

FUTURE



Fit

How to Stay
Relevant and
Competitive
in the **Future**
of Work

ANDREA CLARKE

Introduction by Bernard Salt AM

Praise for *Future Fit*

“Andrea Clarke has given us such a gift with this book. She shows us how to turn vulnerability into a strength, adversity into resilience and the rapidly changing challenges of a modern work world into opportunities to seize. And she does so with an engaging, hilarious and crisp to-the-point writing style that makes you feel like you are chatting with her over a coffee. It is rare for me not to be able to put a book down, but that was my experience with *Future Fit*. And as I navigate my career or just need a boost of confidence, I’ll rely on her wise words for years to come.”

Laura Capps, Speechwriter for President Bill Clinton

“Overwhelmingly refreshing in insight and simplicity, Andrea provides a roadmap for the confusion of the eternal ‘future of work’ question, through thrilling and brilliant storytelling. Funny, overwhelmingly honest and relatable, I found this book a satisfying and entertaining read on feeling more in control of the future to come.”

Alicia Stephenson, Director, Generational Dynamics, Incorp

“Andrea takes us on a journey where we realise that we own our future and it’s time to take action and not be a bystander. *Future Fit* equips you with enough exercises for a thriving career for you, and those who role-model your behaviours. It’s a true force multiplier to embrace uncertainty.”

Dominic Price, Futurist, Atlassian

“This is truly an incredible read for CEOs and leaders who know that closing the human skills gap will spark the innovation needed to stay competitive and pursue new market opportunities. Andrea takes readers on a journey that helps build comfort and excitement about the future of work.”

Jacinta Jones, Chief Customer Officer, RollitSuper

“As a foreign correspondent and in-demand corporate trainer, Andrea has a unique insight into how businesses around the world operate. She’s observed leaders who’ve looked ahead, swiftly adapted and succeeded as a result. This book is a clear guide of how it’s done. It’s clever and fast-paced. *Future Fit* is for anyone who doesn’t want to get left behind.”

Mia Greves, Corporate Communication Professional

“Clarke’s inspiring and passionate storytelling combines practical and actionable advice for women and men that you won’t be able to put down.”

Tim Fawcett, Head of Government Affairs, Cisco

“Many parents ask me what they can do to help guide their children to future opportunities. From now on I’m going to tell them to read *Future Fit*. The future can be created, and Andrea’s work neatly summarises the keys to future success.”

Dr Catherine Ball, Scientist and Entrepreneur

In *Future Fit*, Andrea Clarke tells not just her story but also tells a story of resilience, of skill acquisition and of how to deal with intimidating situations in the workforce. Here is a book of practical advice on how to navigate the future of work when you don’t quite know what the future holds.”

Bernard Salt AM, The Demographics Group

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The idea for this book came out of a very confusing session on blockchain, so to my Silicon Valley travel pal, Philippa Huxley, thank you for being as excited about the future of work as I am – I still don't know what blockchain is so can you explain it to me one more time...?

My only intention with this book is to get you thinking.

Foreword

Get comfortable with the idea of change

In some ways it is the biggest question of our time in history. How do I remain relevant in a rapidly changing world and workplace? Some say the answer is education; others say it is being adaptable and resilient. I think the development of ‘people skills’ is an important part of the whole remaining-relevant story.

It’s almost as if modern workers, and employers, are looking for a single quality to remaining relevant. Yet, as with most things in life, maybe the answer is more complex. What if the way to make workers relevant to the future of work is different for every worker? This more nuanced approach would require an understanding of the bigger forces shaping society as well as a kind of manual to help workers remain focused on how to be fit for the future of work.

Let’s begin by looking at how the world of work, and the world more generally, has changed and is changing. From there we’ll discuss solutions and strategies to overcoming skill gaps. What workers really need is an understanding of the bigger picture, evidence of the skills that might be needed in the future, and practical advice about how to manage all-too-familiar workplace situations.

How has the world of work changed?

