

The Mindset for Excellence

**Presentation at Q2002 World Quality Congress
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**Presentation Transcript:
(Transcription provided by WordWave International)**

This is the recorded transcript of the presentation to which we have added some headings to align the transcript with the main elements of the presentation. We have also included a selection of the presentation slides.

**Introduced by Joe Goasdoue, Chief Executive of the
British Quality Foundation**

Transcript Start

JOE GOASDOUE: Well, good morning ladies and gentlemen. The title of this session is 'Excel Yourself - Business excellence in reality' and probably most of you heard yesterday morning a very interesting discussion between John Humphries and a number of people on the excellence model. This morning we've got three excellent speakers, all who, in their different ways, have got hands-on practical experience of using the excellence model, in reality rather than in theory.

Our first speaker is Steve Unwin. Until recently, Steve was head of Business Excellence at BAE Systems. In 1999, BAE Systems won the British Quality Foundation's UK Business Excellence Award and Steve was instrumental in that achievement. He's now in the consultancy business. His company is called Access to Excellence.

I'm particularly grateful to Steve who agreed to speak today at relatively short notice after Richard Duggleby from Yell had to withdraw due to illness. Unfortunately, he has pneumonia.

I'm sure that you'll enjoy what Steve has to say and I'm reliably informed that, in the future, you'll be able to read a lot more about it in a book that he's planning to write. Ladies and gentlemen, Steven Unwin.

Presentation

STEVE UNWIN: Good morning and thank you very much, Joe, for that really nice introduction. You've set me up for the day. You've put

me in a good frame of mind and that's good because what we're going to talk about today - what I'm going to talk about in the next half an hour - is the mindset for excellence.

Presentation Outline

What I want to do is talk about how the way you see excellence and the way you see the excellence model can affect your ability to get real value out of creating change in your organisation. What I aim to do over the next half an hour is create in your minds two characters. Two characters that will illustrate and contrast two different mindsets, and through those mindsets I hope to give you some insights into perhaps how you're approaching excellence and how you might change that approach to be more effective in achieving change.



The presentation format is: First I'm going to spend a moment or two telling you a little bit about my background and filling in a little bit on what Joe's covered. I'm then going to talk, and create some pictures in your mind, about excellence and change and, in particular, the journey of change because the two characters I'd like to introduce are both travellers. So, I'm first going to create a little bit of scenery, a little bit of a backcloth against which we can place those two characters.

Background



My background: as Joe says, I've been involved in excellence, involved in improvement and change, for over ten years - much of that time, until recently, with British Aerospace. Whilst I've been doing that, I've also been involved in a number of ways within the excellence community. I've been an assessor for the UK awards. I've been a jury member for the north of England excellence awards. I've been involved in the development of the excellence model; the new model, as it was called when we were working on it in 1999 and what we now simply call the excellence model. But, in addition, I was involved in the EFQM Green Book, which is the book which tells you about all the different tools and techniques you can use for deploying

the model, and the EFQM Yellow Book, which is about the fundamental concepts, the ideas, that underpin the model.

The picture up there, I'm contractually obliged by my mum to put that picture into every presentation I give because that's her favourite picture of me. That's collecting the UK Business Excellence Award in 1999 on behalf of British Aerospace with Steve Mogford, the MD of British Aerospace Military Aircraft and Aerostructures. As Joe says, I've recently left British Aerospace so I can spend more time working with a diverse range of organisations and really developing ideas for how organisations can more effectively use the principles of excellence and the excellence model. And I've created a company called Access to Excellence and the name's up there so you all know the name, but it's also up there because it reflects my mindset. My mindset for excellence is you can't deliver that to an organisation. What you can do is you can encourage an organisation to access excellence. You can encourage an organisation to want, to desire to be better and then help it to find the ways in which that can be achieved.



Excellence - Being the Best

That's enough of the background. What I'd like to do now is start to create this picture in your minds. And the first thing I'd like to do is create a picture of what we mean by excellence. Now, inviting an audience of quality experts to debate what excellence is we could spend all day and not arrive at an agreed picture. But I hope everyone can agree that excellence, in some form, is to do with being the best. Whatever your product, whatever your service, it's something to do with being the best. And I want to create a picture in my mind and in your minds of what do we mean when we talk about being the best.



