

'Harrogate in Kent' reviewed

Kent CIPD Council representative Peter Cook provided an engaging and intelligent review of some of the main ideas from the recent Harrogate conference. In his review, he offered a rapid digest of three sessions and a dialogue as to whether the content was purely an HR 'fad' or 'the future' i.e. something which genuinely contributes to an enduring HR strategy. In his characteristic style, Peter also linked many of the ideas from the gurus, prophets and sages to his own unique brand of business wisdom from his book 'Sex, Leadership and Rock 'n' Roll – Leadership Lessons from the Academy of Rock' (ISBN 1845900162 – Crown House).



Peter took on three gurus. Firstly Baroness Susan Greenfield, who reviewed the future of work – this was an exciting and thought provoking session, which came from a bio-scientist's perspective rather than the

more usual ephemeral worlds of psychology and social sciences. There was much to take in and it cannot be adequately summarised here, but two points of relevance to HR people can be summarised:

- We live in an 'answer-rich but question-poor' society – our ability to process the vast amounts of data that Google etc. offers us then becomes a limitation. A key challenge for people is the ability to synthesise huge volumes of data into intelligent information. We also need to cultivate people who can ask better questions. As Mr Einstein said, Computers are useless, they can only give you answers.
- Professor Greenfield also pointed out that creativity becomes a vital asset in such a world. I would add that we need the kind of creativity that can be converted into successful innovation, rather than wild ideas on their own. Peter has just learned the hard way with a loss

of £40,000 trying to fly English eccentric punk rocker John Otway round the world on a tour to rival Spinal Tap and Wayne's World. The main reason why the project failed was an excess of creativity and a lack of execution of those ideas.

Susan's book 'Tomorrows People' is a great read.

Peter then turned to Nitin Nohira, a Harvard Business School professor who gave us a session on motivation, pointing out that our choices are dictated by four fundamental drives (the drive to compete, the drive to bond, the drive to learn and the drive to defend). Nohira argued for a 'nature' view of human development i.e. that we are largely out of control of these drives. Nitin's session was an interesting reinterpretation of Maslow's triangle, but I had expected more of a Harvard Business School Professor. Overall this session was judged to be more of a 'fad' than the 'future', since it contributed little to the advancement of thinking in this area. Peter graphically illustrated this by pointing out that the business school's research could just as easily be summarised by listening to half a dozen rock songs on the subject of motivation. In particular, it was quite a surprise to learn that 'Billy don't be a hero' by Paper Lace can be interpreted in terms of risk taking and entrepreneurship!!

Finally, Peter reviewed Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones session from London Business School. Entitled 'Why should anyone be led by you?', it provided a thoughtful approach to the topic, pointing out that leadership should be studied through the medium of followership and contending with some popular myths, such as:

- The need for deep self knowledge – their research indicates that the self help profession and life coaches may have got it wrong. In general they cast doubt on the life coaching profession's obsession with self discovery.
- What matters is to be an 'authentic chameleon' rather than just relying on authenticity or 'faking it'. Some interesting examples of the ability to change leadership style and take people with you were given by

Goffee and Jones, such as Tony Blair. Peter covered the same ground using David Bowie and Madonna, who have unusually changed themselves, but kept their followers over an extended period in a world of one-hit wonders.

Jones and Goffee's session was very good, although on further analysis, many of the lessons learned over a 25-year social research programme could have been more conveniently learned at rock concerts. Peter offered us some alternative lessons in leadership from the 'Academy of Rock', where our gurus are Prince, Punk Rock and Pink Floyd.

Finally, we were treated to a rare insight into Peter's unique approach to personal and leadership development through a short session on personal reinvention, via a case study on the cult artist Bill Nelson who offers 12 precepts for personal transformation which are directly transferable to the world of work. These are fully explored in his book *Sex, Leadership and Rock'n'Roll* – oh yes and a mini jam session with the participants at the end! Overall this was an engaging evening that was full of intelligent thought-provoking content. Peter's websites may be found at www.humdyn.co.uk for serious business consultancy and coaching and www.sexleadershiprocknroll.co.uk for conferences, speeches and events with a difference. If you missed the event, you can catch Peter on TV by following the link to www.teachers.tv/video/4932 for a snapshot of his more satirical work. Peter's book is on special offer at the moment with a donation to the Kent Children's Trust – contact him for more details at peter@humdyn.co.uk

Rob Brunger, HR Officer from Marley Plumbing and Drainage who attended said: "I found the session very interesting especially the section of Jones and Goffee. The use of rock stars and music when examining their theories really made it easier to understand enabling it to lodge in the mind better! It was useful to have a whistle stop summary of the CIPD event but was certainly not expecting to have to play the tambourine!"

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