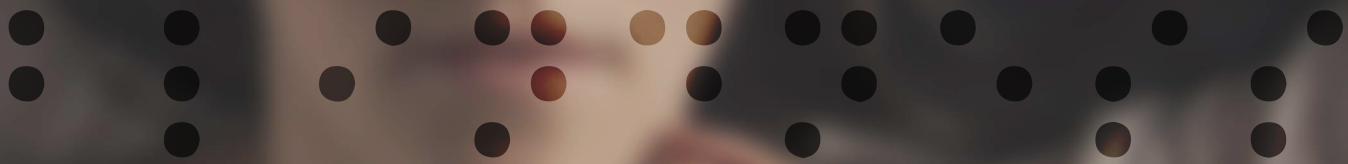
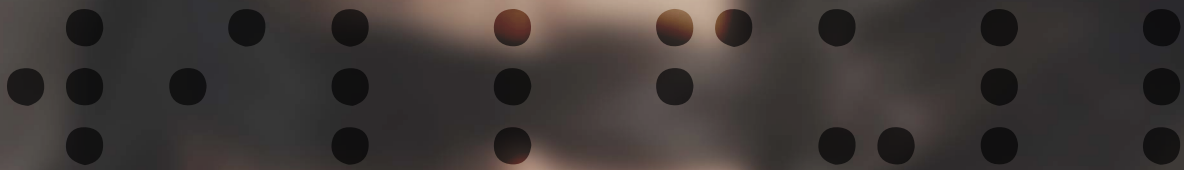
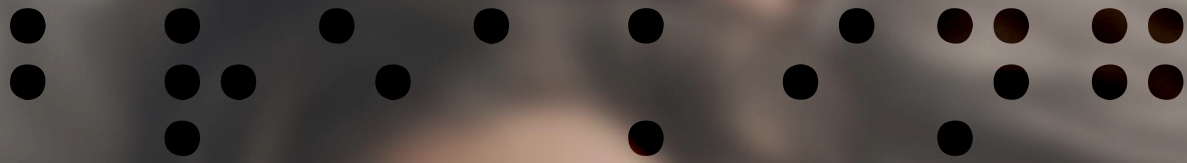


F A I T H W O O D



B R E A K I N G O U T O F

W I L F U L

B L I N D N E S S

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PREFACE

Two of the most basic and powerful human needs are the desire to belong and our desire for significance. To satisfy these needs we attach ourselves to the beliefs of others – our family, our friends, our superiors, our culture, our society. These beliefs impact our perceptions of the world and ourselves. Over time, the only evidence we see is that which supports what we already believe to be true; and we ignore any evidence that contradicts our beliefs. We become blind to that which makes us uncomfortable – a state of Willful Blindness.

This blindness exists because it helps us simplify our world. It takes massively complex issues and distills them down to basic concepts that make us feel comfortable – like simple definitions of “right and wrong” or “good and evil”. It makes life much easier to live. It makes us comfortable. But it also places limitations on us because everything outside our warm safe circle becomes our blind spot. This is an unconscious process. We think we see more, even as our landscape shrinks.

To become successful we must challenge ourselves to remove our blinders; to identify, acknowledge and address our own Willful Blindness – to overcome our fears and remove our self-imposed limitations. The trick is to do all of this while satisfying our basic need to belong and desire for significance – to do all of this and still be in a safe place.

Let's find a broader perspective and a few plausible antidotes to the areas in your life (and speaking career) where willful blindness (or blind spot behaviours) may be creeping in. Perhaps it's time to stop being wilfully blind and start embracing more behavioural flexibility for ourselves and the people we influence.

INTRODUCTION

There are 39 million people in the world who are officially labeled as “blind”. What comes to mind as you read that word? Perhaps an image of the famous Helen Keller. Or perhaps you thought of a grandparent who has lost his or her vision. Or maybe you envisioned someone walking down the street with that familiar symbol of an inability to see, the white red-tipped cane.

However, there is a kind of blindness that can adversely affect every single one of the seven billion people who inhabit this planet. Whether they are working at their jobs, engaged in their intimate relationships, or making decisions that affect not only their own lives, but the lives of others, “wilful blindness” is the choice to ignore certain realities and we do it for a variety of reasons. In the case of world leaders, wilful blindness is a particularly alarming phenomenon as these people are making decisions that affect the entire global population.

We do it every day, often almost unconsciously, or perhaps at least automatically, when we decide not to “see”, not to “reason” or not to “listen to that inner voice” that we absolutely know is right but we do not like what it is saying. Instead, we allow our personalities to make poor choices. When an outcome will cause conflict or go against what we want, we choose wilful blindness and put our values on the shelf of convenience, as generally,

we perceive conflict as a bad thing, rather than as an impetus for much-needed change.

The best way to describe wilful blindness is to say that it occurs when we have the power to allow light to penetrate thought in the form of knowledge or fresh data, but we choose to remain in darkness. Sometimes we stay there because it is the easiest option. Other times it might be to avoid making decisions that would be uncomfortable, painful, or would rock the boat in a way that feels too overwhelming for words.

Essentially, wilful blindness is when the light of “knowing” is visible, glowing brilliantly, and yet the choice is made to extinguish it.

Every day, we wake up to all kinds of news about the events that are happening in the world around us. Some of it is horrifying. Some of it is beautiful. Some of it is mediocre. In every one of our moments, we have a choice to move toward action inspired by what we hear, but many of us just look away and do nothing.

Some of us have jobs that require us to make decisions that will affect our employers, our co-workers, and perhaps even the rest of the world. When confronted with something that feels a little “off” or “rubs us the wrong way”, do we take decisive action even if it means that we might experience some type of discomfort? I suppose

“However, there is a kind of blindness that can adversely affect every single one of the seven billion people who inhabit this planet.”



Helen Keller. American author, political activist, and lecturer. She was the first deafblind person to earn a bachelor of arts degree.

it depends on circumstance and just how much discomfort is involved, but it is quite common for the answer to that question to be “No.” Instead, we choose wilful blindness. We make ourselves look the other way. Or we cross our fingers and hope others will come forward and do the dirty work that we refuse to do, or to even acknowledge what needs to be done. The issue that has just come to light is vaporized, quickly, quietly, without much notice having been taken.

To break out of wilful blindness, we need to become aware of the boxes of comfortable thinking that we have put ourselves into. Then, we need to intentionally decide to step out of it.

To break out of that box, we need to start with being more **AWARE.**

Not long ago, I read about Donetsk, Ukraine. Donetsk Orphanage No. 1 was home to children aged 7 to 16 years. The article painted a lovely picture of decorated rooms of pink flowers for girls and blue boats for boys. It described a peaceful, quiet life for the children who lived there. As reported by Russia’s children’s rights ombudsman, Pavel Astakhov, the Russian government decided recently to close the doors of the orphanage and move the children to Russia, where they joined 22,000 other Ukrainian child refugees who are now being detained.

Young Popova said that normal people would have asked her opinion before they told her she had to leave her home and the place of her birth.

Where are these “normal” people of whom she spoke? Who are the people



who should be saving these orphans when Russian insurgents impose their propaganda tactics? There, in that town of Donetsk, Ukraine, a whole town has become wilfully blind. Based on the inaction of its residents, one might even argue that the whole world has become wilfully blind. But it is a political “hot button” that is perhaps only discussed in lunch rooms and by the water cooler..

In retrospect, we must examine our own consciences on this matter. In Canada most of us have chosen to look the other way. We have chosen to ignore the plight of those Ukrainian children. We have been wilfully blind to their problems.

We rationalize that there are children in Canada who may be orphans or Permanent Wards of the government.

There are in fact, approximately 67,000 to 80,000 children in Canada, with about 27,500 of them First Nations children. Dr. Nicolas Trocme, Director at the Centre for Research on Children and Families and Professor of Social Work at McGill University stated that “there is no data in Canada on the number of children in foster care.”

So, if asked the question, “How many children in Canada are in foster care or are Permanent Wards?”, no one in the Canadian government can answer that question. Doesn’t this mean that an entire country has donned its blinders and become wilfully blind?

