

## **Releasing Spirit, Energy and Creativity for Customer Service Excellence.**

*If you want to deliver excellence to your customers, then you have to treat your people as you would like them to treat your customers - give them excellence.*

*"As within, so without." Hunbatz Men, Mayan.*

**At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century**, we are in the midst of a transformation that compares with the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions. We call it globalisation. It affects every aspect of our lives - social, political, cultural, spiritual and ecological. It is transforming institutions of every kind including community, family and our individual lifestyles. We need to understand it and work with it.

**Organisations everywhere face enormous challenges** - unprecedented global competition, constant and rapid change and unpredictability. It is challenging, exciting and full of opportunity. If organisations are to thrive and survive, they must continuously innovate. To do this successfully they need the collective intelligence of the whole organisation. No one person or even a good top team can possibly know everything that needs to be done.

**This means releasing the initiative, enterprise and creativity of all their people.** That requires a new kind of leadership and a new kind of culture that enables people to empower themselves. This is a revolution in workplace culture – from workplaces that limit, frustrate, alienate and dis-empower people to ones that release energy and spirit. The reason so many people do not take responsibility or take initiative is that for generations they have been discouraged from doing so. They feel no sense of commitment or ownership. People need to feel valued and significant. For survival, culture is top of the agenda.

### **Service = Profits ...Driving profit through Customer Service Excellence**

Strangely, research shows that in the long term, the most successful companies do not make more profit by focusing on it. Businesses succeed best in the long term by focusing on inspiring values, purpose and mission. They inspire their stakeholders with their vision. Simply making money, especially for someone else, who may not treat you very well, does not inspire most people. The best people want to work for ethical organisations that have an inspiring mission, lead their people well, meet the needs of society and avoid doing harm - in other words good workplaces that do good and make a profit. It is the century when we need “servant leaders”, more than ever before.

**An upward spiral** If you want a profitable company, a big part of it is about giving **outstanding service** and having **excellent relationships** with customers, suppliers, employees and other stakeholders. As a result, you get an increasing flow of repeat business, which is the cheapest and easiest way of getting business. That is what one of my clients found - they made more money than their competitors and saved money through wonderful relationships with clients who kept asking them to do more work for them. New business flows from the reputation you earn and the recommendations you

get. Delighted customers produce more business for you and their appreciation, as opposed to complaints, feeds your energy. They also tell other people! So it is an upward spiral. And that cuts your outgoings on selling, marketing and handling complaints. Highly committed staff stay and give their best. Alienated staff do the opposite. Low staff turnover means less recruitment and training cost. It means better service from experienced, well trained and developed staff = more revenue and less cost.

**A culture that releases spirit, energy and creativity** To achieve excellence requires the best possible leadership and a culture that releases spirit, energy, creativity and the desire to give outstanding service. Given inspiring and challenging leadership, everyone works to create the best systems and standards of service. They continuously work together in quickly addressing issues that emerge and bringing about improvements. Everything is helped by energy, spirit and feeling good!

**Leading is more complex today.** In a world of intense competition, the leader has to be exceptionally good at getting business strategy right. She or he is more likely to do so by leading inclusively. Apart from requiring exceptional entrepreneurial flair, leaders need to do *two* things exceptionally well: They both **inspire** and **enable**. On the one hand, they have to offer **an appealing message** about purpose, values, vision, direction and culture. On the other, they need to **enable** the organisation to respond, adapt, create, re-create and replace itself as a living system. In an organisation there are two ways of creating the future. There is **designed future**, first created in our imagination; there is the **emergent future**. It is about both **making things happen and letting go and allowing things to happen** – yin and yang. The leader today has to be good at both. Leaders need both charisma **and** the wisdom to be enabling servants.

