

REPORT ON BUSINESS

POWER

You've heard about this thing called "status anxiety," right? That's when a colleague tells you about his fancy new care and it really irks you. Don't get mad - learn to play the game.

By Sarah Hampson

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Come on, admit it. You've read appointment notices of people the same age as you in the paper and felt the knife wound. They can ruin your day, can't they, those paper daggers? No? They didn't make you wonder how the hell he or she got that job and you're still where you are? You haven't noticed? Really? Well, never mind. You have had your mind on business. You're far too busy for such nonsense. Focus, they say, is everything.

Wait, come to think of it, you have been at a momentary loss of words when a colleague mentions, ever so casually, a new house purchase, an upcoming marriage or a renovation, a new car. Your smile was a little brittle, wasn't it? The congratulations a bit terse. It's true you have been thinking about getting that car everyone talks about, the one that promises to make you feel like a million dollars, even though you can't afford it. Not only that, you have even been lusting after a gold Rolex, because, well, that's what movers and shakers are supposed to wear. And you are a mover and shaker, aren't you?

It's called status anxiety, real and prevalent enough that someone has written a book about it. In *Status Anxiety*, Alain de Botton explores why our sense of worth has become dependant on what we have and how others see us. Blame it on the democratization of wealth and the high expectations of our generation. There's a sense that if you don't have all the things that are deemed important--and now there are more than ever before--then you're not smart enough or good enough. Corporate scandals aside, wealth, and the things it allows you to buy, are thought to be deserved, the result of hard work, creativity, intelligence, perseverance. Ergo, if you don't have them, you've failed somehow.

By the way, hasn't anyone noticed that the walkway from Union Station to the bottom of all the interconnected buildings is called the PATH? Who came up with that, anyway? Some subversive pencil-pusher who wanted to make the bitter point that to be successful on Bay Street there are regimented steps you have to take, certain things you have to do, places you have to go, words you have to say, behavioural patterns you have to adopt? Like, lighten up, man. Call it The Journey or something.

Oh, forgive me. This is a business story. The Journey suggests uncertainty; discovery of where you belong. The PATH promises a mapped destination, a bottom-line kind of goal. And truth be told, there are expected Bay Street manners. Casual Fridays may suggest a cult of the individual, but, beware, a metaphorical IBM blue suit reigns. Never speak about business in the elevators, for example. Others may be listening. "It's like people who pick their nose in the car. Do they forget there are windows?" one high-placed lawyer sniffs.

Another: Think checking in with your BlackBerry is multi-tasking? It speaks of anxiety. Are you worried something is going to happen without you? Plus, it's bad manners, especially if you happen to be wrapping up a meeting or a lunch with another client. And another thing: Forget eccentricity. It may make you feel less like a lemming, but it won't work for you, not unless you're rich enough for your behaviour to seem quaint. Allan Gottlieb, the former Canadian ambassador in Washington, used to drive a Toyota around town. Fine for him. He doesn't need to follow the PATH. He's already at the destination called Made It. He's an aesthete with rare books in his dimly lit, climate-controlled second-floor library, unusual antique furniture, including a cradle in his dining room, and a collection of art. Can't beat that, can you? Yup. Bay Street has expectations of you. It's a highly conditional culture. So embrace your status anxiety. You'll need it.

Demand a free parking spot in the garage under the towers at King and Bay. That's where you'll find proud attendants who have manned their console tables in their uniform jackets for years. They will politely help you back into your spot. They will lock up your keys. They will tell you not to worry, have a nice day, be happy, if you seem a little rattled. It's a hotel lobby down there, minus the fancy flowers. You feel obliged to tip.

If you're so inclined, go ahead, save money by parking over at Roy Thomson Hall. Get there before 9:30 a.m. and it's 10 bucks for the day. So you have to walk from the other side of University Avenue, where parking is more than \$20 a day. Which is why you want it as a perk. Make it part of your employment package. Oh, and something else to consider. It's not enough to have a spot. You want the best spot. Those are by the exits. The exit to the street and the exit to the stairs, leading to the building. Makes for a quick getaway. Time is money, you know. Oh yes, ladies and gentlemen, competition doesn't start at the bottom, but underground.

