

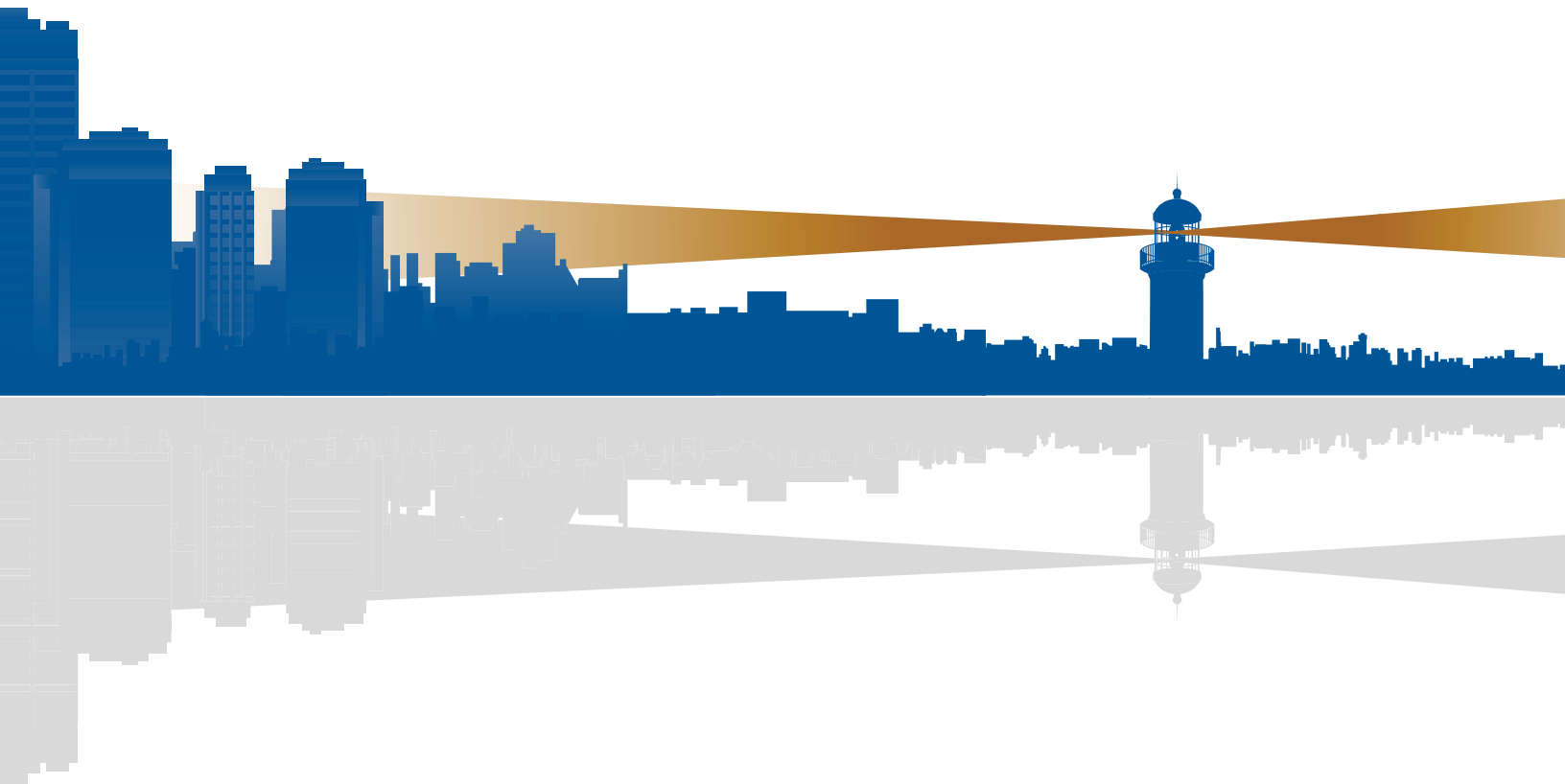


THE BEACON GROUP

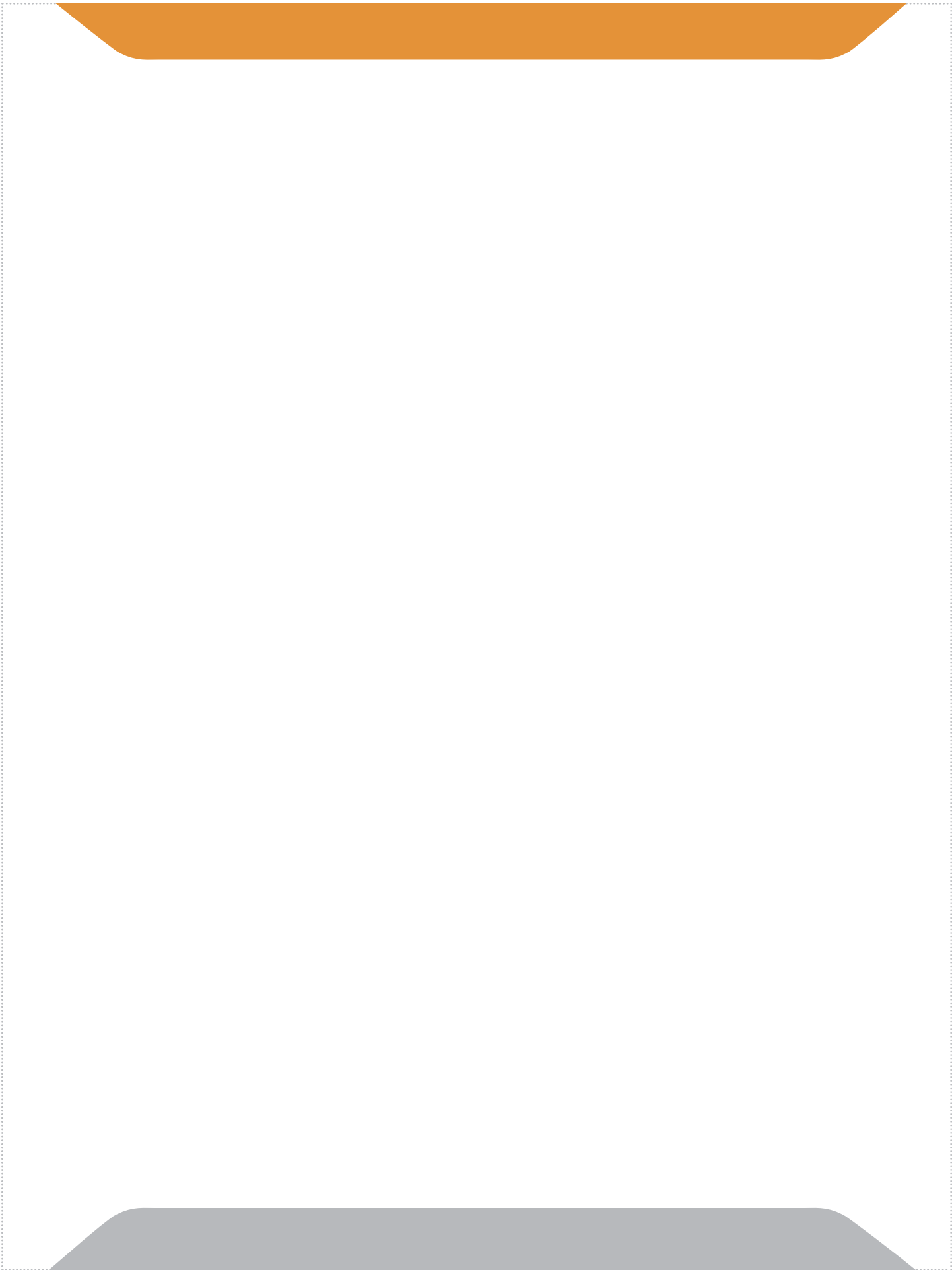
Navigate the Future™

"The Powerful Influence of Perspective"

Issue 4 - Volume 1
Spring 2012



Executive Report on Leadership & Business Strategy





In Our View ...