Wise leaders respect everyone and involve them in creating changes. This taps into the collective wisdom and knowledge in the organisation. This means good PROCESSES for involving people. This is often forgotten – some leaders think they can drive changes. People resist being driven. Strategy is more likely to be right, and is more likely to be successfully implemented, when everyone “on the ground” has been involved in creating it, has contributed to it and is committed to it. When people are involved there is more likely to be good teamwork and communication.

*“It is common to hear that people resist change. In reality, people do not resist change; they resist having change imposed on them.”* **Fritjof Capra**

**Relationships** Business is about relationships and trust. Relationships depend on integrity and truthfulness. When times are tough and uncertain, it is relationships that provide support and help people find their way through and achieve the impossible.

*“The only way to lead when you don’t have control is you lead through the power of your relationships. You can deal with the unknown only if you have enormous levels of trust, and if you’re working together and bringing out the best in people”* *“It is possible to prepare for the future without knowing what it will be”* **Meg Wheatley**

**The Servant Leader** models the behaviour that is required. Successful leaders set an example, walk their talk:

*"Be the change you want to see." "Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony." Mahatma Gandhi.*

She or he needs to be human and authentic; to listen and encourage people to be themselves and speak their truth, without fear. She or he welcomes conflict and uses the knowledge coming from diversity; creates a learning culture by admitting to not knowing - instead wanting to discover and continuously develop and challenge themselves. They embrace the whole organisation's intelligence and stakeholders in deciding, planning and implementing change; give everyone dignity and meaning. They demonstrate they are open to feedback and learning, open to change. They work on their own development as leaders.

They appreciate and celebrate what works rather than overly focusing on what does not; show faith in people; create conditions that can bring out everyone's full abilities.

It requires integrity, humility, corporate citizenship and having the courage to stand up for what is right and to stand out against what is wrong. It amounts to "servant leadership".

Leaders need to engage mind, heart, body and spirit. All four have to be embraced if workplaces are to be fully productive and attractive to employees.

Of course these factors alone are not sufficient. There are many other factors in creating a successful business - entrepreneurial flair, imaginative branding, product quality, marketing and financial management.

#### **The Servant Leader**

- Walks her/his talk *"be the change you want to see."*
- Offers clear values and purpose and an inspiring vision of how the organisation can be - encourages everyone to do the same.
- A leader of leaders, not followers.
- Makes sure everything goes well
- Open to feedback and learning - continuously develops and challenges self
- Human, truthful and authentic - shows integrity, humility and admits mistakes
- Creates a learning culture by admitting to not knowing -wants to discover
- Asks empowering questions and listens with respect - encourages people to be themselves and speak their truth, without fear
- Welcomes conflict and values diversity and difference
- Embraces change and uncertainty
- Involves the whole organisation's and stakeholders' intelligence in creating change
- Gives everyone dignity and respect
- Creates an environment of appreciation, high expectations, challenge and support appreciates and celebrates
- Learns from what works rather than overly focusing on what does not

- Shows faith in people and has high expectations of them
- Creates conditions that can bring out everyone’s full abilities
- Puts corporate citizenship and sustainability top of the agenda – sees her/himself as a steward; has the courage to stand up for what is right and to stand out against what is wrong
- Engages mind, heart, body and spirit.

Just one thing more – **love**.

*"The most powerful force in business isn't greed, fear or even the raw energy of unbridled competition. The most powerful force in business is love. It's what will help your company grow, and become stronger. It's what will propel your career forward. It's what will give you a sense of meaning and satisfaction in your work, which will help you do your best work."* **Tim Saunders, Senior Executive Yahoo.com in Fast Company Magazine, February 2002**

*"To love is to will the good of another."* **Peter Challen**

But it has to be **tough love** – that means being truthful and caring so much that you tell the other person the truth as you see it – lovingly.

**Are you really up for it?** If you are really serious about transforming your company, be prepared to change yourself. Your own development is the key to your organisation’s future. Seek feedback; listen to the full diversity of views, especially those you least like or those resisting changes. Release the human spirit — the spirit of your organisation matters most.