The fact is that many people who will read these words have already put on their blinders. Maybe they tell themselves, “I don’t live in Canada or the Ukraine. This is not my problem.”

They see no reason to even think about it. They might even be asking themselves why I am writing about this issue. Or they might be uncomfortable and squirming as they read about it if almost instantly, they made the decision to be wilfully blind to the plight of these Russian children.

Canadian readers might also be wilfully blind to the plight of First Nations children, who are twelve times more likely to be placed in foster care than other children. A shocking 80% of First Nations children are wards of the government.

Maybe you are from the USA, Germany, South Africa, or Japan and what I have reported to you now is making you feel

a little ill at ease; you have now been made to think about the plight of your own country's children. **You have three choices: Put on your wilful blinders and totally ignore what I am saying; make a conscious decision to be a part of the solution; or investigate this topic further and find out if there is any way that you can help.**

How can we recognize wilful blindness in ourselves? How can we learn to see the unseen?

First, we must accept that wilful blindness appears in every area of our lives. We choose to ignore cues about a troubled or dying relationship. We would rather not consider our own imperfections or habits, especially if we are aware that they bother others. At work, it wreaks havoc on employers, staff, and all other aspects of businesses.

It is a matter of becoming “aware”, no matter what the subject of controversy, taking that first step to permanently remove the cumbersome wilful blinders and viewing challenges in an innovative way—through the monocle of “Solutions”.



TIMING

How do managers or supervisors know when to don blinders and when to keep their eyes open?

Is it simply a matter of knowing when to become wilfully blind and when to make sure your eyes are wide open? Is it a matter of timing?

The only way is through their personal “feelers” and becoming aware of how wilful blindness works. Wilful blindness in the workplace can stagnate an organization and change that organization from an open flowing system to a closed system very quickly. It can also cost employers money and managers their jobs.

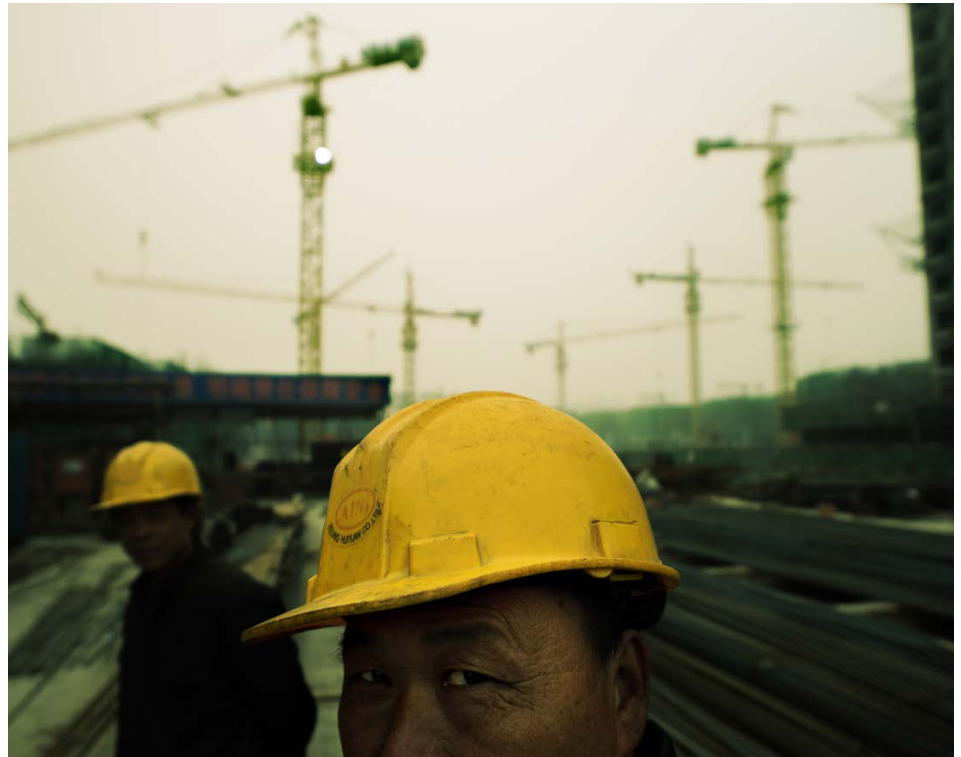


CONTROLLING OUR OWN BEHAVIOUR

Each individual in the workplace has an option every day to remain wide-eyed and open to changes and decisions that must be made. Some people choose wilful blindness as an escape, some choose it only occasionally when the going gets tough, and others rarely put on the blinders at all. Of course, much of what we do in life has to do with our personality types. There is a personality test at <http://www.16personalities.com> that can help you identify what “type” of person you are. Once you know more about yourself, you can use this knowledge and your experience to become a more effective manager or employee.

Please take a moment to do this quiz. Before you read any further, having a clear understanding of your personality and its impact on your employees or team members will be crucial to applying the information contained in this e-book. All of us are a part of a larger whole and especially if you are an employee in a company.

This is why I always caution team leaders or managers to take the time to know and understand their subordinates. Just the very word “subordinates” is a psychologically dangerous word. Why not say *assistants, juniors, or aides*? There are other words that come to mind that are not so tasteful, words like *minions, underlings, and dependents*.



When team leaders or managers know more about the personalities of their team members/crew, they are able to help those team members resolve issues more effectively and expediently. By doing this, managers, team leaders, bosses, and employers can avoid the pitfalls of wilful blindness within the company’s ranks.

When employees sniff out managers or team leaders who are the types of people who revel in their own power, those employees most certainly will don their thickest wilfully blind goggles. In a manager’s quest for efficiency and capturing a supremacy base, they might

find that this type of muscle makes their team/crew blind, or selectively blind to any sound data that a team leader is presenting, even before that leader has a chance to present all the whys and what-fors of a company decision. It is a losing battle before the players even get to the battlefield.

We know that if we throw a rock into a lake, eventually the ripples reach and touch the shore. In the same way, every day we affect those around us in our families, in the workplace, and as we interact with the world at large. We can be a positive influence and presence, contributing what some call a “positive



energy”, or we can be the negative influence, or negative energy.

It is so important for managers to have regular training sessions for their employees, not just for new employees, but for long-term employees, as well. Sometimes once a month is enough time to train, but in some fields with so many new computer products coming out, or with other rapid changes, it might even be advantageous to train more frequently than that. If managers ignore this training, employees begin to wear their blinders more often and it is much more difficult to get them to acclimate to changes that a company needs implemented later on.

Getting employees used to learning new things, and new ways of doing them insures the life-blood of a company. Employees who become accustomed to change keep a

company alive. Companies are organic. They need to breathe and grow. Stagnation will kill them.

A company can implement change daily, even in the smallest of organizations, and it comes through people.

Are you able to change your mind set on a spur of the moment request from your manager/boss?

Lawson and Pierce in McKinsey Quarterly discuss the four conditions necessary for change. In my opinion, at the top of the list would be to tell anyone in business to take off the wilful

blinders!

Then, to persuade them to do something different, managers are charged with the responsibility of helping employees understand the change and then, hopefully, agree with it. If new training is required, then everything must be efficiently in place to make the change as painless as possible. Sometimes this means that employees have to learn to do things differently or they have to learn new skills. The more experienced employees might be the first ones to balk and keep their blinders on.

Managers or experienced employees must model what they want their employees or underlings to achieve. Often experienced employees are hesitant to even try something new.

Seasoned employees can often

strangulate a company with their inability to be flexible. That's why when companies have mergers or buy-outs they will often get rid of the seasoned employees in favour of training the newer employees so as to avoid conflict.

Do you willingly change, or do you dig your feet in and refuse, even if it means you might lose your job?

The degree to which people are able to change has a lot to do with their personalities. When employers realize that employees will react to change

based on their personalities and their experiences, they will comprehend an employee's resistance to changes within that frame of reference.

Unfortunately, in the busy workplace, management just might not have the time to ferret out the natural-born leaders or they might not have the time to help employees find their strengths.