The dawning of a new year provides an opportunity to stop and reflect on what has been and what might be. It is the pregnant pause that is meant to refresh and, sometimes, it even achieves that goal - albeit inconsistently, and not always with maximum soothsaying ability.

In this case, it was mission accomplished and from the beneficial distance of Colorado's ski slopes with their added benefit of high altitude and ample fresh air, everything came together in perfect unison. The epiphany was brilliant in its simplicity - the realization that mindset affects everything and it provided a perfect opportunity to ruminate on "The Powerful Influence of Perspective" - its majesty and its mystery.

In a world where we do not control much and where the levels of chaos and confusion seem to be rising daily, perhaps the one thing we can control is the way we look at the world. The lenses we use, the point of view we adopt and the way we choose to make sense of things, can have a huge and often invisible impact on our choices and our choices govern our destiny.


It's time to refresh our perspective and learn how to master the benefits of looking at old problems and new challenges through a different prism in order to arrive at a different conclusion.

Yours truly,

R. Douglas Williamson
President & C.E.O.



Fog, Rain and Mist ...



I have always had a fascination with the special and romantic role of the lighthouse, no doubt born of the fact my grandfather was a light keeper. As a result, while I was growing up, I had the good fortune to be his "assistant" during the summer school holiday period.

The light served to guide the ships well when the night was clear and the passage calm, but more interesting to me was the second important role of the lighthouse, the role of the fog horn on those occasions when visibility was impaired by fog, mist or heavy rain. How fascinating, when the conditions change we simply could not do more of what we had been doing, but rather we had to alter our senses and move from sight to hearing.

Adaptation is the willingness and ability to adjust to circumstance and allow other tools to guide us when conditions change and our existing repertoire is no longer sufficient or relevant. So it is in business. When conditions change, we need to alter the methods we use to make sense of the environment around us or we will sail straight onto the rocky reef hidden by the fog.

Leaders know when and how to pivot. They know exactly the right moment to abandon what is no longer working and embrace new tools that are more suited to the conditions they find themselves in. These moments are presenting themselves with increasing frequency, but the question we need to ask is why are so many leaders and organizations not brave or smart enough to switch from sight to sound. Why can they not hear the distant sound of the warning horn?

Other Treacherous Conditions ...

Climate is but one element that we cannot control and that can change in a flash, shaping our destiny accordingly. There are others. Things like currents, shoals, wind and tides. Each one of these typically presents itself at the most inappropriate and inconvenient of times.

- Allowing the current to carry you can cause you to overstate your prowess.
- Looking ahead at the horizon will not help when you need to be looking down.
- Fighting upwind will slow progress while running with the wind will assist.

Claiming false credit for success when a rising tide is lifting all boats will almost always allow complacency to creep into the organizational DNA

There are so many important parts of a leader's job I expect the number of books written and shared will increase as we continue to search for the holy grail of leadership. Having said that, can anyone deny that paramount to a leader's success is the ability to sense subtle shifts in the environment that signal threat or opportunity, and make timely adjustments in the instruments of navigation they use and the course they set?



The Perils of Blindness ...

We can all be perfect armchair quarterbacks once the game is over. We can all spot the moment when opportunity presented itself, but nobody on the field saw it and time ran out, or the ball was dropped, or the throw was too high, or too low.

Blindness is a guaranteed curse in business and, while I don't have the statistics to back it up, my experience and gut tell me that blindness has likely caused more than its fair share of business failures. The human eye is a magnificent thing. When coupled with the human brain, it creates a powerful combination that makes us distinctive in the realm of planetary life. On the other hand, vision can be impaired or lost altogether by a variety of different means from cataracts, to glaucoma to macular degeneration or the simple inconvenience of colour blindness.

