

Peter Cook's new book *Sex, Leadership and Rock 'n' Roll* sets out three analogies that provide a different set of lessons for leaders. Rather than the Master of Business Administration (MBA) this is Management By Attitude.

Leadership lessons from the

ACADEMY OF ROCK



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Peter's book *Sex Leadership and Rock 'n' Roll* can be obtained from www.crownhouse.co.uk or from Waterstones and other bookshops. Peter will be signing copies of the book at the FP Business Conference on 26 September 2006 – for further information call FitPro on 08705 133 434, email busdev@fitpro.com or visit www.fitpro.com/business. For radical creativity with rock music call 01634 855 267/573 788, email dean@academy-of-rock.co.uk or visit www.academy-of-rock.co.uk

In the beginning there was sex, then there was Rock 'n' Roll, followed by leadership...

I guess that some will say this is an oversimplification and the events were not exactly in this order. Nevertheless, my contention is that the messages from some business gurus have become increasingly indigestible and we need some fresh thinking on personal development and leadership.

The three analogies that make or break a business are:

Sex – Refers to making, keeping and ending work relationships, drawing on leading-edge psychology in a digestible way. We're talking romance, love and friendship under the "sex" analogy rather than whips, chains and hardcore, so it's OK to read on.

Drugs – In other words, motivation and leadership. "Drugging yourself" is about reaching peak personal performance and "drugging others" about engaging people in a shared ambition; ie, leadership. Again, we're talking adrenaline and endorphins rather than smack, crack and cocaine.

Rock 'n' Roll – This is about reaching and sustaining high performance. This includes delivery and execution skills, learning, unlearning and reinvention.

This article gives you a taste for the book, its style and content. In the mutilated words of AC/DC: "For those about to lead, we salute you".

Sex, lies and relationships

In a world where products and services can be copied almost instantly, one of the only differentiators between your business and your competitors is the power of the relationship. Some people get it right, others get it wrong. In the book, we compare and contrast what works versus the outright failures, which are widespread. Of course this comes sharply into focus when we look at the world of fitness centres. I overheard a conversation in one the other week where a customer called into the health suite desk to report a problem with one of the squash courts in the same building. The receptionist said: "Can you go up to the other desk and tell them?" Instead of doing that, the person in question decided to tell all the people in the health suite.

A marginal change in the receptionist's response would have produced a completely different response.

The book uses the sexual analogy of "foreplay", "intercourse", "climax" and "afterglow" to plot the course of relationships at work. I leave you to draw your own conclusions, but it is clear that some business relationships require more of a "warm-up" phase than others. Have you ever been to a meeting where there was insufficient foreplay? Does this make a difference to the sort of results you can achieve?

It's one thing satisfying your customers, clients and colleagues, it's another thing keeping them wanting more. In this context, it's what happens afterwards that counts. Most businesses want to know the answer to the eternal question: "Will you still love me tomorrow?"

The best some businesses can do after a sale is to ask the client: "Can we put you on our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database, so that we can send you a monthly newsletter and text updates about our innovative products and services?" Who ever wanted to hear that after an orgasm? Let's face it, it's absurd – just say no.

What we do want to know is something about the client experience, so that we can learn from it and build that into our competitive intelligence. Not many people like asking this question, in case the client did not like the experience or, worse still, us.

Talking this around with female friends and colleagues, I have been told that the way to solve the problem of a longer lasting personal relationship comes down to some well-known, simple but rarely used methods:

1. "Refreshing the sex" – trying it on the kitchen table or booking a hotel for a weekend.
2. Introducing unusual moments of romance, love and friendship – "Moments of pleasure" as Kate Bush would have said.
3. Starting over – making sure each time is like the first time.
4. Fidelity – aka single supplier agreements.
5. Spicing things up with infidelity – aka competitive tendering.

Many of these analogies are transferable to a business setting. Do any of these sound familiar to your customer relationship or marketing people? Which ones could you add to the mix?

Project managing the greatest rock 'n' roll tour in the world

Sex, Leadership and Rock 'n' Roll looks at high performance through the eyes and ears of rock music. In this context, one of the things I have been currently doing is helping to deliver an audacious project to fly a chartered airbus round the world, performing at venues such as Sydney Opera House, Central Park in New York and the Madinat Hotel in Dubai with cult English eccentric punk rocker John Otway. The project has a budget of several million pounds and requires the precision of a Swiss watch to execute this ambitious goal.

The book outlines the criteria which have helped John Otway succeed as an entrepreneur over the years. These may be summarised as:

1. One Vision, One Mission – Start with the end in mind.

One way to deliver a project of this magnitude is to define the intended outcome and then systematically work your way backwards from that end state; in the same way that Einstein conceived the theory of relativity by contemplating what it would be like to ride on a beam of light and then doing the maths.

2. "Cold Sweat" – Inspiration plus perspiration equals success.

Brainstorming without execution is about as useful as trying to get a fish to ride a bicycle – the hard work is always more important than the inspiration itself.

3. "Head Butts" – If what you are doing isn't working, do something different rather than bashing your head against the same wall.

There is a subtle difference between persistence and the type of flexible persistence that requires you to adopt the maxim "if at first you don't succeed, try something different".

4. "Tubthumping" – Rapid reflection and emotional resilience; the "bounce back" factor.

Chumbawumba said: "I get knocked down but I get up again". They did not say: "I get knocked down, then I lay on the floor for a number of years feeling bad – eventually someone helped me to get up again". Emotional resilience is not about being unresponsive to feedback, however – it just means we have to learn from it and move on. One of the hallmarks of John Otway's approach is his ability to pick himself up after getting a piece of bad news. This is a rare quality in business.



5. "Like a virgin" – Relish every opportunity as if it's the first time.

John Otway's career has lasted nearly 30 years in an industry that measures longevity in weeks. One of his success factors is his ability to see things as if they are completely new opportunities. ■