



**Article 4: Leading in a Quick-Fix Culture**

What has been playing in my mind since I completed my last article is considering the impact of our 'Quick-Fix' culture and what implications this has for Leaders in our time.

In this first part I'm going step outside my own perspective to present some rather provocative, judging, challenging and uncompassionate views on some aspects of our western culture. Later on, from a more understanding and constructive viewpoint, I will go on to explore what might be going on for people caught in such scenarios.

**LOSE WEIGHT FAST:** dieting fads; pills; lipo-suction; cosmetic surgery; gastro-clips. Instant external 'transformation': high prices for minimum effort with no internal shift in attitudes, beliefs, self-esteem.

Did you see the pictures of Sharon Osbourne in the papers recently? After more than £300,000 spent, she is once again 'putting on weight'. Despite undergoing hugely invasive medical procedures to make external changes to her body and her looks, the change has not 'stuck'.

**BECOME A MILLIONAIRE OVERNIGHT:** play to win the Lottery ..... maximum prize for no or minimum effort

There are many shocking stories about people who win the lottery who then go on to end up in misery – on the dole, bankrupt or even dead. Equally, many have gone on to lead happier, more secure lives. The outcome is not necessarily the point. What is interesting is what leads people to 'buy that ticket'? It is easy to say 'oh it is just a bit of fun!' but do you ever wonder what lies beneath the surface of that comment or the one that says 'If only I could win, then all my problems would be solved'?

**GET TO THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN:** use the cable car; instant ride to the top: no need to physically train or expend effort to walk or climb all the way there

Cable railways in Switzerland: 'Experience that delightful rush of adrenaline as you enjoy a panoramic cable car ride to some of the highest destinations in Switzerland. The way to the top of a summit may be strenuous but truly worth the effort once you have successfully scaled it.... with the help of some technical miracles ... you and your loved ones can have the time of your life.' As the extract from this online holiday site says, you can get to some of the highest mountains in Switzerland without having to train hard, walk or carry overnight equipment and days worth of food, water etc. It is very convenient for the individuals..... but ..... at what cost to these extraordinary natural environments when millions of people can now experience what, in the past, only a dedicated few were able to?

**INSTANT FAME:** put yourself on reality TV and become a household face and name for no reason other than that you dared to expose yourself to millions while you eat, sleep, play and fight, make up and make out: no need to work hard, or develop skills to match nascent talent

As Jeremy Cliffe on 'café bable' says: '... is reality TV a case of the greed of television producers being matched only by that of those contestants keen to grab their fifteen minutes of fame; in short, a modern form of the cock-fights held in town squares of days gone by?

**INSTANT MEALS; FAST FOOD:** no time to eat and no time to stop! Little or no need for preparation; gulp it down whilst on the run; no need to think about choosing, buying, preparing freshly grown, healthy products; reduce it to a functional activity rather than a social opportunity; make it fast, make it cheap, make it convenient to me and damn the consequences

And what greater cost than the impact on the massive rise in obesity and coronary heart disease? To get a sense of just how far-reaching the implications of becoming a fast-food world are, have a read of Eric Schlosser's revealing and shocking book, 'Fast Food Nation: What the All-American Meal is doing to the world'. Everything has consequences, most of which are unanticipated and unintended. While we remain indifferent, ignorant or unconscious, we cannot make considered choices

**WIN THE RACE AT ANY COST:** use performance-enhancing drugs to win gold; pretend it was all by your own endeavour; never think about the longer-term consequences on your health or being caught

Johnson captured the imagination of Canadians on 27 September, 1988, when he won the 100-metre sprint title in a world-record time of 9.79 seconds at the Seoul Olympics. The euphoria of Johnson's win didn't last, however, when it was found the Canadian tested positive for the anabolic steroid stanozolol

**GET IT DONE AND GET IT DONE NOW!:** just do it! No time to think about and reflect on it; work harder and longer or they won't think I'm pulling my weight....have to just keep going and going....

..... what stories of your own could you add in here?



**What is going on for us when we find ourselves living our lives as in these scenarios?** If any of these rub a little too close to the bone, what may be going on for you?

When I'm working with leaders and coaching clients, such scenarios are not uncommon. The stories, reasons and justifications that emerge nearly always are underpinned by one common feeling. Fear. Fear that is very real. Fear that either something horrible will happen to them and they will experience pain, loss, infamy or blame (commonly called 'away-from motivators'); or, rather more tricky to surface is the fear that they will not achieve the 'positive' thing they are aiming for: pleasure, gain, fame or praise (commonly called 'towards motivators'). So what does this have to do with the notion of 'Quick-fix'. My supposition is that while ever we focus on gains that are externally motivated, we disconnect with what truly guides and moves us from within – a sense of passion and purpose (our source of inspiration) which is less about ourselves and our own egos (motivations) and more about the contribution we want to make to those around us and the world at large. I alluded to this distinction between motivation and inspiration in my previous article. It is a journey that each and everyone of us can take, though sadly, many do not find their way to discovering or re-claiming what gives their life meaning.