**So, what is the culture that works?** What is the culture that will create excellence, provide the value added for all concerned and create wealth and profitability for Jamaica? ..... triple wins!!!!

Above all today, the culture of a country and an organisation needs to empower everyone to take leadership together in a rapidly changing and unpredictable world. They need to create the culture that works for them.

I listen to a lot of people and this is the sort of thing they tell me is needed:

- The Empowered Workplace**
- Delighted customers and other stakeholders– pride in what we do.
  - Everyone works to create the best systems and standards of service - continuously work together to address issues and make improvements.
  - People love to come to work – it’s rewarding
  - People are clear about the company’s direction and their role in it.
  - One team – good communication, promises are kept and everyone pulls their weight.
  - High expectations, encouragement **and** challenge – appreciation, celebration **and** *“Tough love”*.
  - Trust and Integrity – people are told and tell the truth.

- A culture without fear or blame - mistakes are welcomed and to be learned from.
- Complacency is driven out
- People take personal responsibility and give up complaining and blaming
- Not afraid to tackle conflicts or difficulties openly.
- Being direct with people.
- Passion and feelings are OK - eg enthusiasm or anxiety about change.
- Everyone fully involved in change, learning and discovery.
- Leaders encourage feedback; really listen; and act on it.
- Diversity and difference respected and valued.
- OK to be who you are, your unique you.
- Excitement, fun and humour – not at another’s expense.
- Balance - space to reflect, recover, be creative and keep well – not a long hours, macho culture.

A lot of people need healing and space to recover from unrelenting pressure and change. It may mean challenging the pressure to do everything in the shortest possible time – always wanting more for less and “value for money.” The exhausting Anglo American culture of overwork is alien to enthusiasm, energy and creativity. It makes it harder for women with families to reach the top.

*‘There is an Indian proverb or axiom that says that everyone is in a house with four rooms, a physical, a mental, an emotional and a spiritual. Most of us tend to live in one room most of the time but, unless we go into every room every day, even if only to keep it aired, we are not a complete person.’ Godden, R, (1990) **A House with Four Rooms***

## **Empowering Tools for transformation.**

*I believe people are the experts on their organisations. Together, they can create the best solutions. Everyone is a potential leader and can make a difference. With good leadership and support, they can make their organisations work better for all involved and contribute to making the World a better place for everyone. I believe organisations will succeed best, by treating employees and suppliers as well as they want to treat customers.*

Now I want to give you some practical tools or structures for helping people bring about transformation. Simpler tools are better. Being accessible, and easily understood, they empower people. Anyone can use them.

**Focus on what is working - positive news.** A key concept is to study what is working in an organisation and make it grow. Appreciating how much is working, what is working and why it is working, helps people learn and feel good about them selves. Having a lot of people all focusing on what they appreciate and what is working has a profoundly positive effect on the whole organisation. Many of us struggle with self-doubt and lack of self-esteem. When we feel good about ourselves we have more energy, function better, are more creative and more powerful. Whatever you focus on enlarges. If you focus on criticism, mistakes, problems and failure, that enlarges.

Some people call this approach Appreciative Inquiry or AI. It underlies all the following models. First, appreciate what is working and celebrate success!

Another key ground rule is *Take individual responsibility!* If you have an idea, take responsibility, share it and do it! See difficulties as opportunities and setbacks as gifts that can teach you.

*“There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving .... and that’s your own self.”* **Aldous Huxley.**

**1) An approach based on Appreciative Inquiry** Here is a structure, which your organisation, team, however large or small, whatever your position is in the company, can use together to transform your organisation. It can be used as the basis for an event for a team or a major organisation intervention. Or pair up with a colleague and take turns to do this. Before these key stages, the first step is the **Definition Phase** to identify the key issue or issues that need to be inquired into, plan the strategy of an intervention, roles and logistics, craft the questions and create the conditions for a success. These are the key stages:

#### **Key Stages**

- **Discovery** What is working? What gives life? Celebrate it. Think of times when you experienced success. Criteria. What characterised it?
- **Dream** What might be? Our vision. Our highest hopes for our organisation or my part of it.
- **Design** Making it real. Key issues to address.
- **Delivery** Goals, your key actions.

