



WASTE PAPER COLLECTION – THE ANSWER ISN'T ALWAYS FOUND IN A BOOK

“Education is useless because it destroys our common sense, because it isolates us from the rest of humanity, because it hardens our hearts and swells our heads. Bookish persons have long been subjects of suspicion and contempt and nowhere more so, perhaps, than in the United States during the past twenty years.” Daniel Cotton

In a landmark case of its kind early last year in the US a Mr. Johnson sued his alma mater, Pepperdine University in Los Angeles, California, claiming that it "took [his] money and left [him] with an education amounting to crap on a cracker." The reason his case was taken up by lawyers was that it was so obvious that Mr Johnson was a complete imbecile yet he graduated with his MBA as a top A student. Because of his outstanding academic results he was courted by all the top firms but never made it to the second round of a single interview. Said a hiring manager for Deloitte and Touche, "this Johnson was an idiot no matter how you sliced it. It was like they took his money and let him finger paint for two years."

So then when are we going to stop placing so much emphasis on paper qualifications? A colleague of mine recently selected his daughter’s school solely on its excellent track record of exam results. He wasn’t interested in its extra murals, the quality of its equipment, its culture programmes, its intrinsic value system or its sports facilities and fixtures - only on the school’s almost guaranteed ability to get excellent academic results. It’s so easy for a parent to fall into this trap. Just recently one of my colleagues offered her son a significant incentive for every A he achieves in his exams. What does she equate that achievement with – good study habits and learning ability? Why did she not rather or in addition, give him an incentive such as volunteering for a community project.

If, for example, he had offered to re-paint the drab walls of their elderly neighbour’s house what would he have likely gained from that experience? Project management skills for one. Budgeting? Definitely. A sense of self-respect and professional prowess. New skills acquired. Not to mention client satisfaction and his mother’s immense pride. Achievement fivefold. Surely on a par with an A-grade pass in his exams?

With so much emphasis on academic achievement, it is no wonder that many people who are struggling with various aspects of their jobs turn to education for the answer, believing that a post-graduate Masters or PhD is the panacea for all that's wrong and will miraculously help them cope better and be better. In addition, they will receive greater respect from their peers and stress and pressure will magically disappear because they have more knowledge. It doesn't, of course.

In my experience as life coach, I am often exposed to those who see further study as confirmation that they have learned and have knowledge when all they have really gained is another piece of paper. Don't get me wrong. Many who choose to pursue post-graduate studies do so out of interest and intellectual stimulation and therefore do not fall into this category. They have chosen it for its own sake and not because they weren't coping with their jobs. Their goal was self-growth, not certificates.

It's interesting if we look at the trend in Botswana. Back in the 1980's everyone was being sent for higher education. People couldn't get enough of it. No sooner had you come back but you were off again for the next degree - without even having time to put into practise what had been learnt. By the time it came to the 90's there was much despair – productivity was still not so good, and little success in terms of localisation was being reported. And when things are no longer working for your organisation panic sets in.. Instead of looking for the keys to productivity where you are likely to find it - where the light is - you look to what you think must be the productivity panacea - training. And of course it doesn't work. Pieces of paper don't equate with better job skills and increased output.

That is management by training course crisis so no surprises that towards the end of the 90's that fashion was petering out too. With statistics informing us that as little as 11% of what is taught in the classroom is transferred back to the workplace no wonder employers felt despondent and confused after throwing so much money away into what turned out to be a seemingly bottomless well of ignorance.

I come across hundreds of people that make the majority of us look as light as a feather educationally. They are doctors of this and professors of that. But it's hard to really get to grips with what they can actually do. Y'see regardless of what our schools and colleges purport they still do not help you learn, but instead teach you how to memorize, how to follow rules, and how to conform. And they miss the crucial last value-adding step – how do you take knowledge and transfer it to something concrete which will in turn add value to business, the economy or the world!

It's not all doom and gloom however. There is a growing body of thought which is starting to recognise that education is not the be all and end all. Sure it's a start and often a necessary one to get your foot through the career door, but with time education holds less and less weight and its only value is as a trophy on the wall.

Once education is secured, psychological fit should become the most important criterion for selection and placement - the natural abilities the person has. If you are looking for someone in a customer service role don't take the one with the customer relations diploma. Take the one who makes you feel good in the interview, the one who naturally smiles, appears friendly and is willing to help. Because she will be a natural fit she'll make it work with or without the education.

We are less likely to find the keys to productivity in the classrooms or lecture halls but in assigning and putting the 'right' (not educated) people in the right roles doing what comes naturally to them as individuals. Round pegs, round holes, and the emphasis on personality, skills and ability, not a collection of letters after a name which turn out to be not worth the paper they're printed on. Still sceptical? Trust me on this one - I'm a Doctor!

