



Source: Alan Cowell, 'Blair turns up pressure as Iran digs in on sailors', *New York Times*, Agencies in *The Age* online, 30/03/07.

Tags: [workplace](#), [art](#)

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'Does the positioning of the work in the space preclude us from reading its singular aspects?' Lisa asked. The students looked blank. Another tack needed, she thought. 'The way the images are hung, does it help us to look at each at them individually, do you think?' A few weak nods followed. It was much harder today, doing a guest spot in someone else's class, than last week. Lisa sighed inwardly as her mobile started to ring in her bag on the other side of the room. Normally it would be turned off, but today was different, she had to be available in case of emergency. 'Emergency' would mean some cock-up in the plans for Simon's Doctoral examination. Still, it was hard to look dignified as she fled the room, clutching the still-squealing mobile.

Sure enough, mild chaos had ensued; The school receptionist said the previous examiner had left the keys at his hotel, but somehow the person higher up the food chain than Lisa hadn't clicked to that. But it wasn't as if the next examiner was being held up waiting for them. The receptionist said there'd been no sign of him at all and wanted to know how she was to get in touch with him. Lisa had a dilemma—although her priority was probably to Simon's examination, the outcome of which was hanging on reports from these two people, one of whom was probably out shopping at that moment—it wasn't clear that abandoning the task at hand was going to help. Fortunately it wasn't the kind of examination that needed the candidate to be present, so Lisa settled for compromise. Try and sort the missing keys and examiner by phone and return to the group left behind, finish that job and when it was done, return to the other.

But her concentration had been broken. Where on earth was that examiner? Lisa wracked her brains as she returned to the room but realised she didn't actually know enough about the arrangements that had been made for today. In some senses she wasn't supposed to get involved with this, just yet—she still had trainer wheels on for this organisational role, and this particular examination was supposed to have been sorted by her predecessor. Still, the receptionist had her mobile number and had pleaded with her to leave it on in case this kind of thing happened.

'...and that was what I thought her intention was.' There was a hiatus as Lisa realised she hadn't heard a word of the student's summarising of her classmate's work, and now she was clearly expected to comment upon this summary. An irritated silence descended upon the group as it was clear how distracted she was, a distraction that as a teacher she regularly berated the students about. They weren't allowed to leave their phones on during these sessions.

'Yes, I'm miles away, and it's not Sam's artwork that's the reason' she offered, not quite enough to raise a laugh, but enough to move things along, as a kind of admission had been called for. It's not as if someone died', Lisa told herself quietly and then launched back into the discussion. Later, after the class had disbanded, she wondered about that perspective. The cat had bitten her hard that morning, and there was the ongoing frustration of the neighbour's mess out on the sidewalk; they'd just dumped some garden rubbish out there expecting the council would take it away.

She knew these were little things, that they were nothing compared to what happened during a real crises, whether natural or man-made. The problem was that Lisa hadn't really experienced disaster. Crisis, maybe, she thought; about her friend's suicide, her sister's dead baby, or other family deaths. She examined them briefly, each memory rising up like the elaborate interior of a marble held up for examination, but she left them to float back from whence they came. It was annoying that she couldn't know from those experiences just what she'd do if pressed by real emergency. She knew what she'd like to think she might do, but also knew that that wasn't guaranteed by simply having those thoughts. She'd surprised herself before, not only with cowardice, but with bravery, too. Wrong behaviour, right behaviour—both seemed equally possible. She wondered if it mattered, or if only the aftermath did; how she dealt with it, or acknowledged it. This was the only thing that made her feel better about the unpredictability of things, of her reaction to things. And she moved on.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ruth Watson.*