A company I know, in which customer service excellence is vital, used these questions for a team retreat.

#### **When did you experience really excellent customer service**

- Think of a time when you experienced really excellent customer service
- What characterised it?
- What are the implications for your organisation? Where could you use this understanding? What do you now want to do differently?

They added another question: “Think of a time when you experienced really bad customer service. What characterised it?” They came up with these ten commandments to guide their communications:

#### **Ten Commandments for Customer Service.**

- 1) **BE HONEST**
- 2) **ASK QUESTIONS**
- 3) **ACT COURTEOUSLY**
- 4) **HAVE A CAN-DO ATTITUDE**
- 5) **BE FOCUSED**

- 6) *HAVE CONFIDENCE*
- 7) *EMPATHISE*
- 8) *HAVE CLARITY*
- 9) *LISTEN*
- 10) *BE CONSISTENT*

**2) A Good Listening to** Secondly, here is a simple agenda or model you can use and adapt for working with individuals in a one-to-one consultation session. Or it could be used as an agenda for a co-mentoring session or a team meeting where people share how they see the situation and then decide what each person will do to change things for the better. Whichever way it is used, it is essential to listen and not interrupt. When you interrupt you destroy the other person's thought flow and you are taking over. In a team meeting a simple technique is to use a "talking stick." Each person takes the stick when they are ready or it is their turn and while they hold the stick, no one interrupts. When someone else has the talking stick, give **total** attention. Time is shared equally between each person and someone keeps time.

I call it "a good listening to" because most people benefit enormously from being asked well chosen questions and given your full attention – it is often as simple as that:

- An Agenda for a Good Listening to**
- **What is working well?** Good news. Celebrate. Focus on this and think about where there could be more of it.
  - **What is the current situation?** What concerns you or has been difficult? How do you feel? What is the gift in this? What is the key issue that, if addressed, would transform the situation?
  - **Vision** How do you want to change things? How would it look if everything exceeded your highest hopes? What if you got in touch with your passion? What is your higher purpose? Your exciting vision of the way things could be and need to be.
  - **What will get in the way** if you don't tackle it? Out there and **in you**.
  - **What will you do then?** What are those few, key actions that will make all the difference and be "*less is more*"? Who do you need to influence?
  - **What support do you need?** From whom? Can I help?

You can also use this model for co-mentoring, first, with a trusted colleague and yourself, later with others you respect. These are wonderful ways to make close friends in your organisation and help them and you bring about change. Or you can use it to develop people. In the process you are also collecting data about the key issues of the organisation.

*“The right way to do things is not to persuade people you’re right but to challenge them to think it through for themselves.” Naom Chomsky*

In a team meeting, have a round on each question in turn or combine a few questions. Sharing answers to the first two questions helps everyone see the whole picture. The next one, Vision, is uplifting. The next three could be done in pairs and then briefly shared in the whole group.

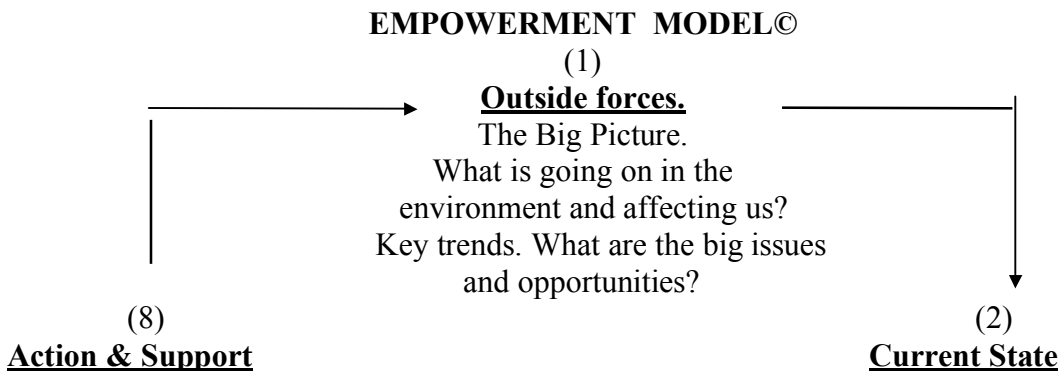
**3) Tough Love – Feedback.** Getting and giving feedback is essential for a learning organisation. One outstanding and very gifted leader was *“much loved but rarely challenged.”* At a critical time, his colleagues did not give this good man the feedback he urgently needed. He did not like that kind of feedback. Sadly, this contributed to his having to leave the organisation.

