John Naisbitt describes a ‘change mindset’ as exploiting opportunities, not solving problems. Yet we choose to define our world through problems, where change is seen to upset our plans. Our thinking is shaped by certainty. Compliance to plan is good, with little time to consider what is right. Effort is consumed in justifying opinions and the greater our investment of effort the less room we have for new thought. We take pride in being pragmatic and keep busy to hide the absence of dreams. Yet in our chosen world of problems they roll in like waves and as King Canute we exhaust ourselves on endless solutions.

Comedian Steven Wright speaks of modern life:-

“I have a microwave fireplace. You can lay down in front of the fire all night in eight minutes.”

in our search for speed and efficiency we often forget the reason for the journey.

In each newsletter I’ve recommended books and wondered if anyone had been influenced to read anything new.

I confess that in my past corporate life I made little time to read other than text books in search of answers.

However, good reading isn’t about instructions, but the space for thought, and the risk of where it may lead.

I’d love to hear your thoughts on reading and any books you recommend.

Student: ‘The questions of this year’s exam are the same as last years!’

Einstein: ‘True. But this year all the answers are different.’

‘In a single sunny afternoon sitting in the shade of a tree, you could create the entire catalogue of improvement tools, with little more than a blank piece of paper, a pencil and self belief.’

Steve Unwin

‘We fritter our lives away on 10% improvements whilst in our hearts we yearn to be 1000 times better.’

Steve Unwin

‘Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what next or how. The moment you know how, you begin to die a little.’

Martin Luther King

‘Some books leave us free and some books make us free.’

Ralph Waldo Emerson

‘Most management books should not be tossed aside lightly; they should be hurled against the wall with great force.’

Michael Hammer

‘In the case of good books, the point is not how many of them you can get through, but rather how many can get through to you.’

Mortimer Dale

Time to Read

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15 billion years of evolution mean we are more than capable of meeting the challenges, if only we choose to face them and rather than seeking to adopt other’s answers, realise that life exists in the questions.

Once we do, we discover that challenges don’t destroy or detract from life, they define its very meaning.

Life is the journey.

Life is the seeking of answers.

Thus to give an answer is an act akin to murder, and to find one an act akin to suicide.

Best Wishes

Steve Unwin

‘In the case of good books, the point is not how many of them you can get through, but rather how many can get through to you.’

Mortimer Dale
A Man Without Letters

Last year I gave a talk and spoke of Leonardo Da Vinci describing himself as ‘a man without letters.’ I explained that his interest was in discovery rather than learning what was known.

Afterwards a delegate asked why I had letters on my business card. They recorded membership of three professional institutions, chartered engineer status and my degree.

It was an interesting question that set me thinking.

Of course the letters were a form of recognition, they symbolised past achievements, but what did they say about me and the future?

I’d acquired the memberships in the final days before leaving my corporate past. At the time it had felt that I’d need every assistance I could find as I stepped from the corporate comfort blanket out into the world alone.

Paradoxically during almost 25 years of my previous working life, I’d felt no need for them.

I recalled even exploring undertaking further studies in conversation with a university lecturer friend. His description of the PhD process stuck with me.

‘The challenge is to explore the island of documented knowledge, describing every feature, each hill and valley, crevice lake and coastline. Having done this you earn the right to place your very own pebble amongst the millions that line the beach.’

Not words to entice Da Vinci and small wonder that radical ideas have such difficult births and that the best entrepreneurs often skipped formal education.

It seems to me that the ability we need above all others, is of learning how to learn.

This is not to be confused with learning.

Learning too often is seen as the acquisition of knowledge; believing that knowledge is good and more knowledge better.

Learning how to learn, is the dynamic of stepping between learning. It is the journey, and has as much to do with leaving behind what you once knew, as travelling towards new knowledge.

If all we do is learn then inevitably we build on what we know, becoming ever more specialised, focused and disconnected from areas outside our specialism.

Our rucksack, burdened with the weight of what we’ve acquired, we are valued as a provider of answers and increasingly less able to ask real questions. Our knowledge, now a ball and chain tethering us to what we were.

The paradox for the expert in a world of change is ‘what value has expertise?’

As the financial world is discovering, expertise of past worlds is of questionable value.

The expertise we should value is not that of providing answers, but of asking questions, a willingness to not know and to make connections and often bizarre and unexpected leaps of imagination.

