

HOW  
COURAGEOUS  
FEARLESS  
&

PURPOSE-DRIVEN  
BUSINESSWOMEN  
IMPACT SOCIETY



How Courageous, Fearless & Purpose-Driven  
Businesswomen Impact Society – 1st ed.

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# KAREN CROMBIE

## *About the Author*



KAREN IS THE FOUNDER of Exact Editing, where the aim is to make your work shine. Her unique experience and broad depth of knowledge give her an insight into what will make paragraphs flow, with a knack for selecting the ideal word that instantly improves the entire sentence. Exact Editing provides services for business professionals, including the editing of company reports, website copy, sales campaigns and blogs. Karen knows that you don't want sloppy spelling or distracting errors detracting from your brilliant business.

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Exact Editing is where authors feel confident to entrust their manuscripts. Some genres that Karen has handled include memoirs, self-help, fantasy, romance, dystopian futuristic and thriller. Whether you are an experienced author or a first-time writer, she is patient, honest and good-humoured.

Karen would like to thank her favourite human, Quentin, for his endless cups of tea, support and encouragement. Behind every creative business is a meticulous provider of spreadsheets and robust numbers, supporting the wonderful words!

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# EXACT EDITING

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*by Karen Crombie*

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## **CORRECTIONS, COMMAS AND THE CROWN**

WHEN I FIRST WENT to London, I never expected I would soon be working for the Queen at Buckingham Palace. Walking through the enormous golden gates at the front for the first time was surreal and it felt extraordinary to be entering this famous place. Although I had travelled a great deal as a child, seeing some incredible places, racking up 15 schools and a dozen countries, most of them had been in the tropics, in lands throughout South East Asia. I had lived in the Philippines, Malaysia and Irian Jaya, now East Timor. My father was an intrepid photographer and his work took us to a variety of remote and beautiful countries. Europe had always fascinated me, however, and many of my childhood favourite books were English; Beatrix Potter, Enid Blyton and later the Sherlock Holmes mysteries.

As a child I had lived for several years in Papua New Guinea, a country with over 832 languages - and that's separate languages,

not dialects - which makes it the most linguistically diverse place on earth. The rugged and isolated terrain contributes a great deal to this. You can have a group of people speaking one language, and then, just on the other side of the mountain, you can discover a village which has a completely different language. Not a slight variation on the first language or a similar dialect, but a totally different tongue, with its own alphabet, syntax and rules.

When we lived there, many parts of the country were uncharted by the Western world and in some of the most remote areas, there were a few tribes which still practiced cannibalism. It was wild virgin territory for explorers, botanists, photographers and students of linguistics. Missionaries who harboured hopes of converting the natives found that first, they had to learn their language. Then, devise a written alphabet, teach the villagers to read and write, and then translate the entire Bible or other holy book to share, a process which would take them many years. My childhood experiences gave me a healthy curiosity for other cultures and an interest in language and the powers of communication. The ability to read and write is of inestimable value.

Cultural context is also of great significance. I remember a missionary telling me of their translation attempts with a Bible verse where Jesus says; "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." The villagers recoiled in disgust at this and she found that, in this tribe, only an intruder or thief would come banging on the door. In their territory, a visitor announced themselves outside a hut with a polite clearing of the throat. So, for this tribe, the verse would most accurately be translated; "Behold, I stand at the door and cough."

Cultural context is vitally important in delivering a clear message. I frequently work with writers who do not have English as their first language, and having an English mother-tongue editor will trump an automated translating tool every time. ‘Lèche-vitrine’ means to literally ‘lick the windows’, not ‘window-shopping’, for example!

Despite the constant upheaval of travelling between countries and the numerous schools, thankfully, I was a bright student who excelled at English, Literature and Drama. Maths was certainly not my strong point but having great communication skills and a quick wit was more important when having to adapt so often to new environments. The Drama teacher at one particular school was an alarmingly tall American who terrified us all. Towering over the room, he would drawl, “Improvisation time. Who wants to go first? No volunteers...? Oh, good... that means I get to pick!” We all cowered in our chairs, avoiding eye contact as he searched for his first victim. We had no idea what we were doing, but he dragged all of us up onto that platform one at a time and forced us to *communicate*. He taught us the organs of articulation. He taught us to project our voices. He taught us the entire epic Iliad and Odyssey sagas of ancient Greece. He taught us to think on our feet and to speak with courage and clarity. The power of communication and the spoken word were his dominion.

