



ITS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

Tea cosy

By Stuart White
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There's a great story of a Zen Master who is listening to one of his students rambling on about a subject he believed he was an 'expert' on. The master listened patiently and then began to make tea. When it was ready the master poured tea into the scholar's cup until it began to overflow and run all over the floor. The scholar saw what was happening and shouted: Stop, stop! The cup is full; you can't get anymore in." The master stopped pouring and said "You are like this cup; you are full of ideas about this and that. You come and ask for teaching, but your cup is full; I can't put anything in. Before I can teach you, you will have to empty your cup."

When I grow up I want to be just like the Yen master. I too want to have clever illustrations to get my point across while all the time having a calm air of confidence instead of wanting to throw the hot cup of tea all over the person because they refuse to listen. I've had two incidents in the past couple of weeks dealing with such people. One was a potential client to whom I was talking about the use of occupational assessments, explaining their merits in business today and the validity of their uses. Half way through the presentation the prospective client simply folded her arms and said "I don't believe in this stuff". I tried to enquire about what her objections actually were, to which I got a curt "I just don't think they work". A few more probing attempts later I was still none the wiser and I was left with the message "It's just the way I feel". No explanation, no argument and the presentation was over... the lights had gone out!

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The second incident was a little more subtle - a presentation where the opposition was so understated but cunningly hostile and disruptive, and I couldn't figure out where the resistance was coming from. I mean why would you be angry with my product - it was its first introduction. Every ounce of me wanted to shout out "Lady what is your problem?" I instead sought to explore the client's reason for refusing and refuting almost everything I said. Again I was left in the dark; client had switched off and again the pitch was over!

It puts me in mind of the three brass monkeys. I struggle with blindness in people who can see, hate deafness in people who can hear, and don't understand those who won't speak up. I'm well aware the products I am peddling are not for everyone - I get that but I love people who raise objections and challenge my methods, techniques and products. It's a great way to showcase what I have and give me the opportunity to deal with uncertainties and issues. It helps allay fears and really tests your product knowledge, even to the extent when myself and my colleagues have gone back to the drawing board; improved what we have, made better products, and developed better methods and superior tools.

I suppose when things are difficult to understand or complex, it's easier to simply dismiss them. Rather than saying "I am struggling to see how this works - help me to understand this better or present an objection worthy of debate", some people take the easy option and switch off. But it's only the confident that can challenge effectively. A confident and self assured individual is happy to admit when they don't understand a complex subject and let's face it - occupational assessments are complex because human behavior is complex and it is tricky comprehending attitudes, motives and behaviours, just as I am struggling to comprehend them in these two instances.

In each case I had presented valid statistical facts from studies conducted by very eminent people - true global experts in this field with more degrees and accolades than I have songs on my iPod. My presentation covered the unshakable reliability and impressive validity of the product, as well as the blue chip client list that uses it. Peter Saville, the mastermind behind the assessment tools which I use in business, is like the father of occupational assessments this century. His groundbreaking developments in the field have been heralded as a new generation of occupational assessments, but this was neither here nor there for these two individuals who could, with absolutely no reason (well none that they would give me anyway), simply dismiss it all as tripe. I am left speechless at times but alas, when the mind is closed it's closed and it sometimes feels that not even God's can-opener can open it.

We have all come across narrow-minded people in business, people who can't see further than themselves and are rooted in what they currently know with no room for anything else. Somewhere along the line there their brains put up the 'Parking Full' sign, learning has been halted and their minds closed - people so enamoured by their own ideas and opinions, trapped by their conditioning, filled to the brim with no room for anything else to get in.

I believe we all need development. Mine is for patience, understanding, tolerance and forgiveness, rather than biting my tongue and exercising my willpower not to throttle the other person. Not only is their cup full to overflowing, the tea has been left standing for so long it has gone stone cold. They need to throw it out, pour a fresh cup and see how thirsty they really are for knowledge and new ideas.

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