**Be the Change**

**by Lorraine McBeath**

Linda arrived early, one, because she didnae really ken far she wis gan and, two, because she’d bin awak aa night worryin aboot it. She hated training courses!

She got aff the bus fan she saw a dismal industrial estate in the distance oer the railway line. She wakked through a car park, doon a path that led to mair car parks filled wi flash cars, past bleak blocks, concrete and corrugated containers o folk, glaid it wis Friday. It wis startin to drizzle, she could feel her hair frizz, and she wished she’d wore a coat instead o her jacket. A sign read ‘Drillbit Drive’, she realised she wis close. The name wis devoid o imagination and she could feel her hairt thumping at the thocht o fit lay aheid. On the right she spotted a big shiny sign ‘TRV’ – this wis it! Maybe she could jist keep on wakkin, pretend she wis nae weel, phone her boss and explain, but instead she heided for the door. She telt hersel jist tae get on wi it, she didnae need to spik or tik part, just listen, write doon a few notes tae please her boss and come hame. One day, that’s aa it wis.

A blonde receptionist wearin a reid jumper wi a sequined robin on it asked her to sign in, noting she wis early. Linda looked in her bug for her ain pen, but the lassie shuvved een oer the coonter. ‘You haven’t filled in your car registration’, she said loudly, even though there wis naebody else gan aboot. Linda started to explain she didnae hae a car, but the quine wisnae really listening as a guy wi an American accent approached. Naebody came on the bus to these places, maybe an office junior or somebody that worked in the print room, hooever, it usually wisnae lang before they hid a car wi their ain personalised number plate and they’d smugly drive by the bus stop and never gie onybody a lift.

Funcy leather sofas and huge plants in huge pots filled the reception area and fit Linda like tae ca ‘corporate’ art. Heilan coos, stags heids, some local landscapes, and the usual photos o oil rigs. A massive squiggly splash o colours in a thick black frame hung above een o the sofas, somebody obviously pretending they hid some knowledge o Art, but Linda kint fine they didnae hae a clue! She sat doon an wis suddenly aware o her dump claes, weet feet and frizzy hair. Mair folk were arriving, and she searched desperately for a friendly face, a kindred spirit, somebody that looked as oot o place as she felt. Two o her chums were booked on the next course, there wis only two guys fae her office on this een, Andy and Geoff. She hoped tae avoid baith o them. Jist wi that thocht, she glunced oot the big window and spotted Andy McHardy parking his new car. Her hairt sunk as she watched him bounding across the car park using his briefcase as an umbrella an huddin a bright blue ring binder under his airm. Andy loved training courses, onything that involved spreadsheets, ordering stationery, bossin folk aboot and telling lang boring stories. Geoff wis wi him, wearing jeans, and a AC/DC t-shirt stretched oer his big beer belly under his parka. Geoff’s favourite phrase wis ‘bin there got the T-shirt, mate’, he said it aa the time. Linda wondered if he’d actually bin tae an AC/DC concert and got the t-shirt. She also spotted the bright white trainers a mile aff, they didnae seem to hae a logo o ony kind and just looked sad. She skulked beside a spider plant staying oot o sight.

Two big doors opened and anither lassie wi a bright green jumper wi bells on signalled tae come through. A lang narra corridor led to a door wi an A4 paper sign ‘BE THE CHANGE’ in Comic Sans, slightly off centre. A chubby guy wi glaisses wis spikkin to anither lassie wearin a pink fluffy jumper wi Rudolf on it, as she put notepads and pens on every table. Linda surveyed the room wi nae view takkin in the predictable paraphernalia o the training course. Flip charts, hi-lighter pens, black markers, yellow post it notes, a tray wi cups, an urn, a big jar o Nescafe, a Tupperware tub o teaspoons, a sma bug o sugar, a box o tea bags and two kinds o milk, green tap and blue. The obligatory sweeties on each table to encourage participation. The room wis freezin but would nae doot start tae warm up wi aa the brain stormin, mind mappin and hot air comin oot abody’s mou.