Another teacher who influenced me was an English teacher who later became the Principal of that school. She was kind, neat and polished, with smooth brown hair and eyes that sparkled with intelligence. Library time with her was fun as she shared new books and challenged us with novels supposed to be for

older children. She gave us assignments to write that were interesting, such as giving the start to a story and asking us to continue. She wrote on my essay once that I was ‘very perspicacious’. Perspicacious? What on earth did that mean? It sent me scurrying for a dictionary, brow creased with anticipation. It meant very perceptive, insightful, keen, aware. Joy filled my heart at this praise. Then I smiled, realising how clever she had been. I’d learned a new word; the lesson continued! She taught me that the written word is equally as important as the spoken word and that a single word can alter the meaning of an entire paragraph.

After leaving school I worked as a Speech and Drama teacher. I had won several local acting competitions and a teacher who saw me perform invited me to teach at her school. I had come over to compliment some of her students who were also competing, and she was delighted to meet someone who encouraged others rather than criticising them. She worked at a huge private school with a thriving Drama program, thanks to their Principal, who had struggled with a terrible stutter as a boy. Speech therapy and Drama lessons had helped him to such a degree that as an adult, he spoke clearly and confidently in front of large audiences without difficulty. He was therefore enormously supportive of the Drama program and it was a wonderful school where I enjoyed working.

Children appreciate truthfulness and I would tell my students directly, “I don’t mind at all if the only thing you do this term is learn a funny poem and perform it for your friends at the school concert. I don’t care if you’ve completely forgotten it by

next term. Because the really important thing that you'll learn with me is to communicate well. To get up on that stage, even if you're scared, and speak clearly. To be confident and know that the person at the very back of the room can hear your every word. That is a skill that will last you your whole life, you see."

"It will give you the courage to address a meeting room full of colleagues at work. It will enable you to be calm in a job interview. It will mean you can get up and give a great speech at your brother's wedding one day. The ability to communicate clearly is something you will always use."

My combination of honesty and encouragement worked, and I was proud of my students' progress and how their speaking skills and self-confidence increased as the school year went on. I enjoyed teaching, but I had always dreamed of travelling to Europe. The best way to do that while on the limited Working Holiday visa offered at the time was to do office work. Consequently, I signed up to a few temping agencies and began doing office work, receptionist jobs, secretarial roles, and all kinds of miscellaneous administration tasks. I knew that once I got to England, I'd need experience with this kind of work and my ability to adapt to any new environment came in handy once more. I worked at three jobs simultaneously and saved hard for a few years until I had enough funds to buy my ticket and pay my own way for the first few months. I paid all my bills, kept well organised and focused on my goal of getting to Europe. As I neared my greatly anticipated departure date, friends said, "Oh, you're so lucky! Going to the UK!"

No.

Luck had nothing to do with it. I had sacrificed a lot and worked vigorously towards my objective; Destination London. Home of Mary Poppins, practical yet fun. Sherlock Holmes, clever and observant. Eliza Doolittle, clearly spoken and hardworking. That's where I wanted to be and I was sure it was going to be amazing!

London was freezing cold. Yet spring was in the air, waves of saffron daffodils were bobbing cheekily in the parks and the unfamiliar city was a jumble of excitement to me. I was thrilled to see a statue of Paddington Bear in Paddington Station, and a statue of Sherlock Holmes outside Baker Street Tube Station. The scarlet double-decker buses, Royal Mail pillar-boxes and phone booths added to the colour. I went to the National Gallery, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, St Paul's Cathedral, the Planetarium and Madame Tussaud's Waxworks Museum.

At the Tower of London, I stood with a group of tourists, eager to hear the Yeoman of the Guard's guided tour. He introduced himself in ringing tones and asked if there were any questions before he began his tour of one of Britain's most famous buildings; at times a palace, a prison and an historical landmark of kings. A nasal American voice at the back of the crowd said, "Yaaah, where's the nearest McDonalds?" The Beefeater's eyebrows bunched together like two angry caterpillars and he responded, "Across the street and up the road! Now bugger off!" The group erupted into laughter and a Cockney voice chimed in jokingly, "Orf with 'is head!" The group moved off without the hungry American.

Unlike the American, I was hungry for history rather than a burger, but after a few short weeks in London, my funds were already getting low. Everything was expensive and my Australian dollars did not go far. I looked in the paper for vacancies and was daunted by how many of them wanted credentials I didn't possess. Some jobs I had thought too junior expected all kinds of qualifications. A boy working in a Prêt à Manger sandwich shop told me that he spoke four languages fluently and my heart sank as I wondered if I would be able to negotiate my way in this challenging city. I signed up at a few recruitment agencies and waited to be sent to interviews for office jobs.

The very first job I was offered was at Buckingham Palace.

