

## Making a Difference: the Human Spirit at Work Pt.6

### The Star Fish - a story inspired by Loren Eiseley and Joel Arthur Barker

An old man was taking a sunrise walk along the beach. In the distance he caught sight of a young man who seemed to be dancing along the waves. As he got closer he saw that the young man was picking up starfish from the sand and tossing them back into the ocean.

"What are you doing?" the old man asked.

"The sun is coming up and the tide is going out; if I don't throw them in they'll die."

"But young man, there are miles and miles of beach with starfish all along it - you can't possibly make a difference."

The young man bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it back into the ocean, past the breaking waves.

"I made a difference for that one", he replied.

As we saw in the previous article, the vision of the architect and developer was to "Build to Inspire". In building a cathedral he was well aware that he could not do it alone. He advertised for craftsmen who had the energy to create buildings which inspire us to pause, and admire the beauty of human creativity. Like all businessman he faced the reality of choosing the right people in a tight labour market, procuring quality supplies - and many other day-to-day challenges. He knew that the one quality that would determine his (and others') ability to fulfil the mission would be each person's State of Mind. He knew that without recognition of the power of State of Mind, the mission would be doomed... at risk and prey to the whims of an unconscious mind.

Today, businesses face a more educated and in many ways more self-aware labour market. Of those young recruits to industry, many are reaping the benefits of past generations' sacrifices and the desire to give this new generation a better life.

The down side to that is of course that society tends to be more materialistic and ambitious; more prone to status and power. But each generation struggles with its own thoughts and desires. Each is invited to reflect on what they have contributed - in what ways they have made a difference. For our emerging young leaders, who face **their life** and **their world** with increasing unease, and who instinctively know when something is not right; there is an emerging revolution - a new perspective.

### *An emerging revolution*

*"Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimension."*

Those words by Oliver Wendell Holmes (author and physician 1809 - 1894) have a resounding present-day truth to them. For it is indeed within our minds that revolution evolves. When our minds are posing 'what ifs', suspending personal reality long enough to hear others; and holding in anticipation, *without concern*, the knowledge that we are not quite sure: then we are in an inner spiritual space.

These moments are just **Being** - and there is no going back once this moment has dawned. The power of changing our mind contains the seed: of seeing that we think, and that our thoughts become the possible - the new 'what is' of our lives.

That new possibility, the new 'what is' of our life is "bending down to pick up another starfish and throw it back into the ocean, past the breaking waves". It is, for young employees, the strong desire to contribute meaningfully despite the apparent odds.

Young, or not so young, the desire to contribute is universal. People want to make a difference, contribute to something larger than them and commit to a common cause. No matter how big the project or how vast the vision might be ("there are miles and miles of beach with starfish all along it...") when employees feel that their contribution makes a difference to the common cause, **those same employees ARE the business.**

### *A spiritual or performance challenge - that is the question*

A business that I am working with has engaged Rocky Bay, which has as its mission to *optimise the quality of life for people with disabilities*. I have never seen the workers that have been employed, or their support staff. However, the managers of the business speak of their contribution with high praise and appreciation because prior to the Rocky Bay initiative, internal recycling and rubbish handling was a topic of frustrated bewilderment as to how the problem could be resolved.

Yes, intellectually disabled workers might be ready to do jobs that no one else is prepared to do. But Rocky Bay's mission is positive. Workers come and put in an exceptional day's work and go home with a sense of pride, knowing that they

have contributed to something worthwhile. Each can say "I made a difference." In truth they have.

What of the broader applications? What if, in your business, each staff member could see their contribution to the problem? What if they could change from "It's not my problem" to "It's my goal, my mission"?

What if each person could see their attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, judgments and thinking as their contribution to the whole? The quality of their customer service - internally and externally - to the business? What if each member of staff could see that recycling and keeping the place clean was a valid and valued way of making a difference?

This is a spiritual challenge before it is a performance one. Because well before performance, or even aptitude, there is attitude. The challenge for each of us is in seeing that our thoughts contribute (or don't) to making a difference in our work, our relationships, our life and our world. ■ ■

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