



talking about...

February 2011

... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

Fostering Personal Growth

"Only in growth, reform, and change, paradoxically enough, is true security to be found."

... Anne Morrow Lindbergh (1906 - 2001) US writer

When I am asked about what I aim to help people achieve through my work, there is a simple answer that springs to mind. I help people grow. Now this will invariably have many different meanings for people but for me "personal growth" simply means expanding an individual's capacity to observe from greater and more varied perspectives and synthesise that greater complexity into a better way of being. Even though there is obviously much more behind that statement, it can be said that personal growth means more capacity to deal with greater complexity.

Many organisations spend a lot of money on developing their people and encouraging their personal growth. Despite that investment and their belief in its value, many organisational leaders are unaware of how they then hamstring the personal growth of the people who work for them by reducing their ability to see complexity and asking them to be very focused in their efforts.

An obvious example of this lies in the way key performance indicators are established in an organisation. Most organisations develop performance indicators by rolling them down from the strategic plan through the hierarchy. As most organisations insist on being able to measure each KPI, this often leads to the establishment of very quantitative performance indicators from general managers down to individual employees. The result is the lower in the organisation, the more focused and specific the performance indicator. The idea seems to be that the combination of all of these indicators will generate the desired outcome. The reality in many cases is each individual focuses purely on what they are to be rewarded for doing and lose sight of the context in which they are doing it. The results are often not what are expected.

No doubt many people would say this is simply a matter of poorly designed performance indicators and there may be something in that point of view. However the first casualty as people get busy always seems to be the context of why something is done. If the context is not effectively established and reinforced in the conversations to establish performance indicators, the connection of these indicators to the broader organisational context can be easily lost.

If you want to improve how you create performance indicators then we invite you to consider two key points.

Firstly, make the indicator relevant to what you want people to do. It makes little sense to use specific targets associated with low level actions to reward people in more senior positions who you would expect to focus

on organisational dynamics and strategy. Rather, we suggest you establish indicators related to the creation and effectiveness of dynamics and strategy.

Secondly, seek to create performance indicators that have a clear context and relationship to others and ensure each individual understands their connection to the broader organisational context, not just when the indicators are established but throughout the year. You may well help not only your business outcomes but also your people's growth.

"Growth demands a temporary surrender of security."

... Gail Sheehy (b. 1937) US writer, journalist & editor

All for Nothing! ...

Thanks to Greg Stephenson for this one... In 2002, this story was apparently broadcast on an afternoon program on ABC radio. It may or may not be true. Whether it is or not, I have no doubt it could be!

In March 1999 a man living in Kandos (near Mudgee in NSW, Australia) received a bill for his as yet unused gas line stating that he owed \$0.00. He ignored it and threw it away. In April he received another bill and threw that one away too. The following month the gas company sent

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

him a very nasty note stating that they were going to cancel his gas line if he didn't send them \$0.00 by return mail.

He called them, talked to them, and they said it was a computer error and they would take care of it.

The following month he decided that it was about time that he tried out the troublesome gas line figuring that if there was usage on the account it would put an end to this ridiculous predicament. However, when he went to use the gas, it had been cut off. He called the gas company who apologised for the computer error once again and said that they would take care of it. The next day he got a bill for \$0.00 stating that payment was now overdue.

Assuming that having spoken to them the previous day the latest bill was yet another mistake, he ignored it, trusting that the company would be as good as their word and sort the problem out. The next month he got a bill for \$0.00. This bill also stated that he had 10 days to pay his account or the company would have to take steps to recover the debt.

Finally, giving in, he thought he would beat the gas company at their own game and mailed them a cheque for \$0.00. The computer duly processed his account and returned a statement to the effect that he now owed the gas company nothing at all. A week later, the manager of the Mudgee bank branch called our hapless friend and asked him what he was doing writing cheque for \$0.00.

After a lengthy explanation the bank manager replied that the \$0.00 cheque had caused their cheque processing software to fail. The bank could therefore not process ANY cheques they had received from ANY of their customers that day because the cheque for \$0.00 had caused the computer to crash.

The following month the man received a letter from the gas company claiming that his cheque had bounced and that he now owed them \$0.00 and unless he sent a cheque by return mail they would take immediate steps to recover the debt. At this point, the man decided to file a debt harassment claim against the gas company. It took him nearly two hours to convince the clerks at the local courthouse that he was not joking.

They subsequently helped him in the drafting of statements which were considered substantive evidence of the aggravation and difficulties he had been forced to endure during this debacle.

The matter was heard in the Magistrate's Court in Mudgee and the outcome was this:

The gas company was ordered to:

Immediately rectify their computerised accounts system or Show cause, within 10 days, why the matter should not be referred to a higher court for consideration under Company Law.

- ☉ Pay the bank dishonour fees incurred by the man.
- ☉ Pay the bank dishonour fees incurred by all the Westpac clients whose cheques had been bounced on the day our friend's had been processed.
- ☉ Pay the claimant's court costs; and
- ☉ Pay the claimant a total of \$1500 per month for the 5 month period March to July inclusive as compensation for the aggravation they had caused their client to suffer.

And all this over \$0.00. Makes you wonder, eh!

"Growth is the only evidence of life."

... John Henry Newman (1801 - 1890) English religious leader, prelate & writer

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ACN 112 307 892
info@talkingabout.com.au
Telephone: +61 3 9504 3558