



### WHEN IS ENOUGH, ENOUGH?

I have a watch that suits me very well. It was inexpensive to buy and yet has all I want in a watch – a large white face with clear numbers in black; it has a second hand, the date and day; and of course it has kept perfect time for some 6-8 years except when the battery has run down, which seemed to be the problem in May/ June. My usual solution was to go to an expert watch and clock repairer in Portobello, McAlpine Jewellers – but he was closed for a month and I needed a working watch. So off I trotted to a well known high street ‘Posh Shop’, on Princes St. The shop attendant looked rather disdainfully at my time-piece and went off to check it. She came back and said she had used a machine to test the battery and said it was fine, that there must be something wrong with the watch and that *‘it would cost far more than the watch was worth to take a look at it, let alone repair it’*. I returned home feeling rather glum and dug out my plastic swatch watch to tide me over until I returned from Switzerland when I would have more time to look for a replacement.

So in early August, I am back home pottering around Portobello and discover my expert watch-repairer is back at work. I drop in and tell him my little tale of woe.... He takes the watch into the back and after a few minutes comes back asking who it was who told me the battery was fine, because it was completely dead! He had replaced it and said that there may be an intermittent fault which might show up again, but for now, to give the new battery a go. It cost me all of £3.50. The last time I had had a battery replaced in a posh shop, it cost me £10 for the privilege – still not a lot, but a whole lot more than McAlpine. I trotted off feeling rather chirpy at having my favourite watch back on my wrist. However, I also noticed that I was also a little annoyed at the service I had experienced at the ‘Posh Shop’; and also had a niggling worry about how little McAlpine had charged me. I found myself thinking that somehow I was taking advantage of him, by allowing myself to be charged SO little! This rather odd concern stayed with me for days. I was bothered that he was not charging enough to keep himself safe and in business.

About a week later, I realised that my leather watch strap had started to tear.... I was slightly annoyed at myself for not having noticed sooner but decided I would head back to McAlpine. So off I went. I found a strap similar to the one I already had. It cost about £18 but he pulled out another one that was genuine, strong leather which had some better features and it only cost £6. It was actually nicer than the one I had first found, so I duly bought it and he fitted it for me. It was then that I opened up into a conversation with him. I said *‘Since I last came in, I have been really worrying about you because I am not sure you are charging enough’*. He looked at me and his face seemed to soften. And what he told me was this: That he used to do most of the repairs for many of the bigger shops but had stopped that some time ago. He knew that they often charged around a 400% mark-up (sometimes more) on their goods and services – he saw this on the slips that came with repair jobs. He said that he was no longer VAT registered which meant that he did not need to charge 20% VAT which also enabled him to reduce his prices even more... and anyway he said, *‘I earn enough for what I need, why would I charge more?’* His words reminded me of something Ghandi once said *‘there is enough for everyone’s need and not enough for one man’s greed’*.

I was deeply touched by this quiet, gentle man who knew when **enough was enough**. This experience reminded me of an unusual company started in Finland some 15+ years ago, whose primary purpose is to support the personal development and fulfillment of its partners. Each partner decides how little they need/want to live the life they want and then they work out how little they would need to work to fulfil these requirements. It is up to each of them to earn the little they want, by best serving the needs of their customers/ clients. They have been successful on their terms in every year of trading. What both these examples reveal to me, is that there are people in the business and trading world who know when **enough is enough** and choose to live accordingly. There are probably many more than we imagine. My guess is they are unlikely to be in the public eye; they will be living simple, unglamorous lives and they are probably happier than many in the corridors of power and fame or those seeking to be in them.