Steal time, not from your family, not from your job, only from sleep. It's 5:30 in the morning, and the gym at the Fitness Institute, in the penthouse of 79 Wellington St. W., is full. The day stretches in front of you. The city lies still. Anything seems possible. There's fatism on Bay Street, and it's more potent than ageism. A fit body is a sign you're on top of your game, that you pay attention to your well-being as much as you would a company's. And there's this little private knowledge: No matter what happens today, good or bad, nobody can take away from you the feeling of power, this high, this illusion of control. The view--36 storeys up--suggests supremacy. When the sky is clear, and you're running on the treadmill by the wall of west-facing windows, it feels as though you're skimming over the city's towers, surmounting it all.

A membership at the Fitness Institute, owned by the Cambridge Group of Clubs, costs \$1,250 in initiation and \$1,895 in annual dues. It's not the only Bay Street gym--there's the Adelaide Club, also Cambridge-owned--but FI is the best known and, more significantly, the only one with a name that suggests the body is a subject of higher learning. It's a culture of superlatives. The club's advertisements, seen on the PATH, tap into corporate-ladder mentality. "There's still room at the top," the headline promises, below a photograph of an athlete working out at the top of the building. There's a restaurant, Club 36, offering fine food. Executive chef David Ross, who has worked at many of the best restaurants in town--Auberge du Pommier, Splendido, and so on--was recently hired to add culinary clout. The club also offers a sports health clinic with two doctors on staff.

The large, spotless gym, where many Olympic hopefuls train, is a temple to the rational. Do this and you will achieve this, an easily understood maxim for the results-oriented professional. Yet, what's odd is the self-infantilization, the willing subjugation, inherent in working with a trainer. You do as you are told. Run faster. Do 10 more sit-ups. Lift 50 this time. One more set. Twist this way to work that precise muscle structure. Tasks are completed briskly, efficiently. A grey-haired man counts out his 100th pushup, and leaps to his feet for his next exercise. There's David Peterson, lawyer and former premier of Ontario, deeply involved with the elliptical machine. That's Robbie Pryde, who works at TD Securities, over there on the treadmill. There's Stephen Grant, a McCarthy Ttrault family law specialist, performing textbook sit-ups.

Steve Roest, the 36-year-old chief operating officer and executive vice-president of the club, exemplifies not only how others want to look--there's a Calvin Klein-like photograph of him on his office wall, with his toned, hairless chest--but also business self-help orthodoxy.

Born to Dutch immigrant parents, Roest was raised in Scarborough, Ont., in a middle-class home where no one had gone to university. He was encouraged to become a cop. But during a year he took off after high school, he was recruited by the University of Toronto football team. He studied physical education there, and in the early '90s was drafted by the Argos. After an injury ended his professional football career, he started two businesses. One was personal training, the other was Roadhouse Security--he ran a team of bouncers at downtown bars. After a few months, he concentrated more on personal training, having approached the Fitness Institute in 1992 to work, unpaid, as a personal trainer, just to demonstrate the benefits to potential clients.

Soon, he was training the top dogs, including Lawrence Bloomberg, former chairman and CEO of First Marathon; David Thomson, scion of the Thomson family and chairman of Thomson Corp.; Leo DelZotto, president of Tridel Corp.; and Peter Godsoe, former chair of the Bank of Nova Scotia. Roest works with athletes--he was the contracted trainer of the Toronto Raptors--which gives him street credibility and adds to his promise of high-performance workouts. Executives like his chutzpah.

The boyish father of two young boys does his job with undisguised glee. "You don't get old and stiff. You get stiff, then old," he will say, smiling. He had the big decision-makers, one on one, for at least an hour. He told them his dreams. They encouraged him. He listened carefully to any advice they offered. In 2000, Roest and his partner borrowed \$3 million to buy the Fitness Institute and its sister club in Mississauga, then owned by H.J. Heinz Co. and its subsidiary, Weight Watchers.

His aim was to become Canada's fitness guru--a pursuit aided by Gerry Schwartz of Onex Corp., who hired Roest to outfit his home gym in his Joe Brennan-designed compound in the heart of wealthy Rosedale. With Lynda Reeves, superboss of Canadian Home Publishers, which produces Canadian House & Home magazine, Roest is developing a television series called Sweat with Steve Roest.

When Roest took over the club, and eased into management of the three other clubs in the fold of the Cambridge Group, which together comprise a \$12-million-a-year business, he started to wear suits to work. Soon after, one of his clients gave him a very generous gift of congratulations for becoming a manager. Ah, it was like saying, Welcome to the joys of status anxiety.