In business, lack of proper care and attention to the power of sight can result in commercial blindness and oblivion. The modern leader would be well advised to build up the muscle of sight by forcing the organization, and its leaders, to constantly scour the horizon for the faint signals of change that spell opportunity and fortune. They must learn to embrace new points of view, examine new perspectives and alter the focus of their energy.

Opportunity tends to not present itself in the clear light of day, it is typically hidden just out of sight and only faintly visible through the fog to those whose perspective is skewed to just off of centre.

Strategy as Problem Solving ...

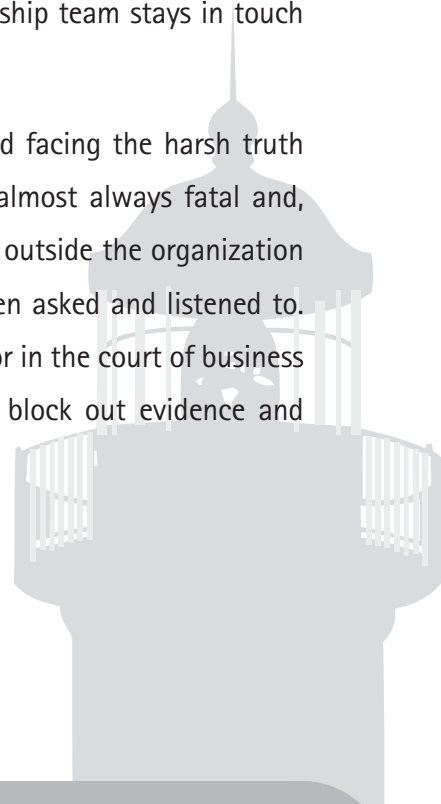
Steve Jobs seems to have been crowned the preeminent business genius of our time, and yet everyone that knew him or worked with him speaks of his "reality distortion field", the fact he simply ignored the facts as other people saw them.

How fortunate for Steve, how fortunate for the rest of us!


Sadly, this tendency can work for evil as well as good and, in most organizations, the reality distortion field is more typically comprised of hyperbole and denial. The fact that most middle managers and junior executives withhold and/or suppress their true beliefs and opinions is a sure sign that the reality distortion field is at work. There are two questions we ask leadership teams that inevitably show us the magnitude of the gap between the way things are and the way others may wish them to be.

- The first question - relates to whether or not decisions are second guessed.
- The second question - relates to whether the leadership team stays in touch with the ideas of their people.

In far too many cases, organizations and their leaders avoid facing the harsh truth and lean too heavily on their own press clippings. This is almost always fatal and, almost without exception, there are people both within and outside the organization who could have "outed" the distortion, if only they had been asked and listened to. Ignorance is not a suitable excuse in either the court of law or in the court of business performance. If we allow our personal distortion fields to block out evidence and dissent, then we are doomed.



Rose Coloured Glasses ...



In a perfect world, the sun would always shine, there would be no disappointments and we would all proceed through life without the inconvenience of setbacks or pain. Seldom does that happen, however, and so we might ask what a person (or an organization) can do to lessen the harsh impact of these events. It seems to us that unadorned candor is one answer, and a healthy dose of constructive skepticism is another.

In the case of candor, we continue to believe that the worst truth is still better than the best lie, and the shortest distance between two points is still a straight line. In a world where the traps and temptations of embellishment have been set all around us, the ability to call it as it is should still be an asset, not a liability.

In the case of skepticism, perhaps if we reframe the negative connotations the word brings to mind and re-label it as chronic discontent, then we can better understand how a curious, critical eye can be our best friend.

At the end of the day, we have an obligation as leaders to deal with the difficult, or as we like to call them the "wicked", problems. Unfortunately, those take a courage of conviction and a clarity of purpose to tackle to the ground and resolve.

Blissful Ignorance ...

