



A Birthday Present....

To mark the occasion of our 9th birthday we have compiled our 9 Biggest Lessons over our history of client work and are imparting our wisdom to you. Below are the top 9 that have transcended industry and sector and that show up time and time again.

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"The ability to deal with people is as purchasable a commodity as sugar or coffee and I will pay more for that ability than for any other under the sun."

John D Rockefeller

Lesson No 9:

Reactive Costs More than Proactive

There are typically two approaches to investing in change related work. The first is being *reactive*; waiting for a crisis, a burning platform, or rock bottom before making a change. The other is being *proactive*; capitalising on existing strengths and spotting opportunities to increase or sustain high performance and competitive advantage. We've seen time and time again OD & change type initiatives reaching the top of the priority list when in reactive mode; when the pain has become too apparent to ignore or sweep under the rug. The problem is that the damage is often far gone at this point and any change efforts would need to be multiplied in order to reverse the damage and recover into good health. It is not impossible, but it is much more laborious, pervasive, and costly.

The few, the ambitious ones, who take a proactive approach are much more willing to make a case for continuous improvement in the absence of any excruciating pain and maintain a belief that the ROI will pay dividends in the long run. Think open-heart bypass surgery versus regular fitness and vitamins. With the former there is much more at stake; the risk and investment is high and the implications of the problem are pervasive. With the latter, there is a maintenance and performance improvement mind-set, lower risk, and arguably lower investment. We've been lucky enough to work with several ambitious leaders who take a proactive approach to performance improvement and who have since built in resilience into the people and organisations they lead.

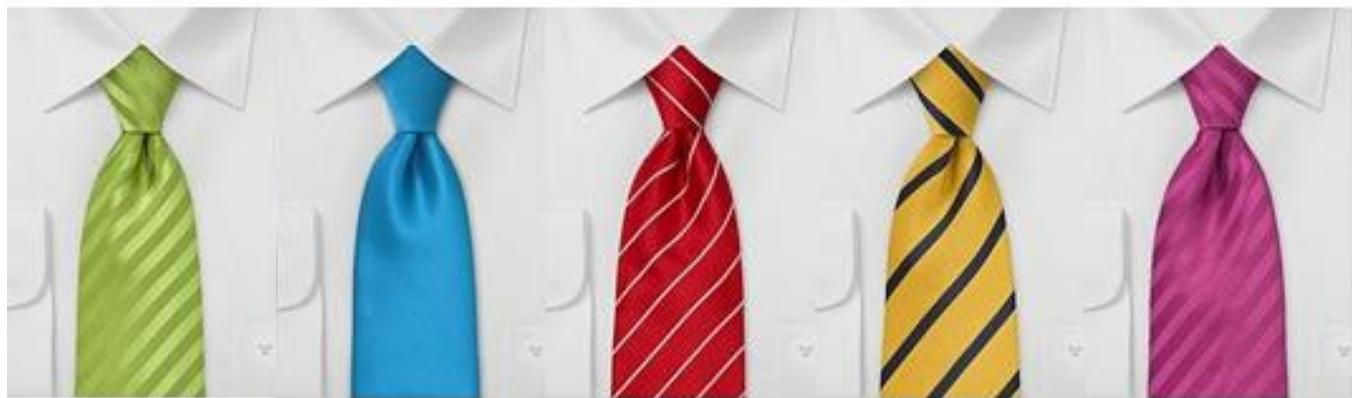


Lesson No 8:

Diversity is Money

Behind every business challenge is a people problem. Typically, behind every people problem is a clash of preferences and style. In almost every business challenge we've supported, we've often uncovered that a lack of awareness, recognition, appreciation, and utilisation of diversity exists within relationships and teams. The visionary sees the detail-orient as nit-picky. The completer-finisher sees the idea-generator as irresponsible. The extrovert sees the introvert as slow. The thinker sees the feeler as too soft. The above are neither true nor untrue; they are simply different perceptions based on a person's point of view.

Teams who outperform others are often those that have taken the time and opportunity to understand the differences that exist amongst team members. A successful working relationship is often grounded in strong awareness and appreciation of each other's' differences and preferences. A strong leader or high performer is often tuned into diversity and preferences so that he or she can adapt their style and approach to better influence and achieve a desired outcome. The bottom line is, diversity is money. When ignored, dynamics are negatively affected which directly impacts financial success. When leveraged, dynamics are strong, people work better together, and achieve the greatest results. So here's our takeaway: Develop the *curiosity* to take interest, and the *will* to make use of, the diversity around you in order to leverage strengths, adapt, and achieve the outcomes you want.



Lesson No 7:

De-risk Change Programmes with 1:1 Support

McKinsey's research found that many change programmes fail either because leaders aren't willing to change themselves or that people are more likely to defend the status quo. They go so far as to suggest that by shifting mind-sets at the onset, companies are four times more likely to succeed in their organisational change efforts than those who overlook mind-sets.

