

# Board Room for Heart and Soul?

David Whyte, a poet and organisation development specialist, speaks of how heart and soul, our inner sponsor, are mostly left out of the boardroom and workplace landscapes. It's as if they were dirty and very non p.c. words beyond utterance. By Sharon Eden

**H**owever, I believe their very exclusion has been part of the ongoing international economic problems; aridity arising from the lack of joined-up 'being' far more than the lack of joined-up thinking.

That the corporate world needs something 'different' reverberates around it like rattling dried peas in a tin can.

"The current economic and financial crisis gives us the opportunity to insert gender into the re-writing of the rules. We need new people at the table – people who are not associated with the past," proclaimed a World Bank senior advisor, Nadereh Chamlou, at an international women's forum in October.

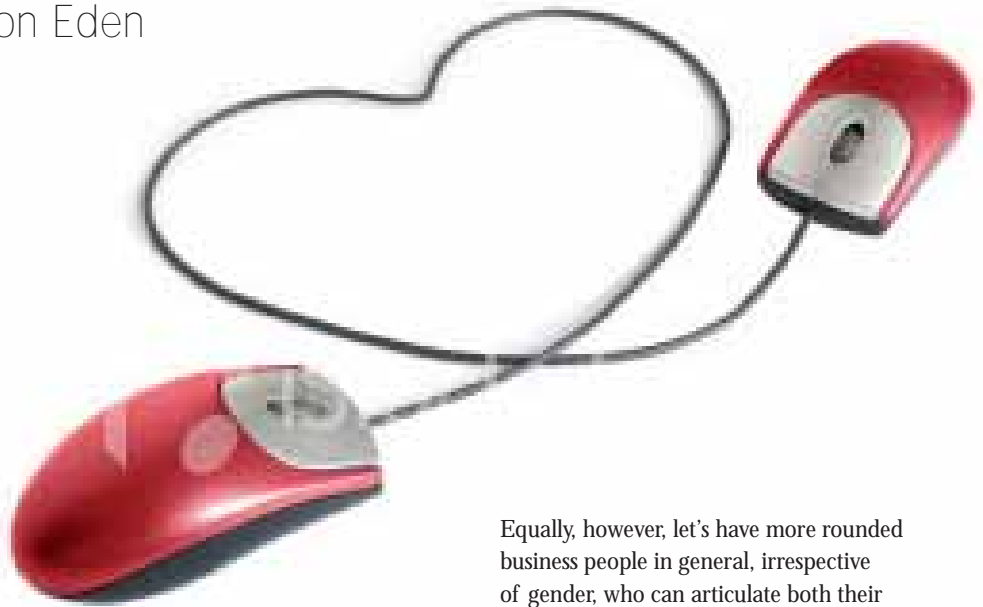
The business section of the Daily Telegraph head-lined a recent report 'Call for more women in the boardroom'. 17 leaders from some of the biggest UK companies, including J Sainsbury and BP, are calling for action to ensure more senior women are appointed at the highest business levels.

Great! Yet the whole issue of heart and soul goes way beyond gender and gender politics.

I'm a woman who advocates traditionally thought of 'feminine' qualities and skills having far more presence, influence and power in the workplace.

Receptivity, co-creation, collaboration, community, sensitivity to the finer nuances of inter-relationship and communication, the development and use of intuition, a more heart centred approach and what David Whyte terms 'the fierceness of the feminine' as in the pup's mother teaching it to fight.

However, I find it naive to believe that women won't be associated with 'the past'. That somehow those women career-reared in existing organisational structures will just because they are women somehow magically



be different from the men who've historically dominated these arenas.

A colleague tumbles out the tale of being the only female senior partner in a very large accounting firm. She took keen delight in the fact that, by popular demand from her male partners, she was the one assigned to resolve 'difficult' issues or hammer out tricky deals with clients. She gloried in her ascribed nickname, 'The Rottweiler'!

Then she woke up. She suddenly recognised how unhappy and out of sync with herself she felt. She realised she'd not only unconsciously adopted male modes of operation, becoming 'one of the boys', but she'd taken them to extremes in order to develop her career in a male dominated profession.

