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For Managers, Principals, Team Leaders and Internal Consultants

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### **Issue No 25: FRAME BREAK – move beyond ‘stuck’**

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Word count for this issue: 1384 words

Approximate time to read: 5<sup>1/2</sup> minutes

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### **FRAME BREAK – move beyond ‘stuck’**

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A series of unrelated events have recently conspired to have me think about how organisations effectively move from the old to something new. This could mean better performance, creating a better value proposition or attracting and retaining better staff.

I thought it might be useful to share some of my thoughts on how some organisations do move from being ‘stuck’ to moving forward – and often then on to improved results.

In terms of the recent events, the first was when I was facilitating a project team who are developing a new consulting service. It was the first meeting of the team and once we had established objectives I could see the project team with ‘that look’ and accompanying silence which means, “Where to next”?

The second event was sitting with the three directors of a client who had some pressing strategic and succession issues and I could see that the meeting was going around in circles and the leadership group was extremely frustrated.

The third event was facilitating a planning meeting for a client who is seeking a better organisational structure and also to resolve some quality issues in its production area. Up to now whatever they tried hit the proverbial brick wall. It seemed overwhelming for them and they were not sure where to go to next.

### **So how do these clients and other organisations move forward**

The approaches that I use come under the banner of 'Frame Breaking'. Essentially, what a Frame Break is, is looking at a problem with fresh eyes or from a different perspective. It's about moving beyond the things that hold you back, to move you forward. It sounds easy but is quite challenging to do because it requires something that many of us often feel we lack: time and space. It is also something that needs to be flexible. There's not a simple, documented procedure called 'Frame Breaking', how you do it varies given the organisation and the circumstances.

In the case of the first group, they had put time and space aside to brainstorm and set objectives for their project but they still felt overwhelmed. So we needed to think a little differently. I drew a simple circle on the whiteboard and inserted the word "Consulting" in the centre and asked them to brainstorm ideas. What followed as I drew the mind map, (a way of creating ideas by association drawn radially to assist with lateral thinking), were some very good creative ideas that I don't believe would have flowed had I just written them on the board lineally one after another. New 'frames' make the brain think differently and more creatively - And yes, this goes for anyone even those who think they don't have a creative bone in their bodies.

After examining some options, the second group made a decision to promote two staff members and delegate some of the tasks of the directors to these new managers. Although this caused some noses to be put out of joint, (a reason many often do not take steps forward), by taking some steps it's clear that the business is now heading in the right direction. The fear of consequences could have doomed this business to "stuckness" - with its resulting frustrations together with low levels of energy and interest.

The learning from this organisation is to just do something. Starting something will re-energise you and open up your options (it's learning by doing). When you are 'stuck' often the only thing you see and focus on are the problems – and this can become self perpetuating. I recall a story told to me some years ago about a major department store and their struggle to make things happen. Out of frustration, the chairman of the board had his chauffeur drive him into the basement car park. The chauffeur promptly opened the boot and pulled out a tin of paint together with a roller and over the next 2 hours the chairman whitewashed all the basement walls. Magically, after the painting things started to happen – all that was needed to break out of their current state of "stuckness" was for someone to take the first step.

The third group were in a different situation – they had quality issues and were 'just going to do something to fix it'. In this case I encouraged them to slow down. We needed to take stock and come up with a solution that would fit the longer term needs – not just patch the here and now. We took the managers out from their day to day activities and they did some team leader training. Our idea was to stop and transfer to the managers' skills, and a different way of thinking about their roles, before trying to take any "fix it" action. Once they had a different way of thinking about their roles, we had some foundations to implement something different. The most important

learning to come from this 'Frame Break' is that the managers are starting to see themselves as managers rather than as hands on day to day operators. It's a process that will take time but the important thing is it has started. The managers are finally seeing how, if they effectively take up their roles, they can build succession and make inroads into some of the troubling systemic issues in their organisation – like quality.

### **3 More Ideas for Frame Breaking**

1. Learn from and celebrate mistakes. Our greatest learnings and satisfaction come from challenge – not from things easily obtained. Encourage the development of a "Learning Culture" where we learn from our experiences and mistakes. A purposefully implemented learning culture will see your people grow (faster) in capability, completing tasks and taking up their roles effectively. A CEO once said to me, (after I failed to secure a \$10k project), "I hope you have learned something as this "training workshop" you just "attended" cost us \$10K." I did feel flat at the time, however, I have remembered these words and in hindsight find them encouraging. And yes, I did learn from the experience!

2. Embrace synchronicity to create growth. I recently met up with the Managing Director/Owner of an international recruitment firm. One of the primary spokes of his business model, (and he is now in 14 countries with more 40 branches), is to create something from unexpected opportunities. So if one of his team needs to move to another country or state, then he will say, "Fine, this means it is time to open up a branch in that place," no feasibility studies - just total belief and support. The Managing Director of the Australian operation said to me, "... with that type of belief and support in people, the owner builds a huge amount of loyalty."

3. Suspend the old ways of doing things and the old functional responsibilities. Look at re-badging some of these functional responsibilities to meet the needs of today's work place. I read recently that Microsoft has a "Chief Anthropologist" – a person in their market research area who looks at ways people live and interact with technology as well as identifying differences in cultures. Could you re-badge your marketing function to, for example, Inquiry and Development? Inquiry suggests a shift in thinking from just marketing existing products to looking at new and innovative solutions. Or could you rename your HR function to Culture and Learning? New names create new frames for looking at things and create opportunities to further promote your strategic intention.

### **In summary**

I have been fortunate to work with and observe many organisations who are great Frame Breakers. They have dared to try something different and have not just accepted the status quo. They take calculated risks and are entrepreneurial; they don't look back or sideways, but forward and leave "stuckness" in their wake.

Breaking the frame is about expanding your thinking and moving away from one-dimensional thinking. It's about finding some creativity, inspiration, energy and courage that starts to get things moving today and into the future.

Look at how your organisation or team is going about building for the future - How can you use Frame Breaks to build your success and even better performance in your business?

*"All the innovations in the world have come from doing something that others would not or could not do"* **Michael Voss (Former captain Brisbane Lions)**

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