



# talking about...

September 2011

... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

## Deciding the Risk

**"And the trouble is, if you don't risk anything, you risk even more."**

... Erica Jong (b.1942) US "author, poet"

The world appears to be going faster and faster. Obviously, I don't mean that literally, rather that our experience of living seems to be speeding up. I suspect you would be hard pressed to find anyone in modern society who would disagree with that sentiment.

The continuing introduction of faster technologies and electronic delivery services means that every year we seem to deal with more and more information and issues. As well as technology, downsizing combined with the constant demand for productivity improvement, has many people in the workplace dealing with an ever-increasing need to produce more.

One of the challenges for we human beings lies in a basic need we seem to have to create certainty in our world, despite its inherent uncertainty! This shows up as a counterpoint to the incessant demand to deal with more because with a desire for certainty comes a requirement to avoid, or at least be seen to avoid, mistakes. This often ends up as push for increasing compliance to rules and processes to demonstrate how something has been done. The assumption being that this will always lead to better outcomes. In the end, this leads us to having to deal with more information and concerns.

In a nutshell, people in today's workplace are expected to continually do more and more with little or no room or forgiveness for error. Is it any wonder that stress has become the major cause of work place insurance claims in the past decade?

The one thing that has not really changed over time is us. We still think one thought at a time. We live in an emotional state that for many is quite tumultuous. Sure, some of us may have developed greater self-awareness and techniques to work through large amounts of information but we still do this one thought at a time in an emotional state that often is not conducive to our clearest thinking.

This greater pace of issues and information often means that we are having to make decisions about more things in a shorter time-frame and often with less information. One of the challenges with making quicker decisions is that there is an increased inherent risk in many of the decisions being made. This leads us down one of two paths when we feel we have to take an important decision. Either, we make a decision based on what we know at the time and accept the risk or we put the decision off - we decide not to decide - and take a risk that way.

Even though many people are not thinking of uncertainty and risk when they are making decisions, at some level, we recognise this is what we are doing. The idea of human beings as rational beings has held sway for many years and continues to be seen by many as the seminal aspect of the human condition. This philosophy posits that human beings always decide in a rational way by weighing up the pros and cons of any deci-

sion. Over the past thirty years or so, it has become clear that the actual act of deciding is an emotional one. Something feels right to us. Hence we can make decisions quickly by drawing on our experience and intuition.

The challenge for many people is that the emotional states associated with stress are more aligned with anxiety, resentment and resignation which tend to impede our intuition and ability to observe patterns. As a result, the opportunity for people in today's workplace is to ensure they put in place emotional management strategies, understand their priorities and take time out to reflect. To do so will make them better able to make better decisions.

**"Every business and every product has risks. You can't get around it."**

... Lee Iacocca (b. 1924) US auto business executive

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## Implements of Math Destruction

Another one plucked randomly from the internet ...

At New York's Kennedy airport today an individual, later discovered to be a public school teacher, was arrested trying to board a flight while in possession of a ruler, a protractor, a square, a slide rule, and a calculator. The Attorney General believes the man is a member of the notorious Al-gebra movement. He is being charged with carrying weapons of math instruction.

"Al-gebra is a very fearsome cult, indeed", the Attorney General said. "They desire average solutions by means and extremes, and sometimes go off on a tangent in a search of absolute value. They consist of quite shadowy figures, with names like "x" and "y", and, although they are frequently referred to as "unknowns", we know they really belong to a common denominator and are part of the axis of medieval with coordinates in every country."

"As the great Greek philanderer Isosceles used to say, there are three sides to every triangle."

When asked to comment on the arrest, President Bush said, "If God had wanted us to have better weapons of math instruction, he would have given us more fingers and toes."

***"In essence, if we want to direct our lives, we must take control of our consistent actions. It's not what we do once in a while that shapes our lives, but what we do consistently."***

... Tony Robbins (b. 1960) US author and motivational speaker

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