.

Firstly, we will be judged on how fairly we spend this time: how fair we are to each other, to our people, and how fairly we act as global citizens, and members of our broader community.

And secondly, we will be judged by how much we view this as an opportunity to invest in people, or the chance to exploit them.

In this book, I have tried to lay out a landscape and take us on a journey: we must ensure that everyone has packed their backpack, we must learn to lead in remote spaces, and we must find ways to be together apart.

We must act fairly to each other, responsibly in our communities, and seize the opportunity we have been given to invest in the skills and culture that will act as a foundation of future success.

Those who act selfishly, for short-term gain, and at the cost of others will fail, because they will cheat themselves out of their own future.

As a Social Leader, you must stand up for what is right: help your organisation to do well, help each other, and remember what it takes to find the campfire.

You need space, you need community, you need firewood, but also kindling, oxygen, and matches. We will carry different loads, but do not let anyone carry more weight than they can bear, and ensure that your first action is to listen to the silence, and ensure that nobody is left in the wilderness alone.

THE GUIDEBOOK SERIES

I've written a series of *'Guidebooks'* for the Social Age: these cover aspects of my work that are still rapidly evolving, or which I have not made time to write a full book about yet. They are typically under 10k words, and are intended to provide an overview of the landscape. I try to keep them practical, with a key highlight on *'what you need to know'*, and *'what you can do about it'*.

'The Social Learning Guidebook' provides a practical overview for the principles and design techniques of Social Learning in a modern organisation.

'The Learning Science Guidebook' is a practical, pragmatic, exploration of learning science, and helps you to curate your own discipline as a Learning Scientist. It looks at how learning can be evidence based, research led, and truly effective.

'The Trust Guidebook' explores our extensive research into the Landscape of Trust, and asks 72 questions that leaders can use with their teams.

'The Community Builder Guidebook' brings you practical ideas to create engaged and dynamic Social Learning Communities and Communities of Practice.

'The Social Age Guidebook' provides a comprehensive exploration of our new environment of work, and highlights key areas where Organisations need to adapt.

'The New York Dereliction Walk' is more experimental work, exploring how Organisations and ideas fall derelict and fail, but can be reborn through social movements. It was my favourite writing from 2018.

'To the Moon and Back: Leadership Reflections from Apollo' shares eight key stories about the Apollo programme, alongside my personal reflection on what this means for Leadership in the Social Age.'

THE HANDBOOK SERIES
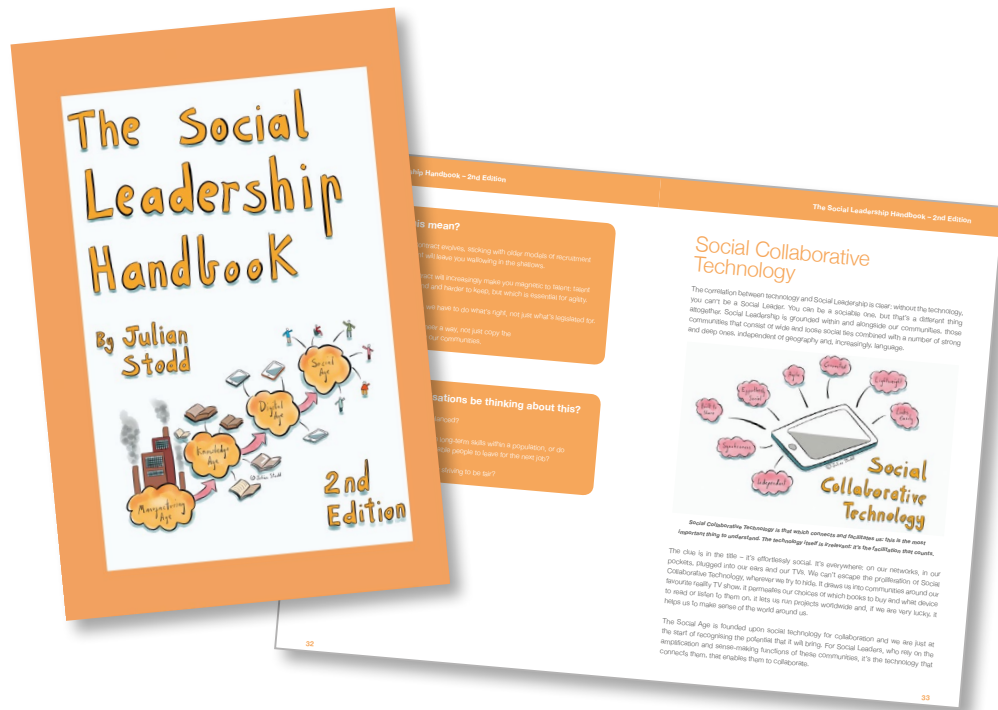
'Handbooks' are intended to capture a full snapshot of my evolving body of work on a particular subject. 'The Social Leadership Handbook', now in it's second edition, explores the intersection of Formal and Social authority, and considers the importance of this in the context of the Social Age.

I'm currently finishing writing 'The Change Handbook', which is an exploration of how Organisations change, and the forces that hold them constrained. It considers how we build more Socially Dynamic Organisations.

THE '100 DAY', AND 'SKETCHBOOK', SERIES

Whilst 'Handbooks' and 'Guidebooks' are about ideas and strategy, the '100 Day' books tackle how we do these things at scale. They do so by providing a scaffolded space, which you can explore, document, and graffiti, as you go.