Now, there's one picture that looks like this. Here you can see someone who's the best and they're the best because they've managed to climb. They've managed to scrabble their way to the top. They're the best. But they're the best because everybody else isn't the best.

That's not my picture of excellence. That's not my picture of being the best. I want this presentation to be the best but I want Eduardo's and John's to be the best as well because, if they're the best, then this will be a fantastic session. And, if all the sessions today are the best, we'll have a terrific day. And, if the three days are the best, then what a conference this will have been.

So, the picture in my mind isn't that one. When I think of excellence and being the best, I think of being the best that you can be; being better than you've ever been before. So, as I give this presentation, I'm aiming to be better than I've ever been before but I know, at the same time, that if I was to give this presentation tomorrow, it would be so much better. I'd have learned so much from today that I could incorporate into tomorrow. And you might say, "But we know that all along. We already know that" because the bottom line of the slide says, "Continuous improvement. Excellence is continuous improvement". But the picture that creates in my mind is this picture. It's a picture where being the best isn't a pyramid. Being the best is where everyone can be and I love this quote. I think it's a really powerful quote, "There's always room at the top". It's a really enabling idea for excellence.



So many times organisations see the first picture. They see the pyramid and even as they commit themselves to excellence, even as they're making the mission statements and objectives that they're going to be the best, that they're going to be excellence, they're already preparing their excuses because they see the area at the top of that pyramid is so small. My picture of excellence is that anyone can be the best. Everyone can be the best.

Another really good quote around this is one by Frank Dick. He's a sports coach and he says, "Take the risk of winning" and he's talking about sportsmen when he says that but he could equally be talking about business. So many sportsmen, before the gun is fired at the start of the race, have already lost. They've already got their reasons why they're not going to win the race.



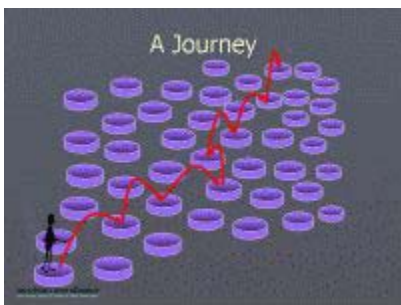
I support a football team. I support a football team that make a habit of getting relegated. That football team, throughout the season, will hardly win a game until it's relegated and, as soon as it's relegated, it starts to win because the risk of winning has been removed. It doesn't matter how many games it wins, Its fate is already decided. It's got the freedom then to play. And so many organisations are like that where they won't take the risk of winning. They've already decided. Despite what they're saying, internally, their mindset is they're preparing themselves to lose. They're preparing the reasons and the excuses to lose.

Continuous Improvement - Change

So, we've created a picture of what, for me, excellence means and within that we've identified excellence is continuous improvement. Now, continuous improvement implies change. It implies constant change, continuous change. So, I want to create a picture in my mind now of what do we mean by change. What's the picture that can illustrate change? I'm sure, already in the conference, we've heard change described as a journey and a journey with no destination. That doesn't mean it's a journey with no direction, with no purpose, with no focus. Of course, it's a journey that's got all of those things. It means a journey that's got no end. It's a journey that will go on and on and on and on.

Now, I want a picture in my mind of what represents that kind of a journey and the picture that I like is this one. It's a picture of stepping stones. I like it for two main reasons: the first one, the obvious one, that with stepping stones, as you make progress, you're clearly on a journey. You're clearly travelling.

The second reason I like it is that, as you stand on one of those stepping stones, you're faced with choices. You're faced with options. You're faced with having to select what the next step is. And as you take that step the world changes. The options change. You've got a completely different picture of the steps that you can now take.