For her it was all pro-activity, competitiveness, mind-centred linear thinking at the expense of sensitivity, logic and action without any heart-centred considerations and combat, delicious combat, rather than alliance.

So, yes, let's have more gender equality in the boardroom by appointing more women.

Equally, however, let's have more rounded business people in general, irrespective of gender, who can articulate both their traditionally thought of feminine and masculine approaches, qualities and skills. And use them co-operatively in relating with others as well as within themselves.

A 2007 study, '8 Ways To Build Collaborative Teams', demonstrates that such roundedness is absolutely possible. 55 large teams from corporations ranging from Royal Bank of Scotland to Marriott to Nokia were researched and 8 success factors identified which created the strongly collaborative and most effective ones amongst them.

#### These factors included...

- executives role modelling collaboration which 'trickled down' to other staff,
- a 'gift culture' where managers mentored employees daily rather than a transactional 'tit for tat' culture,
- training in relationship skills including communication and conflict resolution,
- a sense of community fostered by sponsoring group activities and
- leaders who were both task and relationship oriented.

There's undoubtedly a strong movement in the corporate business world, a swelling underbelly of realising that organisations cannot profitably continue to operate as they have in the past. You only have to hear mention of corporate 'social responsibility' via community and ecological projects to know that's so.

However, how about more social responsibility within organisations? How about more ecology there, more 'right relationship' in organisational cultures, in a person's quality of life as an employee and from leaders at all levels?

Box of Crayons is a company that works with organizations and teams around the world to help them do less Good Work and more Great Work.

Michael Bungay Stanier, its founder and senior partner, focused his blog on 26th November about the great work being done by Innocent, the highly successful UK drinks company.

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Looking at their website, he'd found a 'lest we forget' page which showed a photo and paid homage individually to every single person who'd ever worked at Innocent.

Clearly, there's absolutely no commercial reason to do that. However, as an example of walking your talk, actually believing the phrase 'our people are our most important asset', Michael suggested, "...this is about as good as it gets. Great Work needs great people....".

And it's very clear that the leadership at Innocent empirically demonstrates 'right relationship', heart centred soul-fullness including traditionally thought of feminine as well as masculine approaches and qualities, with their people, their products and their operations.

Through exploring their website it's recognisable that because of this they're offering a very different organisational model which others could embrace. And they're enacting their ethics and values, including

very apparent humour and humanity, instead of having some dry cerebral mission statement tacked to a wall.

If Innocent can do it, so can every organisation and its leaders. If there is to be a new age, a 'global community' as George Brown and other pundits have dubbed it, let them and the business world show us they have the willingness and courage to evolve as human beings, to clean up their acts and embody leadership in

its richest, wisest sense. To inspire, motivate and lead by example in line with the highest integrity and intention of good for all.

This cannot possibly be achieved without including heart and soul throughout the corporate and business landscapes.

This, in turn, will enable more people in business, from chief executives to admin officers, from janitors to chairs of the board, to evolve in their humaneness. And so bring their roundedness and the vitality of their own hearts and souls into the equation of their working lives.

And, by so doing, they'll bring that heart-soul vitality, that humaneness, integrity and creativity, to the lives of those they work with, the people they work for and the people for whom they serve. ●

#### References

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#### Biography

Sharon Eden's an Evolutionary Coach MAC, Certified Trainer INLPTA, Trainer Member ANLP, UKCP Registered Psychotherapist, Writer and Charter Member of the International Positive Psychology Association with an MA in the field. She specialises and delights in working in out-of-the-box ways with leaders, executives and visionaries in both the public and private sectors who desire high performance, presence and power. Her work includes innovative 30 Minutes Pin Point Coaching™ and specialised business training including courses tailored specifically for women like 'Politics Can Be Sexy!™'.

Contact Sharon via [www.edendynamics.com](http://www.edendynamics.com), [www.womenofcourage.co.uk](http://www.womenofcourage.co.uk) or call her on +44(0)20 8597 9200

