



talking about...

January 2009

... 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.

Maintaining Trust in Challenging Times

"When a gifted team dedicates itself to unselfish trust and combines instinct with boldness and effort, its ready to climb."

... Pat Riley (1945 -) US, basketball coach

In these more challenging economic times, all organisational leaders find themselves looking at how they can successfully steer their organisation through this uncertainty. Some merely seek to survive, others see these times as an opportunity to adapt and thrive. For people who work for these two types of leaders, there is a clear contrast in their experience of belonging to that organisation.

Organisations in survival mode tend to go into a process of coping and tend to narrow their perspective to purely financial ones. Although there is no disputing the importance of the financial well being of an organisation, the capacity of that organisation to grow rapidly once the crisis has passed is dramatically diminished. A key reason for this lies in the impact on the people who stay in the organisation as their relationship with the organisational leaders is often severely diminished. Trust is damaged.

You may recall from previous newsletters that we speak of trust as a set of four assessments: sincerity – you tell me the truth as you know it; competence – you are capable of doing what you say you will do; reliability – you keep or effectively manage your promises; and involvement – you genuinely care about my concerns. When we explore the nature of these assessments more deeply, we find that to build and nurture a healthy relationship we must maintain a strong sense of involvement. We are far more likely to forgive the occasional lack of sincerity, a lack of competence or not keeping all of our promises, but our relationships will founder quickly if we don't believe the other person cares about us.

This creates a breakdown when organisations start to retrench staff. What was most likely promoted by the organisational leaders as a social contract or relationship – we care about you and you should care about us; we are in this together – is suddenly a market (or business) contract – we only care about you when we need you. Once the story takes hold that involvement is diminished and the social contract is no longer valid then it is hard to recover from that position. Given that cooperation, team work, motivation etc are built on the common ground that we are all in this together and sharing a common purpose and vision, this can be very

detrimental to maintaining a highly effective organisation into the future.

Leaders of organisations who hope to do better than just survive the current situation might well look to how can they maintain trust and most particularly a sense of care for those who work for them.

"Only mediocrity can be trusted to be always at its best."

... Max Beerbohm (1872 -1956)
English essayist, caricaturist & parodist

A Violinist in the Metro ...

Thanks to Julie for this one ...

A man sat at a metro station in Washington DC and started to play the violin; it was a cold January morning. He played six Bach pieces for about 45 minutes. During that time, about a thousand people went through the station, most of them on their way to work.

Three minutes went by and a middle aged man noticed there was musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds and then hurried up to meet his schedule.

A minute later, the violinist received his first dollar tip: a woman threw the money in the violin case and without stopping continued to walk.

A few minutes later, someone leaned against the wall to listen to

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him, but the man looked at his watch and started to walk again. Clearly he was late for work.

The one who paid the most attention was a 3 year old boy. His mother tagged him along, hurried but the kid stopped to look at the violinist. Finally the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk turning his head all the time. This action was repeated by several other children. All the parents, without exception, forced them to move on.

In the 45 minutes the musician played, only 6 people stopped and stayed for a while. About 20 gave him money but continued to walk their normal pace. He collected \$32. When he finished playing and silence took over, no one noticed it. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition.

No one knew this but the violinist was Joshua Bell, one of the best musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written with a violin worth 3.5 million dollars.

Two days before his playing in the subway, Joshua Bell sold out at a theater in Boston and the seats average \$100.

Joshua Bell playing incognito in the metro station was organized by the Washington Post as part of a social experiment about perception, taste and priorities of people. The outlines were: in a commonplace environment at an inappropriate hour: Do we perceive beauty? Do we stop to appreciate it? Do we recognize the talent in an unexpected context?

One of the possible conclusions from this experience could be:

If we do not have a moment to stop and listen to one of the best musicians in the world playing the best music ever written, how many other things are we missing?

"As you enter positions of trust and power, dream a little before you think."

... Toni Morrison (1931 -) US novelist

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