

# Journal

Jo Ouston & Co  
Summer 2011

## The Vision Thing

A striking image from the US President's visit to the UK in May was Michelle Obama's address to a group of girls from an inner London secondary school on a visit to an Oxford college. Surveying the ancient hall she said 'Look around. Just look at this. All of us believe that you belong here, that this is a place for you as well.'

She spoke of her own experience of making it from a poor background to a top university. 'People sometimes questioned whether someone with my background could succeed at an elite university ... But after a few months there... I realised that I was just as capable ... I realised that success is not about the background you are from, it is about the confidence that you have and the effort you are willing to invest.'

The response from her young audience was enthusiastic – with the words 'interesting', 'inspiring', 'exciting' and 'memorable' most prominent.

We need a dream and inspiration – whether from parents, teachers, employers or First Ladies – to give the sense of possibility, igniting the spark of passion and commitment, and creating the motivation to put in the hard graft that is required.

But we also need a practical vision of how to make it happen, how to navigate the landscape to develop a long-term career and release individual potential. Unfortunately, there is often limited understanding of the world of work in schools. The opportunities that are available and how to access them may not be obvious.

The CBI and the National Union of Students have recently produced an admirable publication *Working towards your future - Making the most of your time in higher education*\*. This identifies the skills that are important to employers and explores ways that students can benefit from higher education to develop knowledge, skills, experience and wider resources that will equip them for a flourishing career. Key among these are initiative and social skills - self-management, communication, team working - and these remain highly relevant throughout working life.

\**Working towards your future - Making the most of your time in higher education* - March 2011  
<http://educationandskills.cbi.org.uk/reports/>

The job for life with one company is of course long gone and 'traditional' career paths in paternalistic organisations along with them. There is a revival of interest in apprenticeships, but general graduate entry schemes, where new recruits obtain experience in different parts of the organisation before focussing on a particular specialism, are now rare.

Increasingly it is expected that graduates will bring specialist skills from their university courses and go straight into specialist functions such as marketing, finance, IT, legal, operations, etc. The focus and rigour required to develop knowledge, skill and experience in the specialist function - essential to compete in a globalised world - may mean that there is little scope for developing wider awareness.



Jo Ouston

However, those that aspire to responsibility of a different order – a leadership role in a department or a division, perhaps a board-level opportunity - need to be able to take a broader view looking across all functions embracing strategic considerations. If the traditional model followed a capital 'I' shape – starting broad and general at the bottom, funnelling into a narrower specialism on the way up and then widening out again at the senior level, the current model is perhaps a capital 'T' – starting in a specialism but still with the need to be able to broaden the view to be effective at senior levels.

Successful organisations are led by people who have a firm grounding in their specialism but who are able to take a broader view, to collaborate and build relationships. This is rarely innate. It needs to be consciously practiced from career beginning, through different jobs and different seniority levels, so that when the opportunity comes the understanding and clarity of vision are already in place.

Vision and perspective are not just for those at the top of the tree. They are also at the root of every satisfying career.



Jo Ouston

*'we need practical vision of how to make it happen'*

# Do Less, Achieve More - the Importance of 'why'



Peter Docker

In today's society there seems to be a relentless drive to do more, says Peter Docker. This is particularly apparent in the workplace where the pressure to get more done with less seems to be increasing. Often doing more does not seem to lead to us feeling more content or fulfilled.

There are those who appear to be just as successful – if not more so – while being more relaxed and apparently less affected by the belief that doing more is better.

Simon Sinek, an American guru in Leadership, offers some insight on this. He talks about what he calls the Golden Circle of Why, How, What\*. His view is that everyone on the planet can describe what they do. Some can explain how they do it, while only a few can say why they do it.

The Why is the belief, the higher purpose, which drives individuals and organisations. For example, the Why cannot be just 'to make profit' – this is an outcome not the reason why the business actually exists.

Most people, when asked, will start with an explanation of **what** they do, moving onto the **how** and finally (if they can) onto the **why**. And this is the instinctive way to explain things – to move from the most easily defined through to the haziest. But inspired leaders start with the Why – and are very clear why they do what they do. They act from their belief, with a clear understanding of why they get up in the morning – and why anyone should care.

This belief is genuine, authentic and visceral to anyone who sees it. The power of this way of 'being' is that it creates a context within which remarkable breakthroughs occur. If people in an organisation are driven by the 'Why', a groundswell of passion and excitement causes magic to happen.

Importantly, when we are driven by our belief – our 'why' – it is much more sustainable and inspiring for others, than when we are just driven by an accumulation of results or outcomes. Moreover, the momentum can really begin to build when, as Sinek

\* Simon Sinek – *Start with Why*, 2009

points out, we strive not to do business with everyone, but just focus instead on working with those who believe what we believe.

