



Addendum: Two years on...

(Published in paperback edition of Diary of a Change Agent, 1998)

Press fast forward for two years. It was December 1995. Now it is January 1998. The paperback edition of Diary of a Change Agent is going to print. Do I want to change anything? Well yes, in a way everything, because all the events seem so distant now...and in another way no, it all felt so real then, so let's leave it warts and all!

People still ask me: "Do you still keep a diary?" "Why did you really write it?" "What did Helen think of you doing this?" "What has happened to you since the book?" "Are you earning loads of money now?" I'd like to use this space to give some answers and a brief update.

Such a lot has happened in the wider world. For example, when I finished writing the book:

- Emotional Intelligence by Daniel Goleman had not yet been published here
- Email was rarely used (at least between me or my clients)
- Diana was still alive and not even officially divorced from Prince Charles
- we talked of the "tiger economies of Asia", before the crash
- Hong Kong was governed by Britain
- we had not had the huge environmental disaster of the Borneo fires
- Britain was squabbling with Europe and confused about its position in the world
- our butchers sold beef on the bone
- oil companies sold more petrol than supermarkets...

Now in 1998, after a change of government, in spite of catastrophes and a relentless pressure to life, I feel a much greater sense of optimism.

Yes, I do still keep a diary and, looking back through, it is clear that the book experience consumed me. Helen will tell you I was not a joy to live with! When I delivered the manuscript I felt relief, but early in 1996, harsh reality kicked in. I had neglected my consulting and money was getting short. Thankfully, work soon began on a "facilitating change" project, and there was income again.

In the early summer of 1996, invitations for (unpaid!) public platforms arrived. The first was a mini-workshop entitled "How to spot a faker?" about shared values and being authentic, based on a pairs conversation using the question "What really matters to you?" These conversations developed a momentum of their own and were hard to bring to a close. The session proved memorable, producing advance orders for the book and invitations to run two more workshops.

The book launch was a two hour "Brainstrust" session at Maresfield Curnow. Here I found myself selling this rather odd baby of mine to 30 or so sharp, critical minds. I was telling them my very personal story and (impertinently?) presenting it as relevant to them. Delivering the session was a weird, intense, timeless, vulnerable, adrenaline experience, and at the end strangely anti-climactic. Perhaps this was a sort of personal rite of passage, a transition to a new career phase, seeking some sort of acceptance from my peers.

There followed sessions at the Strategic Planning Society, Ashridge, South Bank, Lancaster and Middlesex. I learned the hard way about the need to prepare thoroughly and then almost to throw away the notes in order to connect authentically with the audience. Most of this work was unpaid, but provided a chance to sell books and to indulge in conversations about reflection, change, the diary method, authenticity, double-loop learning and so on. I developed a five-minute demo of the power of reflection that brings a mood conducive to deeper dialogue.

A short, live TV interview broadcast on a satellite channel was harrowing at the time, but I have yet to meet anyone who watched it! Reading reviews in professional journals made me tense at first and I came to realise some people value this book and other people just don't get it. People Management and Management Consultancy Magazine were

quite positive; Company Secretary and The Director were critical and bemused.

There was a memorable session in a coaching firm. The participants, experienced coaches, talked at me without listening to one another. Perhaps they had a heightened need to talk having exhausted their own capacity for listening. At a restaurant afterwards, my host asked me why I had needed to write the book. I said I wanted to provide an example of double-loop learning, which was true, but under his scrutiny I found a deeper "existential" need: like the coaches earlier, I needed to exist, to be recognised for who or what I am.

I now realise that everyone, at some level, has an existential need. We all need to be reminded we exist, that we're OK, valued and accepted by other people. And I'm no different except I did it this way. So if that was my underlying reason for writing the book, one question is settled, and another arises: what do I do next?

During 1997 three specific developments helped me find a way forward. The first of these was an invitation to work with a charity called The Centre for Tomorrow's Company. Under the inspired leadership of Mark Goyder, Stuart Hampson (of John Lewis Partnership) and others, the Centre is a think tank and influencer, with several of Britain's leading business organisations in membership, promoting "an inclusive approach" to customers, staff, suppliers, shareholders and the wider community. By quite different routes, we seem to have reached a similar conclusion: that sustainable business success depends on how we address people and relationships.

I'm currently spending about 30% of my time working with the Centre, some of it fee paying, but a lot for free. I find this work exciting because it offers an entirely new way of helping companies develop. I'm making a contribution to something larger and gaining the chance to work in a team.

A second development was an invitation to join an on-line conference called Chautauqua (named after a lake in New York State where people used to gather in tents for learning events). Each day during June last year I eagerly logged on and lead a "virtual" transatlantic discussion about the book and my consulting practice. I learned how to use

facilitation skills on-line: taking care to notice people, helping conversation develop and insights to occur.

A final decisive development was being encouraged by Tessa, a fellow consultant, to express my personal vision in a pictorial way. During this exercise I kept thinking of a Nike ad with a long-necked basketball player wearing Nike trainers, and a headline that read: "feet on the ground, mind in the stratosphere!" Somehow inspired by this image I admitted to a true, but until then private, stratospheric aim of "making the world a better place".