Do you know what your intrinsic strengths are?

How can you identify employees' strengths and weaknesses?

Employers need to be aware of the natural-born leaders within the company and help them rise to positions where they can best serve company needs. Someone who is tolerant, reliable, charismatic, who can

multi-task and does not shun from multiple responsibility is an asset to a company, but only 2% of the population share these traits.

Can these qualities be developed in employees?

Generally, no. That's why having a potential employee take a personality test is such a good idea. There are many such tests available to be used.

Leadership skills are essential in the management of employees. Leaders must motivate employees by having a global vision of what needs to be done and then setting goals to reach objectives to insure company success. This is why there is no place for wilful blindness in company productivity. However, having said this, it is not an



easy task to insure that employees invest themselves in the organization's objectives and goals to enhance productivity.

How do you ignite a fire under your employees and make sure it continues to burn?

Managers are always trying to think of innovative ways to keep their employees excited about completing their jobs. Inspiring workers and co-workers in an on-going manner helps the company continue to grow and move forward.

The next step in breaking out of wilful blindness is taking time to address our potential **oversights** (or what we might be overlooking)



COMMUNICATION

When it comes to the bottom line, the employees can make or break a company.

Communication is one of the major factors in company success. But when employers are blind to their employees' abilities - or lack thereof - or when employers "look the other way" if an employee makes errors in reports, has continuing conflict with other employees, or incites conflict, or has "run-ins" with customers, the company suffers.

Training is the key to having good written communication skills, yet how many employers have the time, energy, and most importantly, the money to train people in communication skills, or writing skills, or presentations skills? Very few companies could do this.

The ideal, then, is for managers to be aware of the competencies of the individuals they are considering hiring before they are allowed to join the workforce. Although communication can be taught, for some people it is a long arduous task with little result.

Some of the most important people in an organization are managers in human resource positions with hiring as one of their many responsibilities. They must consider not only experience and

personality, but what type of work ethic the potential new employee would have.

What are the qualities of a potential employee with a strong work ethic?

Obviously, hardworking is at the top of the list but employees should know how to pace themselves through their various jobs during the day. A manager should not have to ride herd on employees to get them to accomplish their objectives. Though no employer wants an employee to work 24/7, all employers want employees to go that "extra mile" now and again.

Nowadays, it is so important for employers to seek individuals who are adaptable to change. Employees need to know how to multi-task and adhere to schedules and assigned tasks. Employees need to be given "tools" and use them in the best way possible. In today's environment of shrinking resources, employees who understand the need to stretch resources in creative ways is invaluable.

Likewise, flexibility is needed in all areas of business and with all individuals involved.

It is the golden word in any organization—from the employer down to the staff that keeps the bathrooms tidy.

I know the head of a huge corporation who makes sure that the bathrooms are spotless three times a day, not because he wants to get on someone's toes, but because clients use that restroom and he wants to make sure that it is spotless. Often he does a quick mirror wash or toilet paper replacement.

The important point to note is that he doesn't shout, "Whose responsibility is it to make sure there is toilet paper in the restrooms?" He just does it because it needs doing. He might leave a note to the people responsible for the job, saying that they should check more often, but he doesn't become angry. Quite simply, he does what needs to be done at the time.

Do you think that any position in a company is above picking up and doing the smallest job?

If you do think this way, then you are a prime candidate for wilful blindness. It



is the worst kind of blindness because it is chosen after seeing what needs to be seen. I am not saying all of us need to replace the toilet paper in the rest room, but if we are aware that it needs to be done and the person who services the restroom is unavailable until the next day or later in the evening, shouldn't we do it?

Or should we?

When hiring an individual, do you want them to see a task and do it?

Are you a manager that rewards initiative?

What are some good ways to reward employees? Must they always be financial?

Oftentimes, employers don't reward employees because it can become expensive. Managers think in terms of certificates etc. that cost money. They don't think about the things that cost the company nothing, but might mean a lot to the employee. Employers are often blind to the small, but **important things that can bring up productivity** such as the following:

- Employee of the Week parking space
- Getting off a half-hour early one or two days of the week
- Coming in an hour later for a day (if it doesn't cost the company)
- Moving their desks to more prominent positions in the office
- A framed certificate honoring what they accomplished
- Half-hour extra at lunch

How many bosses often "look the other way" when an employee is slipping in their duties at work because it is easier than confronting the problem?

Perhaps the boss sees the entire picture and prefers being wilfully blind to the issue because she/he knows that it will take time, energy and money to retrain an individual or a group of individuals. Accepting the status quo may be the easier solution, but not necessarily the best one by any means.

When employees are not performing at optimum, it is up to the managers to find out why. This takes effort. Looking the other way or putting on wilful blinders is often an easy-out situation. William Wilberforce (24 August 1759 – 29 July 1833) was an English politician, philanthropist, and a leader of the movement to abolish the slave trade. He said, "You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know."

Are employees trained to make good decisions, weighing all the alternatives?

Decision-making is a very necessary task in any organization. Some are top-heavy decisions that only managers can make, but on a daily basis many employees must make decisions that can affect the company's bottom line. Employees who learn to identify a problem and find a solution without management intervention save the company time and money. Likewise, employees willing to be part of a team effort (like the restroom situation) are invaluable to any company. They tend to both the large and the small tasks.



BEWARE THE OFFICE CANNIBALS!

A word about “caustic co-workers”. Generally, these are the individuals who pass gossip and create “office secrets” and “office tall tales”. A manager needs to be aware of their tactics in order to foil their plans.

An office cannibal will make it impossible for other employees to complete their work. He/she may withhold information from new employees in order to keep their perceived sense of power and the upper hand. They may alienate others against another employee.

The office cannibal may pass misinformation to obtain or create mistrust. And then there are the coveting employees.

These are the ones with all the “information” and who refuse to work with the new employees so they can remain “top dog” and “look good”. But they are also the ones who are costing the corporation/business money. They need to release information, and share what they know, where things might be located physically or on the Internet. Often these people make transitions in a

company impossible.

Employees should be willing to work together, facilitating mutual acquisition of knowledge in a team effort. The “old days” of business with hierarchy and peons is in transition. Employees sharing their new ideas and contributing to the whole have made the blinders come off, thanks to humongous organizations like Google. Employers know now that happy employees mean a more prosperous, successful business.

IS PLAYFULNESS ENCOURAGED?

A person's face is shown from the nose up, with their hands covering their eyes. The person is looking through the fingers of their hands, which are held up to their eyes. The background is a solid, muted brown color.

How can you ensure that employees have fun while they complete their tasks?

Studies have shown that when employees are engaged in what they are doing, they are often found to reduce the incidents of donning their willful blindness glasses?

If not given release from monotonous jobs, employees may invent their own release. I know a dishwasher who realized that when she hit the dishwasher detergent bottle down hard each time it made bubbles. Her game was to see how many bubbles she could pop before the next dish was done. In the world of production, it was certainly not an epic goal, but it did serve its purpose.

The third step in breaking out of willful blindness comes down to our experiences. Our history (prior outcomes and consequences) have a definite impact on our perspectives.

“Experience is a hard teacher, because she gives the test first and the lessons after.”

WILFUL BLINDNESS IN BUSINESS AND THE ECONOMY

In 2012, Canadians began to buy products elsewhere, spending 8 billion consumer dollars in the United States. Shopkeepers such as Paul Rainmundo own their own stores, like his La Vieille Europe grocery store on Saint-Laurent Boulevard in Montreal. Rainmundo has owned his store for 50 years. It has been touted as a "... destination type store".

Will Canadians weaken their economy by choosing to shop at the giant malls and recognized name-brand stores?

The economic truth is that if we buy from the US or China, we weaken our own economy. By ignoring this fact, we sabotage our own country's economic good health. We can argue why it is "good" to buy ground-breaking products from other countries but of course in doing so, we become blind to the argument against "buying Canadian" or buying our goods in the little mom and pop stores. Or, there is the little problem of slipping into the US to do a little shopping.