'Social Leadership: My First 100 Days' is a practical, guided, reflective journey. It follows 100 days of activity, with each day including provocations, questions, and actions. You fill in the book as you go. It's accompanied by a full set of 100 podcasts.
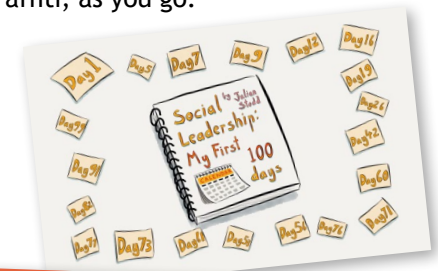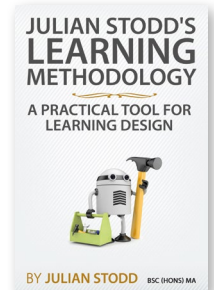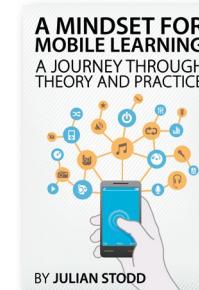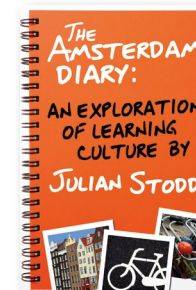

'The Trust Sketchbook' is another guided, reflective journey, a walk through the Landscape of Trust, but in this case you graffiti and adapt the book, to capture your own landscape.

OTHER BOOKS

I have written a series of other books, covering aspects of learning, culture, technology, and knowledge, which you can find details of on the blog.

CERTIFICATIONS

In 2018 I launched the first Certification programme on *'Storytelling in Social Leadership'*. It's based upon *'Foundations'* and *'Techniques'*, which are practical and applied, and *'Experiments'*, which you learn to run in your own Organisation.

Throughout 2019 and 2020, the Certification offering is growing rapidly to include:

'Storytelling in Social Leadership'

'Leading with Trust'

'Community Building'

'Foundations of Social Leadership'

'Modern Learning Capabilities'

'Leading Through Change'

'Social Age Navigation'

Get in touch to find out more.

MOOCS AND PODCASTS

I run two MOOCs, one on *'Foundations of the Social Age'*, and one to accompany *'Social Leadership: My First 100 Days'*. You can find details at www.seasaltlearning.com, or drop me a line.

I publish occasional podcasts, on all aspects of my work. You can find me through your usual podcast player.

THE BLOG AND THE CAPTAIN'S LOG

I write the blog every day, sharing my current thinking and illustrations. You can find it at www.julianstodd.wordpress.com

I write a weekly newsletter for Social Age Explorers: it comments on news items, from the perspective of the Social Age, as well as providing expanded commentary around my own writing and thinking. Visit www.bit.ly/TheCaptainsLog to sign up.

SEA SALT LEARNING ⚓

In a more formal space, I founded Sea Salt Learning in 2014, acting as a global partner for change. We help some of the biggest and most interesting Organisations in the world get fit for the Social Age, through strategic consulting, building capability in teams, and building programmes to reach out at scale.

ABOUT SEA SALT LEARNING
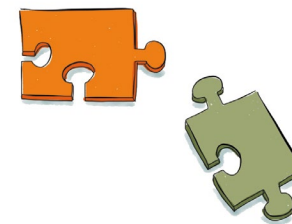
We are a dynamic *Social Age startup:* five years old, living the values we speak. We are virtualised, global, inclusive, and agile. We are a core team of around twenty Crew Mates.

We are surrounded by a much larger layer of Social Age *'Explorers'*, people who are heavily involved in *'sense making'* around our core topics of Social Learning, Social Leadership, Change, Culture, and the Socially Dynamic Organisation.

Sea Salt Learning builds upon the work by Julian Stodd, author and explorer of the Social Age, recognised for his pioneering work in helping organisations to adapt to the new reality of the Social Age.

The *Sea Salt Research Hub* carries out original, creative, and large scale research, providing an evidence base for our work.

Sea Salt Publishing provides a curated body of books and online publications, exploring all aspects of the Social Age.

Sea Salt Digital provides our technical capability and build capacity for eLearning, mobile, video, and other forms of online learning.
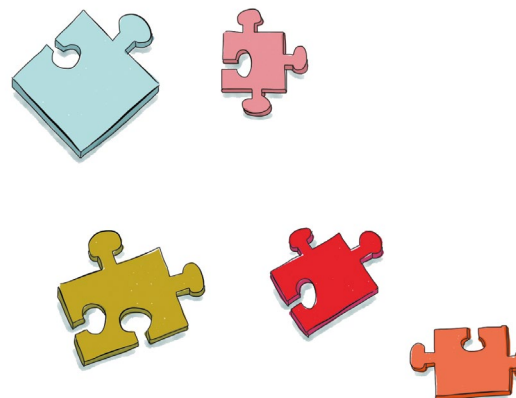
THE EXPLORER COMMUNITY

All alumni of Sea Salt Learning programmes join our global community of Explorers. This gives access to all of our Open Sessions, as well as dedicated Explorer events, webinars, and networking.

It's an open community, dedicated to exploring all aspects of the Social Age: membership is free, based on foundations of respect and sharing, celebrating diversified views.

GETTING IN CONTACT

Find out more about how our Guidebooks can help you and your Organisation.

If you want to discuss any of the products in this Guidebook, or discuss your particular requirements, you can reach us here:

Talk to us: ahoy@seasaltlearning.com

Find out more about Sea Salt Learning: www.seasaltlearning.com

Find us on twitter: @seasaltlearning

Follow Julian's blog: www.julianstodd.wordpress.com