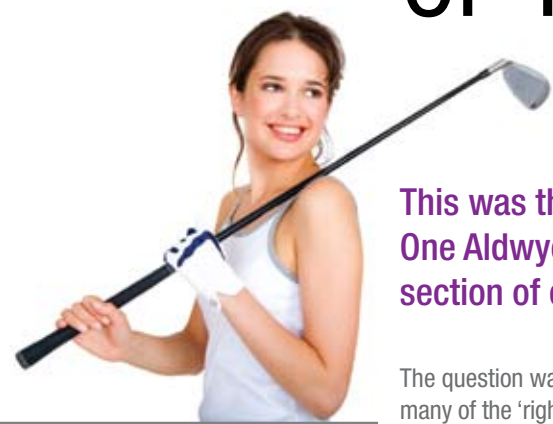


IF WOMEN ARE SO GOOD, WHY AREN'T THERE MORE OF THEM?



This was the provocative theme for our dinner in mid October 2007 at One Aldwych, attended by nearly forty of our clients from a wide cross section of organisations.

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“Women were rated equal on business skills by their direct reports but their peers and bosses rated the men higher.”

The question was a serious one. If women have so many of the 'right' characteristics of outstanding leaders, why are there still so few at the top of our businesses? Which leads to more questions: how do we know what these characteristics are; is it true that there aren't enough women at the top table; are there gender differences in leadership?

Richard Lowe from our partner organization, Worldwork, and one of our coaching associates, set up the debate. For the past 5 years, Worldwork has been building a large international database from the thousands of senior people who have used THE INTERNATIONAL PROFILER (visual on page 2). The Profiler covers 22 areas of competence, which are a practical mixture of skills, attitudes and behaviours. We use them to help executives improve the way they work cross-culturally – a fact of life for many of us now. There are striking differences between men and women.

Women give more emphasis to Welcoming Strangers, Acceptance of different behaviours and norms, Learning Languages, A Spirit of Adventure, Information Gathering, Valuing Differences, and adopting a Range of Styles to fit the cultural setting. Women also put more emphasis on the non-verbal aspects of communication (Attuned) whereas men emphasize the lower context skills of clear speaking (Clarity of Communications) and clear intentions (Exposing Intentions). Women also seem to put more value on Active Listening, using a range of influencing styles and on building trust and warmth into personal relationships.

Men, on the other hand, put more energy into the political aspects of influencing, typically sorting out the lines of power to get things done. Men also seem to be more likely to set goals and stick to them, through thick and thin. So which is better?

In 2006, Worldwork ran a survey across Europe for 'experts' and academics in cross-cultural work, and business professionals. 125 in total replied and they were asked to rank the 22 competences in terms of how critical each one was for successful international leadership. The experts and the business people agreed: the 'feminine' Active Listening was at the top of their lists. And, in general, women had more of the desired skills and attitudes than the men. And, you could say, if they predict success internationally why shouldn't these same characteristics also favour the women in a home country setting?

One of our mainstays is a 360° feedback tool called the LEA (Leadership Effectiveness Analysis) produced by the Management Research Group® of Portland, Maine (MRG). A decade ago they went through their database of 150,000 managers and found 900 pairs of men and women who:

- Were at the same management level
- Held the same position in the same functional area
- Had comparable years of management experience
- Worked at the same company

**2 IF WOMEN ARE SO GOOD,
WHY AREN'T THERE MORE OF THEM?**

The 1,800 managers were rated by their bosses, peers and direct reports on three dimensions of effectiveness: overall effectiveness; business skills; people skills. In overall effectiveness, the bosses saw men and women as equal but peers and direct reports rated women higher in this respect. Women were rated equal on business skills by their direct reports but their peers and bosses rated the men higher. However, all three observer groups put women higher on people skills.

The data also indicated that women were generally seen as using a more energetic, relationship oriented and friendly approach to getting things done. Men were seen as more strategic and objective but restrained in their behaviour. How much of this was down to directly observed behaviours and how much to gender stereotyping we will never know. What was striking was that, overall, men and women were seen as equally effective, credible and promotable managers.