Another problem is that Canadians are wilfully blind regarding the result of choosing only the high volume grocery

stores. It has been seen in every small town across the country and, one could argue, expanding the globe. Big business pushes out the smaller stores.

Who's on watch? Who makes sure there aren't people running around with blinders on?

Do you believe it is important to help small businesses survive?

That's the fundamental question because if the answer is yes, then you must make a conscious decision. Either you will do something about it or you don't your blinders, perhaps using the excuse that there is a process of economic evolution at play and it is a matter of "survival of the fittest."

In Great Britain, in little towns like Durham County's Stanley, the government has allowed gigantic malls to be built with big roller coasters to draw huge crowds who will shop at the plethora of new stores. The economy of the little nearby towns begins to dry up one by one until they are completely crushed by the larger behemoths.

Like everything we choose in life, we

can ignore the chain of events here in Canada and watch as people like Paul Rainmundo struggle with enterprises that they have been building for 50 years. If we shrug our shoulders and put on our blinders, then we, too, must accept the consequences.

What are the consequences of allowing businesses like the La Vieille Europe grocery store to "die a natural death"?

Some of us believe that when a product or a business fails, it is a natural process best left alone and nothing about which we should be worried.

Are you one of the people who say, "If that small business had done more market research, put other modern technology into place, modernized the factory (or whatever), it wouldn't have gone under"?

If you scratch the surface a bit more, take off the blinders and deliberate on your own business (or someone's business that you know well and wish to see succeed).



Would you want your business to suffer a similar fate? What could you do to avoid it?

Psychologically humans like the status quo. We like the same seat at the dinner table, or in a classroom. We are creatures of habit. Some people have to eat their salad first (e.g. Americans), but in Paris the salad is consumed last.

Imagine how you would feel at one of my events where there are several tables and you have to find a seat amongst this room full of strangers. You might introduce yourself to your 'neighbours'. You might have laid out your pen and paper "just so". You might have chosen your seat so that you could view the board or me more clearly, or you might have decided to be closer to the door.

What if you were then asked to pick up all your things and move to another seat or to another table? Many people would experience discomfort at some level.

You might have thought it was an

inconvenience. Or like many people, you might have felt a pang of anxiety. You might have got to the event early to scout out your perfect place and then it was arbitrarily changed. Perhaps after moving, you would find it difficult to get back to task, or to think clearly, or even listen to what was being said. You might want the status quo of sitting in the seat you had chosen and the little "comfort zone" that you had created for yourself.

How would you feel in that circumstance? How would you react to having to move to another seat and sit with new people and start over again?

The 'status quo' often gets in the way of success in organizations. And this is usually because it means people are wearing their wilful blinders.

But reluctantly or not, you move and you introduce yourself to your new neighbour. If I were to let you chat for five minutes, you would learn some information from that new person. Forcing people into new situations or new thinking is not necessarily a "bad thing". Being pushed to take off your blinders can give you a whole new perspective.

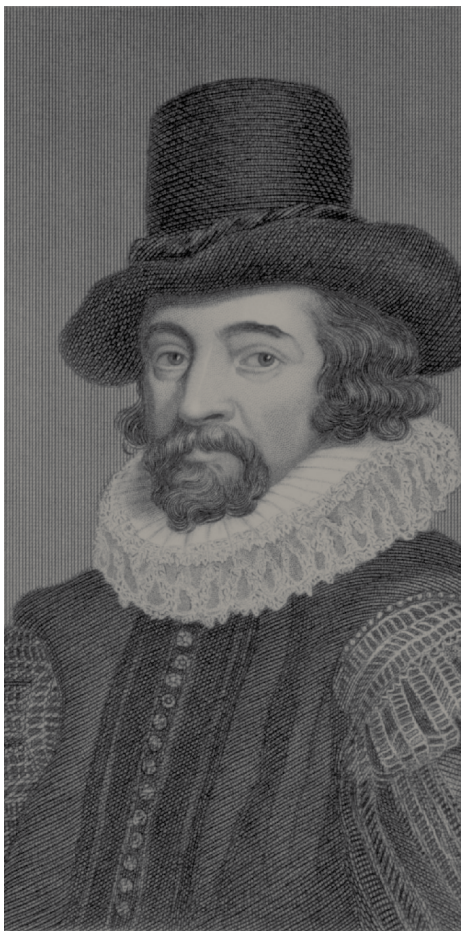
What can I do to make sure my business doesn't end up with its staff wearing wilful blinders?

The first thing you can do as a manager or boss is to initiate a clear plan of action, which results in employees being much more easily motivated to do the tasks at hand. Visuals such as charts, graphs, and timetables can aid employees in their understanding of what needs to be accomplished.

Managers should not overlook the power of the "field trip". You may remember these from school days. Employees - and ultimately the company's bottom line - can benefit

greatly from taking inter-office field trips to learn what others are accomplishing within the company. If it is a large organization, for example, there are many areas that can be explored. In a smaller company it can help to know why the secretaries need signatures on certain documents by such-and-such a date or time. Once there is an understanding of why something is done, employees are more willing to step up and more efficiently accomplish any necessary tasks.

Francis Bacon (22 January 1561 – 9 April 1626), was an English philosopher, statesman, scientist, jurist, orator, essayist, and author. He stated that, “Knowledge is power”. This has never been truer than in today’s workplace.



Can I have employees looking the other way while company profits dip inch by inch, or highly qualified employees come in and go out just as quickly?

When business isn’t going well, a company can absorb employees looking the other way for only brief intervals before it begins to affect the company’s bottom line. Nothing is more devastating to a company than qualified employees coming in and then going out just as quickly, taking their weeks of specific training with them and leaving a gap in the proverbial “machine” of efficiency.

In a clock or a watch there are gears that mesh together to make the clock run well and keep perfect time. If one of those gears does not mesh, the clock does not run or keep correct time. The same is true of a company with employees coming and going. When an employee leaves, the gear that controls that portion of the company is missing. A new “gear” has to be “made” and put in its place. This takes time and effort. It takes the energy of the others within that employee’s empty space. The precision of the company is “off” and continues to be “off” until that part of the company is running smoothly again.

This takes time and as we all know, in business “Time is money.”

Can a business with an open system allow itself to become a closed system with no innovative thought, creativity or initiative?

Absolutely not!

When a company is closed, it dies, pure and simple.

In any organization, employees are what keep the system running and open and flowing. All employees can make regular contributions to the innovative thinking and growth of a company if the climate of that open system allows for their feedback.

Letting employees “see” and “speak” often times needs to be rewarded, but most certainly, appreciated. Though there are employees who gain comfort from sitting quietly and going through their “ho-hum” days without any challenges, likewise there are employees who have much to offer a vibrant, breathing open system company. These employees are not only open to new challenges, they welcome them.

Managers have to provide those challenges.

If an employee in the back of the room gingerly raises a hand after brave contemplation about presenting an innovative idea, management must not shoot this person down simply because the ideas involve change or thinking about the old picture in a new way. A manager would need to grab onto that new idea, write it on the board and draw attention to it.

In short, managers have to be open to employees’ suggestions.

It is often easier to allow the natural death of a company or an idea than to have to unbridled new thinking and inject a business with new thought and imagination.

“New” equals work.

At the word “work”, did you feel yourself put on the wilful blinders?

WILFUL BLINDNESS WREAKS HAVOC



Sometimes it is as simple as “passing the buck”. This is an old term, but it still is relevant today. This brings me to the audit of the Housing Crisis of Attawapiskat First Nation, in which there was a discrepancy about \$1.8 million in government funds that were to be used to relieve a housing crisis. The government is demanding repayment of this money as auditors claim that there is a lack of proof to substantiate expenditures, while Attawapiskat says that the majority of the money is related to two major contracts, each of which was completed and paid in full.

Is Prime Minister Stephen Harper justified to ask for 1.8 million back?

That’s the question buzzing around business circles, household dinner tables, and at the proverbial water cooler. It is, of course, noteworthy that 90 million dollars have been spent on Attawapiskat. Unfortunately, that amount represents \$50,000 for every man, woman, and child in the community. That is not chicken feed, yet the people continue to live their lives under the poverty line.