And is this ALL that is going on? I suggest not. Alongside and sometimes activating the fears that may be at play, are likely to be a range of values and beliefs – some of which may be locked in our unconscious. The trouble is, when we are unaware of them, they become driving beliefs that control our reactions/ actions - this is when we find ourselves defaulting to unhelpful, short term behaviours, unable to see or contemplate long term, broader consequences. We continue to feel unhappy, unfulfilled and become increasingly disillusioned when none of our 'successes' or attempts at making our lives feel better seem to work. It is a despairing place to be. Some examples of unhelpful beliefs that can 'lock' us into stuck place, include things like:

- ✿ Life should be easy!
- ✿ Life isn't fair (and it should be)!
- ✿ Eating with others is a waste of time
- ✿ 'Having it' is more important than 'having to work for it'!
- ✿ Sod the environment – I won't be here to worry about it
- ✿ It's my right
- ✿ 'I have to be seen to be doing something or else they will think I'm doing nothing' (they'll think I'm lazy/ that I'm an imposter/ that I'm not worthy/ that I'm not up to the job/ that I'm useless etc)
- ✿ It has to be done fast
- ✿ It is always someone's fault
- ✿ Convenience is king
- ✿ I should be able to get there quickly!
- ✿ Everyone should be able to experience it regardless of effort
- ✿ 'Being there' is more important than 'getting there'!
- ✿ 'Winning is everything, it doesn't matter how I win!'
- ✿ I have to be right; be perfect!
- ✿ If I have loads of money/ that big house/ fast car/ high-profile job then others will think I'm important (hiding a core belief that 'I am not important')
- ✿ People cannot be trusted
- ✿ People who get it wrong should be punished

**What is the cost to us, as individuals and as a society, when we live from a place where unrecognized fear and unconscious values and beliefs control many of our waking hours?**

It means we may act primarily from an ego-based standpoint. This place finds us valuing externally rewarded achievement of end goals or 'arrival', over the nature and quality of the journey (how) and the learning that got us there? In essence, when we are driven by fears, beliefs and values outside of our awareness, we will react to personal needs. If these are not satisfied, we may believe that this will threaten our survival, safety, sense of belonging and general self-confidence – in essence we become afraid that our ego, our sense of self, will be damaged/ annihilated (see Maslow's hierarchy of needs). When we set goals without having a sense of a deeper purpose, we are in danger of only serving ourselves. This state of being ego-driven can find us being hugely, outwardly successful. However, rarely does the achievement of such goals find us experiencing a profound sense of fulfillment, contentment, inner peace. It is not that having such goals is inherently bad – it is more about what underpins them – why we want them? The more conscious we are, the more likely we are to act for ourselves AND the common good.



For those of you who have watched the Secret Millionaire on the TV, in almost every case, you will have seen how deeply touched those materially rich people have been, as they have witnessed the extraordinary endeavours of ordinary people making a difference in their own communities. It brings into question – ‘Who is the richer?’ Those who dedicate themselves to making a difference to others in greater need, or those who pursue personal financial rewards and material success – possibly, over all else? Of course it is never that simple. We all need money to live in a society where that is the currency for securing the resources we require to sustain ourselves. My key message here is that if we make the effort and take the risk to discover our innermost worlds to face the fears (our demons or dragons) that control and drive us, we discover a richer, deeper, greater power – a unique sense of purpose or meaning that inspires us, a passion that fuels us through life, no matter how great the challenge. We discover a sense of freedom having been liberated from those thoughts and ideas in our heads that have previously tyrannized us. And when we get to this place, our relationships with ourselves, others and the world are transformed. In short, as we change our inner world, so we impact on the world around us.

My favourite film at the moment is ‘How to Tame your Dragon’. Apart from being a cinematic delight, its metaphors and relevance to what I have written about so far are perfect. This is my interpretation. The Dragons represent the worst and greatest of our fears. Some of the beliefs I see at play in the film are that:

- ✿ Dragons are dangerous and if we don’t kill them, then they will kill us
- ✿ We have to fight them and overcome them to prove that we are worthy of being called Vikings
- ✿ The only power of any worth is the power of physical might
- ✿ We have to fight to survive
- ✿ Any other faculties such as using one’s mind are not relevant or valuable
- ✿ The only way to view our situation is the one that has been in place for thousands of years
- ✿ If you do not do it like us then you are not one of us

But what we learn through the film is that all these beliefs are false. A climate of fear and tyranny is transformed as a young, skinny boy ends up befriending the most feared of all Dragons, simply because he looked into the injured beast’s eyes and recognised fear

‘I couldn’t kill him because I saw he was just as scared as me’

And so, in the film, our young, boy is the Hero and becomes the first ever Viking in history to choose not to kill a Dragon even when he could have done so. Instead, compassion and curiosity was awoken in him which opened the way to a journey of discovery, delight and innovation; resulting in the two beings learning to fly as One and to revel in their shared ability – each dependent on the other - to soar through the skies in joy and delight. This small boy showed a different kind of leadership. And through the process of transforming his relationship with the Dragon, they both impacted the world. It became one where Dragons and Vikings lived in joy and harmony.

