

Catalyst

Catalyst is published every two months, for alumni of our seminars and workshops to remain connected, and for coaching clients, prospective clients, and other interested parties to learn about who we are and what we do. Also available electronically in Writings at www.DancingStar.com

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Beyond Diversity: Instinctive Inclusivity

This is the fourth in a four-part series on Diversity. Thanks to Bob Rosenfeld, CEO of Idea Connections, whose work inspired it.

When you see people who are obviously different to you, do you see an opportunity to learn something new? Or do you ignore, dismiss, even secretly despise them?

According to the 2000 US Census, US demographics are shifting. In 1982, less than 20% of Americans were minorities. In 2002 it was 29%; in 2022 that number is projected to rise to 37%. By 2042, the "minority" population is expected to reach almost 50%. Other countries are seeing similar shifts.

At the same time, multiethnic buying power has increased. In 1990 the combined buying power of Asian Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, and African-Americans was roughly \$700 billion; in 2001 it rose to over \$1.44 trillion.

Map these changing demographics onto a globally competitive marketplace fueled by rapid advances in technology and communication.

Increasingly, business leaders need to hear, understand, and act on the desires, needs, and concerns of people with vastly different life experiences. They then have to weave that understanding into the long-term vision as well as day-to-day operations of their companies.

Too often, their goal has been to

simply tolerate and manage diversity issues, implementing policies that preserve the status quo so they can get back to their "real work". A lot of people, including the minorities they are trying to attract, say that's just not enough. What they want are cultures that embrace diversity – that welcome and embrace people from all backgrounds.

Trust must be the foundation of any culture change around difference

What is needed to move forward, argues Bob Rosenfeld, is an inclusive culture. In such a culture, leaders' understanding and behaviors change, which impacts the rest of the organization, thereby attracting diverse talent interested in retention.

An inclusive culture identifies and evolves the unique leadership styles and capacities of individuals within it. Instinctively inclusive people have an internal impulse which, when they see or sense difference in another person, urges them toward that difference rather than being repelled, cautious, or suspicious.

An inclusive culture improves communication by freeing people from negative perceptions based on outworn mental models that block connections. It drives collective success by stimulating us to value human diversity and indiscriminating fellowship, says Rosenfeld. This results in identification of new

revenue and growth opportunities due to cross-fertilization among businesses as well as between business and society, helping break down silos and increase trust.

Trust must be the foundation of any culture change around difference. The cycle Rosenfeld proposes starts with a friendship, which over time engenders deepening trust. Such friendships get people talking about possibilities, which open up new opportunities to take action, which lead to demonstrable results.

When trust is present, risk-taking is encouraged, mergers of all kinds are more successful, innovation infrastructure works well, "doors" open during times of strife, and it becomes easier to make "deals".

When trust is lost, communication breaks down, legal suits increase, innovation slows, and aversion to risk increases. It becomes more difficult to make the "deals" which benefit all parties.

Change is upon us. The question is whether business leaders are equipping themselves and their organizations to handle it.

What resources do you use to implement such a simple yet powerful solution as building trust between diverse groups? Are those resources effective? If not, Bob has put together a program called Mosaic Partnerships to help corporate and civic leaders. See more on p. 2, or give me a call. – Deborah Huisken

ARE YOU UP FOR IT?

If you or people you know are committed to having an impact in the world, and can use the services of a coach to help you remove the obstacles which keep you from staying on target amid myriad demands, or to subscribe to this newsletter, contact Dancing Star International, phone: +1 413.367.9416. Email: info@DancingStar.com, or on the web at www.DancingStar.com.

We are not yet free. We have merely achieved the freedom to be free. – Nelson Mandela



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*One must embrace the chaos within to give birth
to a dancing star – adapted from Nietzsche*

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RESOURCES & NEWS

The Mosaic Partnerships program was originally implemented in Rochester, New York, and is currently being rolled out in Greensboro, North Carolina, where the civil rights movement was launched (see www.sitins.com). For Greensboro's perspective on the program, have a look at www.ci.greensboro.nc.us.

On another note, there are changes coming here at Dancing Star Productions, starting with a name change to Dancing Star International. We are learning how to explain more clearly what we do for our clients – stay tuned!

Deb's Corner



When I first heard of Idea Connections' Mosaic Partnerships program – in which civic and business leaders are paired for a year with the goal of simply

becoming friends across lines of difference – my interest was caught.

My cross-cultural experiences have met with varying degrees of success.

I grew up in a Boston suburb. Realtors in my town would not show property to people of color. In the early '70s, my high school was "integrated" by inner city black kids who sat on buses for two hours or more, every day, to study next to white kids. Some of my peers were prepared to (and did) fight them with knives.

I was fascinated by the black kids. But I didn't know how to connect with them either, so I tried too hard. One girl I tried to befriend finally turned to me in exasperation saying "You don't have a clue, do you?" It hurt, but she was right, and there was no structure to help us talk it out.

During my first visit to Europe on exchange as a student teacher, there were race riots in London over immigration, and a group of very black Africans at our host school. I'm not sure which group – us "Yanks" or the Africans – was more suspect by the Brits. Again there was no structure to help us bridge the gaps among us.

When I returned to London to work, I learned to Lindy Hop (aka Jitterbug or Swing). Now for me finding the Lindy Hop was like finding my soul. I wanted to dance with some of the

folks from the '20s and '30s who had created this wonderful dance, so I went up to Harlem, in New York City. For the first time, I was one of the few white faces in a sea of black.

Here, however, was a connection – a structure if you will – our common love of the music and the dance. The both sides were cautious at first, on the dance floor the barriers came down and our connection came through the ways we responded to each other, to the musicians and to other dancers. There was no need for words – our actions were plenty loud.

Living in London, my world expanded to include friends from different parts of the world who were as curious about me as I about them. I'd learned by then to speak through my awkwardness – that if I'm feeling it, I'm likely not the only one. I repeatedly took the risk of asking for more information, saying what I felt, and being curious about others. People almost always answered my questions, and we'd end up having conversations about life which allowed us to get to know each other in a very different way. I've been amply rewarded with friends, experiences, clients which pulled me into very different places in my life and work.

I've learned that people who act superior usually aren't, just how big hearts can be, and what decency and grace through adversity look like. I am committed to learning how business can change when it embraces such generosity of spirit. Will you join me?

LETTERS

– Responses to our recent newsletters on diversity commented that the term has come to refer primarily to e.g. race, physical limitations, age, when in fact there may be more subtle factors at work, such as class, emotional or psychological differences, economic, or educational factors, making it more relevant to talk about inclusivity... – Deborah

– Jim Early could have been describing one or two of my clients here: "if you have an executive or manager who generates complaints and criticism because s/he often: does not listen, communicates poorly, is impatient and abrasive, intimidates others, burns through support staff; this person might be super smart and struggling", as well as many of the other elements he mentioned. Looking at them in that light provides greater latitude and openings for coaching than seeing them more narrowly as "productive narcissists" (per Michael Maccoby). Thank you – I'm going to give this new perception a try. – Linda Laddin, Wise Resources Ltd, Hong Kong

Linda – you and others interested in this topic may be interested in the talks I'll be giving on aspects of giftedness and high sensitivity. Have a look on our website, www.dancingstar.com under "Upcoming Events" for details. – Deborah