A young woman was fired from her job on the phone at 10 o’clock at night. It was done in a kindly way. She had been in the job for two months but had received no feedback or guidance as to how her performance needed to change. Her boss did not have the courage to tell her directly or face to face. If we love people, we have the courage to tell them what they need to hear.

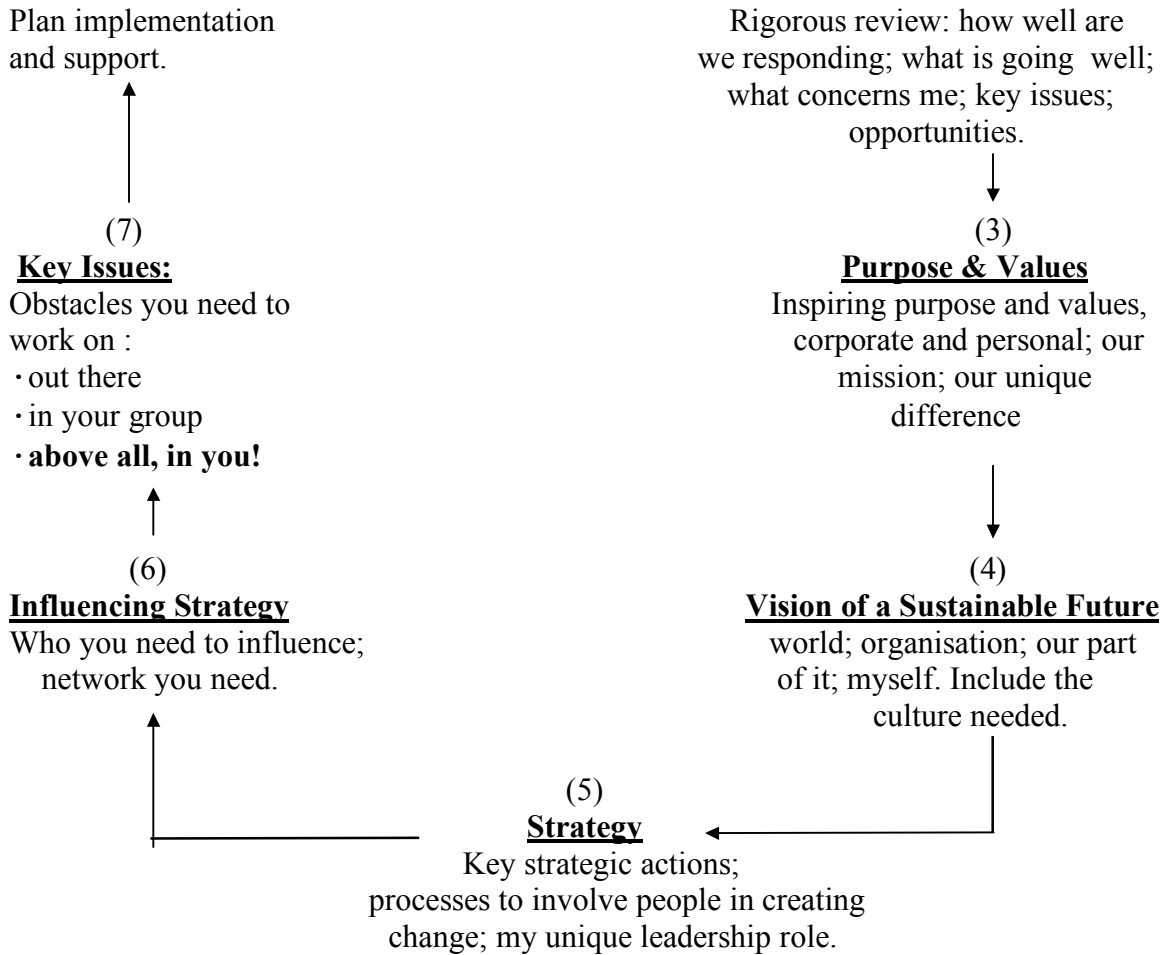
There is a good way of doing this that works. It is best when feedback is asked for, but sometimes it simply has to be given – too much is at stake. Best if it is two way. In an empowered organisation, colleagues trust each other and seek and give each other feedback regularly. Do this in turn. Use your words.