This is a story about what can happen when we choose to seek to understand and befriend, rather than fight our greatest fears. It has deep archetypal meaning. I recommend a viewing to see how and where it touches you.

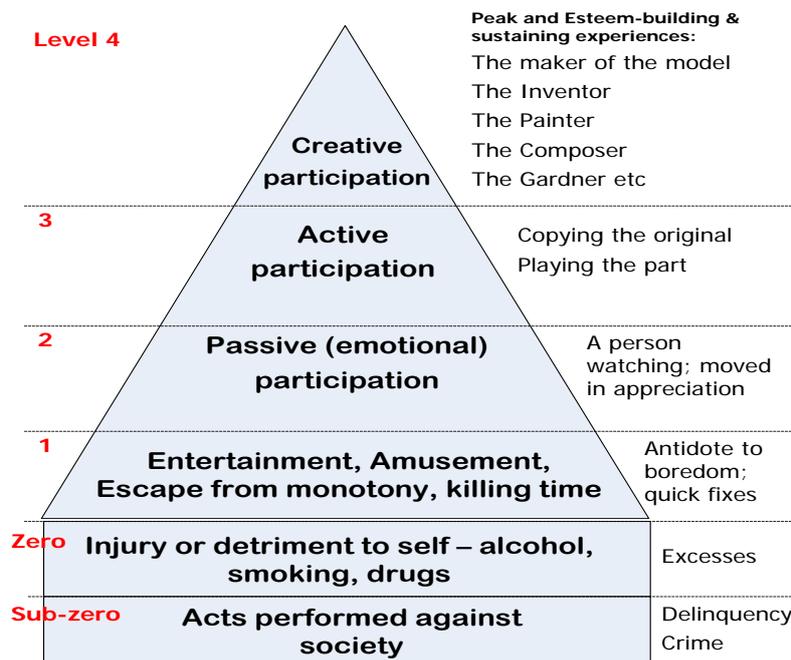
Having touched on the impact of fears, beliefs and values, let’s look a little more at how society is tending towards quick-fix experiences.



To do this, I'd like to introduce you to a model that I discovered 30 years ago. It is one of those models that clearly touched something in me because I find myself not infrequently remembering it. This model was used to classify different types of 'participation' in leisure time. Focusing on a model used to understand leisure may seem rather narrow, however, I am working on the assumption that what is reflected in how people 'use' their leisure time is also reflected in other dimensions of our cultural/ societal context.

Levels 1-4 of Nash's model broadly align to Maslow's hierarchy of needs but Nash adds some interesting zero and sub-zero levels. My sense is that much of what our western societies engage in, falls within Levels 1 and 2. Level 2 opens the space for more recreative, regenerative experiences – allowing us to be touched emotionally. However, it is not until we engage more actively at Level 3 that we truly begin to experience the benefits that Maslow calls self-actualisation. Level 1 suggests a settling for a lowest common denominator that, if this becomes our default state of being, can find us easily slip into a degenerative cycle of excesses.

### Nash's Concept of use of Leisure Time (1960)



A recent radio headline about Scotland that was quoted to me whilst in Nova Scotia, Canada shocked me to the core: **'Scotland, a Nation on a suicide mission'**. This was referring to the increasingly high incidence of obesity, smoking and drink related health problems. What is going on amongst our nation's people that we collectively slide into a zero sum state of existence?

What can we as Leaders do to avert the potential time bomb ticking? No longer can we resort to quick fix solutions at an individual or collective level. They do not work. What we need is a group of highly self-aware, bold, powerful, inspiring leaders able to hold a long term view, with an unshakeable constancy of purpose, acting for the common good, willing to truly come together in real partnership, to forge revolutionary systemic ways of collaborating to co-discover new solutions and to lead others through uncertain times. This is one hell of Mission!

In partnership with The3rdi and others, we are looking to convene a group of respected, trusted Leaders who have moved beyond that place of self-interest; who are willing to step into the fire to catalyse change and to be risk being changed in the process.

If you know of someone who is there; if you see yourselves as one of these significant players, then please get in touch. The pathway is not marked out. That we must discover together. We will want to know what you will put into the mix – time, energy, connections, money? When we have the beginnings of a group we will take the next step.... Whatever that may be!

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