MRG carried out another study seven years ago at director level, comparing 13 matched male and 13 female CEOs and 73:73 senior VPs in 88 North American companies. This time, all three observer groups rated men and women as equally effective; the gender differences in behavioural terms were slight compared with the previous study.

One could speculate that those women who make it to the board room adopt a way of working indistinguishable from their male counterparts.

That may be the very reason for their success. Or the selection process filters out any diversity of approach. In the UK, board composition has changed radically since 2000 as a result of the Higgs Review. The number of executive directors is at its lowest level for seven years, while the number of non-executive positions is at its highest level. Whilst women are still desperately under-represented in the executive ranks of FTSE-100 companies, they have made great progress as NEDs: 110 now compared to 60 in 2000.

Even better news is to be found in the talent pipeline to the board represented by the executive committees. In 2006, 53 of the FTSE-100 companies had 70 females on their executive committees. By 2007, this had risen to 60 companies, 122 women making up 16% of senior executives and an increase of 40% on the previous year. Tremendous progress, but still a very long way from any sort of parity...

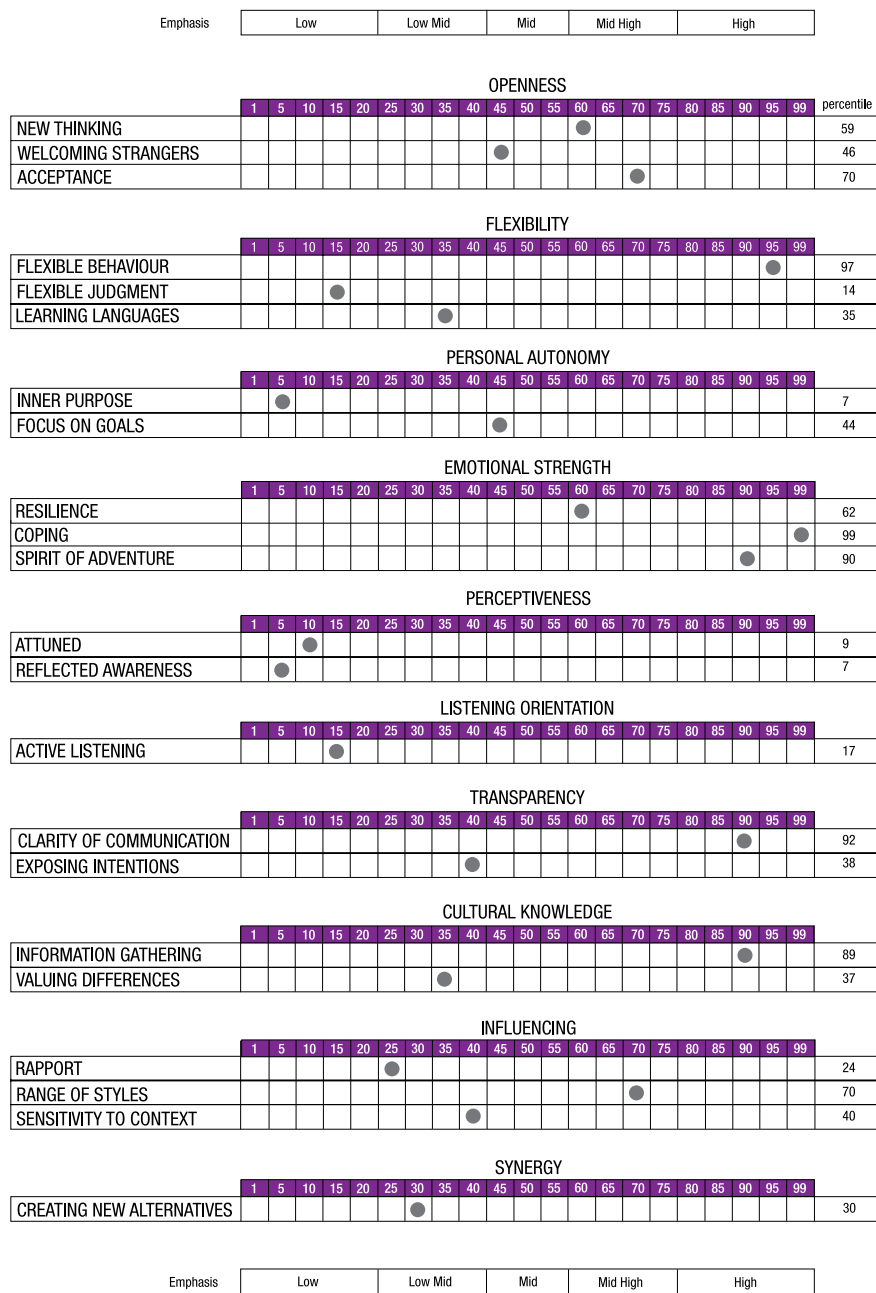
Back at One Aldwych with our two thirds female guests, the debate ranged over the expected issues facing women including: the balancing of work and family; choosing not to play the male games; setting up their own businesses in protest. It was also clear that our clients saw different industry sectors as more or less 'unfriendly' to women.

