

Bringing **big ideas** to life

With urgent deadlines, working across different continents, our team at Performance Unlimited just hadn't met regularly enough last year. Finally, when we did get together to share stories and compare notes we discovered some startling evidence for leaders about what is now required as the world hauls itself out of the worst recession for 60 years.

Undoing the Knot. For organisations in 2010, the old adage "do what you have always done, and you'll get what you have always got" could not be more true.

In 333 B.C., whilst crossing Asia, Alexander the Great heard the legend of the "Gordian Knot". A prophecy states that whoever is able to untie the complicated knot will become the king of Asia. The story intrigued Alexander; he studied the knot, making some futile attempts to find the rope ends. However, Alexander decided to make up his own rules and taking out his sword, sliced the knot in half. Legend has it that from that day, Asia was fated to Alexander.

So many times in a short life, Alexander excelled in doing differently; with courage and conviction he questioned traditions, changed the rules and set out a breathtaking vision of a new world order. Over the next few months in *The Grapevine Magazine*, we will explore how organisations can excel in doing differently. These articles will focus on how to create a culture of innovation, how to disrupt the status quo and how to harness the creativity that exists but is so often untapped in our workforce.

Crazy Dancing Guy. Doing differently is not a solo or one time event. Doing differently requires followers, creativity is a team sport and innovation needs to be infectious.

If you are not one of the 3 million people who have seen the Sasquatch Music Festival video clip, it starts with a guy dancing by himself in a kind of crazy way. Soon another crazy dancing guy joins and then another. Those sitting around them look a little embarrassed but then a few more people join and within a few minutes the field is alive with hundreds of people dancing.

What's remarkable is that whilst the rest of the crowd just sat and watched, the crazy dancing

guy kept dancing and soon hundreds of other spectators wanted to be part of what he was doing. Around the world, from multinational companies to small businesses, leaders right now need to do what the crazy dancing guy did; to do differently, to stand out from the crowd but critically, to inspire and enthuse others to want to join in.

Thinking Differently. I recently visited with a HR Director of a global FMCG business. There was something important on his mind; a major project that he was leading wasn't delivering results. In 2008, he had launched a major innovation initiative; training leaders, designing new processes and investing heavily in new technology. "Last week I went to visit a plant; I had lunch with the plant manager and his team. These are good people, these are the people that our company depends upon and we are still tying them in knots. My initiative was to make a difference, I am here to make a difference but nothing has changed, not really," he concluded.

Despite investing in re-structuring and new processes and technology, the project had not changed the systemic thinking and belief of the organisation. In other words, the habits hadn't changed and the old ways remained ("Do what you've always done ..."). In creating a culture of innovation there is no shortcut; our role as leaders is to help others think differently and "get outside their box" and to shift and align the habits of the organisation.

Out of the Cold. In the same week that Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy, *Business Week* published the article, "At 3M, A Struggle between Discipline and Imagination". In the 90s 3M was heralded as the Invention Machine but by 2001 shareholder value was shrinking. In response, out went innovation and in came quality management and six sigma and profits started to climb again. By 2005, as 3M's innovation pipeline dried up so did sales and, after another executive shake up, innovation was back in vogue.

Since this article was published, balancing innovation and efficiency has become yet more business critical. Ken Chenault at American Express and Steve Jobs at Apple argue that



recession is the time for innovation but for most organisations, with an unrelenting focus on costs, efficiency and risk, innovation is out in the cold. For 3M, relegating innovation had a dramatic impact on long term profitability and shareholder value. Performance Unlimited's experience over the last two decades would echo the views of Chenault and Jobs and the experience of 3M. Tomorrow's leading companies will be those that, of course, drive efficiencies and cost discipline but they will also be those that dare to do differently; those who set a breathtaking vision, inspire innovation and harness creativity.

Bringing Big Ideas to Life. When Performance Unlimited met as a team back in November we had a flipchart with this question, "What will

successful companies be doing in 2010?"

The completed flipchart read like this:

- Stand out from the crowd
 - Rewrite the rules
 - Breed innovation
 - Enthuse and inspire others to join
 - Help change habits
- and in big red letters at the bottom of the flipchart
- Do differently and think differently.
- For two decades, Performance Unlimited has been partnering with companies from around the world, working with them to bring their big ideas to life, helping them do differently and think differently. If you would like to talk to one of us about how we do this or you would like to participate in our 'Big Ideas' debate please contact Nick Warren at:
- nick.warren@uk.performance-unlimited.biz
or visit our website
www.performance-unlimited.biz

In next month's edition of *The Grapevine Magazine* we will be sharing more of the 'how' of doing differently and in April's edition, readers will have an opportunity to participate in Performance Unlimited's Innovation Index.



We have chosen Anish Kapoor's Cloud Gate in Chicago's Millennium Park to illustrate this month's article. Kapoor's sculpture represents innovation and the confidence to stand out from the crowd and the story of its installation is a case study in the art of thinking differently.