Naebody was sitting doon, abody getting coffees and teas, chatting and laughing like they hid kint each ither for years. Linda spotted one other lassie, she was flicking her hair and laughing loudly wi the chubby guy wi glaisses. Fit wis it wi wimmin in the Oil Industry? Nae sisterhood avva, Linda thocht tae hersel. This wis thoroughly depressing. She started thinking of how she could fint, suddenly fa doon withoot obviously really hurting hersel and she wid hiv tae ging hame. Jist as she started to think how best tae dee it, the chubby guy wi glaisses said ‘Hi folks, I’m Gary’, laughed, pushing his glaisses up his nose ‘Your guru for today!’ Oh god, it wis time for torture. ‘Going to take a quick register folks and get you into groups’. Linda looked doon at her feet, praying to God that Gary the Guru hid put Geoff and Andy in anither group. ‘The theme is confectionery, so when I call your name and your sweetie, can you go and sit at that table?’ said Gary, chuckling and fiddling wi his tie. Linda’s heid wis dirling as Gary listed names and sweeties. The Liquorice Allsorts were seated chatting and laughing, the Sherbet Fountains were next up takkin their seats, the ither lassie brushed past Linda takkin her place next to the Wine Gums. Linda was feart to look up, her name wis read oot along wi Andy, Geoff and the ither Jelly Babies. Laughing at some cartoon he put on the big screen, Gary took his place at the flip chart at the front, big black marker in hand. Linda stared straight aheid oot the thin strip o window at the grey splodge o sky, the colour matching her mood.

The bit that Linda dreaded wis aboot tae happen, she’d dreamt aboot it aa night, felt sick at the thocht o it. ‘We’re going to do a couple of Ice Breakers, guys, just to get to know each other’. Linda wid hiv rither gin intae a giant freezer and broke ice wi her bare hands than play games wi a bunch o strangers plus she didnae wint tae get tae ken onybody. ‘Ok, guys, with your neighbour, tell each other your favourite sweet and why’, said Gary as he squeezed himself in wi the Wine Gums. For a split-second Linda thought o her favourite sweetie but couldnae get Fox’s Glacier Mints oot her heid, the Polar Bear, surely the OG o Ice Breakers. Nervous laughter roon the room as folk swivelled towards each other. Linda turned to face Andy wintin tae greet as he launched intae the tale o the first time he got a Soor Ploom fae his Granda, listing sweeties and stories stretching back to the sixties. He wis still spikkin fan the next bit of ice needed brakkin and Linda wis paired wi Tim. They hid tae dee some hand clapping exercise that they kept getting wrang, despite Andy butting in wi instructions. Still clapping, Tim’s hands cal and clammy, closed in mid-air as Gary interrupted wi the dreaded PowerPoint Presentation. ‘Now for the important stuff’ he said stepping forward and twiddling wi his tie. Did he really believe this wis important? A heap o folk in their forties, fifties and sixties stuck at the back o beyond in an industrial estate playing games.

**‘Be The Change’** AR Hermann, possibly the worst font tae read, orange on a brown background. Graphics was obviously not one of Gary’s strengths, however you could tell he wis chuffed wi it! The ‘a’ in Change was an ‘o’ which he apologised for, makkin a joke about being French or posh or both. ‘My daughter Lisa was meant to proofread these!’ Abody laughed but Linda. ‘What do we mean by this? I hear you ask’, he paused, although naebody was asking. ‘What change can we bring to our workplace?’ He coughed, pushed his glaisses up his nose and started. ‘By the end of today I want…….’ Linda glanced at her watch, twenty to ten, oors o torture lay aheid. She hid tae get a birthday card for her niece; she reached for a pen to write on the back of her hand and noticed Andy scribbling doon notes already. ‘By the end of today I want *you*to be the change for your company. Right guys, meant to say there will be a printout of this presentation available and I’ve emailed it to each of you’. Ok, Linda thought, so why did we have to trek to Drillbit Drive?

