

## MAVERICKS NEED NOT APPLY

Last week's article on the Peter Principle clearly resonated well with many readers as people were very quick to tell me that the syndrome is indeed alive and well in corporate Botswana today and it appears we may well be guilty of appointing the wrong people into executive management positions. I hope I also hit a few raw nerves up top, but if I didn't leave a few Board Chairmen feeling a bit uneasy, I soon will! Because I'm convinced that the many less than conventional problems we face in business today require less conventional and technical managers to deal with them and CEOs who don't wise up to that may live to regret it.

Just to recap, the Peter Principle is the theory that in any hierarchy every employee tends to rise— eventually— to his level of incompetence. This happens because we value people's technical capability and contribution over other factors and hold the notion that if you are particularly good at one level in an organization this is likely to predict successful performance at a higher level. I hypothesized that as we climb the corporate ladder the level of complexity increases and thus demands a completely different suite of skills and abilities.

So, if the 'technically competent' are not the ones to lead our organizations what should we be looking for? I'm not saying that one leadership size or style fits all but I do believe that more than a decade after jumping on the economic diversification bandwagon with little success from conventional leadership and wisdom, there is a strong argument to support the need to look for an alternative style. To turn our model of what a leader is on its head and go for something more radical. That clearly doing more of the same will add little value to an economic agenda which seeks to grow and diversify.

Maybe what a lot of our organisations are crying out for is the Maverick leader, the wild card, wild child, fresh approach which questions everything, accepts nothing and is results-, not method, based? Founders of global advertising giant TBWA, Warren Berger and Jean-Marie Dru base their own and their clients' success on a principle they call Disruption – the overturning of convention in the marketplace to find a completely different way of presenting a brand to the world, and in doing so changing the

In their book 'Disruption Stories' they write 'Disruption methodology begins by **identifying conventions** – those limiting definitions and narrow boxes of thought that companies put themselves into. Conventions are everywhere but can be hard to see because they hide in plain sight..... Disruption is a means of creating something dynamic to replace something that has become static. Disruption challenges convention and changes the way we see things.' And Disruption and Maverick leadership and thinking go hand in hand.

We often don't recognize Mavericks' contributions to our organizations and just dismiss their sometimes unorthodox and radical approaches as weird but rarely wonderful. Yet having Bohemians in executive posts may just be what is needed to give some failing organizations a boost, find new and innovative ways of expanding market share or just save bored and uninspired employees from slitting their corporate wrists and watching the organisation bleed to death.

Are Mavericks made or born? Author Polly Le Barre says "it's probably a little bit nature, a little bit nurture." She argues that it is possible to nurture the Maverick in all businesspeople as 'what red-blooded working person wakes up in the morning, looks in the mirror, and says, I think I'll stand for business as usual today? Deep down people want to make a mark, forge their own path, and express themselves in the world....It's just that some of us need more of a nudge down that path than others. But in essence there is a little bit of Maverick in all of us – and that means employees as well – we just have to coax it out."

So what is a typical Maverick profile and which industries are you likely to find them in? In the book 'Mavericks at Work' thirty-two companies were featured with vastly different histories, cultures, and business models. After examining glamorous fields like fashion, advertising and Hollywood as well as old-line industries like construction, mining, and household products, it was discovered that the Maverick leaders of these organizations come young, old, male, female, multi national and multi ethnic, charismatic and preacher-like, retiring and almost reticent. They just don't fit any one mould – that's part of what makes them all Mavericks!

But do we have them in Botswana? Well I think that all depends on whether we are prepared to a) recognize their existence and b) having done so, encourage them to stand up and be counted, develop them or provide opportunities for them to apply their nonconformist approach to business. I wonder if CEDA, BDC, BEDIA and IFSC have room on their scoring sheets for the weird and wonderful plans which are the ones that often work and produce surprisingly brilliant results? If Richard Branson had proposed any one of his half crazed business ideas to them I wonder if they would have entertained his flights of fancy? More likely they'd have shown him the door then sat back and congratulated themselves on their perspicacity and business acumen.

The scariest thing is not even that we don't recognise and appreciate their existence enough nor encourage Maverick development but that we actually build structures to dismantle Maverick behaviour. Our preoccupation with job descriptions, oftentimes nothing more than formulating neat little boxes designed to panel-beat employees into conforming with rules and regulations, prescribing what to do and precisely how to do it, simply put in place a 'leave your brain at the door, you won't need it here' mentality to people utilisation. So don't be surprised if that's exactly what your workforce does.

With our preoccupation with constantly curtailing and reining in people at work you wonder how a Maverick could ever survive, much less thrive, inside a large, company full of conveyor-belt MBAs — to state the worst case? As Le Barre says "A better question might be: How will large, companies full of MBAs survive, much less thrive, without a healthy complement of Mavericks?"

We need 'different' people throughout our organisations at all levels. Sometimes the unlikely appointments on paper will deliver the best results. Adam Crozier is a textbook case in point. Coming from the post of Chief Executive at Saatchi and Saatchi at the ridiculously young age of 31 to take over as chief of England's Football Association, shocking many FA officials to be running the English game with no experience of the business side of football, Crozier is a classic Disruption Maverick. When he stepped into the FA and saw an old fashioned institution with an outdated approach he set about trying to revolutionise the way the game was run, on the way meeting stubbornness and status quo head on. Not content with that he recently hit the headlines again earlier this year, this time taking over as Royal Mail (Britain's equivalent of Botswana Post) Chief Executive. He hardly qualified for any job in the Post Office based on his background and resume – but then who would have thought he was the man to run the FA either? Now as CEO of Royal Mail (and he's not even 40 yet) he is facing the biggest challenge of his career. With more than 160,000 postal staff and a remit to deliver a £400 million profit this year, fighting fierce competition from courier and electronic services and with the threat of a national strike looming - it brings new meaning to the idea that his might be the worst case yet of post-traumatic stress disorder!

