



sensei

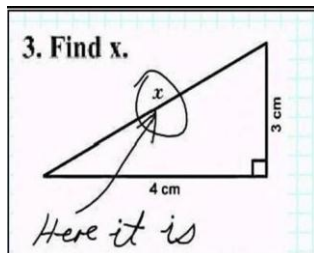
ENGAGING HUMAN PERFORMANCE
TO DELIVER STRATEGIC RESULTS

LEADERSHIP CONVERSATIONS

April 2012

'KISS IT – Keep It Simple & See It Work'

'What we need is to offer our clients an accelerant curve demo's to bring to life our UVP's' was the sentence that made me slump in my chair and put my head in my hands. I was listening to an earnest conversation unfold between two of my colleagues grappling with the challenge we face of getting more senior leaders to be aware of what we actually do and how we can add value. The thought crossed my mind, not for the first time in the meeting if I am honest, 'when did our business become this complicated and how did I let this happen!'



The genius of this quote is that it resonates in so many situations. Apple for example have built their global brand on their ability to make their highly complex, fully integrated products so simple even adults can use them.

Marketing and communicating a complex message is nicely described in a recent CGMA report:

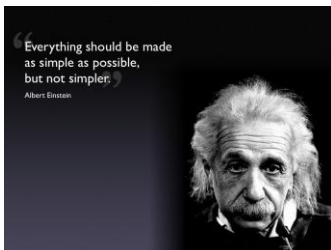
<http://www.theiirc.org/2012/02/02/cgma-report-rebooting-business-valuing-the-human-difference/>

This report contains research based on a survey of over 280 CEO's from 28 countries. The report highlighted the need for leaders to make the most of the human dimension in their business and maximise the intellectual capital under their stewardship. The report showed that CEO's recognised the most complex asset they have at their disposal are the people who work for them.

Finding ways to access, focus, engage and develop this latent talent in impactful and lasting ways is what Sensei are really all about. Now, how can we say that in a simple way.....?? (Any answers on a postcard or email we will really appreciate 😊).

In my work with leadership teams I observe leaders often fall into the trap of being too clever for our own good. Simplifying the complex is inherently difficult and to do so with elegance is a genuine challenge. The growth of complex processes to communicate what we want to say accompanied by complex organisation structures

Like many CEO's I often sit and wonder how to simplify what we do and I know this is a challenge not to be underestimated. Anyone can make



simple things complex but as Einstein demonstrates so well, to make complex things simple requires real genius.

Many years ago I remember reading Einstein's 3 rules of work and being struck by the elegance of his quote.

'Out of clutter find simplicity; from discord find harmony; in the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.'

is all too common a result of leaders failing to solve this challenge.

'How can we simplify? Is a great challenge that should be applied to all solutions developed by senior leadership teams.'

Often help comes from outside the organisation. Looking at how others see your business and using their world views to help you understand the challenges you face can be very illuminating.

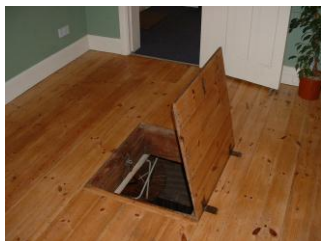
In common with all marketers and brand managers I worry that if we fail to communicate in a simple way to our chosen customers they will simply not hear us. The world we all live in today is far too noisy to spend time to understand complex messages.

Time and again we come across corporate communication so sanitised it is meaningless. For example one FTSE 250 company say on their website that they have a simple strategy to ensure their future success:

'Our aim is to deliver stakeholder value through a focus on sustainable, profitable growth. This strategy can be broken down into four areas that are all linked to our key performance indicators (KPIs) and other management tools, which we use to measure our success and our progress.'

I can only imagine this set of words emerged after a very long day in the 'bored' room, as put together this way they typify the problem. 47 words to say absolutely nothing at all!

Once leaders have grappled with the challenge of clearly explaining what it is their businesses do, the next challenge is to explain what makes them



different? Another trapdoor opens in this discussion. The

dilemma is if leaders simplify too much they sound the same as everyone else. In our

own marketing meeting the words - *'we help clients solve problems and deliver outstanding*

results' emerged as a contender for us. Hardly unique in the consultancy market I fear! The desire to demonstrate our unique value leads us to our *'unique value propositions'* or to make it more special and of course less understandable, we code it with an acronym, our UVP's. I referred to this at the start of this conversation and so we come full circle!

Communication and simplicity should be comfortable bedfellows yet they rarely are. I know many senior leaders struggle as they try and distil their complex messages into simple language that resonates with their key audiences. How can we communicate with such diverse groups such as investors, customers, consumers, employees in a way they understand without losing the very essence of what we want to say?

The challenge often results in communication that is so complex and stuffed so full of jargon and management speak I am often left wondering if no communication at all would deliver a better result!



Maybe the answer lies outside the communication area. I started my career as an engineer and I remember being really impressed when visiting Japan in the late 80's by the sheer volume of simple aids that they had all over their production lines designed to make the assembly job easier to do. The philosophy that underpinned this work was Kaizen, the continuous pursuit of simplicity and removal of waste. One engineer I talked to said we aim to design all assembly jobs on the production line to be able to be done with one hand, so when we employ people who have two hands it becomes really easy. Brilliant!

I wonder if we applied this philosophy to our corporate communication it will help. The challenge is to design messages so simple you only need one ear to listen and a 10 year old will still get the essence of what you mean. Good luck! **Malcolm Follos, April 2012**