There is enough evidence in the world, of people behaving in ways - fed by assumptions that year-on-year growth is both desirable and is the mark of a strong (successful) economy – that suggest that more IS better, and the more you earn and the more you have, the better and more successful you are considered to be. ‘More’ is success; ‘less’ is failure. We are trapped by this way of thinking and seeing; and it manifests through our choices and behaviours in almost every aspect of our existence. How many designer dresses, shoes, cars do we buy? How expensive is our jewelry and how much do we have? How many properties does one person need? How much money does one person need to earn to lead a comfortable life? How much food do we consume and waste? How many holidays, nights out, drinks can we consume? The list of going for ‘more’ goes on and on and yet whatever we have, appears never to be enough. It is unsurprising that ‘Greed’ comes to mind as a dominant cultural pattern of our time. It is interesting to note that the escalation of executive salaries in the UK started



to rapidly increase after it became law to publish them publicly. Someone senior in the UK Banking world suggested that this was less about earning or having more; that it was more to do with competition – the unconscious, driven desire to be seen to earn/ have more than others.

We find it easy to accuse Bankers, Investors - or even footballers and celebrities - who earn millions for equivalent hours of human endeavour, for 'their Greed'. However, I suggest that what many of us do in our own lives, is in principle, the same; the difference may only be in scale, context and/or how near to the public domain our 'greedy behaviour' shows up or impacts. It is ever thus in complex systems – patterns repeat fractal-like at every level. So, to this mix, we could also add 'blame' as another of our repeating patterns – certainly in the Western World. Blaming others is helpful to our own fragile egos because it has us deny our part in how this current reality is playing out. It is them 'up there' not us 'down here'. Margaret Heffernan's wonderful book, 'Wilful Blindness' expertly charts the awful consequences of our collective inability to see reality and to stand out as different from 'the crowd'. Her collected and collated evidence shows that through our actions, most people unconsciously choose to 'belong and be wrong', than to 'be alone and right'. What is so shocking and scary about this so-called 'choice' is that it is usually completely out of our awareness, As Margaret writes, '*The carrot of belonging and the stick of exclusion are powerful enough to blind us to the consequences of our actions*'.

Sadly our ability to choose with awareness will not increase UNLESS we improve our ability to see more of reality: the reality caused by our individual and collective, governmental and corporate decisions and actions that play out at local through to global scales. One of the ways to broaden awareness is to actively welcome diversity into a group or system; to invite in people with views and perspectives different to our own. This is more likely to open up and inform a broader exploration, which in turn, is more likely to generate innovation, catalyse transformation and grow adaptive capacity. But we are less likely to proactively bring in difference because it tends to create disturbance to our own cosy worldview; it cracks open the status quo and takes us into unknown, unpredictable territory (which is, by the way, the nature of reality). And, it often means that someone (usually one willing and able to face hard knocks, rejection and isolation) has to stand alone, amidst those who are busy 'working on belonging' until the dominant paradigm begins to crack open. Leonard Cohen's song, (in my view sung most powerfully by Camille O'Sullivan – an extraordinary talent who dares to stand alone amongst the crowds of conventional performers) invite the challenge

*'Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering.  
There is a crack – a crack – in everything. That's how the light gets in.'*

Many of us champion the increase of gender diversity in business and in leadership realms but we need to remember that this is only one dimension of diversity that is not always relevant. It is dangerous to assume that simply by bringing more women into a previously male-dominated domain, better decisions will be made. This is not necessarily the case, especially if the women who are recruited have succeeded by learning to play the current game by current rules of engagement which are frequently gladiatorial in nature. If the women who end up at the top are just as caught by believing that they have to be able to give as good as they get, that 'more is better', and the one who 'has/does/wins the most' is de facto 'best', then their presence as one of the opposite gender will make not one jot of difference. Again as Margaret Heffernan pointed out, the paradox of competition is that it tends not to encourage diversity, rather it drives us towards similarity. So, it is not surprising that in the world of business and especially in the corporate world, we see more and more people behaving in ways that seek to differentiate themselves (competing to 'win') but who end up by becoming ever more similar in how they dress, speak, behave because they are also caught by wanting to belong. Women (consciously or unconsciously) colluding with convention and competing to exceed current social expectations will not transform business, communities nor the world; just as men playing this game has not.

What we need are 'Game-Changers': men and women who are willing to create new arenas in which to play and new ways of playing; men and women who will do more than simply say 'enough is enough'. We need people who are willing to step outside the current ways of living and working; to speak up, take action and dare to stand alone long enough until others catch on and come along to join in creating something altogether more sustainable.... and arguably preferable.

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