

Development of People in our Industry

Before discussing the development of people in the Design & Advertising industry, there's a need to put into context how the industry is currently operating. Amongst those businesses that are competing locally and globally, performance pressures are relentless. While this is true of most industries, the business of services relating to the delivery of creativity has become even more difficult. That's because there is little, if any, balance. Before there were long lunches, golf days, commissions and mark-ups. Now there's greater accountability, performance contracts, fee structures and tender processes. It's become about processes and time, not talent or our greatest currency, ideas. While the latter is appreciated, and for some clients is important, it's no longer the majority. This is evident in the average work that's out there, but that's another debate.

In a state of constant change, it's no wonder there is little time or energy to adjust the manner in which we manage our industry, our agencies and most importantly, our people. The latter is the focus of my writings. The reason for this is that I have to wonder why in the time of such national skills shortage, we as an industry, are one, doing very little to attract great talent, and two, as individual agencies are doing less to inspire and retain those we do have. There are many people tired, exhausted and uninspired who have left in an attempt to seek alternatives. In our industry particularly, few manage and lead people in a way that allows them personal mastery within their careers. People do well, earn well, win clients and a couple of awards, but as leaders we do little to ensure that our people are able to consistently realise the results that matter most deeply to them. Or to create an environment that assists them in becoming committed to their own lifelong learning. Hence their need to leave or the decision not to enter the industry in the first instance. And, because we're not attracting enough talent for the relevant areas of our business, many are being put into positions they are not equipped to handle. They may have insufficient experience, but the need drives leaders to place them there. There's no alternative. As a result, the industry is weakened.

On the issue of attraction, it's fascinating that schools offering design & advertising as part of their curriculum do not regularly consult with the industry to understand what is ultimately required. It's evident from many students entering the industry that this is not happening. Schools could do an enormous amount to assist the industry. On the flip side, I find it equally concerning that as a collective we are not going to schools to talk to learners sooner about career opportunities in our industry. When I've suggested it to colleagues in the past the feeling is that the government is opposed to any interference from business with regards to the school guidance/life orientation curriculum and that there is too much bureaucracy. One comment was that we have to focus on our businesses, that this is the job of educators. All well and good if we're being fed talented individuals who understand what our industry has to offer. But we're not, and they don't.

So, fantasize that we are identifying and attracting the best there is out there, and that they have been successfully recruited. What then? In an industry that is fairly incestuous we come across the same small pot of people. I've yet to interview anyone who feels that their agency did everything in their power to develop their talents, and to figure out the

best way to transform those talents into performance. Ironically, this is what enables business to be more productive and successful.

Instead most describe the environments as volatile and inconsistent. Some suggest fear-based, highly judgmental and critical management. Bosses who are demanding rather than curious, and controlling rather than teaching. This is a sure sign that, while there may be high levels of creativity and intelligence, there's little emotional intelligence. And little understanding of what an open, learning organisation can achieve. This is old style management or leadership. As Peter Senge writer of *The Fifth Disciplines* suggests, environments that encourage openness, reflection, deeper conversations and personal mastery are those that uniquely energise change. So, if we are facing daily challenges and changes as we are, it's a wonder we have not looked to these philosophies as an alternative to the way in which we currently lead.

Now that I've taken the industry apart, what are some of the answers! Typically, one looks to the development of the individual on three levels. Skill and competency, interpersonal relations and development of self. Skill and competence can be taught and learned, mostly through institutions, on the job experience and mentoring. This happens quite naturally in our industry. Getting individuals to look at ways in which to develop their interpersonal skills becomes more complex. It may begin with a better understanding of the self and others, through for example, Insights Personality Profiling, where not only are traits identified, but also ways in which to more effectively communicate with different personality types may be explored. Workshops around these insights can be beneficial, as they potentially establish clarity for each individual and those they're working with. Once clarity has been established, they can move to greater interpersonal integrity and ultimately, accountability. This is where maturity in relationships is achieved.

Personal development then is even more complex as it requires awareness on every level, including emotional. The pursuit of this deeper understanding goes to personal mastery. It is also more difficult as it requires choice. No one can be forced to develop personal mastery. However, it be encouraged in a number of ways, one of which Executive Coaching. The discipline is quite practical, yet can go as deep as the client requires. There are many ways in which to seek this out, most of which are personal and private.

The best we can do is work hard at fostering a climate in which the principles of personal mastery are practiced. Where it is understood that personal development is valued, even at the risk of people seeking their higher purpose, elsewhere. It can be best done by building businesses where it is safe for people to have a personal and collective vision, where commitment to the truth is the norm, and where challenging the status quo is expected. There is nothing more important to an individual committed to his or her own growth than a supportive environment. And the essence of the strategy is easy: be a model.