

Generating Breakthrough Performance

FEL Annual Conference, 2006

Morning Session – Lectures by Mark Tigchelaar and Joseph Jaworski

Joseph Jaworski and Mark Tigchelaar share a passion: the pursuit of far reaching change. Both men were inspired by the Shell scenario planning process. They were motivated not only by the global scope of the scenarios and the power of storytelling, but more importantly by the realisation that scenarios could be generative rather than simply reactive; that they could be used as a tool for making the future, rather than just for responding to a future determined by someone else.

Joseph has a longer term mission, born from personal experience, of trying to understand and recreate the unique connectedness that can exist between a group of people working in extreme crisis situations (the united action field). He has spent a lifetime looking for ways to engender this highly effective way of working in a non-crisis setting.

Joseph has refined his ideas into the U-Process. This approach has been proven through its application to a wide range of international business and social problems. The three main stages of the U are **sensing** or observing the current reality; allowing an “inner knowing” to emerge (**presencing**), then **realising** a new reality through acting swiftly. In practise these stages are broken down further into 7 capacities. The whole process may take anything from 3 days to several years to complete.

The 'U' is more than a road map for implementing change, its success depends on the individuals involved responding effectively to a profound personal challenge. Looking inwards, proponents must understand and clarify their own roots, and how they affect one's view of the world. We are a part of what we see. When observing the situation we are trying to change, this needs to be recognised. Looking outwards, it is necessary to drop the traditional view of a 'static' inflexible world and replace it with an understanding that the world is highly dynamic and that profound change initiatives must dovetail with an unfolding global reality, and will influence it.

The U process includes tools to help meet this personal challenge. Development of a regular meditation practise not only paves the way to greater creativity but encourages control of the chaotic, multi-task thinking that characterises much of modern life. A wilderness 'solo' lasting several days gives space for thinking that is normally unavailable in modern life. Addressing the personal challenges inherent in the 'U' moves an individual from being a causer rather than being caused.

Bringing together the different players in a specific problem is very important. In Generon's work to reduce hunger in India the group working towards change includes a mother of malnourished children and the Minister of Agriculture. In pursuing change, organisations need to make a step change both in the quality of their direction and personal interactions.

The need to establish more effective ways to implement change is greater than ever. The now undeniable impact of human activity on a global scale, threatens not only the

environment in which we all live, but also the dignity of individuals living through this period when the damage is being done.

Further information on the U process can be found in a number of different books. 'Presence' gives insights into the interdependence of the 7 capacities that constitute the U. Joe Jaworski found the road map that he needed to implement the U process in 'I and Thou', by Martin Buber. Brian Arthur ('Thinking Partner' of Generon) is writing a book which includes a description of the process. www.generonconsulting.com has links to more papers and books.

Afternoon – The World Cafe

Delegates engaged in dialogue in groups of five at Roundtables to share their own experiences. A number of repeating themes emerged:

- It seems inevitable that the most important catalyst for change will be some sort of crisis. At this time not only do funds become available but also the willingness to risk moving away from the current position to something unknown increases.
- The statistic that more than 10% of your employees could be actively undermining the business was even more striking for some delegates than the estimate that more than half of the employees of a typical organisation were 'sleep walking' through an average working day. Both clearly need to be tackled, this situation could be considered a crisis.
- The traditional emphasis on establishing a work life balance is shifted by the challenges of the U. Someone who lives according to the principles espoused in I and Thou will have largely eroded the difference between 'work' and 'life'. If companies encourage staff into deeper levels of thinking they need to accept that their employees may 'wake up' to discover they are working in the wrong place.
- The challenges associated with observing and becoming one with the situation one is looking into, are very pertinent and can lead to benefits beyond the change process.
- Practical implementation of the U process would require more input than was available to delegates. It is a big subject and it was appropriate for the conference to emphasise the personal implications of the U process.

Afternoon – The Panel: Paul Bell (Dell), Ruud Sleijffers (Philips), Jan Wilem Weck (Ministry of the Interior)

The whole panel emphasised the need to make work meaningful for employees and the importance of this in releasing potential. In developing the self-awareness that this requires, the atmosphere can be greatly influenced by the attitudes of an organisation's leaders. For example the willingness of a manager to open themselves to 360 degree appraisal can have positive repercussions on communication throughout all levels of an organisation.

Even though there are cultures where 'awareness' plays a greater part in everyday life than in the west, and is thus more easily discussed, there were real examples of a rapid and positive change in attitude towards attempts to get staff to think deeper about their own values. Small steps in this area were seen to have a big impact on the work environment.

Further nuggets of wisdom from the panel included the value of taking time to diffuse resistance to change proposals. Heat can also be taken out of a situation simply by spending time together in a non-work situation. The importance of giving autonomy and power to a group charged with making a specific change was seen in Dell as being essential to success in implementing change.

True leadership is about the release of human possibility. Advocates must learn to live with the paradox of travelling deeper into situations and gaining a greater understanding of them than they are accustomed to, whilst letting go of the control that many managers are used to exerting, and instead striving to positively influence an emerging reality that is bigger than any one individual. In simpler (Dell) parlance, you have 2 ears and one mouth, learn to use them in that proportion.