It seems like the pace of social and economic change has quickened over the last decade, and especially in Australia. The local car-making industry, for example, has been reimaged

by globalisation of the manufacturing process. The governance and the ethics of the banking industry have come under intense scrutiny, prompting calls for a change in culture and in regulation.

The mining industry is now less labour-intensive than it was even a decade ago; it has evolved into a highly mechanised transport and logistics business. These bigger-picture forces have also applied to agribusiness, although in this sector the immediate focus seems to have been the need for economies of scale via farm aggregation.

Profound social and technological change is evident across most facets of modern life. The use of cash – actually handling notes – seems ‘messy’ and less hygienic than clinically tapping payment, as we like to do today. The beloved ink-ridden newspaper – especially the broadsheet variety – has been weakened, and some say terminally so, by the rise of online news sources.

And then there is the landline which is, apparently, all but dead. (Note to today’s teenagers: a landline is a telephone handset that was attached by a line fixed to a wall or to a skirting board within the family home. No, really.)

Postal mail, let alone truly archaic concepts like the aeroplane and the telegram, as well as fax machines and even answering machines have been consigned to a period of time with a start date and an end date. Black and white television might have started in Australia in 1956 but it began to be superseded with the arrival of colour TV from 1975 onwards.

No one queried the effects of this new technological marvel on the television-making workforce at the time, but perhaps this was because it was seen as an exciting new product. No one was ‘disrupted’ by colour television, and indeed its arrival merely prompted a new all-round heightened consumerism.

Music was once committed to pressed vinyl, then it was committed to cassette tape, then to compact disk (CD) and from there it was streamed and shared as it is today. The entire transition of the way music was consumed took place between the 1980s and the early 2000s. And yet its effects have been wider and more substantive than, say, the introduction of colour television.

Artists needed to realign their management interests and creative output away from recording companies (such as EMI) and towards global technology businesses (such as Apple). The transition wasn't neat and efficient; it played out messily and over a decade or more. Some artists seized the moment whereas others proved to be laggards.

But eventually the pathway becomes clear. Streamed music is a better product – meaning it is more convenient and accessible – than a vinyl record. Bigger farms offer better economies of scale than smaller farms. Cars made in China can be produced and shipped to Australia more cheaply than they can be manufactured in Australia. And tapping a credit card is a faster and more frictionless method of conducting a transaction than accessing, carrying and passing over the required amount of cash. I suspect that not only has the landline disappeared from the family home but so too has the plastic ice-cream bucket with stored coins.

The point of this is that 'change' has been part of the way we have lived and worked for a generation or more. But something changed in the way things change, about a decade ago. The world is now more globally connected via trade. Corporations are even more inclined to take on a global perspective: what works in America is likely to work in Australia or the UK, for example. Cheap air travel means that the middle class in both the West and in developing countries can and do travel.

Consumers and workers are increasingly exposed to wider influences from leading economies such as those of the US, Japan, Europe and China.

The Chinese middle class aspire to elements of the Western lifestyle including owning high-end branded goods, drinking red wine, eating dairy products and even beef. New Yorkers discerningly eat sushi just as the average Australian can now master chopsticks. In a global world where ideas, fashion, technology and corporations move seamlessly from place to place it is logical that both the present and the future belong to the skilled, to the agile and to the resilient.

Change has always been part of everyday life. The difference today is that the pace of change has quickened, and its impacts are wider reaching. The demise of the car-making industry in Australia created unemployment among those with tool-making skills but it accelerated demand for transportation, logistics and warehousing functionalities.

There are fewer farm labourers today than there were a generation ago but there is greater demand for niche growers (consider the demand for bok choy and pak choi, for example) and for value-added processing. It is also possible that in the future Australian farm produce could be shipped fresh via expanded regional airports into Chinese markets as is currently the case at Toowoomba's Wellcamp airport.

