

## Or so it would theme

I have really had to control myself not to write a column this week laced with a festive feel. It would seem that it's almost a compulsion, around this time for writers to 'do' Christmas, just as you feel obliged to sit around a table wearing a ridiculously style-less crepe paper hat during Christmas lunch. And it's not confined to this one time of year. We feel compelled to continuously come up with columns about the seasons, the time of the year or even the time of our lives. Looking back on articles I have written over the last few years, I notice reflections on the holiday season, Easter, winter, the coming of spring – you name it, it has been covered.

It's as though we live out our lives in stages and themes. Certain times of the year are set aside for celebration and partying, others for introspection and chilling, sometimes it's family comes first, other times it's religious devotion, our chosen deities and beliefs. I guess it keeps us moving along and provides some structure and semblance of purpose to life.

Even our lives themselves have their stages and themes. Children, teenagers, adults, pensioners – they all have their own feel and character, their own activities, priorities and proclivities - health mode, work mode, spiritual mode or in limbo – with me the list is exhaustive. I look back on certain periods of my life and refer to them as phases; stressed, repressed, depressed, obsessed, sad, mad, bad, glad, son, father, brother, lover - (less of that unfortunately) - but they are just temporary themes that I have embraced at different times. I have been healthy, fit, slim and motivated and at other times slovenly, fat, unfocussed and irresponsible. I have had love moments, hate moments, moments when my bio-rhythms were in sync and I was aligned with the universe and times when I have felt so out-of-step I have fitted into the natural order as much as a cheerleader at a wake.

Life is a kaleidoscope of themes. And each theme builds on the one before – each time we learn and take our knowledge of the experience into the future and somehow we are supposed to get better as our wisdom expands. Living by themes and having a theme in our life is what we cling on to as human beings. It somehow makes us feel connected – to each other, to the environment, to the planet, the universe - and it allows us to label and record our mood and manner at that time; I'm elated, motivated, frustrated, infuriated, irritated, emancipated, liberated,...

And we have taken our need for themes and labels into the workplace. There is always a theme at work. We are downsizing, expanding, rationalising, rightsizing, centralising, decentralising, locally-focused or globally-minded or it's high margin, low margin, low volume or high volume, and if it's no volume no margin you are back to re-sizing. One thing's for sure – it's always on the tip of our tongues to verbalise where we are, who we are and what we are at any given time – name that theme.

Themes are anchors that hold us steadfast and guiding stars to move us forward. Without them we would be as lost and disoriented as a blind man in the ocean. Just as a mission statement reminds an organisation of the reason for its existence and purpose, themes in our work lives demarcate that statement and keep us constantly re-evaluating and guiding us back on track. If your mission statement is to provide fantastic catering products to restaurants and Joe Entrepreneur comes along and offers you the prospect to sell third party insurance to restaurateurs, you wouldn't do it because it doesn't fit with the theme – it's not what you do.

We tend to hold on to physical festivities, embracing them as outward manifestations of our beliefs and spirituality. So Christmas gives us direction through its traditions and directives – it's the time for giving so we give - no one wants to be Christmas scrooge – and the time for partying – 'Oh go on have another drink/mince pie/Christmas pudding.... it's Christmas.'

So what happens in life if you are not holding on to a theme for a purpose? Most of us would feel as if we have nothing, yet what if you were just able to 'be' – staying true to yourself undefined by theme? According to the spiritual leaders this is where true enlightenment is found. Call it Zen, call it Nirvana, call it Inner Peace - Christmas doesn't bring that level of happiness neither do alcohol, drugs, expensive presents nor any themed holiday. It is not found when the Easter Bunny, Santa Clause the Tooth Fairy comes along – because they never do. These symbolic icons simply represent the long expected something we all wait for. But just as it was for Vladimir and Estragon. Godot never comes.

Most of us will never experience true enlightenment so we need our themes to feel connected. But they needn't be themes that have been handed down to us from parents or ones that please our peers, themes that read like a script of how we should measure out our lives, like poor old Alfred J Prufrock and his coffee spoons, nor those prescribed by our profession and place of work or home. Instead we should determine our own by working out what is important to us as individuals, our own code of conduct and belief system. So throw out the New Year's Resolution you've been working on and map out your New Year's Revolution instead. In other words, plough your own furrow, but only if you're into agriculture, not because someone says you have to make a contribution to next year's Harvest Festival. Regardless of what you do, it will just be another phase or so it will theme.