After the first shock of disbelief and thrill of excitement, came the wave of panic. I was anxious to get the job and desperate to make a good impression. On the day of the interview I got up two hours earlier than necessary and put on the smart clothes I had agonised over selecting the day before. I rode the bus down Charing Cross road to Trafalgar Square and alighted near the gigantic lions by Nelson's Column. Then I walked down the long, stately avenue of The Mall to Buckingham Palace. As it came closer and closer, I felt mild hysteria rising. Surely I would never get past the front gates! If you have days when you feel like an imposter, imagine how I felt going up to the policeman on duty at the gates and telling him I had an appointment at the palace, and could I come in, please! I could feel the sweat prickling my armpits as he checked my ID, checked his list, made a call to somebody inside and then checked my ID again. I tried to remember my Drama training and took deep breaths as I stared

at his domed blue helmet and endeavoured to look like the kind of dependable person who was employed by the Queen.

“Straight ahead, Miss, and through that door. They’re expecting you.” The Policeman instructed gruffly.

“Thank you.” I squeaked.

“First visit to the Palace?” he asked.

“Yes, I have an interview for a job here.” I replied anxiously, hoping for some reassurance.

“Good luck. If you get the job, we check your background *very thoroughly* before you get your access pass.”

“Right. Of course. Thank you.” I responded, trying to sound calm and sensible.

I set off across the expanse of gravel that separated the front gate from the towering wall of the palace. This was the famous front courtyard where the Queen’s soldiers performed their daily Changing of the Guards routine. Another policeman admitted me through a small side door and I was ushered into a waiting room adorned with a painting of Queen Victoria that looked like an original masterpiece which belonged in a museum. More phone calls, more checks and then I was taken up a series of stairs and turns to an office with several people working inside. On the wall was a painting of a youthful Queen Elizabeth II in a yellow ball gown, crowned with diamonds, a spray of golden wattle on her shoulder. I recognised it instantly as a picture which is displayed in schoolrooms and public offices throughout Australia.

Was this the original?

I did not have time to stand about admiring the artwork, as I was quickly ushered into the office of one of the Private Secretar-

ies to Her Majesty. She explained that the job involved one of the most important parts of the Palace's interactions with the public; the organising of the birthday cards issued to those celebrating their 100<sup>th</sup> birthdays. The Queen's father, King George VI, had begun the popular tradition and the Anniversaries Office now handles thousands of special greetings every year. The 100<sup>th</sup> birthday messages are the most well-known, but the Queen also sends congratulatory messages for Diamond (60<sup>th</sup>), 65<sup>th</sup> and Platinum (70<sup>th</sup>) wedding anniversaries. Aside from the Press Office, it's the only department in the Palace that deals with phone calls from the general public. Buckingham Palace expected standards of the staff that were not just high; they must be perfect.

I was, obviously, Australian. Did I have what it took to work for the Monarch of the United Kingdom?

"Well, I voted to keep the Queen when Australia had the referendum on becoming a republic last year..." I attempted to lighten the mood with humour. The Secretary folded her lips into a straight line, a pained expression crossing her face at the thought of republics in general. I pulled myself together and strove to be sincere.

"I think the Queen is remarkable and I would love the opportunity to work here." I said honestly. Her rigid stance softened somewhat.

"Attention to detail is vital here. This is one of the few jobs in London where, if you make a mistake, it could be in the paper tomorrow." Alarm registered in my eyes, and she explained further. "The tabloids here are merciless. Think of the consequences if you were to send a 100<sup>th</sup> birthday message to Mr.

Smith instead of *Mrs.* Smith, for example. What if her husband, Mr. Smith, died twenty years ago and she's a widow who's now devastated at our heartless error?"

"I understand." I raised my chin with resolute sincerity. "I'll check everything carefully."

"See that you do. Every. Comma. Counts." She stared at me with icy seriousness. "This is a job where every item we send out is in Her Majesty's name. It cannot be anything less than perfect." She straightened her papers and then stood, indicating the interview was at an end.

"Can you begin tomorrow? There is a great deal to be done." She extended a cool hand.

I took it and shook it firmly, a shock of excitement thrilling through my spine. She had offered me the job!

"I can start tomorrow, yes. I will be here."

It was surreal to be working in a place that was part of royal history, for possibly the most recognised Head of State in the world. Every day I dressed with great care and made every effort to be punctual. I was friendly to the other staff, who all considered working there to be a great honour and I did my best to learn the job. It was hard to stay focused and not lose attention when the work was often repetitive. If a letter had even one comma out of place, it had to be done again. I did my best to swallow my frustration. I was always pushing ahead, eager to clear my desk and get all the messages out, but this was work which could not be rushed. Mistakes were not allowed to exist! Yes, we were sending out messages on behalf of Her Majesty, but did she even see the letters? Was she nothing more than

a distant figurehead while we fretted daily over tiny errors? I wondered this aloud, as respectfully as I dared one day, and one of my colleagues leaned over.