Between the last two Australian censuses the job that lost most workers was the role of secretary, down 19,000 positions. The reason is clear enough. Over the last decade, senior management has learnt how to type. Even the Chief Executive Officer and the Chairman of the board of directors now communicate via self-typed email. There is no need for a memorandum to be dictated, *Mad Men* style, to a transcribing secretary.

As a consequence, secretaries have had to reinvent themselves as ‘office managers’ where they draw upon their typing skills, their IT knowledge, their HR expertise and their corporate experience to manage and to deliver the outcome of an efficient and an inspired workforce.

Overcoming the skill gaps

What is required of the secretary is the same as what is required of the retrenched tool-maker. They both need access to a vast and evolving job market that offers work as an office manager or perhaps as a warehouse manager or forklift driver. But there is something else that is required of these displaced workers and that is an inherent willingness to be retrained, as well as the social skills and the self-confidence to pitch for available work. This is not easy for some people and especially for those who have been in long-term jobs.

It is understandable that displaced secretaries as well as retrenched car-manufacturing workers might feel resentful about losing their jobs. But this is part of the overall challenge of reinventing yourself to surf the waves of change rather than to wallow and be swamped by the forces of change. These changes are being driven by global forces and by the fundamental consumer desire to live a better life, to live a frictionless life, a life that offers better value-for-money access to consumer goods and experiences. These are unstoppable forces.

Your role in this wider world of change is to remain upbeat, to retain social connections, to hone skills, to scan the horizon for opportunities and threats, and to understand that no technology, no workplace, no enterprise, no management structure can last indefinitely.

At various points, perhaps even at numerous points, in your working life you will have to reinvent yourself or at the very least

change the basis upon which you earn a living. It is unrealistic to rail against the forces of change. You need to get comfortable with change. You need to see how others have managed this process and to extract learnings and lessons.

And who better to tell you a powerful story of reinvention than former Washington D.C. television news correspondent, humanitarian aid worker and expert media trainer Andrea Clarke, who has built a nationwide corporate training business?

In *Future Fit* Clarke tells not just her own heart-pounding, gritty and at times laugh-out-loud funny story, but she also tells a story of extraordinary resilience, of skill acquisition and of how to deal with intimidating situations and people in today's workforce. Here is a book of practical advice on how to navigate the future of work when you don't quite know precisely what the future holds.

Bernard Salt AM

Preface

When robots ‘take our jobs’, what do we have left? A remarkable opportunity to be more ‘human’ than ever before. I believe firmly that the future of work is about being more connected to ourselves, our purpose and our power to do more meaningful work – everything that cannot be automated. It’s not about the technology – it’s about how we want to live, work and contribute to our communities.

As artificial intelligence is adopted into the workplace and traditional employee arrangements transform, we’re heading for a far looser, less structured work arena. For organisations, it means reimagining talent models and redefining business practices. For employees, it means understanding that the responsibility for finding, securing and delivering work is shifting to the individual in ways we have not seen before. While the fault line is clear, so is the opportunity: those who take ‘human skills’ to the next level will be powerfully differentiated in a dynamic new market. There is a multitude of human skills, but I have chosen to focus on eight: reputation capital, communication, adaptability, creativity, networking, leadership, problem solving and continuous learning. If we want to stay competitive, grow and prosper in our chosen fields then we need to invest in ways to develop these and take them to the next level, because they will each need to be applied in new ways as we move into a new environment.

This book will help equip you with a new kind of job security – the security we create for ourselves by investing in our own

capability. I'm going to explain and explore the tactical tools that will help you become invaluable to your current employer, capture emerging roles across your sector and create roles that may never be advertised on a job seeker website. These eight human skills will help us all lean towards change and become an asset to ourselves and the company we work for, instead of a liability. I'll help you avoid the fault lines, identify what you want to excel at and sharpen up your view of the workplace to see the vast opportunity that disruption presents to all of us. I'll help you be the person who is 'fit and able', regardless of the environment.

