

**SAMPLE CHAPTER**  
**PAPER CLIPS DON'T GROW ON TREES**

Our notions of cost and value change over the years, as do our value systems and circumstances.

About 20 years ago I was a member of Sydney Rotary Club and met many delightful people through that association. One such gentleman was Paul Cotton, the then New Zealand Consul General.

He was dignified, urbane and successful – at the top of his profession; which is probably why over two decades later, I vividly recall a story that seemed somewhat out of character with his distinguished diplomatic posting.

One day at lunch, he proudly proclaimed that he had never spent a cent on the purchase of paper clips.

'I figure that as many paper clips must come into the office as go out of the office so I insist that staff remove them, prior to throwing the paper in the bin.'

Remember, this was long before the days of recycling being popular. At the time, I must confess that I thought this was a rather odd, penny pinching practice. After all, I was an IBM executive, during a stage of rapid growth, and felt that the cost of paper clips was pretty inconsequential to a larger organisation.

How wrong I was!

Many years later, I still think of that story and now view both the principle and the person in a totally different light. Paul was certainly not an eccentric and thrifty bureaucrat but a visionary – both economically and ecologically.

Even such a small saving actually signalled a much bigger shift in the mindset of every employee. Just like Mum often chastised me that money didn't grow on trees, likewise... paper clips don't grow on trees!

This made me curious about the origins of the paper clip.

A Google search proved fascinating but confusing, as there was little agreement on Wikipedia and other sites as to who invented the paperclip! It seems there were several patents filed in the late 1800s and early 1900s in Norway, the UK and the USA. I'll leave the ownership debate to others but the paperclip has certainly has been around for a long time.

Its prime purpose was to replace paper and string when bundling piles of paper. Today, these ubiquitous office supplies are so versatile that there are even claims on the internet that only one in 10 paper clips are used for their intended purpose. They are commonly called on to clean out crevices, re-set electronic device, hold up hems and twiddle into various shapes as a form of stress relief!

It became far more than a fastener in Norway during World War II. Prohibited from wearing anything with the king's initials, Norwegians wore paper clips on their lapels to show national unity and opposition to the German occupation.

Let's show international unity to put paper clip thinking into practice and cut unnecessary costs. Let's adopt paperclip productivity and pursue paperclip profitability. Like the humble paperclip, this concept can, literally, help hold our organisations together. Of course, this means I'll never be invited to address the Paper Clip Manufacturers conference – but c'est la vie!