“You would be surprised how involved she is and how much of an interest she takes.” He gave a secretive smile. “Look at this.” He indicated a pile of letters from the world outside, which had been opened and sorted. “We choose some every day to include with the Queen’s correspondence and she reads a lot of them. You can tell which ones because she marks them with red pencil and sometimes sends us notes or comments as well.”

I took the envelope and read the few words in red pencil on the envelope. The Queen of England had read that letter that very morning and now I was holding it in my hand.

He grinned. “I know, it’s rather bizarre sometimes. I had to archive some of Queen Victoria’s letters once and it feels remarkable, the little pieces of history that you hold in your hand. Yet another reason we need to do our part to make sure things are completely correct.” I nodded and bent my head to the task again.

“We have a special one here,” I told my co-worker later that month. “It’s a 100<sup>th</sup> birthday message, but they’re twins. These ladies are amazing; they worked as WRENS in World War II and they never got married. They still live together and they’ll be one hundred next week. I think we should do something special for them.”

“What do you mean? There’s the set formula for the birthday messages,” he replied.

“Yes, but for something unique like this? Twins both making it to one hundred must be rare. They’ll look at each other’s

cards; they shouldn't be identical! They should both get different wording in their messages. It's more personal, more special." I insisted. He thought about it and agreed.

The day after the twins celebrated their joint birthday, there was a big feature on them in the newspaper. The ladies were pictured side-by-side, peering at each other's cards from the Queen. Everybody in the office was delighted and I felt I was doing well. Soon afterwards, I was asked to fill in for one of Prince Phillip's secretaries while she was away on holiday. I was in the most remarkable position, for two weeks, of working for a Queen in the mornings and a Prince in the afternoons.

If anything, the work in the Duke of Edinburgh's office required an even greater level of concentration. I happened to be there in the weeks around HRH's birthday, and this meant a flood of birthday messages had to be answered. All letters to Buckingham Palace get a reply, and the form the reply takes depends on the correspondent. Members of the public get a letter via Royal Mail and Heads of State and royalty get a telegram. I didn't know that telegrams still existed! All the birthday greetings had a reply of thanks sent and I had fun looking up addresses for other royal castles in Europe. The Prince was also patron of a vast number of charities and military groups and would usually be asked to attend their annual events or meetings. All of this correspondence had to be dealt with as well and each kind of invitation or greeting had their own special style and template. I did my best to stay patient, learn fast and pay meticulous attention to detail.

Every item of correspondence I produced was checked by a Private Secretary before being presented for HRH's signa-

ture, and anything that was not flawless had to be done again. Sometimes it was frustrating, but it is a smart system for any document that you wish to be faultless – first, one person writes it, then another fresh set of eyes edits it, then it is signed off before it goes out into the world. This applies equally to a website, blog, report or novel.

Fast forward years later and I had travelled the world, married my favourite human and lived in Paris for six years. I had a number of jobs in international companies and had acquired a lot of high-level administrative skills. Our two sons were born in France and we later moved our little family back to Australia. After several years at home wrangling my energetic boys, I was becoming fed up with having no mental stimulation. As every mother can attest, raising small children is challenging and exhausting, but I longed to engage my brain again.

I went on a writer's course with the charismatic and outspoken Catherine Deveny, author of nine books. She was hilarious, but nevertheless had a zero-bullshit approach, which we all appreciated.

“Some days, I'm barely even a mammal!”

“Procrastination can be cured; there's an app for that!”

“Stop worrying about what other people will think; write your truth, they may never read it anyway!”

“I'm dyslexic and I still write for a living. What's holding you back?”

It was the kick in the backside I had needed. What, indeed, was holding me back?

Later that day, we were all discussing our different approaches to writing. The lady sitting next to me shared that she just ‘vomited’ all her thoughts out onto the page, with little heed for grammar or punctuation, and I visibly cringed. My years of attention to detail with words meant I feel compelled to correct, adjust, and polish the paragraphs, with sloppy grammar being my number one target! I explained how vitally important that side of things was to me and Cat pounced, well, like a cat. “The world needs editors!” she declared. “We need writers, but we also need editors to clean up our stories and be that honest filter.” Voila! No messing about, no discussions. The pieces all fell neatly into place. My love of words. My desire for clear communication. My obsession with reading. My ability to spot a spelling mistake across a crowded room!