The trademark of my career so far has been not just showing up, but keeping up with change in myself and the businesses which I have been a part of: job loss when I least expected it, working in an industry that largely failed to adapt to shifting audience trends in real time, and navigating the sharp edges of starting a small consultancy business. In each career transition, there have been no safety nets. There has only been one constant – investing in myself to consistently add value to a business, maintain currency in the market and evolve intellectually.

Staying 'Future Fit' was driven by my own desire for growth. As it turns out, those skills which I have been delivering and teaching to emerging leaders now take on more meaning – they're the skills that can help us all accelerate into a future of work where we are more exposed and more responsible for our own path.

My wake-up call to staying Future Fit happened while I was on assignment in Iraq, which is where I want to take you now...

Andrea Clarke

www.careerceo.com.au



Bombshell in Baghdad

“Choose courage over comfort. And choose the great adventure of being both brave and afraid, at the exact same time.”—BRENE BROWN

“Stand by for a rapid descent!”

It’s not a phrase you ever dream of hearing, but it’s what I heard early in the morning of 28 September 2008 when I found myself sitting halfway down from the cockpit of a UN charter jet, flying into a war zone over Baghdad, Iraq. The adrenalin surging through me was explosive, when the 30-seat plane suddenly banked hard to the left and began a free-fall nosedive towards the scorching sands of the Iraqi desert.

I wish I could say the experience forced me to face some profound epiphany about life or our purpose on this planet, but it didn’t. My only reaction was to let out a scream of “Oh my God!”, as I prepared myself for the distinct possibility of a fiery death in a plane crash over Iraq.

Now, here’s the thing about an aircraft in the middle of a nosedive from 20,000 feet, the sound of the engine shifting gears to speed up and slow down is deeply alarming. This was

no standard commercial flight, where the pilot's job was to make the journey as smooth as possible. I was the only passenger on the dangerous hop from Amman, Jordan to Baghdad, but at no time on this flight did the pilot offer words of reassurance, which was seriously disconcerting.

With only the smooth sound of John Mayer playing through my headphones and my laser-focused pilot in front of me for company, I felt so alone. I watched the desert rush towards us and suddenly realised how a skydiver must feel, if the parachute fails to open. What I found strange (other than the obvious) was where a person's mind races when faced with such an unnerving experience. I found myself captivated by the lines that divided up the desert below. I was a sky-high witness to a desert puzzle. There I was, screaming vertically towards an active war zone, and I was curious about lines in the sand.

I started to reflect...

Under normal circumstances, I'm not even close to being afraid of flying. Quite the contrary: I love it. I grew up flying with my dad on many weekends and school holidays when I was a kid. My father ran a rapidly expanding business involving trucking haulage, so having a light aircraft was more of a necessity than a luxury for him in the early 1980s, when he needed to cover extreme distances around regional Queensland. Dad's first plane was a Cessna 172 – an American, four-seat, single-engine, high-wing, fixed-wing aircraft. Since we were too young to sit up front, my two sisters and I sat in the back seat, obeying Dad's one rule "no shenanigans". If we could have only followed this rule in life on the ground, I'm sure we would have made our parents (and each other) a lot happier.

A few years later Dad upgraded to a Cessna 182, before finally settling on the Cessna 210, to accommodate the increasing luggage of his three teenage daughters. ("Only pack what

you can carry” was a routine instruction, little did I know then that it would turn out to be a life mantra.)

We loved the new plane, not because of the size of it or because Dad flew it himself across the Pacific Ocean from Hawaii. We loved it because the wheels retracted after take-off. We all felt a deep sense of ease and adventure with flying, so I’ve never really shared the common fear of commercial aviation. That being said, nor had I ever been a passenger flying over a heavily monitored military airspace, dropping 20,000 feet in a matter of minutes.

Back to Baghdad

At the time of my descent, Baghdad International was the most heavily defended airport in the world. While I knew that – and thank God it was – there was still plenty to be concerned about. If you wanted to land in Baghdad in one piece, the landing must resemble a skydiving ‘halo drop’ – (a high altitude – low opening) jump from 25,000 feet – in an attempt to remain undetected. Insurgents were stationed right outside the protected airspace, armed with surface-to-air missiles, and perfectly willing and able to blow up civilian or military aircraft with a single shot.