But the most startling conclusion of the evening was that the real differentiator was GOLF! Never mind all those carefully researched leadership abilities, ladies – just make sure you can compete over 18 – or perhaps, 19 holes. That's the real and final bastion. ■



THE INTERNATIONAL PROFILER

Normed Scores



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COACHING...

BACK TO THE FUTURE...

Eight years ago, Keary Harper started up in central London as a coaching consultancy for senior executives. By 2000, coaching was already a mainstream development activity and the market was growing fast. Coaching had become fashionable and just about every HR consultancy, all the big accountancy firms, universities, and business schools had added coaching to their product portfolios.

Businesses like ours, dedicated to coaching were – and still are – relatively uncommon. For the clients, it became *de rigueur* to have a coach, almost as a token of their company's esteem. Step back two decades and executive coaching was just emerging like a shy debutante.

In 1985, the author attended a 2-week Coaching and Assessment (sic) Program in the USA. The very idea of coaching was a profound shock and threat to that group of white, male, traditionally trained managers from what is now known as the 'rustbelt'. The idea that people had untapped potential and that a skilled coach could help them realize that potential by asking questions was like black magic. It was as if Carl Rogers' humanistic ideas were irrelevant.

For the next few years coaching was covert. Contracts were kept highly confidential and the programmes sometimes seen as a sign of weakness. The practitioners were part missionaries – forever explaining and justifying coaching – and part enthusiasts – dedicated to helping others succeed. They were mostly men, retired directors of large to medium companies or from the military. Training was 'on the job' with peer reviews to foster learning and monitor quality.

A few used 360-degree feedback and some basic personality instruments but the emphasis was on business experience and skilled listening – lots of it. Referral was the main marketing medium and the buyers were often chief executives and chairmen. It was a tight, clubbable world.

By the late 90s, coaching had become a hot topic. It was also a commodity to be bought by human resources and purchasing professionals. Often they didn't know much, if anything, about senior level coaching. They needed qualifications to sort the wheat from the chaff and to make a defensible buying decision. On both sides of the Atlantic there was a rush to draw up degree courses. Accreditation became the new buzz word. And yet coaching really is practical and skilled – some would say much more art than science. But degree courses require academic rigour.

Step forward the psychologists. In fact, they had already stepped forward and found coaching a lucrative new medium for their talents. The old joke: "what's the difference between a psychologist and a coach? – £75K a year" was not far from the mark. And the psychologists came ready-armed with degrees and diplomas

that so easily became the starting qualifications for any process of accreditation. Economics is often called the 'dismal science' but psychology could be a close runner-up.

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Much of its 20th century development and application was with the mentally unwell. It was concerned with pathology rather than promise, with clinical analysis of problems rather than the development of the mentally robust. Academics like Manfred Kets de Vries, who runs INSEAD's executive coaching business, came from a clinical background. His *Life and Death in the Executive Fast Lane* (1995), is witty but starts from the assumption of dysfunctional leaders in dysfunctional organizations. His latest, *Coach and Couch* (2007) actually argues that clinical psychology training makes for more effective coaches.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 ►

Besides this baleful psychology, we have allowed ourselves to become drawn into the undoubted power of 360-degree feedback that every self-respecting organization now uses. Human nature – and the early cultural influences of schooling – encourage us to look at all the things that the feedback suggests are ‘wrong’ with us and lose sight of our strengths.

