

# How I learned to go on strike

Karen Roem loses her faculties in Australia, her vision in Kuala Lumpur, and her free time to the tyranny of the self-employed diary

## Saturday 12 March

This week I've been mainly working Down Under. I was only training on Thursday and Friday; Tuesday and Wednesday were for my brain to turn up like lost luggage ... excellent opportunity to travel the Great Ocean Road, discovering the breath-taking coastline of South West Victoria. And with a seven-hour stop-over in Thailand on my way back today, Bangkok beckoned. But even with these two extra days, it seemed bonkers. Bruce Willis's character in *Armageddon* springs to mind ... 'Six billion people on the planet, why'd you guys call me?'

## Tuesday 15 March

Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally is a mnemonic to help me remember the mathematical order of operations. (Parenthesis, exponents, multiply, divide, add and subtract.) It's one I bring up when—like today—I'm explaining Excel formulas. It never fails to amaze me what course participants come up with when split in groups and asked to develop some type of memory aid about any of the topics learned. (Typically an after lunch exercise to raise energy levels.) Rhymes. Drawings. But my very favourite must be that F11 looks like a column chart (come on, use your imagination) and is the keyboard shortcut to quickly create a chart.

## Thursday 17 March

Today's training session takes me to a veterinary school. Before we start, one of the course participants tells me he has to leave half-way through the day. 'They'll bring a mouse with a lump on its back and I'll need to examine it.' Well, I've heard some excuses in my time, but this is probably the best.

## Tuesday 12 April

Friends often say to me 'I wish I could be my own boss like you.' Ha. OK, I do occasionally work from home in my jim-jams. But for every day I'm working for a client, the rest of my work piles up. That's why I'm on strike. Sort of. When the assignment to Brazil scheduled for this week fell through (don't ask), I decided not to take on any work. And I can assure you that, with not knowing where your next pay slip will come from, this isn't as easy as it may sound. I learned to say 'no' by simply putting the word 'no' on the days I wanted to keep for myself. But 'no' soon became 'no-ish' and, before I knew it, I was working 70 hours per week. Which is why this time I've written ON STRIKE. And having only accepted 1.5 days work this week, it kinda worked. So I'm



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joining the Be Your Own Boss Week in spirit and celebrate the decision I made to go it alone and be my own boss. With a morning swim. A facial. A reflexology session. When the going gets tough, the tough go on strike.

## Monday 2 May

Since last week's return from Shanghai, I have tested a new software release, prepped a course I'm due to run tomorrow and trained 15 super users. To me, however, this means I have nothing to write about. So kindly stop emailing to tell me my blog is out of date.

## Tuesday 10 May

Yesterday I woke up with blurred vision, yukky stuff from puffy eyes and light sensitivity. No, this wasn't some self-inflicted hangover ... the local pharmacist here in Kuala Lumpur suspected an eye infection and sold me antibiotic drops that were taken off the shelves in the UK over a

year ago. So this morning I walked into the classroom looking like a four-eyed cross between an iguana and Marty Feldman. During the break, one of my course participants explains the likely reason of the manifestations of this unfriendly bacteria ... Malaysia has three seasons: shine, rain and haze. According to my dictionary the latter is an 'atmospheric moisture, dust, smoke, and vapor that diminishes visibility'. Well, it sure diminished mine.

## Wednesday 18 May

The last time I was in an office that had a fire drill, we all had to walk down from whatever floor we were on and gather outside. Today, I experience a fire drill Texas-style. Just as we are about to start a new exercise the alarm goes off. We all scurry purposefully to the staircase. Four floors down (16 to go) we get told off for doing so. 'This is a drill. Do not use the stair wells,' intercom man announces. Turns out they never actually evacuate. All we have to do is stand in the corridor underneath the exit signs. (You can stop sniggering now.)

## Tuesday 24 May

Gotta bunch of smartypants in my class today, who answer all their own questions. 'See?' I say. 'You don't need me.' 'Oh, yes, we do,' one of them replies, '... for the key,' referring to the magic, charged-up device that turns the drinks machine into a free-for-all. Deep breath now.

Karen Roem is the founder of software training and support firm Roem Limited. Diary of a training consultant is an extract from Karen's Blog: [www.roem.co.uk/blog.html](http://www.roem.co.uk/blog.html)