The anxiety of the situation was real, so I switched to a Navy SEAL ‘box’ breathing technique to slow my heart rate – breathe in for four seconds, hold for four seconds and then exhale for four seconds. It’s incredibly simple and very powerful. When we take deliberate control over our breathing, we control our nervous system to bleed off excess stress. Beyond the obvious benefit of reducing angst, when you stack this with a positive vocal mantra (in this case: “I am completely safe”) it allows you to focus and conserve energy instead of haemorrhaging adrenalin that you’ll likely need.

As the ground raced up towards us and I feared the worst, I was suddenly pulled to the left. In an expert simultaneous manoeuvre, which made me think my pilot was a retired fighter pilot or a fighter pilot who was moonlighting for the UN, the pilot hit the air brakes and steered the aircraft into a tight downward spiral.

Normal landings can take miles to execute, but in a war zone you don't have the luxury or the time. Think of it this way: landing in such a small zone would be similar to trying to land your plane into a tall glass of water. Having a basic understanding of aviation, I knew that the spiral technique was the only way to come out of a nosedive without leaving the protected airspace.

When the spiralling moves finally ended, which felt like the hard banking of a roller coaster ride at an amusement park, my pilot pulled out of the rotation, levelled the nose of the aircraft and started our final approach. This might sound crazy, but final approach was more dangerous than nosediving 20,000 feet. At this airspeed, which was around 180 knots, we were at our most vulnerable. The faster the speed, the harder it is to hit us with a missile. So we were a slow-moving duck at the start of hunting season. If you're going to land at the world's most protected but dangerous airport ideally you do it as fast as possible.

My adrenalin levels were off the charts. I was instantly exhausted, as if I'd done a two-hour sprint on a treadmill. Then I heard the landing gear doors opening and the wheels lock into place. The screeching of the tyres as they hit the tarmac was the most comforting sound of this whole experience. We had made it. My father used to say any landing is a good landing, but this wasn't any landing. This was only the starting blocks of a very dangerous assignment.

Relief, momentarily

Baghdad International Airport had very strict rules about landing aircraft. Planes were not allowed to get too close to the terminal for a laundry list of terror-related reasons. We pulled to a stop over 100 metres away from the terminal. The “I’m safe now” relief of touchdown was swiftly replaced with the harsh reality of the situation: we were smack bang in the middle of an active war zone. Safety is a relative term when you’re standing on the tarmac, exposed to sniper fire. I’m ‘safe’, you know, compared to being embedded with a platoon of US Marines in the Iraqi province of Al Anbar, for example!

When the pilot finally cracked open the door, I felt a wave of searing desert heat roll through the empty cabin and hit me in the face. “Ah, yes... dry heat, thank God”, I remember thinking to myself and allowing my thoughts to wander... I cannot stand humidity. Everything is 100% harder in wet heat. A few years earlier, while in Cambodia with a non-profit group, I was shooting a story for CNN on unexploded land mines (which the mine-hunters subsequently found and enthusiastically exploded for my story), when I came to accept that I was far less fun in humidity. When the air is so dense it feels like a sauna and I lose part of my upbeat personality. I guess that makes me normal. I know this about myself. So, for the most part, I’m happy to be met with dry heat. Scared, but happy in this micro-window of a moment.

I took the deepest breath on personal record and snapped my seat belt free. The pilot extracted himself out of his seat. He looked like he’d had a rough time of it as well. His shirt was loosely tucked in and he looked tired. Or maybe this is what you always look like when you’re running Amman-Baghdad return routes every day. All you can do is hope for the best, maintain situational awareness and prepare (mentally) for the worst.