To quote Holmes, an old master, “Put not your trust in money, but put your money in trust.”

Trust in whom, or in what? How can these people possibly repay the government?

One is compelled to ask, should they repay the government the \$1.8 million?

Yet then the second question is, “Who are they?”

VALUES AND INTEGRITY

A solid, strong value system would have kept the Attawapiskat First Nation on track. *The Housing Crisis of Attawapiskat First Nation* is an example of a value system gone awry. It is certainly an excellent example of wilful blindness. Someone or several “someones” along the line had to be wearing wilful blindness goggles—on purpose—to have this allowed this to happen.

At each level of the decision-making process of any business, someone must be at the helm. When a business fails, it is a failure of the entire management process: managers, co-managers, and perhaps even the lesser employees.

Yet at the end of the line - or even in the middle of it - someone has to have removed his or her wilful blinders. Someone - or a group of people - had to know exactly what was



happening around the Housing Crisis of Attawapiskat First Nation.

This is not unlike the Team Building Snake game in which all participants are blindfolded except for the player at the end of the line. This player has all the advantages but also all of the responsibility to ensure that things are working as they should be, and needs a good value system and a sense of integrity to help the team reach its potential and its goals.

Someone dropped the ball.

Someone in the line did not “play fair.” A solid value system was not in place.

Imagine being the person with “all the knowledge” at the end of the line, and without a blindfold. How powerful would you feel having all the answers and making all the decisions?

Imagine being one of the people in the middle, wearing blinders, seeing but not seeing. Trusting but not knowing. Might you feel frightened?

In business many managers are afraid they might make a costly mistake and

their co-workers and working teams often feel the same way when they don't have solid guidelines in place.

When employers give objectives and goals to their employees, there is a culture of calm and peace as employees complete their tasks. When given the responsibility of completing their various missions, the entire company benefits from workers with purpose. The entire company can function as a whole rather than as individual parts of the whole. When employees work together with common goals and objectives, the company has a common value system.

Does your company have a solid value system in place?

Do the employees share the company's value system?

Employees come to work with their own value systems. Generally speaking, Human Resources tries not to hire employees who are at odds with the company's value system if it will cause problems later on. However, it is up to management to instill company values in their employees. All managers and team leaders have their own value systems that contribute and should be aligned with the company's value system.

Values generally fall into the following categories:

- Social Beliefs
- Political System
- Religious Beliefs

• Economic Beliefs

Businesses are very concerned about their employees economic beliefs because, of course, businesses want and must see profits. A company desires all of its employees to work together smoothly in an open system of contributing to the team effort. Managers have to instil in their teams how important the bottom line is to company success. These managers must be efficient in planning, always keeping an eye on the future. Their job is to inspire a work ethic in their teams.

Although many companies might have employees who prefer not to be social at work, it is still an important ingredient for the culture of a company's value system that each employee constitutes an effort to be cordial to their fellow employees and to work cooperatively with them.

Religion and politics are still topics best not discussed at work; however, they can play a significant part in how employees function in their jobs. Religious employees are generally dedicated employees. Their work is meaningful to them in that they believe their work is contributing to a common good in one way or another.

As far as the political arena is concerned, managers should keep an eye on anyone who expresses strong opinions in this regard. Sometimes in the quest to seek personal power and influence these individuals can upset the equilibrium of an office; however, used to the company's advantage, these individuals are powerful assets.

Have you ever been given a new more efficient tool at work and yet you continue to use the older tool because you know how to use it and it's easier for you?

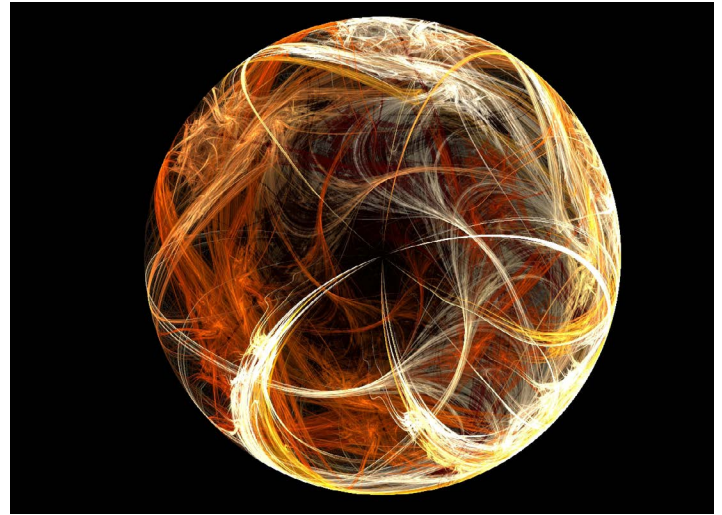
A culture in any company begins with educating employees. However, employees who have experience and time under their belts in a company often just want to do things as they always have been done. They know things could be more efficient, or they know that things are more expensive done a certain way, but learning the new way takes time, effort and new training. So they become wilfully blind to these facts and continue with the status quo, accepting the margin of added dollars in the budget simply so they can continue to do things the old way.

If everyone operated based on this line of thinking, we would be wearing our blinders while dipping our pens in a bottle of ink.

How does a manager influence employees into doing new tasks or completing old tasks in a new manner?

Management's role is to set goals and strong objectives to meet those goals. It must also ensure the proper utilization of manpower to accomplish any and all tasks to that end.

THE BUBBLE OF POWER



Each company has a *Bubble of Power*, made up of a few people who are essentially controlling the workforce. “The Powers That Be” are the masters of the company’s fate, the planners and the goal setters. Proper management of a company determines its ability to be a success.

There is a responsibility that comes from that *Bubble of Power*. Yes, it is isolating to live and operate in the bubble, but it is the wise employer, leader, or team manager who recognizes that there are millions of “pressure points” within that bubble. All of us know what happens to a bubble when it grows too big or it meets resistance. It pops.

Employers, leaders, and team managers should learn to either share the bubble with others, or better yet, not operate in that bubble at all.

Employers, leaders, and team managers must make all types of decisions, basic and routine, which affect others outside the bubble. Good employers, leaders, or team managers give their workers clear guidelines on what actions are necessary, what steps are needed to accomplish goals, and which policies to follow.

The employees need to have these guidelines to minimize the risks in their jobs. Employees want to be able to perform their jobs with as little uncertainty as possible, and within a margin of probability estimates for the outcome that is expected of their performance.