All this analysis and picking over negatives can make strong and effective leaders feel inadequate and dependent on ‘expert’ support. A clever hook to sell coaching but is it really ethical or sensible?

It's redolent with a visit from the plumber who shakes his head at your pipe work and asks 'who on earth installed this?', and then demands a princely fee to retrieve you from your embarrassment and discomfort.

Something astonishing happened in 1998. The president of the American Psychological Association, Martin Seligman told the congress in his inaugural address that psychology should be concerned not only with weakness and damage but also with strength and virtue. He argued for the scientific study of optimal human functioning – a positive psychology.

In the last 9 years, this movement has rapidly gained strength and spawned British supporters. Dr Alex Linley recently established the Centre for Applied Positive Psychology and one of its main applications is, unsurprisingly, coaching. Neuroscience, in the past few years, has advanced swiftly through technology like functional MRI.

The effect of positive thoughts can be seen within the brain and linked to responses in the endocrine system – hard evidence for Carl Rogers' position a quarter of a century ago that if our self concept is positive, we tend to act and perceive the world positively. As coaches, we still have much to learn about positive psychology, but at Keary Harper we have a growing sense that this may be one of the most significant turning points in the short history of coaching. It could bring about a vital rebalancing of psychology's contribution – and take us right back to the roots of good coaching.

Watch this space! ■

GOING FORWARD

This time last year we peered out onto Baker Street with great trepidation about the forthcoming business year: so many of the economic fundamentals seemed out of kilter. Yet things went brilliantly and business confidence remained high for much of the year.

During that spring, the levels of jargon and opacity emerging from companies reached new heights of creativity. For example, promoters of a business startup enthusiastically described it as “pre-revenue” i.e. without a single customer and with the implication that sales were magically inevitable. Many a CEO or chairperson peppered their communications with the in-phrase of 2007: going forward. ‘In future’ used to be sufficiently crisp and to the point but somehow ‘going forward’ seemed more grandiloquent – or perhaps the future was just too difficult to contemplate. Virgin Trains took the prize with, “Moving forward, we, as Virgin Trains are looking to take ownership of the flow in question to applying our pricing structure, thus resulting in this journey search appearing in the new category-matrix format”.

You had to watch out if someone told you that they didn't have the bandwidth to deal with your trivial little issue. Or, worse still, if they talked about empowering associates with stretch opportunities: someone junior was just about to get dumped with an impossible task that all the senior people had wisely side-stepped.

The autumn brought bad news from across the Atlantic and then equally bad news here. We soon learned that unforeseeable market conditions were to blame – never the riskiness of the business model – and valuations would be adjusted suitably. We had sub-prime thrust down our throats at every turn. What an appalling euphemism that was.

The reality was that someone had sold a mortgage to some poor soul on benefits in inner city Detroit, who had as much chance of paying the first instalments as running for President. And these mortgages were wrapped up like Russian dolls in collateralized debt obligations or CDOs. Junk is the only honest word available, but honesty has been in short supply. SIVs were another beauty: structured investment vehicles. Word association suggests wheels coming off, or a much older word: ‘spivs’.

So how do things look this year? One colleague suggested there are more questions than answers. Business life is going to be more difficult and testing, for sure. But there are grounds for optimism too. Individuals and organizations will have to get back in touch with what a sound debt/equity relationship should be. The reality of private equity investment will become clearer.

And people may pay more attention to some of the quirkier companies that succeed because they put their people ahead of financial engineering. The John Lewis Partnership, Toyota, Google, Semco in Brazil and Linux are worth a hard look, as is W L Gore in the USA. Gore-Tex gets along very nicely without organization charts, titles or management layers and its operating units are small, self-managed teams. Time to rethink and move forward! ■



NEW COLLEAGUE

We are delighted to introduce **Ray Longbottom**, who has recently joined our team. Before becoming an executive coach, he was Executive Director of Europe and MEA for a group of businesses and a member of the European Operating Committee of 3M.

To hear more about Keary Harper please do call us or see our website www.kearyharper.co.uk

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Keary Harper was founded in 2000 by John Keary and Rosemary Harper. We are full-time coaches with decades of experience. All our consultants are business people first and last, but are also well-versed in psychometrics. All of us have led at a senior level.