We can link these ideas with the notion of 'Being' versus 'Doing'. We all 'do' stuff on a daily basis - emails, telephone calls, meetings etc. But how are we 'being' when doing those things?

We have all come across people, say two managers, who DO much the same work and yet we find one is considerably better to work with and seems to achieve so much more. What they bring to their work is very different. The more successful manager is motivated by his belief and driven to achieve in line with that belief. There can be the most chaotic situations where some people will prevail against all the odds – such as the military commander in battle, those involved in the rescue of Chilean miners last year or engaged in a hugely complex and high-risk business joint venture or merger. Quite often we may know what to do, but it is the leaders who lead by being, who will inspire others to achieve more than they ever thought possible.

This is a key difference between Leadership and Management. Management – essential for any business – is focused on doing things and getting things done – implementing systems, directing others to complete work and so on.

Leadership is about how one is Being – what one stands for – and sets the context within which we and others do what we do. Leadership that is founded on authentic belief attracts others who share that belief, inspiring them to do – and to be – much more.

Inspired Leadership sets others free to become creative and empowers them to accomplish more for the cause – the organisation's belief.

In these challenging economic times, it is more important than ever for the leaders of any company to be the guardians of their organisation's Why – the reason the company exists. Without this connection there is a danger that the perceived need to just do more (often with fewer resources) will lead to burnout.

If you're a Leader and want to create the spark for breakthrough, try pausing for a moment, reconnecting with your Why, and doing less. If you don't know already, you will find it to be the gateway to extraordinary results.



*Peter Docker is founder and MD of the leadership consultancy Why Not? – <http://whynotunlimited.com> - and has worked with Jo Ouston & Co as a mentor.*

# Cultural difference: cross-current or power-house?



When we talk about inter-personal communication, relationship-building, energy, integrity, value systems - our 'potential in people' principles – to what extent do these things hold up when language, ideology, social codes and all the other 'cultural separators' come into play?

A happy coincidence shed at least one interesting light on these questions when we recently met again one of our very first clients – a man who might almost be called Mr Multi-Culture himself.

Jefta (pronounced 'Yefta') Lakovic is Yugoslavian by birth and up-bringing, British by university education and career, has worked for American, Canadian, Saudi Arabian and Greek owned companies, and still talks vehemently of business and management ideas which are recognisably personal and culture-based, yet clearly universal.

Lakovic was born in Belgrade, over sixty years ago, son of a Colonel in Tito's Yugoslavian army who himself was educated and trained in the west pre-war. After training as a mechanical engineer at the University of Belgrade Jefta came to England, took degrees in science and engineering at Birmingham University and Imperial College London, and was hired by Mars Confectionery as a manufacturing manager. He met Forrest Mars, enthusiastically embraced the Mars ethos of excellence, and found himself, in his mid-twenties, running the Mars production facility at Slough.

Some ten years down the line his reputation prompted an approach from Associated British Foods, owned by the Canadian-based Weston family, to overhaul their bakery division. 'It was a pretty archaic set-up at the time,' Jefta Lakovic says. 'I was very blunt with Mr Weston and he said, 'OK, go ahead and fix it'. We put in more continuous lines, quadrupled output, repositioned some of the brands, and saw a substantial increase in market share.' Pause. 'You notice 'we', not 'I'. In a successful business 'I' does not exist. 'We' rules. Everything is done together.'

Lakovic returned to this theme when he talked about his later career, when he had moved from the multi-national environment of Mars and ABF to smaller,

specialist businesses but ones with the same ambitions for excellence, and keen to use his experience.

He is now in his second spell with Arnaouti, Britain's leading supplier of pitta bread to the supermarket trade, where he is Chief Executive. In five years he has seen turnover increase by more than eight times, and his five-year plan achieved more than a year early. 'There is no magic,' he insists, 'no delivery from an ivory tower, no desk management. You can't do anything by managing a desk, only by managing people.'

Given that he was a Yugoslavian running a Greek-owned company with a north-London work force from a vast range of ethnic backgrounds, did 'managing people' not present some pretty daunting problems?

'Not if you believe in what you're doing. Anything is possible if you believe in what you're doing – and if the people you're working with believe that too. It's about shared leadership. I've seen a young man with no special education rise to be chief engineer of a complex food-processing plant not through any technical brilliance but because he wanted to see things working properly. Seeing the company pulling through inspired him, inspired everyone. We moved to the new site in 2008 while maintaining the continuity of supply. When they saw what was possible they saw their own futures.'

The phrases roll from Jefta's tongue with what could seem deceptive fluency. But hard-headed sense, not to mention a formidable track record, underlie the rhetoric.