Set in a wider context this might seem impossible and depressing. For example the world population is set to double from around five billion in 1990 to around ten billion in 2020. 80% of the wealth of course is owned by 20% of the people living mainly in the Northern Hemisphere. Our children are growing up in a very different world from us, where power and wealth is becoming much more concentrated. Currently 51 of the largest 100 economies are not nations but multinational companies. This is due to expand to around 75 in the next 5 years or so. We end up living in a world where corporations are hugely powerful, governments can be impotent, people are often treated as expendable, and the experience of work can be alienating and stressful. Production is being re-located to low labour cost areas such as India, China, the Philippines, where there is little effective legislation against environmental and human damage.

More optimistically, the consumer boycott of Shell petrol stations in Germany during the Brent Spar dispute showed how vulnerable a large corporation can be, and how important it is for them to manage their vital relationships, not only with investors, but also consumers, staff, suppliers and the wider community. A second hopeful story comes from Nike where they stopped doing business with suppliers that pay poverty-level wages.

With these examples in mind, I realised (blindingly obvious again I'm afraid!) that improving the world is not just my path, and that we may each have a contribution to make. I did not know what my own contribution could be. So when I asked myself "where is my energy?" the answer came: it is in certain special conversations, sometimes called Dialogue (that I have written about in the book). These have a deeply inclusive quality, a powerful energy, and a way of creating alignment in a group. I feel a gut level intuition that these conversations may be of

greater importance than so far understood. And just maybe such conversations can help to create a better world that people appreciate and enjoy more. I want to expand and share my understanding of these.

I found I wanted to collaborate with others in this work. I was waiting for good possibilities to emerge but when I reflected on recent events I realised that some already had. First the Centre for Tomorrow's Company, and then a short Email that had arrived earlier in the year:

From: Robin Wood, Genesys, 20/3/97

Why don't we hold a seminar on Dialogue? If you are interested give me a call.

At first the Email had seemed a little irrelevant, but now it seemed highly important and demanded a serious response. Robin and I have since collaborated to produce a series of one day public events called "Dialogue for Change Agents" starting in 1998. I have also developed a second public workshop called "Navigating Change" under the sponsorship of the Institute of Personnel and Development, which provides practical tools for involving people in business change.

I hope that delegates to these events might create more effective and wholesome organisations that people want to work in. But how do we equip them? People seek tools, but beyond tools we offer heightened awareness and skills for conversation. Perhaps the only lasting impact one person has on another is through conversation. The best conversations enable a person to realise things, to change the way they think about work, the world and their contribution, in other words: insightful, non-oppressive, authentic.

If you believe each person is in charge of themselves, their own thinking, learning and action, perhaps like me you start to question what we mean by "management". Might we nurture conversations in the workplace that encourage strong psychological presence, bringing all available energy and talent to each conversation - BE HERE NOW? Does this lead on to a new form of organisation in which work itself is designed and undertaken in a highly collaborative and energetic fashion?

Around this time I drafted three guiding statements to define my path:

- Creating a world people want to live in

- Creating organisations people want to work in
- Through conversations that transform business life.

A final point. Today I saw this book in a whole new light. After much positive feedback, I have still felt uncomfortable about putting private stuff into the public domain. This eased when I read about an old Tibetan man whose family were killed by the Chinese. In tears he told his story to a visiting American who was confused about why the Tibetan had shared his story. The Tibetan explained:

"You can learn something from it. Besides without knowing this you do not know me...and you could not wholeheartedly work beside me or follow me. Now, if you choose to, you can begin to know me, and work with me, and trust me. I am real. I am not just a name. I have a heart and a voice and a life story." (Ref: Executive Leadership, Emotional Intelligence in Leadership and Organisations, Robert Cooper and Ayman Sawaf, Grosset Putnam, 1997)

We each have a story to tell, but with today's workplace so pressurised, have we started to believe that our stories are irrelevant, that work only follows rational procedures, policy and instructions, without heart, trust and understanding? If so, don't we lose ourselves, making our work relationships shallow, our experience of work unsatisfying, inhibiting our collective performance?

This book sought to describe an inner journey that many have to travel before they can emerge to offer the world their best. If you have such a journey to travel I hope you find the book and the diary method encouraging (in the sense of giving you courage).

Today my emphasis is on directing energy outwards, being fully alive and present in the moment: with family, clients and colleagues. (By the way, I have agreed with Helen not to write another book before the year 2000!)

Oh yes, I'll tackle that money question. The book has not made me pots of cash. Last year I earned a little less than in 1994, but much more than in 1995 when I took time out for writing.

I'm delighted Diary of a Change Agent is coming out in paperback, making it more accessible and affordable for a wider audience. The book

has been a profound learning experience and satisfying because unlike so much of my work, it is a tangible product.

Farewell for now!

Tony Page

Hampton Wick, January 1998