Over the past 9 years, we've consistently seen this to be true. Group or organisation-wide programmes that have elements, which support key influencers at the individual level, render the most successful and sustainable outcomes. This is because 1:1 support allows for leaders and senior managers to address internal blockers to change, which are often perceived as taboo topics or signs of weakness when addressed in public or groups: fear, perceived lack of capability, low confidence, past failures, wanting to remain expert... the list goes on. By building in the right kind of 1:1 support into large development and change programmes, those driving the change have safe, confidential spaces to get to the heart of the matter about what's really getting in their way. If you want change to happen, you need to pair group/organisational-wide and individual/micro-level support to-derisk the investment and to succeed in your ambitions.



Lesson No 6:

Reframe your Relationship with Challenge

If we know that challenge is a necessary precursor to innovation, improvement, sustainable results and financial success, then why do some leaders find it hard to deal with? Over nine years we've found time and time again that the most ambitious and successful leaders are those who welcome challenge because they have a healthy, constructive, positive and inviting relationship with it. Their definition of challenge is inherently different to those who fear or de-value it. They are open to challenge in many forms (1:1 feedback, challenge in the form of an opposing view or opinion, or a different perspective). They are able to separate the challenging feedback from their personal ego, even just for a moment, to look at the feedback as objectively as possible and then honestly assess the connection between that piece of feedback and themselves.

Successful leaders and thriving organisations welcome and seek challenge; it becomes a norm and a part of their culture. They don't see challenge as a threat; instead, they view challenge as a part of their individual and collective recipe for success. What is your current relationship with challenge, and is it time for a reframe?



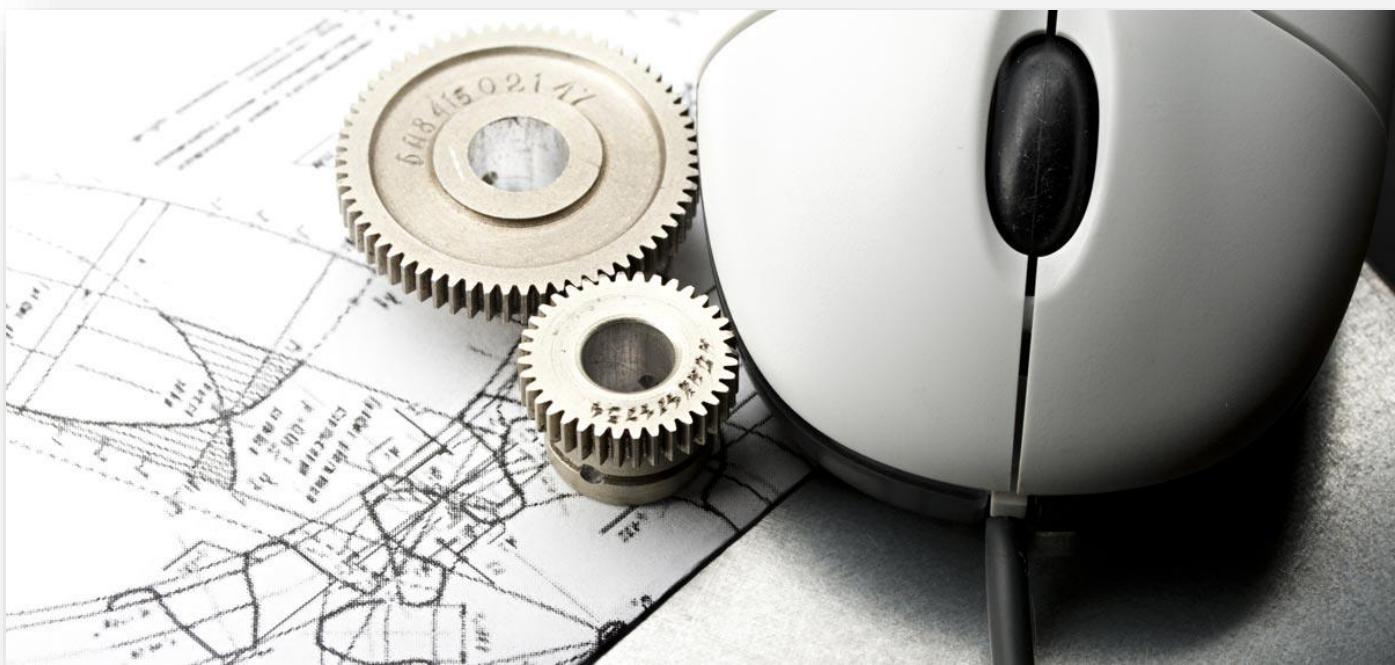
Lesson No 5:

Overrated – The Downside of being (too) Technically Brilliant

The vast majority of senior managers have achieved their elevated positions as a result of technical (functional) competence or detailed organisation & industry experience. But being just technically brilliant is not only overrated, it comes with some serious negative unintended consequences.