And as you take that journey, just as with stepping stones, different people will be able to make different steps. An adult, you might imagine, can make a large step whereas a child can stand on a stepping stone that wouldn't

support the weight of an adult. And it's exactly the same for organisations. Organisations have their history, they have their culture, they have their abilities, they have their fears and each of those conditions which of the steps are the best steps for them to take. So, there is no one path through that field of stepping stones. Each organisation has got to make its own path to the common goal of being excellent.

Now, when we're faced, as I've been in the past and John is today, with trying to present the journey of an organisation, you're inevitably talking about a journey of many years but you're trying to convey in presentation time of a handful of minutes. So, inevitably, the journey tends to look like the slide. We started at A and we weren't very good. And we went to B and then to C and then to D and on to E and now we're much better. And, in truth, audiences love that sort of presentation because they sit there and they look at the presentation and they say, "Ah. So, you weren't very good and you went A, B, C, D, E and now you're better. I'll write that down. I'll write that down because when I get back to work we can do A, B, C, D and E and then we'll be better". The sad truth is that no real change journey ever looks like that. No real change journey is a nice, neatly mapped out, pre-planned sequence of steps. That's not how change happens.

Popcorn

So, I wanted a picture in my mind of how does change really happen and I struggled. I struggled to draw a picture until I spoke to an organisation called Solar Turbines. Solar Turbines are based in America, in California, which is a good place to be based and they're



past winners of the Malcolm Baldrige Award and I was talking to them about change and they used a phrase to describe their picture of change and, as soon as they used that phrase, I knew that that was exactly the right picture. Exactly the right picture to capture what real change feels like. And that phrase was, "Popcorn" or, more accurately, "Making popcorn".

I don't know if any of you have made popcorn but my son has got a popcorn maker. It's a simple little machine. It's a bowl. You pour in the kernels of corn. You put a lid on. You switch the machine on. It blows hot air onto the corn; the corn heats up and pops. So, when you're making popcorn you get the machine; you pour the corn in; you put the lid on; you switch on and the first thing that happens is - nothing happens. Nothing at all happens. The machine whirs but there's no corn popping. And you pick the machine up. You shake it. You're perhaps tempted to take it apart. But like the farmer who can't pull up the carrots to see how they're growing, because, as soon as you pull them up, that's the end. You have to have some faith. You have to trust that the machine's working and if you stand back and leave the machine for a while, after a while, it starts to work. You start to hear some popping. To start with they're infrequent. They're just one or two - pop, pop, pop. Gradually that builds up until you reach a crescendo where there's maximum, excited change taking place. There are chain reactions occurring where one corn will pop and it'll set off a whole sequence of popping of other corn. There's real excitement taking place within that environment and then gradually, as more and more of them are popped, the rate slows down. The popping is less frequent until you reach a point where there's no more popping taking place. So, you take all the popcorn and you look inside the bowl of the machine and, down within the bowl of the machine, you'll find a handful of corn that just haven't popped. They're there staring at you, defiantly. They're not going to pop. All their friends popped. All the other corn were quite happy but this group, they weren't going to. For them it wasn't the right environment. They didn't change.



Now, for me, that's exactly my experience of change. That's exactly what it feels like. Sometimes you put things in place. There are all the right things. You've done all the right things and nothing, but nothing, seems to happen. And other times, in the space of a few weeks, things that you thought would take years suddenly happen as these things pop and combine to create situations where things can happen that you thought would take ages. And perhaps even things happened that you never dreamt could happen. And within your organisation, within some of your people, within some of your departments, you'll find some of those corn that just haven't popped,

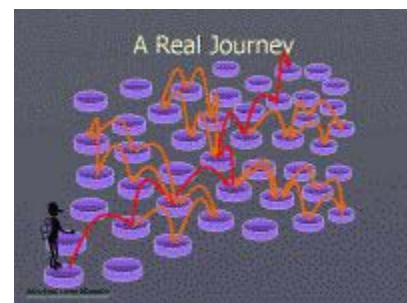
that just stayed as they were. But, for them, the situation you created just wasn't right and for them you need to find something else.

