



ITS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

FIGHTING THE CORPORATE FLAB

I've always harboured a secret masochistic desire to go veggie. A bit weird, I know but I suspect it's some kind of nostalgic throwback to my student days in the 80's when vegetarianism was a hot topic after we'd exhausted our debates on communism, radicalism and all the other isms.

Even now whenever I meet a vegan I always feel compelled to ask the why, when and how? Followed immediately by 'what's wrong with you?' and 'don't you miss it?'. Meat I mean! Well, they must do, mustn't they, because it can't be a barrel of laughs. Noble, granted.. Fun, absolutely not, and If I'm honest the real reason I haven't joined them is because I don't have their resolve. Anyway let's face it, it's just not natural. For thousands of years, before we were educated, we gathered a bit of fruit and some root vegetables and we hunted animals. And when we got back to the cave after a hard day's hunting we ate what we caught. All of it – there were no fridges back then, remember, and besides, Neanderthal man didn't need to count calories. There has never been any evidence to suggest that stone age people ever had to lose weight.

And their hunter-gatherer way of life with its periodic gorging was endorsed by no less an expert than Dr. Robert Atkins the well known dietician and author. He was thoroughly pro their existence, writing about stone age man "eating the fish and animals that scampered and swam around him and the fruits and the vegetables nearby", his point being that those primitive people ate naturally and never had recourse to read his book or try to slim down.

Today we are all consumed with our weight and our diet and as individuals we have taken this preoccupation into the corporate arena. And this obsession with size and shape may well be why ours will be known as the era of right sizing - downsizing, rationalizing, trimming, cutting back, call it what you want, it all amounts to the same thing - waging a war against organisational fat!

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The word diet derives from the Greek 'diaita' which means a way of life. A diet is nothing less than a philosophy for living. Yet when we try to apply a sensible dietary regime to our organisations with a view to trimming them and turning them around, the emphasis seems always to be on the number of bodies we have as opposed to the weight of the philosophy they individually and collectively contribute.

The unwanted fat that we really need to shed is the unquestioned paradigm that length of service, and years of experience are the ingredients for success, when the only place where time served should be an assessment factor is in prison. It continues to amaze me when we try to right size our organizations we first cut back on all the creative departments and people and stick with the what we mistakenly take to be the safe option – the tried and tested people and methods – basically all the stuff and nonsense that got us to the mess we are in.

And the 'last in, first out' downsizing tool is really a killer because it essentially says toss out the new, clean, invigorating blood. I guess it amounts to organisational bulimia! What really takes the calorie-laden cake however is keeping the Chief Executive Officer in place when that's who was basically responsible for the unhealthy weight gain in the first place.

So when we want to trim our organizations we need to steer away from putting our employees on the organizational scale which only measures the bare facts of length of service, age and qualifications and gravitate towards assessing the value factors and orientations of our employees – checking their psychological fit and fitness. Essentially ensuring employees who remain have the right philosophy and belief system about what is desirable and important within the corporate culture and that this is aligned with the organisation's aims. If we don't, that organisation will quickly return to where it was – fat and unhealthy.

We need to recognize that diets don't work. In 1983, diet guru Geoffrey Cannon wrote a book called 'Dieting Makes You Fat' which propounded the theory that when you diet your mind wants to lose weight, but your body does not. You think 'diet', your body thinks 'famine'. And what does the body need to keep it going between times of famine? Fat. Essentially he purported that the more often a person diets, the more their body will protect its stores of fat.

And we see it time and time again in our corporations which seem obsessed with severe organisational dieting. The downsizing is usually followed by what appears to be a raging appetite to get bigger again instead of maintaining leanness. It's the bulimic diet cycle. And the only cure is in recognising that when you start to recruit like crazy with no strategy or insight in terms of how it will make you appear on the success scales then all you are doing is purging and overeating in turn. It doesn't make you feel good, just bloated and lacking in energy. Being slim is healthy and attractive - remember in business as in life you can never be too rich or too thin!