There wis nae point in askin fit he meant by ‘change’, the hail day wid be spent waffling, the room getting warmer, bins brimmin wi sweetie wrappers. Wis Gary fae Yorkshire, Lancashire, maybe even Liverpool? He wis English, that wis for sure, he sounded like Geoff who actually hidnae telt onybody that he’d bin there an got the T-shirt yet, but gie it time. ‘I want suggestions on what you as individuals can do to make changes in your companies’, he cleared his throat. ‘Stay in your groups and create a mind map. My wife Beverley loves mind maps; she uses them in our house all the time’, Gary took a seat smiling thoughtfully. Linda actually felt a bit sorry for him. ‘What are we going to watch on Netflix? – mind map; where do you want to go on holiday? – mind map; what do you want for tea? – mind map. She can’t get enough of them’. Linda imagined them aa in their kitchen in some Barratt hoose in the North of England wi a Flip Chart, Gary in one of those jokey aprons and Beverley with marker in hand. ‘My son Paul likes to line up all the markers in different colours for each of the topics, he gets really angry if she keeps using the same colour’, he laughed. ‘He’s autistic, you see’.

Ten o clock, first mind map o the day!!! Linda wis first wi the pen, writing meant nae spikkin in her book and she wis certain that Andy would hae enough tae say. In fact, Linda wis determined to keep quiet, ony time she made suggestions somebody would claim it as theirs and present it to some big cheese at anither meeting and before you knew it they were being lauded and getting an award o some kind. A guy wi a reid fleece wi ‘Rab’ printed on it spoke first ‘I feel I could improve communication in our office’ he leaned towards Linda, pointing to where she should start writing. ‘Everyone uses a different mode of communication, it’s a nightmare’. He pushed his sleeves up revealing smooth hairless airms. The wye he said ‘nightmare’ made Linda wint tae giggle, but this wis serious stuff. ‘I think I would like to see everyone in the office included in making decisions from the cleaner to the chief executive’ said Tim. Linda thought o the decisions the cleaner might mak, mair pay for starters, naebody allowed tae mak a mess, big bottles o Cif, loads o cloots and a polisher ye can ging back and fore wi. She wrote doon the suggestions, feeling Andy breathing doon her neck, but just like that, Gary pit up anither slide.

**‘Think Outside The Box’** He’d chosen anither font and anither colour scheme, ‘Bauhaus 93’ yellow on dark green. ‘This one always gets people, so don’t over think it guys’, said Gary helping himself tae a sweetie. ‘My son Paul was told at his nursery “Don’t put anything down the toilet”, of course he shit on the floor!’ Gary took his glasses off and wiped them chuckling to himself. ‘He is autistic and takes everything literally, so try to think about things from different points of view’. Fiddling wi his tie, Gary stepped forward ‘In your groups do some brainstorming on this and in about fifteen minutes we’ll stop for a break’. He looked at the door far the quine wi the Rudolf jumper stood counting abody. ‘Donuts are on their way!’, he shouted, winking at the lassie. Yellow stickies lay oer the table and folk started writing things doon. A tall skinny guy wi a washed oot blue sweatshirt started spikkin aboot coming at things fae a different angle and how he had worked in the States for years and every week they had the Mad Monday Meeting. Andy piped up, ‘Is this like Blue Sky Thinking?’ A big guy wi dark curly hair and a bright reid face said ‘Yes, sort of, you’ve got to have some imagination in your approach and not always go for the tried and tested route’. ‘Oh, I love this sort of thing’, Andy said, getting oot his blue ring binder, ‘I’ve got tons of ideas on various approaches’. Linda wondered if he’d written doon ony o her ideas. That’s the kind o person Andy wis.

