



# talking about...

May 2009

... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

## Making the Game Plan Stick

*"Never practice without a thought in mind."*

... Nancy Lopez (1957 - ) US golfer, "The Golfer's Book of Wisdom"

Take a moment and think about where you find high performing people in high performing teams. When I considered this question, one answer immediately came to mind - premier sporting teams. As I thought more deeply about this, I also recalled a recent conversation with my brother who has been a senior coach to state league hockey teams for many years. He had been talking about the difference between players seen as A, B or C level players in a team. The difference had something to do with their natural ability but much more to do with their capacity to make decisions when they are fatigued and or under pressure. The better players consistently made better decisions in these circumstances.

What is it about these "A" graders in high performing teams that allows them to make better decisions? In his book, "Outliers", Malcolm Gladwell posits that those people we see as high achievers do not find themselves in this position by natural talent alone. Almost always, they are blessed by being in the right place at the right time and furthermore they have been practicing their craft for many years before they rise to the top. Indeed, Malcolm Gladwell speaks about 10,000 hours of practice as the benchmark. So it is with elite sports people. Those seemingly freakish displays of talent in a game have been practiced over and over again. The players do not see these displays as flukes rather they are almost expected. Elite players and elite teams establish their structures and way of playing until it becomes habitual so that under pressure they will simply make the best decisions and perform.

What has this to do with leadership? Consider what is done to develop organisational leaders. They do their MBAs and other post-graduate courses; they go on their leadership retreats for a week and the odd leadership program. At some level they learn the distinctions of leadership and what makes a good leader. However, most leaders do not think about or define their leadership game plan. They do not establish the essence of their leadership as we discussed recently but rather go back from their courses to their leadership roles convinced that they know how to lead yet lacking a clear sense of leadership style and way of leading. Added to this is a lack of practice. Whereas sports people can practice on the training ground and hone their skills, organisational leaders don't have the same opportunity. They have to practice as they play the game. All of this can lead to a leadership style that does not hold up under stress leading to less effective leaders.

As you probably know, we use the Human Synergistics (HS) models widely in our work. The HS Circumplex identifies thinking styles related to constructive, aggressive/defensive and passive/defensive approaches to dealing with the world. Research that has been conducted by HS clearly points to an overwhelming desire within organisations to move away from defensive styles and generate more constructive thinking styles at an or-

ganisational, group and individual level. In the context of the leadership game plan this means that leaders have to be clear about their understanding these styles and then practice them to the point that they become habitual. They have to develop new thinking patterns that hold up under pressure.

In these challenging financial times, the word "resilience" has been often used to point to organisations that will do well under stress. One way of developing resilience is to develop habitual constructive thinking patterns and therefore the capacity to make effective decisions under pressure. Leaders can develop this ability by establishing a clear constructive leadership game plan and then working out how they can practice this game plan as they play the game. Coaching uses techniques that help leaders establish and maintain awareness of their style and then create new habits through reflective conversations and action learning over a period of time.

Please contact us if you would like to explore these ideas further. We would be delighted to have the conversation with you.

*"If I don't practice one day, I know it; two days, the critics know it; three days, the public knows it."*

... Jascha Heifetz (1901-1987) Russian-US classical violinist

Talking About Pty Ltd

PO Box 6652,  
St Kilda Rd Central,  
Victoria, 8008.

Ph: +613 9504 3558

info@talkingabout.com.au  
www.talkingabout.com.au

## A Tale of the Sea ...

Thanks to Greg for this little bit of lunacy:

Far away in the tropical waters of the Caribbean, two prawns were swimming around in the sea: one called Justin and the other called Christian.

The prawns were constantly being harassed and threatened by sharks that inhabited the area.

Finally one day Justin said to Christian, "I'm fed up with being a prawn; I wish I was a shark, and then I wouldn't have any worries about being eaten."

A large mysterious cod appeared and said, "Your wish is granted".

Lo and behold, Justin turned into a shark.

Horrified, Christian immediately swam away, afraid of being eaten by his old mate.

Time passed (as it does) and Justin found life as a shark boring and lonely.

All his old mates simply swam away whenever he came close to them.

Justin didn't realize that his new menacing appearance was the cause of his sad plight.

While swimming alone one day he saw the mysterious cod again and he thought perhaps the mysterious fish could change him back into a prawn.

He approached the cod and begged to be changed back and, lo and behold, he found himself turned back into a prawn.

With tears of joy in his tiny little eyes, Justin swam back to his friends and bought them all a cocktail.

(The punch line does not involve a prawn cocktail - it's much worse).

Looking around the gathering at the reef he realized he couldn't see his old pal.

"Where's Christian?" he asked.

"He's at home, still distraught that his best friend changed sides to the enemy and became a shark", came the reply.

Eager to put things right again and end the mutual pain and torture, he set off to Christian's abode.

As he opened the coral gate, memories came flooding back.

He banged on the door and shouted, "It's me, Justin, your old friend, come out and see me again."

Christian replied, "No way man, you'll eat me. You're now a shark, the enemy, and I'll not be tricked into being your dinner."

Justin cried back "No, I'm not. That was the old me. I've changed."...

"I've found Cod - I'm a Prawn again Christian".

**"Inner peace can be reached only when we practice forgiveness. Forgiveness is letting go of the past, and is therefore the means for correcting our misperceptions."**

... Gerald Jampolsky, US psychiatrist

## Our Web Site

More articles and information about our work can be found at our web site, [www.talkingabout.com.au](http://www.talkingabout.com.au). We invite you to take a look.

## Subscribing to talking about

Do you know others who might be interested in reading our e-zine? If so please feel free to send them a copy or ask them to register by sending an e-mail to [info@talkingabout.com.au](mailto:info@talkingabout.com.au).

To unsubscribe from this e-zine, simply reply to this e-mail with the word "unsubscribe" in the subject area.

Copyright © 2009  
Talking About Pty Ltd  
ACN 112 307 892  
[info@talkingabout.com.au](mailto:info@talkingabout.com.au)  
Telephone: +61 3 9504 3558