We have all seen the face of someone who is literally and totally shocked by some particular turn of events. You know, that deer in the headlights look that a person has when they have been blindsided by someone or something. In these cases, have you ever noticed that to most bystanders there is a quizzical reaction often stated in terms of "How could they not have seen that coming?"

All of us get surprised from time to time, but what about those who lead from the position of permanent blissful ignorance? Those who repeatedly ignore the signs and signals and those who deny the facts or twist the core message.

Whether it is ignorance or arrogance, the inability of leaders to force themselves to face the truth is a troubling tendency and we see it all the time in both politics and business. We put our head in the sand and cover our ears, lest we need to deal with what Al Gore coined, in another context, the inconvenient truth.



Widen the Aperture ...

There is a wise photographer, Dewitt Jones, who works extensively with National Geographic and who has been challenged time and time again in his professional work with finding just the right shot to capture the essence of wilderness life. Although Dewitt is not a leadership guru, or even someone from the corporate world, he has wise insights to share with us.

There are three insights in particular that are relevant.

First - his belief in chasing not the one right answer, but rather the next right answer.

Second - his suggestion that excellence comes from putting yourself in the place of greatest opportunity.

Third - that accepting disappointment, and even failure, in capturing the perfect result is a necessary rite of passage and a sign you are heading in the inevitable right direction.

There is a tendency in corporate life to do just the opposite. To seek the easiest, quickest, cheapest level of closest to perfection you can find and then stop there. The better choice is to widen the lens, back away to gain better perspective and then force yourself to discover multiple right answers before locking yourself down too early to a fixed and obvious path. In so doing, you will have a better chance of turning the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Change the Filter ...

Bias is a dangerous thing - especially when you are not even aware it exists.

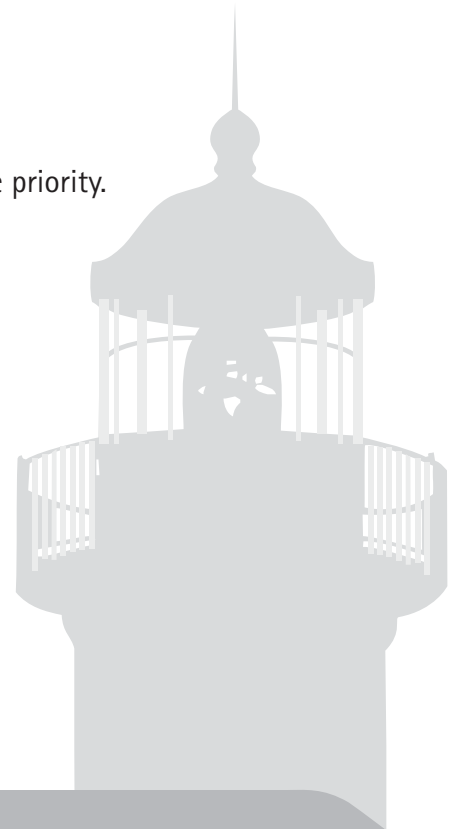
While it is a normal part of the human condition, it does not have to be the fatal flaw it often turns out to be. The puncturing of myths and bias should be amongst the chief responsibilities of the effective leader. A leader who has the discipline to look at problems from multiple perspectives, and who combines that ability with the courage to suspend judgment, will find that problems take on different shapes in different light.

In the fast paced, high pressure world we live in today, it might seem counter intuitive to consciously slow down, but reckless speed in defining the problem can simply put you on a quicker path to eventual disaster. The better option is to go deeper on defining the challenge and opportunity up front by altering the filters through which you examine the issue, and then conserve and channel your speed when it comes to execution and implementation.

Banish bias should be the mantra of the modern leader.

Validating the premise of any argument should become the priority.

Challenging assumptions must become a discipline.



Steps to Take :: Actions to Consider

In the modern business era there has probably been no other period during which so many moving pieces were circulating at such high speed with no obvious or discernible pattern to their movement. It's hard to make sense out of things and even harder to connect the dots and shape them into a clear, confident picture.