Things moved rapidly after that. Being a perfectionist, with a husband who is even more pedantic than me, I wanted to get things done correctly from the start. Choosing a business name for your venture is fun, but you must also do boring things like register it! I got an ABN, registered a domain name and learned about my tax obligations. I began with simple jobs like checking business documents and website copy for friends. Then I was introduced to a man who edits company reports and specialises in transforming legal jargon into clear English. He was kind enough to meet me for a coffee and I went with some vague idea of asking him for some tips. Instead he put down his cup, fixed me with a penetrating stare, as though it was a job interview, and asked what experience I had that made me a good editor. What a good question.

Well, my years of drama training and improvisation mean I think fast, and the answer came immediately to my mind. “I used to work for the Queen.” He blinked with surprise and I told him my story of working at Buckingham Palace, the attention to detail and the standard of perfection which was required. When I had finished explaining this, I glanced over at the menu board in the café and said, “Oh, they spelled ‘dessert’ as ‘desert’ and the ‘fried egg’ is a ‘fired egg’. Poor egg!” He looked up, laughed and said, “You’re absolutely right. I come in here all the time and the eggs are often burned. Thank God the coffee’s decent.” To my delight, he asked me to help with a huge annual report that he was currently editing. That meeting gave me the realisation that my varied life experiences were all valuable and that editing brought them together in an ideal way.

Growing up in different cultures, appreciating other languages is useful and I have worked with many writers who do not have English as their first language. If you have a wonderful story to share or a company document where you want to communicate clearly, then an editor is your best friend. It doesn’t matter if your spelling isn’t perfect or you don’t always choose the ideal metaphor; that’s where I come in. If your work is a rough diamond, I am the meticulous jeweller who cuts off all the rough excess and polishes it to perfection. I have worked with writers who have dyslexia, authors who have written a dozen books and those who are on their first-ever draft. Sometimes I get to check articles that have been written in another language and then put through a clumsy automated translator, and it’s great fun being

able to fix the ‘Engerlish’! No matter what kind of writing it is, I’m here to make the work shine.

Don’t think you’re an expert on everything in your business; I can’t do it all and neither should you. If you are a brilliant salesperson but can’t spell to save your life, that’s fine! Get somebody like me to fix your documents and focus on what you do best. Am I an IT, a graphics or a tax specialist? Absolutely not; those jobs I get the professionals to do for me.

I love working with many different authors; it’s so interesting for me and I have now worked with a great variety of genres; some I previously did not know existed. I respect the time and effort that has gone into every page and, as sometimes the first neutral person to have read their work, I regard it as an honour. I am candid but kind and always try to make my feedback constructive and useful.

I am passionate about the written and spoken word, and I’ve been able to use this to pursue a job that I truly love. How I arrived at this particular place is the result of a life with lots of twists and turns, made up of very unusual and interesting experiences. Through this amazing journey, I believe I have developed a unique set of skills and perspective that has helped set me apart and positioned me perfectly for editing work. Whether it was in the jungles of Papua New Guinea, being a Speech and Drama teacher, or working for the Queen, those experiences collectively have shaped who I am today, and inspired me to establish Exact Editing. I get up each day knowing that I’ll be doing something satisfying and worthwhile, as the work I do makes the writing of others shine.

## EXACT EDITING

If you are writing a novel or a chapter in an anthology business book like this one, an editor is your strongest ally. A fresh set of eyes to clean up, correct and improve your work can elevate it and catch errors you had never realised were there. Often when you spend hours on writing something, you become blind to mistakes and these are a distraction from your message. Once it is printed and out in the world, it's too late to alter, so it's worthwhile to have your manuscript properly edited before it is launched.

If you're struggling with self-doubt, take courage from some of Cat Deveny's words;

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*"This is brilliant. You are awesome. Just keep going."*

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I have this on a coffee cup and it's a great reminder to have on your desk as you type away. Every comma counts, but, unlike brain surgery, you don't have to get it perfect the first time.

That's a job for your friendly editor, and for me, that means making your work shine.



Ziggy Clements

Frances Lourey

Fay Chan

Kim Carter

Karen Kennedy



Dewinta Dandot

Carolyn King

Karen Crombie



## THE WOMEN'S BUSINESS SOCIETY - CAZZANDRA BELL, FOUNDER

Back in 2012 when the Women's Business Society was born I had one goal - to connect and support women in business. Today we continue to strive to achieve that goal. This book is a showcase of talented women I am proud to support. I hope you enjoy reading their stories.

[www.samanthajansenpublishing.com](http://www.samanthajansenpublishing.com)

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