Of course these are abilities we all had as children and still have, though buried deep beneath our knowledge.

We’re know the value we attach to our qualifications, but when did we last consider their costs.

‘Music isn’t just learning notes and playing them, You learn notes to play to the music of your soul.’

Katie Greenwood

‘The less you know the more you can find out about, and finding out for oneself is what intelligence is all about.’

Roger Schank

‘Rapid destruction of your ideas when the time is right is one of the most valuable qualities you can acquire.’

Charlie Munger

‘The purpose of education is to replace an empty mind with an open one.’

Malcom Forbes

‘Real learning comes about when the competitive spirit has ceased.’

Jiddu Krishnamurti

‘Professionals embody the learning dilemma: they are enthusiastic about continuous improvement - and often the biggest obstacle to its success.’

Chris Argyris
Turning to One Another and The Curious Incident...

**Turning to One Another. Margaret J Wheatley.**

"Any fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction."

**Albert Einstein**

In a world made complex by procedure and process Margaret J Wheatley (Meg.) courageously offers a simple truth that the world would be a much better place if we were to hold better conversations.

She offers a wealth of examples of how sharing is and has been valued for thousands of years by human communities. She explores how the art of conversation is being lost particularly in the West and the damage that results.

Her proposition is that we need to relearn how to speak to each other, how to listen, how to share and create common understanding.

Part 1 of the book sets out the case, the evidence across cultures and time of the power of conversation, and the damage being caused by its loss. Part 2 offers space for reflection, whilst in Part 3 there are 10 conversation starters, each with an introductory quotation and a short essay proving ‘talking points’.

These are well worth reading and as I’ve reflected on them their value as a stimulus to conversations has grown.

Wonderfully the book then hands over responsibility to the reader, ‘to go and converse’.

There’s no program, no procedure, no templates, nothing to be commoditised by the zealous and misguided consultant. It’s great.

The world has found space for over 400 million Harry Potter books. Read this and help redress the balance.

**The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time. Mark Haddon**

The story this book tells is of itself unremarkable. At its heart is a family breakup and the impact on those affected. What is intriguing, illuminating and utterly engaging is the way in which the story is told through the eyes of its main character Christopher Boone.

Christopher is fifteen and suffers from Asperger’s, a form of autism. The book tells the story of its writing as a school project through his eyes, experiences and way of seeing the world.

Christopher has a photographic memory, a brilliant understanding of science and mathematics, but can’t understand human beings. His mind is utterly logical and whilst it manipulates numbers with astonishing ease is powerless to understand a raised eyebrow or fathom the meaning of the phrase ‘raining cats and dogs’.

We are drawn into Chris’s world, we see things as he sees them and in doing so we come to understand a little of Asperger’s and Autism. Beyond that we begin to glimpse how easily we assume that ours is the only way of seeing.

A wonderfully insightful book for anyone who wishes to understand autism and become more aware and understanding of others perspectives.

Follow the link for over 70 more reviews of books well worth reading.

Click the link for more book reviews [www.accesstoexcellence.co.uk/html/book_reviews.html](http://www.accesstoexcellence.co.uk/html/book_reviews.html)
Visiting Serbia and Iran

In May/June I had the pleasure of travelling to Iran and then onto Belgrade in Serbia to give workshops and conference talks. I’d like to thank everyone I met who helped make the journey so memorable, the organisers and in particular my friends Hesam Aref Kashfi and Vidosav Majstorovich for the time they gave to ensuring the success of my trip.

Whilst in Iran I was able to travel with my friend Hesam north to visit the shores of the Caspian sea, the world’s largest lake, and the region of Azerbaijan.

As on previous visits to this amazing country, one can’t help but be struck by the warmth and friendliness of the Iranian people and I send them my best wishes and hope that the future brings all they dream of.

‘The question is not ‘did you leave your footprints on the beach?’ but did the beach leave its footprints on you?’
Steve Unwin

Six Days - Novel nearing completion. - Available to pre-order

Planned for publication in August, Six days tells the story of a change manager coming to terms with seeing things differently. Follow the link to read the first chapter.

There’s still time order an advanced copy and have your name included in a ‘thank you’ page in the book.

‘Writing a book is easy, the second word follows the first then come the third, fourth and fifth and so on. The only real difficulty is finding the time for that first word.’
Steve Unwin

www.photonbooks.com/html/six_days.html

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