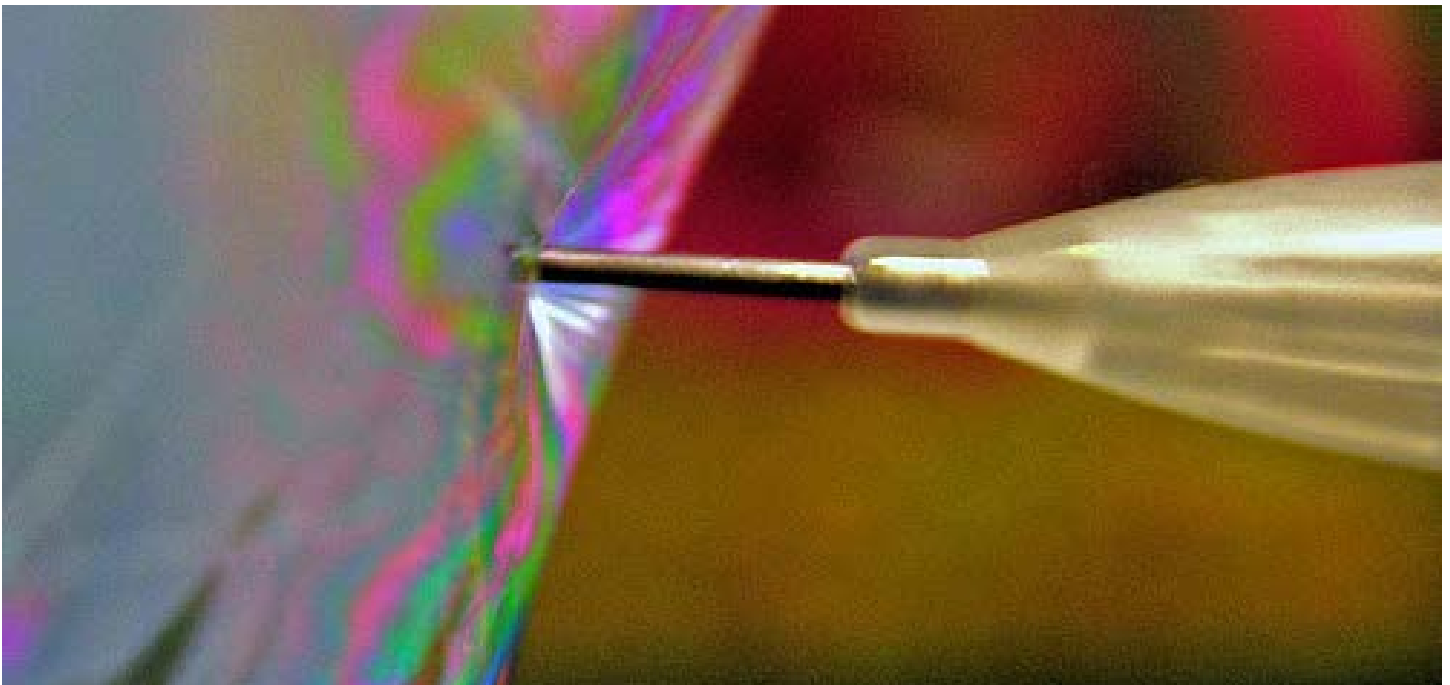
Employers cannot tolerate any wilfully blind employees who act as gatekeepers to an otherwise smooth-flowing open system. Likewise, employees will not tolerate employers, leaders, or team managers who

use their bubble of power to isolate themselves from their employees’ questions or to ignore their employees’ needs.

In science a *bubble of power* is really the idea of sonofusion, or acoustic inertial confinement fusion. This is an interesting concept in the business sense when the analogy is applied to explain what happens when the pressure of the workers runs through a company, exciting all the employees like the tiny gas bubbles of sonofusion. The bubbles grow and collapse until finally, there is an explosion.

Unsatisfied employees can make quite an explosion within a company with or without the aid of their unions. At times, their desire to please their employer runs counter to their ability to do so, or at times they might simply become tired of doing what is required or asked of them. This is human nature.

WHAT POPS THE BUBBLE OF POWER?



There once was a particularly evil step-mother type boss who plotted to get rid of her three right hand people, figuratively having them “consume each other”. Each of them thought that she was the “favoured” one, but it was easy for an outside person to see that the boss was causing the collapse of her own organization.

This organization served 93 abused and injured children in a behaviour health clinic on a daily basis. Now, its doors are permanently locked. The management was the direct cause of its own downfall. The owner/boss of the organization perceived that she was being kept in the dark. She perceived that the employees plotted against her.

If it hadn't been a real life story, everyone would have seen it as a fairytale!

Thirty counselors and teachers lost their jobs. Four managers lost their jobs. Ninety-three children lost their services.

Beware incorrect perceptions. These can kill and/or maim an organization. It is always wise to remember that an organization is a living, breathing thing and its life is dependent upon the healthy functioning of everyone who works for it in some way.

Employers, managers, team leaders and employees must rely on facts.

“Perhaps one fact is better than one hundred analogies.”

A man in a dark suit and tie is shown from the chest up, with his hands clasped together on a light-colored surface. The background is a warm, golden-brown color. The title 'THE INFLUENCE OF NEGATIVITY' is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the upper portion of the image.

THE INFLUENCE OF NEGATIVITY

There are often concrete reasons for people to become willfully blind. Once the pot of negativity is stirred, it is very difficult to reel in its toxic fumes.

Negativity in the workplace is deadly, whether it starts outside the workplace in world controversy, or whether it begins seemingly innocuously at the employee water cooler. All managers and team leaders have to be aware of any signs of employee resentment or infuriation.

Sometimes employee displeasure can be dealt with by simply calling the employee into one's office and having a cordial face-to-face discussion. Creating an atmosphere where employees are secure and comfortable speaking to their team leader/managers is paramount.

The topics that are floating out in the public arena are also often brought into the squeaky realm of water cooler politics. And you know what "they" say about the squeaky wheel? Addressing employees' issues as soon as possible, even the ones that seem whiny and unsubstantiated, can be very effective in avoiding employees becoming wilfully blind at work.

A POSITIVE OUTLOOK

Avoiding wilful blindness means that one is open to new theories of thought and new prospects—which means that willful blindness can be kept to a minimum within a company’s culture.

Not long ago, I read a story about how oil companies are explaining to investors that one needs to think about the oil picture in a different way. For oil companies and investors, that new thinking means taking off their blinders, getting rid of any blind spots, and realizing that gas analysts are telling us to measure acreage in three

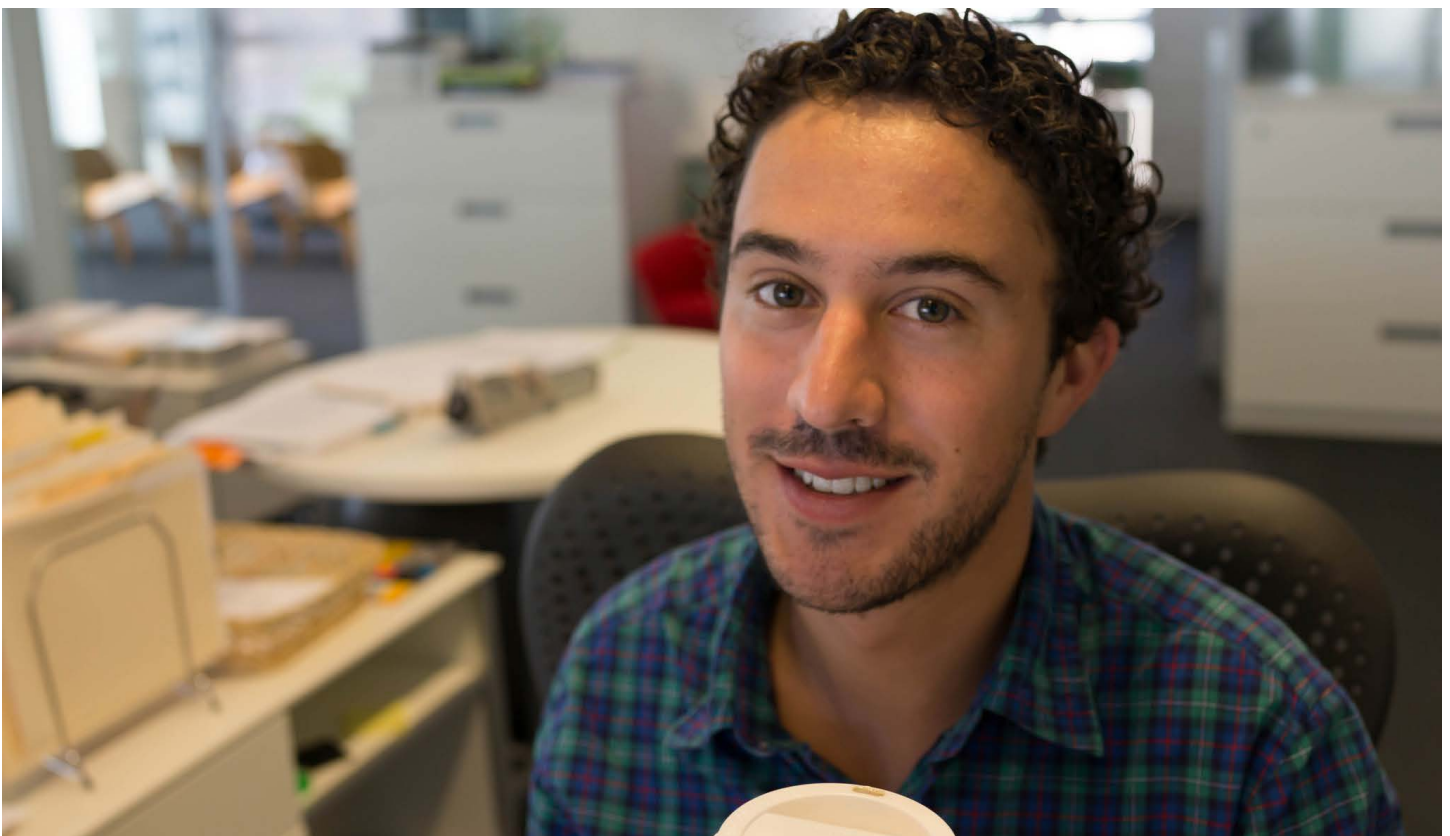
dimensions instead of two, especially in Texas. According to gas analysts that means the birth of the new term, or new to most non-oil people, “*net effective acreage*”.

