

A Week in the Life of Liz Hill-Smith (Principal Consultant)...



Sunday

Sad but true – the working week starts while the roast is in the oven on Sunday afternoon. I work out what is going on for the kids and put a list on the kitchen pinboard. Saves hours in missed orthodontist appointments and avoids leaving too many abandoned children. Then I do the online supermarket order to come Monday night. The kids always complain I'm never around when it arrives! I also spend a bit of time looking at my work diary for 2-3 weeks ahead to see if there is anything I need to start setting in motion early.

Monday

I wake at 4am. I'm still clearly jetlagged from last weeks trip to Japan for a big 4 advisory skills programme. Newish programme (to me), new culture, and working when I should be sleeping – this time last week it had seemed a very daunting challenge, but out the other side I reflect on an amazing week – I loved Tokyo and had really enjoyed getting to know the Japanese culture and the group out there. Our workshop had gone really well and ended with one of our participants playing the Ukelele! We then had gone out for sushi and saki – sadly no karaoke, I was well up for it by then!

I'm raring to get up and go but know that what I really need to do is stay in bed for a couple more hours and force myself back into UK time.

Today is a welcome day back in the office. A chance to catch up with colleagues, find out what's going on around the place, share ideas, catch up on what's been happening with projects and bids I have contributed to. I'm looking forward to debriefing my Tokyo trip with my line manager, Keith, who had recently been out there himself. I've got a meeting with one of our associate team on a competency project we are working on. However, my biggie this week is a new programme we are kicking off with a Government Department. They have run it before, but we have ousted the incumbent consultancy and they are looking to us to revitalise it. No pressure here then! Its a larger group than most of our programmes so we need to think creatively about how we set up exercises, debrief, and construct the experience.

I'll also need to do my least favorite job, double checking everything is "in the box" that we will need. Thankfully, our project co-ordinator, is well on top of things and painstaking in her attention to this vital component of the project.

The associate, and I have a very productive session. I really enjoy working with him. He really knows his stuff and we seem to have very creative and productive sessions together. As we create the report outline we get very excited about how all our research and ideas are coming together.

A new bid opportunity has come in and I am asked to help out on it. Thankfully, my input can wait until next week. It's an exciting opportunity so quite a few of us will be pulling our ideas together to create a stimulating, and hopefully winning, response. The challenge is to get under the skin of what the client is really after through all the public sector procurement "packaging". I enjoy the creative and inventive parts of writing bids. It's the proof reading and checking where I lose the will to live.

After, I'm rushing around doing last minute checks, catching up with colleagues, exchanging ideas, doing the things that were left undone last week while I was in Tokyo. What an amazing place that is. Even the toilets are electronic, with heated seats, buttons to press to squirt water, blow dry, and even play fake flushing sounds to disguise ones "personal noises".

All done in the office, its into the car to drive up to the Midlands – box in the boot – triple checked. Two hours alone with my in-car sound system. I have just discovered Paolo Nutini – what a treat. His wonderful upbeat music has grabbed me totally and I can't stop playing it.

Up at the venue I meet up with two senior colleagues for dinner. During dinner I get a call from home. It is my 11-year old daughter, distraught beyond belief. Turns out her beloved guinea pigs have escaped. Goodness knows where, goodness knows when. She is inconsolable. My husband is out and she is at home with her 17 year old brother. He's not a big fan of the guinea pigs but is great in a crisis. Its hard to give her the big hug I want to give her down the phone, but I try. She cheers up a bit after she tearily asks me if we can get some new ones and I say yes, of course. I'm surprised by how fickle she is.

Dinner is fun with Therese and Steven. Planning, news, aging parents and dead pets dominate the conversation. We all head off for an early night.

Tuesday

Tuesday morning our client contacts arrive over breakfast. Then its into the conference room for checking, set up etc. Our participants arrive and we meet and greet. The day kicks off. Our design flows well, a good mix of sessions and activities. We are impressed with the calibre of the group members and many of their insights. They are all enthusiastic and engaged which makes for a good programme.

The day closes with a visiting speaker from the client organisation. She is an effective and powerful speaker, and what's more keeps to time well. She does a fab job of reinforcing the key themes of day 1 and day 2 which is always welcome!

Over dinner I enjoy the chance to get to know some of the participants better. However, jetlag kicks in and I'm struggling with it so I retreat to my bed.

Wednesday

Day 2 is more to the clients design and sees the participants forming working groups which they will work in on projects outside of the workshop sessions. Through observing how this happens we start to learn a lot about the client and our participants – valuable insights to gain at this stage of the programme. The workshop ends well, although the venue clearly needs to get its act together on the accommodation side. Looks like it needs to go on my

venue development programme – I have had some success in the past working with venues to help them understand more fully our needs and work together in a constructive relationship of I'm OK, You're OK feedback – often with a “fierce conversation” thrown in!

A quick debrief, the client is delighted and thinks we are fabulous. It becomes a bit of a mutual appreciation society as we have enjoyed their openness and flexibility a lot during the design phases – they've given us lots of space to be creative. I head home on a bit of a high, and hugely relieved to have had a successful first workshop. Sing-a-long Nutini all the way home.

Great to get home and see my children. The younger two are still very sad and in mourning over their guinea pigs. Lots of hugs and tears.

Thursday

A day off. I work a part time contract with Berkshire which allows me to take a day off most weeks in term time and most of the school holiday dates. Time for a haircut and a chance to get on top of things at home.

Friday

I'm in London for an action learning set with a group on another leadership programme. This group are doing brilliantly – this year we experimented with moving feedback and coaching skills modules forward in the programme so that the skills could be used more explicitly during the action learning sets. It's worked a treat. The group blow me away with the quality of their observations and questions. No “advice dressed up as a question” here! They've really come on over the 6 months and its fab to hear their stories and see how their confidence and effectiveness has grown. They are really starting to lead now.

I fall asleep on the train home but thankfully wake up before my stop. It's been a couple of busy weeks. I reflect on how lucky I am to be able to do work I really love with great colleagues, and great clients.