Day-trippers

Now, that is my picture in my mind when I think of change. That's my experience of change. So, when I look at this picture of change, of wanting to see change as a nice, neat, ordered sequence of steps, I think that makes no more sense than wanting to make popcorn where you can predict exactly which corn will pop in exactly which sequence. That's not the way it happens. That's not how change occurs. People who want to see - travellers who want to see - change like that nice, ordered sequence of steps, I call those day-trippers and you can recognise day-trippers in my slides because they carry a suitcase. So, I call them day-trippers. They want change, or say they want change, but they only want to embark on change when they know exactly what it will cost, exactly where it will lead, exactly what is involved, exactly how long it will take - maybe plus or minus 10%. But they want to define the future. They want to say, "This is what the future will be" before they're prepared to embark on that change. Change, in my experience, is not at all like that.

Real Change

This is my picture of what change looks like. There are all sorts of apparent diversions, excursions, loops. When a day-tripper sees this picture, they say, "Uh huh, I see why it took you ten years. We've got until Christmas to do our change, so if you could just tell us about the red steps. Just tell us about those. We don't need to know about all the mistakes you made. Just tell us about those red steps because that's the journey we'd like to make". Of course, what they don't realise is that the red and orange steps together are the journey. What they've called mistakes, the explorer - because that's what I call a traveller who sees the world this way - sees as the learning. That was where the organisation developed the capability to take the next steps forward. So, that's the real nature of change. And explorers see the world in that way. Explorers see the world as being one where you can't neatly map out and plan the future direction; the future catalogue of changes that are going to take place.



Explorers

So, we've created two characters. We've got a day-tripper and we've got an explorer, and what I'd like to do is just spend a moment or two looking at those two characters and the different mindsets that they might have; the different ways in which they see the world.

We've got the day-tripper on the right with his suitcase. The day-tripper basically would like to stay where they are. They don't really want to go on a journey at all. They're stood on their stepping stone and they're quite comfortable on that stepping stone. They're quite comfortable where they are. You can, as the picture suggests, try and create a vision of a better place for them to be. There we're saying, "Wouldn't it be nice if you're on the beach, drinking a drink on a deckchair". That approach of presenting a better option tends to work relatively infrequently with day-trippers.

What works more effectively with day-trippers is forcing them to move. Creating a situation where they simply can't stay where they are. Now, if you're a customer you can demand of the day-tripper that they change otherwise you won't purchase from them. If you're a regulatory body, you can demand that the day-tripper obtains a particular qualification, or they can't continue to trade. So, day-



trippers tend to want to stay where they are and will only move when the pressure builds for them to move. As soon as they're moved, they arrive at somewhere that, again, they view as being the place they want to stay until the pressure builds again and starts to move them on to the next point in their journey. So, day-trippers are fundamentally reactive. They react to pressure to create change and their instinct is to stay where

they are.

The explorer's got a different mindset. The explorer sees the reality of the need, not just to take one step and then think that's the end of a journey, but to see that each step, when taken, is merely a prelude to the next step. So, the explorer knows that they'll constantly be moving and they're driven by the knowledge that unless they're moving forward they're moving backwards. We had the quote yesterday from Alice in Wonderland, I think it was, that to stay still you have to run and to actually move forward you've got to run twice as fast. That's how the explorer thinks. Unless they're moving

forward, they're moving backwards. They may be the best in the world. They may be the number one in the world but they're not going to be that tomorrow unless they're constantly reviewing what they're doing, constantly looking for how they can improve it and constantly moving forward.

So, the day-tripper sees the world as one step. The explorer sees the world as an ongoing sequence, a never-ending sequence of steps that they'll undertake. So, the explorer is fundamentally proactive. The explorer is driven by discontent. The explorer knows and fears staying in one point for too long and is driven by that discontent to be proactive and seek change.

Asking 'How?'

So, how do you tell these characters apart because they don't always conveniently have a rucksack or carry a suitcase in the real world. It's not that difficult even though they don't carry those things. Day-trippers, when they approach you to ask you a question, generally begin that question with 'what'. For example, what customer satisfaction measures do you use or should we use? They're looking for a solution. They're looking to make one step on their journey. They're looking for the right thing to do. So, they're looking for you to provide them with an answer.