Putting aside the blinders, for oil people this means that when calculating the actual acreage of harvested “gas”, they must take into consideration the layers of rock into which they can bore, and that have the capability of being developed.

A company, any company, needs to keep a positive outlook and realize

that with any given issue or any given product that there aren’t that many individuals who are against it. Most individuals within a company’s pecking order just want to participate in the decision making process.

However, having said this, voicing their own opinions depends on how comfortable employees feel within the company structure and culture. They must believe that their opinion matters or at the very least, will be heard without invoking negative consequences.



A SHOCKING DISCOVERY



A friend of mine was working as the director of a subsidized child care program which assists low-income families in paying their fees and still be able to receive quality child care. The organization was funded by the state as well as the government, so the company had to follow very stringent rules and regulations. There were legal forms that had to be filed with the government every month, not to mention documents dealing with individuals who were provided assistance through the organization.

My friend had been working for about six months when she came to

a crossroads: to wear or not to wear a blindfold. Should she choose to become wilfully blind or should she expose what awareness she was beginning to realize and identify?

The problem was that although the owner of the organization allowed for many different approaches, such as round table discussions, no one felt that the culture allowed for “truth”. Out of fear of reprisal and/or loss of their jobs, employees did not dare speak up. Generally, it is true that individuals tend to speak more frankly when they are in one-to-one conversations; however, in this company culture, the employees were silent due to their fears.

Being the brave soul that she is, my friend discovered that former directors had not signed some government documents. She had not been the one to fill them out; she did not know the documents’ history, nor the history of the people who were outlined in them. Bringing this to her manager’s attention, she was told to “just sign the papers”. Had my friend done so, she would have been choosing wilful blindness.

After my friend brought this apparent signature oversight to her manager, who was the owner of the company, she was told to “sign the papers, or else.”

She thought perhaps her superior did not understand what type of documents were in question. My friend explained the gravity of the situation to the manager. These documents claimed that the organization was being paid to care for children who were no longer in the system. Therefore, if my friend signed the forms, she would be committing fraud.

Again, the boss told her to “sign the papers or else”.

My friend was trying desperately to focus on understanding what her boss was saying; she couldn't believe her ears. For her, integrity was high on her list of values and generally that would not have been at odds in the

work environment. But now, without her blinders on and having made the choice to avoid becoming blind, she stood with her toes over the precipice knowing that losing her high paying position was a real possibility. Knowing full well what “or else” meant, she refused.

Ultimately, because of her strong value system she was entirely unable to choose wilful blindness in this situation. She refused to sign those documents. She chose to keep her eyes wide open. She was fired. Not only was she fired, but someone came and gathered all the files, put them in the back of a huge truck and hauled them away.



REMOVING THE BLINDERS



There were definitely “issues” that my friend did not want to raise at work but sometimes we have to make difficult choices if we are going to honor the values by which we live. Often the situation in the work place is not as bad as what my friend had to experience, but in caustic environments it can be. It is up to managers or team leaders to insure that the work environment remains corrosive free. Otherwise, the company will ultimately suffer, due to revenue loss and through job retention issues, which is a big problem in today’s society.

In my friend’s case as the director of a huge organization, her employer did not want to hear bad news and the “messenger” was shot. The employee filed a complaint with the legal authorities. Even though this is a worst case scenario, it is used to illustrate the difficulties that can be present in the work force. For some people, “truth” is a difficult thing to practice and it is much easier to turn a blind eye. Willing ourselves to blindness can have very costly repercussions in the work force and in other places in our lives, especially for individuals entrusted with the heartbeat of a company.

Rearranging one’s entire life to keep one’s eyes wide open is not an easy endeavor. Wilful blindness is as strong as a hurricane that has already set its sights on a target for a decisive land hit. Sometimes it just can’t be avoided. Fortunately, everyday life choices fall somewhere in the middle and it doesn’t have to have the result of total destruction. Often it is just knowing about choosing wilful blindness that is half the battle. Sun Tzu in “The Art of War” (chapter 3, paragraph 18) stated, *“If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles.”*

WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE COST OF WILFUL BLINDNESS OR TURNING A BLIND EYE?

What Is The Ultimate Cost of Blindness or Turning A Blind Eye?

I wonder if anyone is upset that Market Watch columnist, Brett Arends, wrote that China has surpassed America as the number one economy.

You might think, “So it’s America and why should we care,” right? Yet the article went on to say that this could lead to a collapse of political and military hegemony. Is the world looking the other way?

Do you believe personally that “it’s about time” some other country got the official title?

After all, if America is no longer number one in the world economy, doesn’t that move everyone up the ladder, so to speak?

China now accounts for 16.5% of the global economy.

Arends believes that this is a “geopolitical earthquake”. What do you believe? How does it affect what you will do in the workplace?

Rome was a world power and now isn’t. Britain was a world power and now isn’t. France and Spain were once world powers and now they aren’t. Is it “just

how the game is played?”

Economic power is real power.

Are businesses looking the other way and donning their blinders, or are we taking notice and planning?

Either blind spots can be tolerated and then the consequences accepted gracefully, or blind spots in our world view or our micro view in the workplace can be erased.

Are you doing anything in your business to eradicate blind spots, or are you tolerating them?

BLIND SPOTS

What are some of the blind spots in a work environment?

The obvious:

1. Misinformation
2. Budget Short falls
3. Missed Deadlines
4. Office rivalry/tensions

Perhaps the not so obvious:

1. Racial Tension
2. Job envy
3. Bigotry/Stigma
4. Gender Bias
5. Homophobia



WILFUL BLINDNESS IN START-UP BUSINESSES

Every start-up starts off with a number of disadvantages against well-set incumbents: they are not the first-to-market, they probably have less money, they have fewer resources and they definitely have a lesser brand (and mind-share) in the market. What start-ups have on their side is the freedom to innovate on business models.

Business model innovation can come in many forms that include but not limited to:

- Fulfilling the need differently (such as from CDs to iPods; from iPods to streaming).
- Fulfilling multiple needs at one shot (e.g. embedded camera and video recorder on a smart phone).
- Telling a story to create a need that never existed before (introduction

of iPad is a classic example).

- Collecting payment based on outcomes (pay per click, pay per action, pay per lead, pay per visit... you come up with your own).
- Create peace of mind while fulfilling the need (hassle-free returns of goods).

I could go, on but you get the idea.

Let's pick three areas and drill down on the business model innovations that are underway here:

1. Video rentals

Blockbuster and Hollywood Video (now, no more) ruled the video rental world for years before Netflix was born. The reason why Netflix came into being? To fix a problem with the business part of a video rental business: late fees.

Originally, Netflix began by shipping out videos. Although this process was slower than going to the video store, it solved the consumer complaint of late returns. Consumers were willing to forgo their desire for instant gratification in order to avoid the bigger problem of "late fees".

