

The loneliness of the long-distance woodturner

“Hello, is that Roger Bennett Woodturner?”

“Yes it is, Linda speaking.”

“Could you put me through to the sales department?”

“Sure. One moment, please.”

Click.

“Hello, Roger Bennett Woodturner sales department here. How may I help you?”

I tried that trick once, and once only because my acting ability is non-existent and I was immediately rumbled and whatever mega order the caller was going to place disappeared in an explosion of helpless laughter.

I can only imagine what it must be like to run a business with numerous members of staff and several departments. It must be pretty challenging, but it must also be so stimulating. All that collective energy, ideas pinballing, the noise of discussions and arguments and laughter. Water-cooler gossip, golf outings, team-building weekends ...

I do enjoy my own company. I am happy that I alone design, make, sell, market, pack and despatch, keep the books, do the accounts, do the repairs ... But I have to work so hard at being my own boss. Like in the current radio ad in which sole trader Jerry persuades himself that he should buy such-and-such a new van, I constantly yatter to myself – scolding, praising, cajoling, swearing. I give myself schedules, set targets, appraise my performance. The walls of my workshop are covered with post-its, endless lists of things to do, things to make, things to buy, deadlines, people to phone, to email. I have a whiteboard with a big fat marker for exhortations to myself: “Make more stuff!”, “Make new stuff!”, “Sell more stuff”, “Make more money”, “If you can't be ruthless be rutless!”

Roger Bennett