As a rule, I think it's really important to talk to pilots and express gratitude for their skills, which is exactly what I did. "Hey mate, thanks for that," I said. "Oh shit," he shot back with a very broad Australian accent, which particularly stands out on a tarmac in the Middle East. "You're an Aussie! Sorry about that dive, but I was pretty keen on dodging a group of local militia stationed just over the rise there on the edge of the runway, waiting to have a go. A rocket propelled grenade launcher up the ass doesn't make for a proper landing."

"Um, nice work," I said, smiling back at him. I kept my "Oh my Gods" to myself as I stepped down the rusted steps, which I was pretty certain had been dragged across the desert during the first Gulf War in the early 1990s.

Welcome to the war zone

I kept calm and carried on as I walked towards the customs hall. I was hoping it was air-conditioned as the sweat began to instantly express out of my forehead. When I opened the door, I walked into what I could only compare to a giant, rundown hot yoga studio.

I immediately scanned the scene and realised I was the only female in the sparsely populated room. You can imagine how nervous this made me feel, so I pretended to be reading my briefing folder as I walked, trying to look very busy, very focused – not a target for kidnapping at all.

I've been told throughout my life that I have a severe and somewhat intimidating 'resting bitch face', so I fully engaged it as a defence tactic. "No one was going to mess with me in this customs hall", I said quietly to myself.

I silently handed my passport to the customs officer and hoped he didn't expect me to speak Arabic. I was super-fluent in one statement only: "Hi there, please don't shoot me".

My instructions were to look for the five security guards who would escort me to the compound. Looking across the room, I saw a team of former UK Special Forces guys draped with AK-47s, grenades and handguns. Scooping up my bag, I couldn't help but notice they were the best-looking group of men I had seen in a while. I can't lie. "This trip just got exponentially better," I remember thinking to myself, any thoughts to distract me from my new reality were welcome.

They were not, however, in the mood for any light-hearted banter or jokes from a young, single Aussie aid worker. Their job was to keep me alive, after all. As a result, they swiftly escorted me through the airport, across a road and into an underground parking garage. On our way there, it was impossible to ignore the bullet holes in every wall. Every single wall was clearly target practice.

Security detail

After an abbreviated security briefing in the searing heat of the underground garage, I was handed a helmet, flak jacket and a burqa. A burqa? What exactly did they expect me to do with this? Noticing the quizzical look which overtook my face, the tallest of the team leaned forward to inform me that I needed to wear it if I wanted to avoid being kidnapped and held for ransom. "You wouldn't last 30 seconds on the street," he said.

"Really?," I thought to myself. The gravity of the situation just got a whole lot clearer.

As for being ambushed while stopped in traffic, the game plan was made clear: "Don't move, if we get boxed in by militia, stay where you are - we'll handle it". My 'outside' voice could not help itself, muttering: "You bet you'll handle it, I'm the only one standing around this entire war zone without a loaded AK-47, four grenades strapped to my chest and a back-up

semi-automatic Glock,” (I leaned forward and pitched my vocals up here), “which I have used before at an unidentified underground shooting range in Israel, but I won’t bore you with that right now. So yeah, boys, you’ll handle it, I’ll just sit in the back of the car while we’re under fire.”

I slowly crossed my arms for effect, highly animated rant over. They all looked at me. I expected some snappy comeback, but I got nothing. These guys were pros. All I got was poker faces. They were obviously trained to ignore highly strung mouthy females, as well as both Shia and Sunni militia. “I’m just saying, if someone wants to give me a gun, I’m cool with that. I do guns,” I declared. Silence. Precisely no arms were forthcoming. But a very strong Irish accent suggested: “OK, I think we’ve covered everything here, let’s move out.” “Yes, exactly, let’s move out,” I mumbled as I nodded. I reminded myself that this was a war zone. Burqa on head – check. Working for an international aid group – check.

Arrived safely in Iraq – check. It was time I got myself on task.

Home from home

I sat silently in the back right-hand side of the armoured 1985 500 SE Mercedes as we navigated the road between the airport and the compound. We were in the middle of a five-car convoy, with two vehicles ahead of us and two behind. The cars in front were the advance team. The reason for them was if there was a roadside bomb, they’d connect with it first. The team behind us would come to the rescue. This was the theory, mind you. When does anything ever go as planned in a war zone?