‘I can’t get them donuts out of my head,’ said Geoff, ‘What box does he mean?’ Each o the Jelly Babies looked at him, even Linda stopped and raised her pen, but luckily the donuts had arrived. The quine wi the Rudolf jumper had of course miscalculated, and she was five donuts short. A few folk were running a marathon the next day and didnae wint een, the ither lassie wis on a special diet, Andy had brought his ain fine piece, the ithers decided to go halfers. ‘We’ll take a break for a bit and get back in about 10 for the next section’, said Gary, donut in hand. Linda’s feet were freezing, although her heid felt roasting. She made for the table wi the coffees and teas, but, realised she’d hiv tae spik tae somebody, so decided to go for a pee instead. Fan she got back maist folk were seated, the Wine Gums and Liquorice Allsorts were mingling wi each ither, and some o the Sherbet Fountains were standing at the front wi Gary. Linda heard him telling them he wis biding in a hotel in the City Centre and hid tried some local delicacies the night afore. The barman wis fae Manchester and they knew some o the same places and baith shared a love o Real Ale, Gary indulging mair than he should hiv. His heid wis a bit fuzzy the day and that’s why he hid tae keep sitting doon. Gary, pale pink and pudgy wi donut crumbs on his belly, stood up, made his way to the flip chart and turned the page.

‘Ok, peeps, hope you enjoyed your donut’ he wiped the crumbs from his shirt ‘I certainly did’. He stood up, giggling to himself again, ‘Have you guys ever tasted Cullen Skink or something called “skirlie”? Lisa, my eldest always tells me when I’m travelling, I must sample the local cuisine, especially in Scotland! She’s been brave enough to have one of those deep-fried Mars Bars’. Folk started chatting at their tables and a couple o them shouted oot ither suggestions for Gary to try. Linda tried to discreetly look at her watch, twenty-five to twelve, two mair sections to go and a lunch break, maybe they could be finished early, she could catch the shops for some Christmas presents. Gary was explaining that he had misheard the name and thought it was soup made from a Skunk. He thought that was hilarious and rocked back and forth giggling, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. He had thoroughly enjoyed the soup and the skirlie. He had called Beverley from the restaurant, instructing her to google the recipe and they would all try it when he got home, even Paul, who didn’t like to try new things. Linda started dreaming - maybe there would be a mind map for all things Scottish, Paul passing a different coloured pen to his mum.

**‘Build Relationships.’** Anither font and anither coloured background, this time ‘Broadway’ pale green on dark blue. ‘This may seem simple as we do it all the time’ said Gary looking round the room, ‘But, do we?’ He started explaining how we should have time for all our colleagues, remembering to say, ‘Good Morning’ and enquire if they had a good weekend. ‘We should build up our knowledge on their families and observe details’ he said looking quite serious. Linda felt guilty; she kint she nivver asked Andy aboot his weekend as she widnae get ony work deen for aboot an oor. She didnae ask Geoff either as he did the same thing every weekend, but still telt her aa aboot it, often right fae the point he left the office on the Friday! She kint Geoff hid a partner caad Amanda, she wis intae Heavy Metal and they wid baith ging tae gigs. Amanda hid a wee loon Ryan, that loved Taekwondo, Marvel movies and gan tae McDonalds. Andy’s wife wis Carol and she wis a runner, constantly exercising, wild swimming, deein Pilates and yoga. Onything tae get awa fae Andy. Andy wis intae wines and could bore ye wi the details, the grapes, the years, the vineyards, it should have been interesting, but nae fae Andy. Hid ony o them ever asked Linda fit she did at the weekend? Mair yellow stickies were passed roon for suggestions on building relationships. Linda didnae bother writing onything doon, naebody would notice.

‘Ok, folks we’re going to play a little game before lunch’ said Garry clearing some space on a table. He emptied a bag o Maltesers into a bowl and picked up a box o straws. ‘This game, believe it or not, actually appears in the Guinness Book of Records. In fact, I think Philip Scofield attempted it. We’ll see how each group gets on either blowing them down the table or making them hover by lying down and blowing keeping them in mid-air’, Gary said taking up his position. He held a stripey straw to his mou and took aim at a Malteser. Jist as he started to blaw, his face went fae bright reid to purple, then lilac, then grey as he fell tae the fleer. The Maltesers went skiting, the flip chart flopped, and Gary lay there on the carpet tiles like a giant toddler haein a nap amongst his toys. Silence spread throughoot the room as abody just sat starin. Then a crunch as Andy jumped into First Aider mode stepping on Gary’s specs as he checked for a pulse. Tim wis already dialling 999, somebody else ran to reception and the quine wi the Rudolf jumper appeared telling abody tae clear the space.

