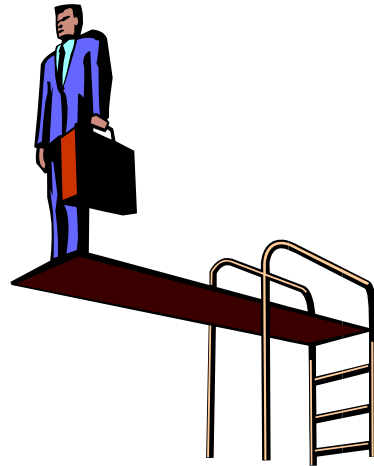


Taking 'The Plunge'

Last week I accepted an invitation to take part in an event run by a group called Working Knowledge. Working Knowledge as a Social Enterprise started in 2004 dedicated to engaging with the "energy, innovation, creativity and talent of our young adults." They call these events 'Plunge' events, the idea being that you are helping the students to swim (in the world of business) by coaching and challenging whilst they take the Plunge. Yes yes I know it all seems a bit worthy and indeed that's what I thought but I give to the odd charity and don't kick dogs so thought I'd do the right thing and give up my day.



When the event was over it started me thinking about my motivation for doing it, in truth it's the same thing that makes people give to charities.... it makes *them* feel good. If someone else gets helped along the way that's all well and good but the giver primarily acts in thier own interests. So it's a win win deal, both parties get something out of participating. I went home on Friday night after having to be relentlessly cheerful and upbeat for the day (*"the aim is not to send them home in tears..... you laugh but it has happened"* we were told) exhausted but strangely optomistic and motivated, it had done *ME* good. Lots of feedback later it had obviously done the students good too.... and that's nice, a win win deal.

Which all started me thinking about business relationships and in particular relationships between suppliers and customers in our sector. Why is it that one or other party at times belives that a win/lose deal is a good thing? For a start such a relationship is bound to end, either in one party going bust or in the business eqyivalent of a divorce (and some have as we all know been very messy affairs over the years). It's in no ones interest for there to be a loser in a supplier customer relationship and customers need to know that just as much as the supplier. If you blackmail, bully and trick your supplier into a deal that he can't make money out of he'll stop supplying. It may take a while and in truth it has taken some system companies years, but they will stop and in today's climate they will stop more quickly. If you don't want to deal anymore then move on but not out of spite or ego do it for sound buisness reasons (like having a supplier that doesn't understand win/win for example!). Backing a supplier into a corner so he makes that decison to leave for you is more often than not a costly tactic.

Give and take means just that, open honest value adding relationships make both parties stronger. I remember going to a business event where there was a great illustration of this. Two willing subjects were called out of the audience (American so there were loads of volunteers!) and sat at a table in the typical arm wrestling stance. "OK" said the speaker (also American!) "if Joe pushes Bucks arm down he gets a Dollar, and if Buck wins he gets the Dollar, you have one minute - GO" and off they went, sweating and straining and eventually Joe won and collected his Dollar. "OK"

said the presenter "now we are going to change the rules, when Joe's arm goes down you each get 50 cents, when Bucks arm goes down you each get 50 cents.... GO" and guess what in a minute their arms sped back and forth and both earned the thick end of \$25. So.... same game with slightly different motivators.

There's a round of price increases going on and if we don't want to damage the whole sector we need to remember - suppliers shouldn't look to disadvantage their customers and customers shouldn't look to defy gravity and 'defeat' suppliers.... or both will be losers.

So would I take the plunge again..... yes I expect so but not for a while, I can't be cheerful two days in a row, what would Robert Peston think!

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