We were travelling at warp speed and must have clocked 150 mph as we raced past the blown-up, blown-out wrecks of cars, trucks and other disfigured objects. Then a 10-car convoy,

with lights and sirens, whizzed by us. They were slippery clean, jet black Chevys. “Let me guess, they’re State Department?”, I piped up, sarcasm in full flow. “They like to keep a low profile,” said one of the guys. Everyone roared with laughter.

When we arrived at the compound, I was quickly shown to my room by a six-foot-five Chief of Security. Someone told me he was former MI5 – I had no reason to think otherwise. He was a serious operator. He told me how we would escape if the compound was overrun. “You need to get to the roof in less than 20 seconds, otherwise you’ll be locked down here.” He then swung open the kind of steel door there would have been on the Titanic, the sort that stopped megaton water breaches. “This is the door that you want to be on the right side of, if you hear the alarm, OK?” “Yes, that’s all very OK,” I thought.

“And not that it matters, but there’s no hot water here,” he added as a casual footnote. Rewind. Can we stay on this subject for another minute? “Like, you mean no hot water, ever? Not just between certain hours?”, I asked. “Not any hours. And the shower heads are broken, so you have to use a bucket,” he said. Since we were in a war zone and all, I let it go. As a general policy, I don’t start pointless arguments with people who can kill me with their bare hands, because it’s not like I just checked in at the Ritz-Carlton. “This is a war zone, Andrea,” I reminded myself, “so adjust accordingly.”

Living under stress

My objective in the following few weeks was to interview local Iraqis who had returned to restart their businesses after being given micro-finance grants from USAID (the United States Agency for International Development). These stories would form a business case for the same aid programs being extended.

This was a deeply insightful and rewarding project and it left me with three key lessons for effective teamwork in a chaotic and high-pressure environment. They became the same lessons that are directly transferable to any workplace and which I still teach to this day:

1. Get clear on the team's objectives.
2. Get comfortable with courteous confrontation.
3. Give everyone the chance to have a voice; the person who's manning the front gate might see something that saves a life, in this case.

There's no need to set an alarm in Baghdad's 'Red Zone'. Tragically, every day, workday or otherwise, began the exact same way – being awakened to the sounds of car bombings in the morning markets. The gunfire was constant and happening just over the wall of the compound in which I was stationed. Bizarrely, you got used to the gunfire. After about an hour, it was just background noise, like a lawnmower running up and down your neighbour's lawn. You just learnt to ignore it, because it was part of the environment.

On a less violent and more personal note, I was distressed by the number of starving and stray kittens I would see in the area. They would sometimes be separated from their mothers and would cry out for them. Even amidst the chaos, I found it heartbreaking.

The level of distraction was off the charts, so every day it was critical to simplify our objectives and stay on point. Every morning, my team and I ran through the checklist to keep us laser-focused and on task. It's a habit I maintain to this day.

Having a master list beside me all day, shortlisting tasks and hustling through to strike them off by 6pm is how I work. I don't finish my work day until my list of tasks has been zeroed

out. When you're clear of distractions and absolute about your objectives, there's no downward drag in the days that follow.

Life inside the aid workers' barracks was simple; sleep as much as you could and always next to a helmet and a torch. If the compound was somehow overrun, we could then find our way to the roof for extraction by the military. The reason for constant readiness was the militia launching rockets from behind the fence of the compound. Then there were the US helicopters on night patrols, sweeping across the roof every 20 minutes. The building would shake as they passed, so sleep patterns were easily broken.

All of this only added to a seriously tense environment. Sensing this, my camera crew and I agreed that if something bothered us, we'd put it on the table right away. The policy proved effective in reducing tension and increasing efficiency. Courteous confrontation builds trust and confidence and keeps everyone playing the 'outside game' instead of wasting time on any form of internal politics or unnecessary drama that might follow. No matter how intense an environment gets, never allow drama to undermine the spirit and cohesiveness of the team. If it does, there will always be a cost. That was something we could not afford.

