

Christmas – early or not – time to reflect



It's that time of the year again when people begin to complain that Christmas is too commercialised, that it starts too early and how they wish we could get back to the real meaning of that word "Christmas". But just think for a moment what would happen if we all did exactly that. Where would Pantomimes be if they didn't plan these maybe well over a year earlier? Or that City Hall Christmas tree if they didn't order it and plan the evening's event well in advance. Or all those new Christmas presents and decorations that appear each year on the shelves if they did not begin manufacturing them early on each year? Or those restaurants that are preparing for all the parties? Or what about those special Christmas Carol and other Services that began to be planned so months ago? And so on and so on.

You see if we were all totally honest with ourselves, we would have to admit that the fault lies within each of us. We haven't thought out clearly what would actually happen if we did de-commercialise Christmas. One sure thing is that we would all be much worse off. No, the problem is that our attitudes are really at fault and this is what we must work on – changing them not the world around us.

Over the years it is exactly the same for any organisation as it is for us as individuals. What drives highly successful organisations isn't only their vision and mission statements, essential as these are. It isn't even their annual budgets backed up by their departmental objectives and targets, systems and procedures, essential as these are. It is management's ability to motivate staff to buy into them and then motivate the staff to achieve them. This depends on the extent to which "the Management" has earned the respect and trust of their staff, because they have demonstrated genuine leadership, openness and transparency, honesty, accountability and integrity etc - the Core Values that underpin successful organisations.

These values are also what should underpin your ambitions and career aspirations as you meet the demands imposed by organisational strategies and objectives. Remember individuals who have made a lasting impression have been those with high values. So organisations and individuals neglect these at their peril.

Here is an example. In the early 1960's President Kennedy had a vision that motivated thousands of people and incurred \$bn of costs. What was it? It was:

His Vision: He openly admitted that he would like to see a man on the moon by the end of the 1960's. The important thing about this was that, in his mind he had a picture of what this would look like. It might have been a man bobbing about or the little buggy bumping over the rough terrain or the capsule landing. Whatever it was it was a picture in his mind. And this is fundamental to any organisational or personal vision (e.g. your 2005 holiday or that new car). If you can't visualise it in your mind then it is not a vision.

The Mission: Now what the mission of NASA is is unlikely to be something like the "Exploration of Space". This is the business they are in each day of every week and what staff are employed to do. It is not something that is easily visualised. But it took the President to express a simple vision that captured their imagination and lifted their minds from the day-to-day activities, to new heights.

The Process: Then no doubt strategic discussions took place and plans were committed to paper. Then working back from the final date, annual budgets, targets and responsibilities were set out and agreed. Each year reviews took place, achievements were acknowledged, threats and difficulties were openly discussed and renewed action with new targets, and time scales and deadlines were agreed and committed to. Where necessary additional resources, such as finance, skills and equipment, were made available. What did not change however was the Vision including the end date. But all through this the mission of NASA continued, and so the vision was, over and above the Mission. It drove the organisation forward.

Their Core Values: Now it wouldn't be stretching it too far by saying that the vast majority of those involved were motivated not just by the Vision. While the Vision provided the challenge what was more important was that it influenced their attitude to the organisation and their attitudes to each other. They had to rely on each other, work for and with each other. This called for trust, honesty, openness, integrity and the other values at all levels of management that are outlined above.

And did they achieve the vision? Yes - by a matter of months. But do you remember seeing on TV the pleasure and relief that the whole team openly displayed. No doubt every other person who had been involved, no matter how insignificantly this was, felt a real sense of pride that they had played a part in this great achievement. They had reason to celebrate an historic event and money wouldn't have compensated for this. What a pity the President wasn't there to see it.

Let me repeat it, it was a commitment to their core values that changed attitudes and was the driving force and the real enabling factor. It wasn't a loyalty to the President or their employers. It was teamwork. And excellent teamwork is dependent on much more than skills and abilities - core values and attitudes to them.

Now Christmas for many of us will be a reason to celebrate, as it will be the culmination of a year's hard work that was needed so that we could pay our bills, save for that holiday, or ensure that we continue to do the best for our children. For others it will have been a year of hardship or uncertainty a result of which will have been a shift, or at best a delay in their fulfilling their future aspirations and vision and maybe challenging their core value systems. So don't knock the commercialisation of Christmas. But let's look at getting in control of it by sorting out our attitudes towards it and by inference to those less fortunate members of our community, or "team".

One way to do it is through the office and other parties. This is the time to go out to enjoy yourself, and there's nothing wrong with this – in moderation of course. But have you thought that you could be talking to someone who has just been told they have lost their job or who are going into the New Year not knowing if they are going to have a job. They are there trying to network the party season by doing what is suggested here primarily:

- Finding out, in advance, who is going to be at the party
- Remembering that it is a Party, and not abusing the opportunity
- Being interested in non work subjects and celebrating the successes of others
- Finding out as early as possible what the person they are talking to does for a living
- Not hiding the fact that they are looking for a job
- Not spending too much time talking to one person – but circulating
- Not handing out a CV to everyone they talk to.

So let's start approaching the festive season now, not complaining about it, but playing our part having sorted out our core value systems and letting these dictate our attitudes. Then maybe we will begin to get the "Christ" at the front of the "mas", spread a little lasting good cheer and celebrate a more meaningful and blessed Christmas.

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