And now, let's pause over lunch. It'll be a power lunch, efficient, quick and to the point. That's what Canoe, Peter Oliver's restaurant at the top of the TD Centre, offers--the opportunity to have a brisk meeting with the illusion of intimacy. Canoe is nine years old, but enthusiasm for it doesn't seem to have waned. It was in the vanguard of the sexy, as opposed to stuffy, business-meal venues.

If you want stuffy, the National Club is over on Bay Street. Located in a stone low-rise, it has lounges and lots of safe art on its walls. There's a passageway to an unmarked door in the King Street subway station, but that's about the only neat thing it has to offer. The two dining rooms are quiet and feel closeted. A few of their upholstered high-back chairs have the initials N.C. on them, a sort of family-like insignia last seen in your great-aunt's dim dining room. Sure, you may run into Mr. Bow Tie, Stephen LeDrew, lawyer and ex-president of the Liberal Party of Canada, but you don't come here to be seen. Business success is a form of celebrity in the culture, something Canoe and its ilk (Bymark, Jump) understand. That's why Oliver trains his service staff to call you by name when you enter Canoe and when you order your \$37 beef tenderloin from one of the circling servers. It makes you feel known, even when you're not.

Sometimes, all that transpires at lunch is a transactional exchange of information. Other times, it's about the formation of the business relationship. So digest this, because here's what that means. You are being asked to lunch because your host wants to get to know you outside of your job title. They will ask about your children, where they go to school, your vacations, your golf, your extracurricular activities. Sure, it's about the development of trust. And if you're the provider in this brewing client relationship, your charm could very well be the tie-breaker between your company and the next one that has just as good a product or service to sell. So learn how to small-talk when necessary. Tell a few jokes. Make nice. Use your table manners. Be courteous to the waiter. Wait to see if your host is having alcohol to drink before you go ahead and order that chardonnay you crave. Don't order the most expensive item on the menu. Be open without being confessional. Don't hog the conversation.

Mr. Serial Luncher in Canoe at table 22, the placement of which, at the far end of a dais, allows for sly surveillance of the restaurant, swears by the investigation of personality it allows.

"If they're not sensitive to what's going on around them, they can't be sensitive to what I'm talking about," is one of his more pointed observations. Ah, yes. Well, he is the one who holds the cards, you see. He holds the power in the power lunches he has almost every day.

But that brings us to the bottom line of it all. It may be that you can get all human and divulge who you are outside of the status of your position, but never forget that it is your status that takes you there in the first place. That's number one. And number two: The person with the power (the buyer of products or services) can forget about the above-mentioned rules of behaviour. He's like the rich guy most women will date regardless of whether he's nice or not. Which, come to think of it, produces another sort of anxiety. Dessert, anyone?

There, Joe Brennan is standing up now. See him? That 50-something guy up there in business class in a preppy blue sweater with the collared shirt underneath, the tan pants. He has a close-lipped smile, just this side of smug. Yeah, well, so would you, buddy. He is Mr. Luxury Builder. He understands the psyche of the rich and successful. That's why he's the only one they'll let build their million-plus mansions and put in the wood-paneled library-esque room--among many others rooms, of course--even if they don't read many books. Libraries seem to be the latest must-have. (Before that, it was special pizza ovens in the kitchen.) You mean, you didn't know? "I stopped asking people what kind of books they had," Brennan will tell you. "It was too embarrassing. Libraries are really trophy rooms now--to showcase all you've accomplished in life: business and family. There are portraits, a desk, a screen to watch the business news."

Oh, don't stare! It would be so rude. It may be Air Canada, but everyone here knows each other. At least, they look as though they do. If you must ogle, ogle discreetly. Always remember: They're watching you to see if you belong. It's a different kind of mile-high club up here. Notice how the women, in their 50s and 40s, are very well-maintained, with their youthfully spiky and treated hair (they go to Jie on Avenue Road or Robert Gage on St. Joseph Street), their smooth faces, polished as expensive marble, and full-blown make-up even though it's only 9 in the morning. They are the Rebuilt Wives. The men are supremely groomed, as well: Many sport slicked-back hair, a tan, white shoes. Go with the Palm Beach flow. Pretend you do this Toronto-Palm Beach commute every weekend. John Bitove Jr. has a house down there. So do Brian and Mila Mulrone, and Steve Hudson. Canadian art dealer Arij Gasiunasen set up shop in Palm Beach more than a decade ago. Mogul wannabe Miles Nadal of MDC Corp. hangs out in the swishy bars.