Explorers, when they approach you, ask questions that begin with 'how'. So, their example would be, "How did you identify customer satisfaction measures that allowed you to understand customer perceptions?" They're asking a question that will help them ask a new question when they make the next step and the world changes and the options before them change. They're constantly trying to collect information to build that picture.

So, explorers ask open questions that begin with 'how'. It sounds like a subtle difference. It is, indeed, a subtle difference but it is an absolutely fundamental difference between the two mindsets of those travellers. The explorer knows that there aren't any answers. The explorer knows that there aren't any black and white. There aren't any definitive answers to any of the questions. What looks like a good answer from this point might look like a less good answer when they've made the next step. So,



they know there aren't absolutes. They live in the world of the unknown. They know that you can't know the best thing to do. You can only know the best thing given your circumstances on your journey at this point in time. So, they're always open to asking questions. So, they're dealing in the unknown, and they, for example, like assessments. They like the shades of grey of an assessment because that reflects the world in which they live.

The day-tripper deals in a world of right and wrong, yes and no. The day-tripper deals in a world of making one change and then that is the change for all time. They're looking to identify the one right place on their journey. So, day-trippers love audits. They love 'yes', 'no', 'pass', 'fail', 'one', 'nought', 'right', 'wrong'. That's the world of the day-tripper. They seek an absolute and final answer to their questions.

So, explorers, with their world of the unknown, know that they've got to collect information all the time because each step they take alters the world, alters their perspective of the world. So, explorers live in the real world of continuous improvement. They're desperate to live in each of the four steps of the continuous improvement process: plan, do, check and act, because they know the only way they'll understand the new world that's occurred because they've moved is by collecting that information.

The day-tripper, however, lives in the world of certainty. So, the day-tripper is far less interested in plan and barely pays any attention to check and act. They're in the 'do' box. They know the right answer and their task is to get on with it.

So, if I can put that all in a nutshell, explorers see excellence as something to become. Day-trippers see it as something to do. It's something that they've got to do.

The Importance of Exploration

What's that got to do with excellence? What's that got to do with the topic of excellence? Well, I hope it's self-evident that certainly, from my perspective, if you're setting out to be excellent, if you're setting out to be better than you've ever been before, then you're not going to find that by doing the things that you've done in the past.

Equally where are you going to find it by retracing the steps that have been taken by other organisations facing other circumstances, with other attributes, on their journeys that, inevitably, are set in the past,

in history? And mimicking or replicating or copying what other organisations have done, blindly, in the belief that, in some way, that will bestow on you excellence, I think is the way which a day-tripper sees the world, and is a completely inappropriate way of approaching the task of attempting to be excellent. I think excellence must be about exploration.

An Exploration Tool

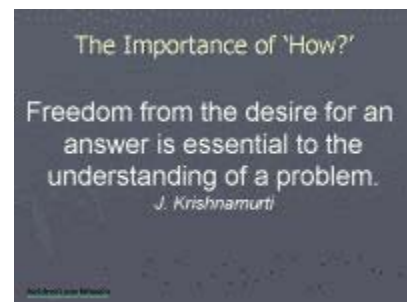
So, where does that leave the business excellence model? This Blue Book: my belief is that, in the hands of an explorer, this is an incredibly powerful tool for exploring; an incredibly powerful tool for exploring an organisation; for understanding how that organisation works; how that organisation could be changed and how that organisation could improve its performance. Sadly, in the hands of a day-tripper, this is just another initiative. It's another check-list. It's another thing to do and then discard as you look for the next thing on your journey of individual steps. And I'd like to just take a moment to hint at how I see this being a powerful explorer's tool.

I emphasise the importance of this subtle but absolutely critical difference between the explorer and day-tripper. And I like this quote. I really like this quote, "Freedom from the desire for an answer is essential to the understanding of a problem". I think that's absolutely critical for any organisation that's trying to move forward. Unfortunately, the day-tripper barely has time to read the question, barely has time to read it before they've decided what their answer is and they're cracking on in the 'do' box, getting something done.