In managing across cultures, across technologies, across genders and ages and educational backgrounds, he has found consistency of values to be the heart of the matter – whether deciding to join an organisation, to recruit staff, or to select for promotion.

'There are things to listen for when people talk. Does the team get the credit? Is the result more important than the time it takes? Can you hear enthusiasm, energy, loyalty? Can you hear total honesty within?' Within? An interesting way of putting it.

The consistency that Jefta Lakovic values is probably quite simple: that the fundamental values of business are not different from the fundamental values of life. That seems to cross all cultures.



*'Can you hear the enthusiasm, energy, loyalty?'*

# Looking In, Looking Up, Looking Out

'Why doesn't he just jump under a Tube train?' growls Roger after being carved up at the traffic lights by a cyclist crossing on red ... wearing earphones and making a call on his mobile. The recurring theme of cyclists on the pavement, with no lights and engaged their in their own electronic worlds gives a truly contemporary feel to *A week in December*, Sebastian Faulks's novel of life in our times.

There are a number of troubling aspects to the always plugged in culture. First is the surprising lack of a self-preservation instinct – people simply cut themselves off from the sounds of traffic and other hazards. (One of the first headphone radios in the 1970s had a plate saying 'When wearing this radio, Do not drive, Do not operate machinery, Do not even step outside!'). But it also indicates a lack of awareness or concern about the impact on others ... perhaps a lack of personal responsibility.

At times it is appropriate to retreat into a small private space. At close quarters on the train or Underground, without even space to hold a book to read, we can only tolerate the proximity by withdrawing. Personal audio helps and reduces the tedium of the journey.

Similarly, people working in noisy open plan offices often need to retreat into their own space to block out the noise and distractions of others. But then managers have to deal with people who are present but not quite all there.

There are of course tremendous attractions to plugging into the incredible wealth of information and richness of entertainment available through electronic media. We are able to connect people and ideas across realms of time and space and apparently simultaneously. However, it is not clear, whatever the popular belief, that multi-tasking really is possible. What we really have is 'continuous partial attention' which undermines concentration on a single task and impedes personal relationships.

When we have to step out of the bubble, for a meeting, conference, or presentation, people notice if we are more interested in the Blackberry than in them. They feel we are not paying attention or giving respect. Rather than appearing lean and hungry we appear not to care.

This can be hugely damaging. If we are distracted we create a bad impression and what's more we miss the important social clues that make for powerful communication.

If we do not know how to behave, we may not be invited another time - resulting in missed opportunities and limiting career progression. The true value of the individual may simply fail to register.

## Practice News

### Gaining Recognition

There is another way to motivate and engage promising staff even when it's difficult to offer promotion or pay substantial increases - encouraging them to pursue Chartered Manager status to further their career development.



Jo Ouston has reconnected with her roots at the Chartered Management Institute, becoming a Chartered Manager Integration centre. This means that Jo can advise clients on achieving Chartered Manager status and support them through the process.

The Chartered Manager is the hallmark of the professional, recognising managers who have demonstrated the positive impact of their contributions at work and who are actively engaged in improving their knowledge and skills. It is a unique designation exclusively awarded by the CMI. If you would be interested in pursuing this further, do contact Jo on **020 7821 8299**.

### Breakfast Showcase Events

Like to know more about our courses and training? Come and meet Jo Ouston and some of the team at a free breakfast-time showcase with lecture / demos and discussion. Next date: **8 July**. Give us a ring to book.

### Course Schedule

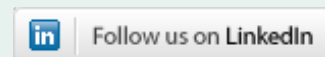
Dates for all our courses to December 2011 are set out in the schedule enclosed with this JOurnal. Latest dates always available at [www.joouston.co.uk/courses](http://www.joouston.co.uk/courses).

### Personal Effectiveness Workshops

Half-day Workshops emphasising practical skills in **Time Management & Organisation** and in **Business Writing** are running again on **23 June** and **22 October**. See [www.joouston.co.uk/courses](http://www.joouston.co.uk/courses).

### LinkedIn

If you would like to connect and keep in touch, why not add Jo to your network? You can find her profile at <http://uk.linkedin.com/in/joouston>



### JO Blogs

What we're thinking - see [www.joouston.co.uk/blog](http://www.joouston.co.uk/blog)

**For further information and bookings call  
020 7821 8299**



Jo Ouston & Co

Career and management development consultants

Jo Ouston & Company  
Lower Ground Floor Nelson House Dolphin Square London SW1V 3NY  
t 020 7821 8299 f 020 7798 5743 e info@joouston.co.uk  
[www.joouston.co.uk](http://www.joouston.co.uk)