**‘Solution Focused’** appeared on the screen, reid on a yellow background, anither font, anither colour combo. Gary must have clicked a button as he fell revealing his last slide, Linda was the only een that noticed. The ither quine wi the green jumper wi bells on asked if a couple o guys could lift him on to a sofa in reception and she would pull some screens roon. Andy wisnae sure aboot this and consulted his blue binder o notes. The guy wi the ‘Rab’ fleece and the smooth airms offered tae help and he bent doon tae Gary wi a glaiss o watter. He actually opened his eyes for a second and the lassie with the flicking hair let oot a sigh o relief. ‘What about Beverley, his wife?’ she said quietly to the guy standing next to her ‘Somebody should call his wife or his daughter Lisa’. This message seemed to travel roon the room and doon the narra corridor as abody filed oot in a daze, abody muttering aboot Beverley, Lisa and Paul. Trying nae to look ahin the screen Linda heard the quine wi the Rudolf jumper ask Gary aboot his wife and fit number tae call. ‘I’m not married,’ she could have sworn she heard him reply. ‘Beverley?’ the lassie said questioningly. Linda went as close as she could to the screen, however, couldnae hear a response. Tim had the number o the Training Course provider and started to dial just as the ambulance pulled up. He telt them fit hid happened and could they inform his family. Tim’s expression changed as he repeated the names Beverley, Lisa and Paul.

Two paramedics entered, and Andy marched straight towards them ready to report, blue binder open and pen in hand. They moved a screen to one side and Linda glimpsed Gary, nae quite the Guru, pale and pudgy, shirt undone, lying on the leather sofa, while the quine fae reception held a glaiss o watter, the sequins fae her jumper reflected in the glaiss. The screen was pulled back and the paramedics set to work occasionally asking Andy for some mair information. Andy wis absolutely lapping this up. Tim wis trying to digest the information fae the phone call to Gary’s boss and pass on his confusion tae abody else. It wis starting tae look like Beverley, Lisa and Paul possibly didnae exist, but surely that wisnae right. Een o the paramedics spoke quietly tae the quine wi the green jumper wi bells on, much to Andy’s annoyance. The screens scraped back, Gary was lifted on tae a stretcher, his broken glaisses balanced on his nose and carried tae the ambulance, while aa the Sweetie groups gawped. Folk put on their jackets, coats and scarves and dawdled ootside.

The three quines wi the Christmas jumpers, the Robin, Rudolf and the Bells sat on a waa like wallflowers at the school dunce illuminated on and off fae the light o the ambulance makin twirly patterns. The sna fell silently, and Drillbit Drive cloaked in white took on a strange beauty. The four sections stuck like a surreal dream in Linda’s mind – **‘Be the Change’**, Gary had certainly done that, he’d physically changed colour, he’d gone fae stunnin spikkin tae sprawling in silence. **‘Think Outside The Box’** – he made up aa them ice breakers, the sweetie groups and as for **‘Build Relationships’** he’d practicallyinvented a hale faimily for himself, a wife fa loved mind maps, a proof-reading daughter and an autistic son who made sure he didnae pit onything doon the toilet. **‘Solution Focused’** wis the lastsection for us. Wis it aa part o a performance and we hid tae find the solution? Wis Linda the only een tae see the slide? Oh my god, fit if the worst wis tae happen? Linda could see the next slide ‘Death on Drillbit Drive’.

Light heided and dizzy fae nae lunch, Linda put on her jacket as the ambulance disappeared fae view. Trying to mak sense o the day she started wakkin to the bus stop fan she overheard Geoff spikkin tae een o the Wine Gums wearing a smart grey coat and tartan scarf. He was explaining that he hid a heart attack a few years ago while on holiday in Spain ‘Bin there got the T-shirt, mate’, he laughed, zipping up his parka as he headed for Andy’s car, his trainers as white as the sna.