Day-trippers live in a world where progress is measured by how busy they are. They have no other measure. So, they're cracking on with their solution even before they've got to the end of the sentence that describes the question.

Explorers live in the world of questions. They live in the world of unknown, of having to find out, of having to discover. And the power of asking how is an incredibly powerful feature of this model. And I'd just like to hint at what I mean by that.

Power of 'How'



At the first level, before ever you open the book, you don't need to open the book for this one, how - the first level of how - is the model gets you to think about enablers and results. Enablers and results, cause and effect. What you do or what that achieves. So, straight away, it's getting you to ask the question, "How would we know? How would we know what the effect is of the things we do?" Not, "What are they? Are we doing the things that everybody else is doing?" "How would you know that those things for your organisation at your point on your journey are achieving the things that you've set out to do? How would you know?" So, it gets you thinking about the fact that the only way you're going to know is by looking at the results. They're the only way in which you find out the consequences of the things that you're doing. So, that's 'how' at the first level.

At the second level, when you open the book and you look inside, you find that all the questions about the organisation and its activities all begin with the word 'how'. They all begin with the word 'how'. If you're a day-tripper, you won't have noticed that. It's very easy to treat the model as asking what you do. And it is an incredibly much easier task to catalogue what you do. But, if you're an explorer, and you start to understand that the questions, ask how, they're not asking you to catalogue what you do, they're saying, "How did you arrive at what you do? How do you know that's effective? How did you arrive at your leadership approach?" Not, "What did you do?" and "Where did you copy it from?" "How did you arrive at your leadership approach? How do you know that that's appropriate for you at your point on your journey?" And the same for policy and strategy; the same for people; the same throughout all the enable criteria. So, how squared is: the model gets you to ask 'how' questions.

The next level - how to the power of three - I really like this one. You turn to the back of the book and there aren't any answers. There aren't any answers there. There can't be any answers. There can't be any answers because there isn't that prescribed sequence of steps that everyone's got to follow. You've got to find your own answers. That won't get in the way of our day-trippers. They'll soon have this page filled in. They'll go and collect the information from databases all over the place and populate it with what everybody else does and use that as the means for identifying what they're going to do. But the real power of the model is that it doesn't have those answers. It forces you to think. It forces you to explore. It forces you to ask yourself what's the right answer for you and how would you know a right answer from a wrong answer. So, that's 'how' to the power of three. 'How' cubed.

And 'how' to the power of four is when you've come up with the answers. It's then got RADAR: Results, Approach, Deployment, Assessment and Review. It takes your answers and it stretches them in those five dimensions. It gets you to think about your answers, about how they tell you about your response. It gets you to think about, in your answers, how you've managed your approach. How have you identified your approach? How have you planned it? How have you deployed it? It gets you to think about how you assess what you're doing so that you can feed that into reviews so that, next time you do it, it will be better than you've ever done it before. That's 'how' to the power of four.

So, I see this as being an incredibly powerful tool for explorers. As I say, for day-trippers, it's just another book. You can quickly read it, use it and quickly put it aside.

Explorers

I'd just like to finish now with some quotes. I'm going to read them. I know you can all read but, for me, each time I read these quotes they do something for me, which is why I like them.

The first one is Albert Einstein, "The important thing is not to stop questioning".

We've then got a fantastic one, Richard Feynman - I wish I'd asked my children this, "What did you ask at school today?" Now, that just creates a completely different picture in my mind of school, of education. A real explorer's picture, "What did you ask at school today?"



And the last one from Spirella, "There is no thrill in easy sailing when the skies are clear and blue. There's no joy in merely doing things that anyone can do, but there is some satisfaction that is mighty sweet to take when you reach a destination that you thought you'd never make".

For me, business excellence is all about exploration.

And it only remains for me to thank you for your attention. Thank you for listening to what I've had to say and for the opportunity to come and share with you one or two ideas.

Thanks very much.

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Steve Unwin, Access to Excellence Co. Ltd.**