



talking about...

December 2008

... designing better relationships for better outcomes

A New Phone Number for Talking About

From December please note that we have a new office phone number – 03 9504 3558. We request that you change your records to reflect this ... thanks. All other business details will remain the same.

A Time for Reflection

As we come to the end of another year, many of us will reflect on the year gone by and ponder the year ahead. This is particularly so in times such as these when we are hearing so much bad news about the world's financial situation and its potential or realised impact upon us personally.

The coming year will most likely proffer the first real test for those of us in the world of coaching and our value to the business world. The common view is that one of the first casualties of weaker economic times is training and development. Given that coaching has only been popularised in the recent period of strong economic growth, the question is will coaching be seen in the same way. Although coaching can be perceived as expensive and discretionary, its popularity lies in what it offers beyond traditional training. This can be simply summed up in the term coined by Jeffrey Pfeffer as the "knowing-doing gap". Whereas training has a tendency to be focused on the acquisition of new skills (the knowing), because of its nature, coaching is about the creation of a new way of being and new habitual behaviours (the doing). Because of its tailored and action-oriented approach, coaching may well be the most cost effective and efficacious way of allowing people in business to enhance their capacity to deal with the turbulent times ahead. Only time will tell.

Jacqui and I would like to wish you and yours the very best for 2009. No doubt there will be harder times for some and opportunities for others. We hope that you are always able to see the opportunities that appear in your world.

When It's Time To Restructure

"Trust is the lubrication that makes it possible for organizations to work."

... Warren Bennis (1925 -) US educator, futurologist, advisor, writer

If you have worked in organisations for any length of time, you will no doubt have been caught up in an organisational restructure. Every organisation restructures from time to time as its leaders seek to redress certain concerns or improve the organisation's effectiveness and outcomes. In many ways, restructuring makes a great deal of sense. The world does not stand still and any organisation will have to adapt its structure to

changes in its environment if it is to survive and thrive. However, often organisational restructures do not fully address an organisation's concerns even though there is a belief that they will. To understand why this happens, we have to look at the way organisations are seen.

Today's organisations are fundamentally built on the premise that they operate in a mechanistic way. As such, they can be seen as a series of processes and systems, that can be put together to create efficient and effective producers of certain outcomes. From this perspective, if something is not working as well as it should, all that is required is a change to the machine. So consultants will be brought in to examine the various functions and structures and will seek to reorganise the structure to better suit the current requirements. We are not saying there is no value in doing this, rather we are saying this is simply not enough to address many organisation's breakdowns. The reason for this is that organisations are not mechanistic but organic. They are networks of people working together not functions operating only through mechanistic cause and effect processes.

When we look at an organisation as an organism, we can see that there are two types of breakdowns that occur within them – structural and relational. Here is an example to explain this more effectively. From our work, one breakdown that we see in all organisations to a very great extent is a failure of accountability, where accountability means ensuring that what is committed to be

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done is done. From a structural point of view, this means that role authority is made clear and so any restructure must ensure that functional accountability is clearly established in the new organisation structure. In other words, everybody is clear and knows who is responsible for what. This is clearly an important aspect of a well functioning organisation. However, on a day to day basis, accountability involves ensuring that people make clear commitments to certain actions and that the people to whom those commitments are made hold them accountable if the commitment is not delivered. This has little to do with structure and everything to do with being able to have an effective conversation with someone. In other words, this is relational.

All too often, we see restructures take place to address relational breakdowns. If we are able to distinguish between relational and structural breakdowns then we can find more effective means to address them rather than using the sledgehammer approach of a restructure to ineffectively address all concerns.

"Life is like a cob web, not an organization chart"

... H. Ross Perot (1930 -) US computer industrialist, philanthropist

I Dream of Jeannie ...

Thanks to Richard for this one ...

A sales rep, an administration clerk and their manager are walking to lunch when they find an antique oil lamp.

They rub it and a Genie pops out.

The Genie says, *"I'll give each of you just one wish"*.

"Me first! Me first!" says the admin clerk.

"I want to be in the Bahamas, driving a speedboat, without a care in the world."

Puff! She's gone...

"Me next! Me next!" says the sales rep. *"I want to be in Hawaii relaxing on the beach with my personal masseuse, an endless supply of Pina Colodas and the love of my life."*

Puff! He's gone.

"OK, you're up", the Genie says to the manager.

The manager says, *"I want those two back in the office after lunch."*

And the moral of the story... *Always let your boss have the first say.*

"When the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will know peace."

... Jimi Hendrix, (1942 – 1970) Musician,

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