Senior managers often have access to more resources, be it money, or the decision making authority. On occasion they can have an over inflated view of themselves, their importance and their overall leadership ability. They've risen because of their technical powers so they've been rewarded for it! Unless they are great at being objective and keeping their ego in check, they can suffocate talented individuals around them, becoming too dominant or critical of others. In the worst cases, they will say, "nobody else is competent around here and they can't do it to the quality I want!" If this isn't spotted and corrected, it can lead to a self-perpetuating scenario; talented people either leave, or fail because they are demotivated and unsupported. This makes succession planning very difficult. This is a major risk in most organisations.

The technically brilliant can sometimes either forget or not value diversity around them. Why would they choose to work with people with different strengths or competencies when they prize the technical or the organisational knowledge so highly? They will gravitate and recruit people like themselves, ending up with one dimensional teams and lacklustre performance over the long term. Too much of any one thing over a long period is bad! Organisations with diverse teams that value a number of skills tend to manage risk and change much more skilfully and ultimately deliver better results.



Lesson No 4: The Power of Strong Sponsorship

The existence of so called 'Wicked Problems' has been around for decades; problems not fully understood until after the solution is created; problems that are unique in nature and are difficult to quantify. For that reason, when dealing with change and performance improvement in complex situations, strong sponsorship is essential.

Sponsorship can come in many forms but its felt impact has some consistent qualities. Strong sponsorship creates the wide spread organisational 'will' to tackle an issue or a challenge. It can free up important resources, particularly people's time and energy to really focus on the challenge for a concentrated period. Sponsorship always creates or reinforces a sense of importance – it serves to remind or create the context in people's minds.

Sadly all too often we see the results of poorly sponsored work. When people don't put their name to an issue or endorse it unconditionally, it generally leads to 'Blame', 'Back tracking' or 'Barriers'. Weak sponsorship is often associated with poor leadership or a short term culture within an organisation. Either way, results don't come as easily and there are often costs and consequences. While senior managers or key influencers might personally feel 'safe' by not backing things up, typically their organisation and their people miss out....



Lesson No 3:

It ain't what you do it's...

..the way that you do it. So much time, management energy and focus is placed on strategy when in fact 50% of the time the real problem lies in the execution and/or implementation of the plans. Too often senior managers and whole businesses change the course in the belief that their idea isn't working. We find it is often the case that the basic strategic principle is fit for purpose but it is how the management team have tried to implement it that's at fault.

It's inevitable really; strategy, vision and business forecasts appear sexier and shinier, getting a lot of attention. People like to be associated with this clever work! The poor relation in contrast is consideration around implementation, change management, communication and, when looking backwards, review and lessons learnt. There is so much value that is simply lost to business here, it's pretty shocking. Until it is reprioritised it will continue to be a self-fulfilling prophecy that, "We got the strategy wrong, let's do it again."

We put it down to a lack of confidence and adaptation; many senior teams lack the skills and the knowledge around change and implementation so they simply ignore it or it gets delegated two levels down with an ineffective communication stream relaying the message. The bottom line is: don't just focus on the *what*, it's the *how* and *why* that can make or break it.



Lesson No 2: Fake it till you break it

It really is impossible to fake a healthy dynamic in a management team for very long. When there is a lack of alignment, low respect or even outright conflict, it will go unnoticed for a very short period until its spotted. The worst leaders simply fake it and deny all knowledge, putting on a brave face. Ultimately these sorts of teams lose the respect of their people and in performance terms they punch below their weight. If left unchecked other costs will quickly creep in; the best talent either leaves or holds the boss to ransom on salary for putting up with poor relationships, other teams actively avoid collaboration because they don't know what to believe or trust, people play games and stop sharing key information thus slowing progress down and increasing mistakes and rework. Morale takes a big hit.

A healthy dynamic or a fresh start is the only key to peak performance and seeing progress and positive change.



Lesson No 1: The Most Important Relationship of All

The most important relationship is with yourself. So many people resist looking at themselves objectively and understanding what's really going on for them. As a result they can lack self-awareness or the desire to change. Instead they often end up projecting outwardly rather than looking inside, perhaps blaming others, handing over responsibility or accepting unhealthy relationships that are less productive & fulfilling. At work it's particularly dangerous for leaders, managers and those with a high dependency on collaboration / team working. That's why when we do organisational change work we encourage all of the sponsors to reflect on the desired change from their perspective to explore the opportunities for their own personal growth and change, through coaching, mentoring or other 1:1 work.

Don't believe us? Remember it was Ghandi who said, "Be the change you want to see."