Here, just for fun, imagine you are talking houses with Joe Brennan. Armed with a business and marketing degree from Maryland University, he immigrated to Canada in 1974 from his hometown of Washington, D.C. He sold plastic bags for a living, then accidentally got into the construction business when he decided to renovate his townhouse in Toronto's not-too-showy Leaside neighbourhood. He has no architectural or design education, but hey, he built Gerry Schwartz and Heather Reisman's estate, completed for \$25 million, knocking down two neighbouring houses to accommodate it.

"Meaning?" he asks, parroting your question about why he loves to build people's dream homes. "Meaning to me is it really pisses me off when an ugly building goes up." What he does is about beauty, he says, and creating an environment that "enhances the client's living experience." The client Brennan is building a complex for on 450 acres in Caledon, with stables and a house, carved from limestone, likely thinks about the "living experience." So do the people in Palm Beach, a two-block spit of land that's home to vast wealth and influence and Brennan's satellite office, which he set up 10 years ago. In 1997, his restoration of a 1938 John Volk estate home that was built for the Firestone family won the Ballinger Award. He went on to more high-profile jobs, such as the renovation of the Kennedy Palm Beach estate. He tells you, in passing, that Rush Limbaugh, the right-wing media pundit who has a house in Palm Beach, spent over a million bucks on custom plastering alone. And he will talk of the five homes he built, at a \$5-million starting price, at the Bear's Club, a gated community near Jupiter along the Florida coast, with its own Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course. He likes to say these projects are "really kind of fun."

"Most of the time, it's not about the money," he offers about people who are well-off. "To be successful, you really have to love what you do. It's all about loving to make a widget." On aesthetics, he has this to say: "Understated aesthetics are more important than very loud statements. You can pick out guys who overdo, who have gaudy, extravagant houses. You know those guys are going down." The trick is not to look as if you're trying too hard to be seen as rich.

Brennan's style is classic and simple, more about clean, handsome architecture than opulence. He doesn't do gilded. The closest he has come to over-the-top opulent is a mini-Versailles vacation home in the Bear's Club for a 30-something American couple with two kids. They bought two lots and asked for a house designed almost entirely in white and mirrors. "I've never had a person I've built a home for who has gone to jail or who went broke or imploded. So is it about money? I don't think so," he says, as he crosses his legs elegantly and reaches for his Perrier in a crystal glass in the dark-paneled comfort of the library (with real books) in his loft near Toronto's Ramsden Park. "It's about attitude." He offers an analogy: "There's a \$50 sweater and a \$500 sweater.

They both look the same. One's made of cotton, the other is made of cashmere. You don't buy the cashmere because people will see it. They might not see the difference. You buy it because you can and because it is nicer."

They like the Pilates classes at the Granite Club. Lunch at Brownes Bistro on Woodlawn Avenue is a good place to meet. They get their manicures and pedicures at Just Nails on the Yonge Street border of affluent Rosedale. For a drink, they head to Lobby on Bloor, home of the oversized, white-upholstered sofas. That's where they counsel their freshly divorced friends to go shopping for the next husband.

When they need something to wear, they stick with the tried and true: Holt Renfrew, Escada and Gucci, or Hugo Nicholson in Hazelton Lanes, where one of the Rosenberg sisters will take them into the private room to show them the gowns to die for, bags and shoes to match, of course. They want a sexy dress, nothing matronly. They are hoping they will be photographed for the social pages. The older women call them "girls." But they don't care. It helps to look good.

Their husbands work hard, and they know that, like it or not, they can contribute to his status. One of the best ways is through fundraising. Starter balls include the Powerball at the Power Plant. Then comes the Venetian Ball, which supports Italian charities through the Villa Charities. They work up to a position with the Brazilian Ball--still the most high-profile in the city--which raises close to \$2 million.

Men have approached members of fundraising committees and asked how their wives can get involved. "They figure that if their wives are looking well-groomed and have enough time to do volunteer work, they must be doing well," says a society wife who has helped several women get involved on the charity circuit. They aspire to the Catherine Bratty or Lynda Prince model. The latter is the rail-thin blonde wife of financier Jonas Prince. She doesn't need the charities. They need her. She is involved with the National Ballet of Canada, a perfect match because of the elegance and grace the art form espouses. She's the one everyone watches as she enters the Hummingbird Centre in her exquisite outfits just before the curtain rises. Better than a ballerina, really. And she doesn't even have to pirouette.