Bribes and losses

During my time in Baghdad, I made a point of walking around the compound for meet-and-greets with the people in charge of the non-profit agency. On one particular occasion, I swung around the corner of a room in one of the buildings and saw a team of people scurrying about. Lined up along the left-hand wall of a large room was cash in the form of US dollars. Endless rows of greenbacks were piled from floor to ceiling.

I had an idea of what a bank vault might look like, but this was different. It was a startling sight. I had never seen so much money at one time in my entire life. There was easily US\$5m in my direct line of sight; probably more like US\$10m. Think about that for a moment: 10 million US dollars in cash. One of the staff members would later tell me that everyone there was paid in cash. “No doubt,” I replied. “It’s apparently everywhere.” Sure, I got that we were in a violent, active war zone, but the payroll arrangement did strike me as a little, well... loose. There were stacks and stacks of cash bound together with rubber bands. From what I could tell, there wasn’t any form of checks and balances, either, no cash-police and no extra security. Nothing? That’s quite a policy.

I was told that all bribes or losses were built into our budget. ‘Losses’ was a very loose term for theft. I was new to the non-profit world and the way they did business, so I held my tongue. However, I did find it a bit alarming.

I heard rumours about the annual staff retreat that was coming up. It was a huge financial spend that was held at a five-star resort in the state of Pennsylvania. When I asked my boss about it, I discovered that not only were we expected to spend three full days with our colleagues playing stupid team-building games, we were also going to be given iPods and other extravagant gifts. Worst of all, it was compulsory – there was no way to ‘opt out’ of the trip. I estimated the cost of sending 300 people to the resort to be around half a million US dollars. As it turns out, I underestimated by a long shot.

The entire experience with the non-profit and how they did business sent up red flags across the board. It wasn’t just the retreat, which was an obvious misspend, it was everything. The cost to move about in Baghdad was, at minimum, US\$5,000 or more. Five thousand US dollars for my team to take me to

Saddam's former palace – which had been taken over by the State Department (and set up as a massive ping-pong hall – no kidding). I had one meeting there and if I knew then how much it had cost, I would have picked up the phone and called someone instead. It was my most expensive ride on record, by a long way.

Let's not forget about the walls of cash and the lack of accounting. Every time I turned around, I saw inconsistencies and things that didn't stack up. I was already suffering from sleepless nights, and the added fear of being kidnapped, but this really got into my head. I wasn't a total idealist about the non-profit world, but I was on high alert for anything that could be fair game in the public's eye.

As the head of communication, it was my job to flag these types of concerns. Anything that could be a news story had to be raised with my boss. What I was witnessing was a laundry list of potentially career-ending headlines for the board and the CEO. I began writing an email to my boss, where I made it clear that waste, fraud or misappropriation of government funds would result in a reputational disaster for the company. It never occurred to me for a moment that I was looking at job suicide. I was literally typing up my own exit.

I had no idea what would happen next or how I would manage it, but it was nothing I would ever wish upon anyone who felt as though they were living out their dream job. It was the first in a series of lessons that I could ultimately use to help others recover from major career setbacks.

While the future of work looks different for all of us, the key survival skills are the same. In the following chapters I'll explain what these key skills are and how they'll help you develop a #FutureFIT approach. These are the skills that we're not formally taught in school, university or anywhere else along

the education journey, bizarrely. These are the skills that land us the job, keep us in the game and help us build long-standing relationships that can swing open new doors as our careers progress. We need to invest equally in these ‘soft’ skills as we do in the hard ones, because we’re entering a phase where the responsibility for finding, securing and delivering work is shifting to the individual in ways we have not seen before. And how we apply those skills will need to be different in each different environment.

This is the first chapter of *Future Fit* by Andrea Clarke, published by and available from Major Street Publishing. The full version of this book is available from all good bookstores and ebook-sellers.