<p><b>Tough Love - Giving feedback</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What I most love and appreciate about you is.... The gift you bring that contributes so much to this organisation ..... What I cherish about you is .....</li> <li>(More than one thing)</li> <li>• As a good friend, my single suggestion is .... My single <i>“do differently”</i> is .....</li> <li>(There doesn’t have to be one of these at all)</li> </ul>
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**4) The Empowerment Model** Next, a model you can use for a “retreat” with large or small groups. It can be modified to suit different needs. People learn best by being helped to face and take responsibility for the real challenges and opportunities they have. This model that enables people to do this.







The model provides the basis for a retreat to review your environment and see the opportunities in it; appraise how well you are responding to it; develop a strategy that grasps these and opportunities and moves you to a new, exciting state. It is a holistic process - different stages require heart, mind and spirit to varying degrees. The opportunity will be wasted unless there is a rigorous support and follow on strategy.

**Simple Wisdom – when the going gets tough** Finally, if you are trying to transform your company or your part of it, often what is needed for survival, things can get very difficult. Resistance, setbacks, and unpredictability are inevitable. After the polite stage, people risk being frank and to the point. Things may get very heated. It may be a long haul and we can get exhausted and depleted, physically and emotionally. To lead well we need to renew ourselves. It helps to remember:

**Simple Wisdom**

- Be prepared to change yourself: your development is the key to your organisation’s future. Give yourself “*tough love*” – appreciate and challenge.
- Be who you are – yet challenge yourself by listening to other people’s reality
- Chaos is part of transformation

- To make sense of complexity and confusion, use intuition and listen to diverse views
- We are part of a bigger process of global transformation
- See difficulties as gifts
- Let go of the old to let in the new
- Trust your vision and dreams
- Believe the universe will support you – beliefs are self-fulfilling
- What you put your attention on enlarges
- Be open to synchronicity
- Feeling is healing
- Give yourself whatever nurtures your spirit and restores your balance. Live in four rooms each day, if only to visit each one: head; heart; body and spirit
- Be a servant leader — a leader of leaders
- Appreciate others and yourself; be grateful for what really matters and celebrate

Put a drawing of an open hand on the back of your door or cupboard, and every so often lean on it and give yourself a pat on the back.

### Resources

- Appreciative Inquiry [www.appreciative-inquiry.org](http://www.appreciative-inquiry.org) ; [www.taosinstitute.net](http://www.taosinstitute.net) [appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu](http://appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu) ; [www.aipractitioner.com](http://www.aipractitioner.com)
- Greenleaf Centre for Servant-Leadership [www.greenleaf.org](http://www.greenleaf.org) [www.greenleaf.org.uk](http://www.greenleaf.org.uk) or [www.servantleadership.org.uk](http://www.servantleadership.org.uk)
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