Today, the Netflix business model has evolved, and new players like Redbox have come in with their own twist: DVD vending machines at local stores with limited selections for a dollar per night. Perhaps another innovative way to solve a perception problem

2. Car rentals

The rental of cars should be a simple business. You go to a different city and you need a car, so you rent one at the airport, where you will find nine out of ten car rental companies. But what if



you need one when you are in your own city? Enterprise Rent-A-Car comes into play. Having created partnerships with a bunch of insurance companies and body shops, Enterprise Rent-A-Car has a thriving business.

What other innovation could be there? Enter ZipCar (Cars2Go) and the world of car rentals changes again. Scott Griffith, the CEO of ZipCar thought of car rental business differently: as “shared car ownership.” ZipCar calls its customers Zipsters and they get membership to use Zipcars on an as-needed basis on a pay-per-use model. The innovation at ZipCar continues. They have extended the same model of shared car ownership to corporations that are looking to reduce costs of maintaining expensive fleets. Today, they are responsible for more than 20 percent of ZipCar’s revenues.

3. Business applications

In the late ‘90s, a Customer relationship management (CRM) (a system for managing a company’s interactions with current and future customers often involving using technology to organize, automate, and synchronize sales, marketing, customer service, and technical support) would take anywhere from six weeks to more than a year to implement. Then Salesforce.com and Zoho came in, blazing the trend of cloud-based applications. The world of business applications changed almost overnight meeting a customer frustration and need.

With cloud based innovation, business applications could be provisioned in days instead of weeks.

From where else can the innovation come in this space?

How about giving these business applications for free? That’s what a new start-up, Apptivo, is intending to do. They have 50-plus business applications ranging from Marketing to Supply Chain, completely free for any number of users. Monetization plans are on the drawing board and will no doubt be implemented later but for now, completely free seems like a compelling offer.

Whether you are government or private enterprise, innovating your business model is no longer an option, whether you are a start-up or not. If your business model is successful, someone is out there trying to replicate it so you might as well commoditize it after a while and move on to the next phase.

IN SUMMARY



With all this discussion about wilful blindness and the various places it shows up in your personal and professional life, what is their left to talk about?

What if you are not being relevant?

What if you were more innovative?

What does it cost to know about something and yet do nothing about it?

What if we really do all share the responsibility of turning a blind eye?

We can't escape wilful blindness. "It's a human phenomenon," admits Margaret Heffernan, "to which we all succumb in matters little and large." In her book, **Willful Blindness**, she explains that it doesn't always bring us to a disastrous end. In fact, it oils the wheels of social intercourse and it is not inevitable but it is persistent. Sometimes we do have

the courage to see. "When we confront facts and fears, we achieve real power and unleash our capacity for change."

Our brains like the familiar. They don't operate in neutral; there's always a bias. "Our blindness grows out of the small, daily decisions that we make, which embed us more snugly inside our affirming thoughts and values. And what's most frightening about this process is that as we see less and less, we feel more comfort and greater certainty."

An aspect of willful blindness (self-deception) is the topic of Robert Trivers' *The Folly of Fools*. He asks, "Why do we possess marvelous sense organs to detect information only to distort it after arrival?" Although we gather an "exquisitely detailed perception of the outside world, as soon as that information hits our brains, it often



Margaret Heffernan, author of **Willful Blindness: Why We Ignore the Obvious at Our Peril**

becomes biased and distorted, usually without conscious effort.”

It’s a fascinating work, but even Trivers can’t help himself from selective recall and arguments molded to fit his own biases here and there. We are all right in our own eyes. It’s difficult to share examples of blindness without exposing our own blindness. Heffernan notes, “when we work hard to defend our core beliefs, we risk becoming blind to the evidence that could tell us we’re wrong.”

What can we do to escape our own self-deceptions and wilful blindness?

Maybe the best we can do is to balance our biases. In her book, Heffernan suggests several ways we can manage our blindness:

Re-examine Your Life. When we were younger we did this more frequently. But at some point we stopped. “Is it that it gets too draining to keep questioning your life?”

Travel between Perspectives. Hannah Arendt (a German-born political theorist) calls it “thinking without a banister.” Traveling between points of view can be risky, but in the intersection between disciplines, real insight can be gleaned.”

Recognize the Homogeneity of Our Lives. Put more effort into reaching out to those who don’t fit in. “Diversity, in this context, isn’t a form of political correctness but an insurance against the internally generated blindness that leaves [our Congress, corporate boards, think tanks and churches] exposed and out of touch.”

Know the Limits of Our Cognitive Capacity. Go home. Working long hours taxes our cognitive capacity.

Exercise. “The only exercise that seems to nurture, or at least protect, our brains is aerobic exercise.”

Seek Disconfirmation. Hire dissent. This is most critical and often the most strongly opposed. “The ability to endure or even welcome debate and conflict requires practice and protection....You need to create a state in which [employees] have the courage to do something. You want to build organizations where everyone sees provocation as one of their essential roles.” Too many leaders are saying, “Why are they questioning me?” or “That’s none of their business.”

Seek out a Professional “third opinion” Having a small network of people, who will bring you the unvarnished truth and with whom you can have unfettered exploration, are a partial antidote to willful blindness.

True leaders—whether they are at the top of an organization or within it—know that you cannot go into execution mode and retain peripheral vision. You cannot focus both on the woods and the trees. So you need a network to

watch out when you have your head down. There is tremendous value to being able to shut down and focus—but you put yourself at risk if you don’t have people out there scouting the horizon, covering your back.

Pay attention to the Outliers. Outsiders—whether you call them Cassandras, devil’s advocates, dissidents, mentors, troublemakers, fools, or coaches—are essential to any leader’s ability to see.

Challenge Complexity. Provoke skepticism around complexity. Many organizations view their impenetrability as a feat of fantastic intellectual virtuosity. In reality, it’s a huge cause of blindness and explains why, when such companies get into trouble, they can’t find their way out of it.

Endure the Noise. Silence—fear of debate,—becomes self-perpetuating. Without conflict, everyone remains afraid and blind. We need to celebrate those that make the noise. Our heroes need to be more inspiring than talent contest winners and drunken movie stars.

When examining the possibility of wilful blindness in one’s life, we need to learn to ask a few simple questions:

What could I know, should I know, and that I don’t know?

What am I missing here?

As leaders, power disconnects us from reality. Wise leaders create systems to minimize its effects. Perhaps it is also time now to provoke your biases and any limited perceptions.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Faith Wood is a Behaviourist, Certified Professional Speaker, hypnotist, and handwriting analyst. She became interested in Behaviour Psychology while she worked as a law-enforcement officer. It occurred to her, if she knew what people really wanted, and what the motives behind their actions really were, she could do her job much more efficiently. Since she decided to hang up her handcuffs, she has traveled the world, helping people all along the way to better understand their behaviours, and how they impact others. Wood has taught thousands how to tap into the area of the brain that controls actions, which in turn, offers a new way of thinking and a new way of life. There is no doubt that she leaves a lasting impression on everyone she touches. Faith is a mother of four. She lives with her husband in Airdrie, Alberta, Canada.

Reasons you will benefit from working with Faith:

Identify HOW to Do, Act and Think Differently than you are right now

Improve or Leverage existing connections (Human Capital)

Create higher impact outcomes with your existing resources

Be inspired and energized

Learn to identify and more successfully navigate potential blind spots

- Beliefs
- Relationships
- Problem solving
- Processes
- Resources
- Human Capital

Greater insights are gleaned when we pause, reflect and orient ourselves to the potential blind spots that are occurring on our journey.

You know you want more but you may not know what IT is or even how to get to that objective – I help you build a better road map. So, if you are ready to:

1. Notice what you may not have been paying attention to
2. Do, think and act differently in your

quest to produce higher impact results

3. Identify where you are stuck or where there is a gap in learning or understanding
4. Identify your desired outcome and develop attainable action steps for achievement
5. Leverage your known resources differently or more strategically
6. Identify and Design strategies for empowering your own talents, ideas, perceptions, skills and competencies
7. Draft a sequential action plan with measurable outcomes and benchmark able moments
8. Nurture an atmosphere of engagement, commitment and accountability (responsibility)
9. Gain clarity in your communication

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