



# LESSONS THAT CANNOT BE TAUGHT

There has long been a tendency to equate Personal Development with progressing a career path; the improvement of one's CV or simply skilling up to meet new objectives. It has tended to focus on skill and knowledge, because that is the most easily measured aspect of development. The result is a loss of capability, because other vital aspects of development that cannot be measured or weighed have tended to be overlooked.



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Personal development is rarely viewed as an opportunity to realise potential, as a search for meaning or a cultural necessity. This fits with a world in which material gain is the main measure of progress and wisdom is neither recognised nor valued. This one-dimensional approach turns us into well-conditioned workers, toiling our forty-five years before retiring to self-indulgent old age. To relieve the pain of meaningless existence, we indulge in palliative holidays, sports, sex, TV and possessions. We find ourselves contributing to a world order that is exploiting natural resources, exhausting the planet and keeping most of us enslaved. Let us consider for a moment what personal development could become - an expansion of being and lifting of the spirit to make work - and hence life - meaningful, fulfilling and wholesome. To evolve as a human being means becoming one, whole; transcending limitations, resolving inner conflicts, realising potential, listening and learning, loving in relationships, spiritually awake and mature. If such is the proper state for a human being, it is frighteningly rare.

The concept of maturing means discovering one's gifts - what you do well, through the practice of which you become all that you can be on earth. More than this, through what you do and how you are, you raise your aspirations and those of people whose lives you touch, contributing to the stirring of the spirit of humankind. Amazingly, many people who appear deprived from a conventional viewpoint, may be discovered to be rich beyond measure, authentic in that they have deep inner resources, gained perhaps from being close to nature or exploring in relationships, from caring for others, or from practised skill in a simple craft. They have an inner calm, a light in their eyes and are full of vitality into old age. They are people who have found meaningful work, dedication to which has enabled them to explore their perceptions and to grow inwardly as a result of effort, sacrifice and the fulfilment they have wrought. Maturing means to become more conscious; less bound up in the everyday world of things or out of touch with your essential self. For any human being it means to fully know your Self and by such knowing to experience profound satisfaction or fulfilment. With self-knowledge comes the inner freedom to create. We will not achieve wholeness in society or wholesomeness on earth if we continue to laud immaturity, competitiveness, consumption and violence and if we remove the meaning from work.

Work, to which most of us devote much of our waking adult life, is an ideal medium for development. Indeed, we could even define work as being any activity (paid for or not) that enables us to contribute value to society while developing ourselves through its practice. Of course, this is far from the prevailing notion of work as the toil by which we earn enough to do something we desire. Such a conventional attitude to work encourages conformity, selfishness, greed and power. Only when we look at a broader picture does it become apparent that a global culture resulting in external wealth for the few at the expense of the many might be humanity's undoing. Especially if we have a role in HR we would do well to reflect upon our own personal place in the evolution of man and our personal worth. What am I? Who am I? How will people value my life when it is done? Most modern management development is focused on performance improvement for bottom line results to the neglect of what makes life and work meaningful or worthwhile. To bring the spirit back into enterprise and society there is an urgent need to re-balance what we work at, the way we do it and why.

Line managers expect HR to deliver highly motivated and capable individuals to whom they can assign tasks, expecting good



performance and motivation. Effective action has three components, corresponding to what, how and why we do something. We can call them; Function (skill and knowledge), Being (capacity to cope) and Will or intent to act. Personal development has tended to focus on skill and knowledge to the neglect of anything else, because that aspect of learning is most easily measured, so most development is one-dimensional. Add to this that that our training addresses Bateson's Learning 1 but neglects the more subtle Learning 2 and Learning 3. By focusing development narrowly upon what organisations think they need, are we not inevitably failing to raise aspirations or to contribute to organisational evolution? Is it enough to do what is expected rather than to awaken our organisations to the social cost of exploitative attitudes to their so-called human resources. Do people exist to serve organisations or are organisations not human constructs that enable people to achieve collaborative outcomes?

Recently we see post-truth, post-factual politics infecting our affairs. It would seem we are not the rational, caring society we had imagined ourselves to be. Witness the pressures on society in our modern world, including those attributed to immigration, the pursuit of self-interest, climate change, unemployment, sexism, consumerism and so on, all of which are systemic issues and hence interconnected. Maybe we are more inclined to mass hysteria and primal urges than to cool decision making through carefully crafted processes? Might it be that the norms of education and HR need to be challenged? Are we really developing people to build a wholesome society in an emerging future or are we unwittingly contributing to the exploitation of employees and to meaningless work?

Historically ideas about development have been influenced by the education system and the idea of measurable skill and knowledge. Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be misinterpreted as proposing self-actualisation for the higher echelons and job security, if they are lucky, for the masses. Jung, on the other hand, saw development as the drive of the individual to achieve wholeness and balance of self. In an age when celebrity and greed win plaudits (being juicy material for film scripts and media coverage) development goes against the grain. Do we, then, leave our employees at the mercy of the media and popular culture or do we help them become better citizens, stronger, more capable, more energetic and socially responsible? What is the cost of having countries and corporations in the hands of people who shrug off responsibility like immature teenagers?

It is worth keeping in mind that you cannot have highly evolved communities or high-performing teams of un-evolved individuals - for us to succeed together we need to develop everyone. Hence our primary Corporate Social Responsibility may be to ensure that everyone has the possibility of using their work as the means of developing their "Self" to its highest potential, not just for productivity or profit but for effectiveness in

living. Personal development is a common good. If we are to get to post-modern self-organisation (The Teal organisations Laloux describes in Reinventing Organisations) then HR needs to wake up. The development of conscious, whole human beings paves the way for better organisational systems in our corporations, our society and our world. Higher levels of perception and increased awareness allow us to organise in ways that utilise the greater freedoms that intuition, inspiration and insights allow. Just as, individually, we can achieve a change of perception and the freedom to creatively respond to change, so our organisations can develop like living organisms with the ability to respond, adapt and grow. Except in so far as we self-organise as living systems, are we not condemned to put on ever more pressure and work even harder? And isn't this a self-limiting strategy?

True development involves systemic change towards a greater degree of awareness, consciousness and maturity - to a more whole or complete state. This implies an awakening of the spirit of enterprise, with more freedom from the attachments of the material world. It implies harnessing multiple intelligences and embracing differences. From over 30 years' experience in personal, team and leadership development, I know people can be enabled in their choices. There is the possibility of developing as whole and balanced human beings in wholesome groupings at every scale. This implies a struggle against the prevailing paradigm, the mainstream, which is concerned with making us all good consumers and contributors to a system that has perhaps lost its way? Is anyone better placed than HR to be the conscience of organisations, helping to break the addiction to shareholder profit before all else. And is not HR also ideally placed to fully realise the potential of people in organisations - and through them to contribute to a more whole and wholesome society? Do HR directors have the courage to seize the day? ●



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UNDOING



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