

<http://helpp.hull-college.ac.uk/uploads/report/interviews/elgg-part8.mp3>

Work-based Mentors

I'm Stephen... I work for, well I've got my own company, with my wife Vanessa, it's Training Consultancy Ltd, we deliver food hygiene, health and safety and leadership training. We got involved in this project because, you know, both having been students ourselves we've had the benefit in the past of people mentoring us so we thought we'd get involved plus there was something for the business hopefully at the end of it. As for the blog, the ELGG blog, really it kept us in touch with what Pete was doing, that's the mentee we're mentoring. So yes, I log on to it quite often to see what's been said and I feel it as my sort of duty that we should write on the blog, to put a record of our conversations that we have with Pete and how the progress of the actual project's going.

Q Would you describe yourself as very computer-literate? Did you use computers a lot?

A We, sorry I'm laughing there. We use computers a lot and I've got enough knowledge to get by in what we need to do..., yeah, I think we've both been self-taught, I think it is more of a case of we've had to learn how to use computers because of the business that we're in rather than that be a choice that we've made with regards to our careers so, you know, with something like the blog, it had to be something that we would be able to use and we would be able to access easily which we both found that we were able to do. Some issues with it, I found it, it was easy to use but I found that I had to go to the tutors' page first because you've got a group as mentors then you have to go to the tutors' friends, perhaps this is the wrong way round this is my understanding, then you I go to the tutors' friends then I go to my mentee comes up so it seemed a long way round to get to the page I wanted but I might be not doing it quite right you know so that's my level of knowledge with the blog, I found a why round it and got to where I needed to be so I don't know if there's a more direct route or not? Is there?

A Yes!, there is. We'll go through that.

A Well that's fine. I was taught, you know I was shown how to use it in the beginning.

A Yes, but it was very brief training wasn't it?

A Yes, but I got round it so that's fine and I used the blog.

Q A navigational problem like that might have put other people off but would you in your business have had time to come back and do some more training?

A Yes, you know, you either commit to the project or you don't. I think we've committed. If we said we were going to be meeting unless there was a big job coming up and we couldn't make it, but we've committed to every meeting and you know I would commit to being taught to do it. It's all down to your attitude, what your attitude is, you know. I think it's also about the value that it adds, I think that that needs to be sold as in it's not just about the outcomes of the project, it's the value that you're able to give the individual by partaking in something like the blog and the meetings with that individual and that's really important to the outcome. I think when you're entering into

something like this as somebody within the business world you have to see things from the student's point of view and not just from a selfish point of view, so it's looking at it from both perspectives.

Q Have you any recommendations to make about how the students use the blog, how they, what sort of comments they write?

A Yeah, I think because it's for public view obviously there's a group of public mentors and it is for business, it's professional so I think the actual words that people use on the blog should be professional, should come across professionally and so yes it should be professional. It's got to differ, I think you mentioned it earlier; it's got to be different between a social blog and a professional blog. People... once you've built up a rapport with someone in meetings it's fine, you get that sort of conversation going on in a meeting but if it's a written record that influences other people, whether they might have wanted to be associated with that blog, it needs to be professionally written, I mean, if you know the names of the people perhaps, you use names, or 'Mr', or not necessarily 'Mr', but not 'him', 'her' and things like that, so it's got to be professional because other people will be influenced by that.

I think probably one of the things, a learning point for us would be discuss with the person we were mentoring the kind of things they were going to put on the blog and perhaps that's an education point for us to actually help educate those individuals as to what would be appropriate because of course we work in the business sector already so that might have been something we could have done. If we'd sent an email out, any communication we do for our business we spell check it, we make sure it looks professional and we tailor it to the individual.

And it says an awful lot about the person, the impression of how it's perceived says an awful lot about the person who's writing and it and that's something, as Vanessa says, it's something probably that we should take on board and sort of mentor in that way.

You know in the business world image is everything, you've got to have to be able to build rapport with someone you need to be able to speak their language and actually in the business world that's so important and as students that are going to go however far into the future it is probably a steep learning curve and something we could probably help those individuals doing. Something else, I think it's a great thing, don't think I'm negative about it because I think it is great to have a record of what's going on but, you know, it needs to be restricted to all the students because all the students post some comments on to other people's pages and I've looked at others and some of the comments, they're not professional, you know they're talking socially to each other which doesn't fit with the whole ethos of what that's supposed to be about.

Q Is there anything you want to say? – *to college representative(?) in room*

A I tried to bring you in!

A I suppose really the fact that you know the College really appreciates employers getting involved, giving their time to work with students and communicating on line with them and value for the student, is enormous so I think that's one of the great benefits of ELGG, when we do have employers who are active on line.

Stephen – but it does give a record of the conversations because you know it doesn't, you're not party to all the meetings etc and everything professionally and you know, Pete really has done well. He's done a very good job.

Q I think that part about the difference in language is helpful to tell students and they are more likely to take it on board from you.

A (from College rep?) Absolutely.

Vanessa – it's really interesting because in the work environments that we work in it's amazing how much text language has started to come into emails – and it's totally inappropriate, I mean one of the things I deliver training on is communication skills and it's trying to take people back to basics, back to formality when formality's required and some people have actually blurred the line and that's really dangerous.

Yes, we've got no issues at all I mean Pete, we're all casual and you know 'Steve' it's actually real casual language but when it's written down it's a bit different isn't it?

Q It's difficult to remind everyone as well that a joke can be quite offensive.

Yeah, you can take it the wrong way.

It's even things that people don't understand such as capital letters and exclamation marks and underlining are deemed as shouting in the business world. You know they are inappropriate use of language. Using lower case when upper case is appropriate, that's a no-no as well, it's actually making sure that things are exactly as you'd like them to be interpreted.

I think the blog though, what they've done is it's a blog, it's a social blog, it's social and they've said it. They might have treated it as social but Pete's language has changed hasn't it?

A Yes.

A He has changed.

A And Pete has changed. I've seen him become a lot more professional.

A And confident, the way he led the meeting later on there.

A I mean, bless him, first time he was like this, absolutely shaking like a leaf.

A It's really good.

That's all you're getting out of me today!

No problem!

Thanks very much.

- Otherwise I'll waffle all day!