When it comes to social pages, she graces many of them, even those of the British magazine Harpers & Queen. The wives want their own power trip, even though it hinges on their husbands' positions. The women on the best committees, such as the one behind the Brazilian Ball, know what allows them to get a rise from potential donors. "Tell me one woman whose husband is Mr. Plonk-a-Long who is going to get return calls?" sniffs one wife, well known in society circles.

If lunch is the first date in a business relationship, then golf is sex. Something's going to be consummated if you're willing to take four or five hours of a CEO's time. To keep pace with the new obsession--the general population is hooked too--six new golfing magazines appeared in Canada in the past 10 years, according to Canadian Advertising Rates and Data. Toronto has an array of extremely high-end clubs one can join, including the prestigious St. George's and the old-money Rosedale Golf Club.

But the latest addition is beyond any golf club in Canada. It is aimed at the corporate golfer, a new and growing species made possible by BlackBerrys, which keep them plugged in when out of the office. Magna Golf Club, in Aurora, and located just one kilometre away from Magna International, the auto parts empire owned by Frank Stronach, was completed in 2001. Memberships cost \$125,000 (Mats Sundin is a member, as are Eric Lindros and Doug Gilmour). Yearly fees are \$10,000. The average age is 45; the percentage of men to women members is 80/20; the ethnic mix is 25% Jewish, 35% Italian, 40% a hodgepodge. No family memberships are sold. Its luxury is so lurid, it's pornographic.

Come in for what David Kaufman, the executive director, calls "a seamless hospitality experience." Drive up the sweeping road, through the big wrought-iron gates, check in with security to give them your name. When you come over the hill, you'll see the clubhouse, a building designed by architect Stephen McCCasey that looks like a large home, sensitively set in its environment. A valet is now coming out the door. The security guard has telephoned him to say you're on your way. He greets you by name. He parks your car. You enter through the heavy doors to marble, limestone, antiques and the plushiest toilet paper on the market.

You have a tour. The 18-hole course itself, designed by Doug Carrick, accommodates all player levels. There is a marshal installed on each nine to ensure the play moves along. It is immaculate. Someone clips by hand around the sprinkler heads. The cups are painted white, just like on the PGA Tour. Golf confers gentility, a certain grace, upon those who play it. You don't sweat playing golf. You wear preppie establishment-at-ease clothes.

The game requires precision, control, etiquette. Even if you're an excellent golfer, you can play with someone of lesser skill and not humiliate him. Everyone plays to the best of his or her ability. You are together as a group but essentially on your own. Bad shots should be greeted with the right amount of disappointment and desire to do better the next time. If you can get out of a sand bunker with lan, you can climb out of any corporate snafu. Blame the caddy or throw your club down in disgust and you signal the wrong attitude. Excellent shots should be greeted with a pleased little smile, not vulgar boasting. In short, the game of golf is a microcosm of corporate life.

In the men's locker room, attendants await you at a desk and greet you by name if you have just come off the course. (Someone telephoned ahead, again.) The lighting is soft, the carpets of good quality, and the benches beside the lockers are covered in soft leather. You shower behind frosted-glass doors under rainheads. The lockers are crafted from wood and measure 48 centimetres wide. Your name is engraved on a little gold plaque on the door of yours. You can hang a suit in it easily. There are air vents. The locks are digital. There's a cedar-lined shoe drawer beneath the locker door that doesn't lock, because attendants regularly shine your shoes without being asked. (These individuals are sent to a cobbler in Aurora who teaches them the perfection of the shoe shine. Kaufman calls it Shoe U.) In the locker there is a valuables drawer, lined in velvet, perfect for your Rolex.

Now you are sitting in the bar area. Waiters anticipate your every need. A newspaper? A different channel on the plasma TV screens? Water? Your glass is filled up every 15 minutes, even if it's still more than half full.

In Status Anxiety, de Botton suggests that art and religion can help ease the need for outside approval. He couldn't have known about Magna. Of course not. He couldn't have known that every painting, every print, in the clubhouse features thoroughbreds, sleek, strong, focused, some of which are racing headlong for a finish line. It's a Magna thing, sure. Ol' Frank has a thing for racecourses. But the message is so irresistible. Those horses speak right to the heart of the status-conscious executive.

Train yourself to win. Demand the best. Be the best--the fittest, the richest, the most ambitious. Someone's putting money on you. You can feel an audience watching.