As a result, the cognitive and interpretive skills of the leader are being put to the test like never before. The old approach, the tried and tested may not be the best approach to solve new challenges where there is no precedent to call upon.

Here are some things to consider instead.

Reduce Anxiety Levels

In an environment that is full of uncertainty and anxiety, the role of the leader, at any level, is to reduce the anxiety that gets in the way of performance. Healthy anxiety is one thing, but endlessly, spiraling down anxiety that creates sludge and becomes an excuse for inaction is simply not acceptable.

Ask Tougher Questions

Sitting at your desk will not help. The best way to gain a different and clearer perspective is to get away from the task at hand and elevate your vantage point. Get out into the world of your customers and your customers' customers and see what they are feeling and experiencing.



Face Down the Demons

In every organization there are obstacles, barriers and excuses that get in the way. They seem to be known by everybody except the leader or the responsible unit manager or executive. The current climate, with the swamp having been drained, provides the perfect opportunity to slay the demons and deal with the things that are now even more obvious.

Tap into the Creative Class

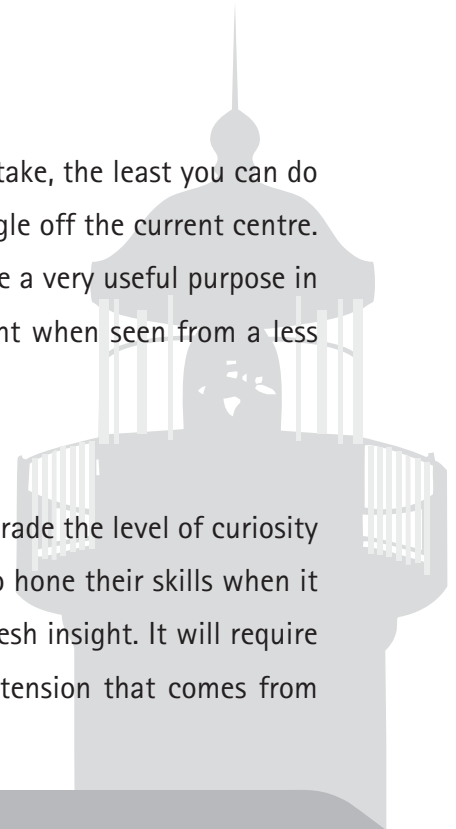
It is highly unlikely that your traditional, buttoned down executives will have the capacity or the willingness to find the "next right answer". Chances are they are just too invested in the status quo to become the active champions of transformation you actually require. You will need to weigh the risks of non-action against the risks of opening up the dialogue to the next generation of leaders from the creative class.

Shift by 45 degrees

In case radical transformation is just too big a leap to take, the least you can do is force your organization to look at things from an angle off the current centre. The enforced discipline of altering perspective can serve a very useful purpose in terms of identifying things that are just no longer right when seen from a less comfortable and traditional point of view.

Amplify Your Curiosity

If all else fails, the least you can do is take steps to upgrade the level of curiosity displayed by your key people. You need to ask them to hone their skills when it comes to posing the questions that lead to new and fresh insight. It will require you to disrupt convention by accepting the inherent tension that comes from useful debate and improved dialogue.





The Beacon Group is ...

We are a Canadian-based professional services firm supporting clients throughout North America and around the world. We work with organizations in all sectors and industries in the development of their business strategies and in helping them leverage their investment in human capital.

Our goal is to support senior leadership teams in their efforts to:

Optimize - strategic positioning and market opportunities

Maximize - long-term organizational effectiveness

Develop - leadership competency and fitness

Create - superior levels of performance

Our practice is divided into four main areas of expertise:

Strategy | Culture | Talent | Leadership

When integrated, this broadly based expertise provides our clients with a comprehensive Organizational Health and Business Performance System.



Our Core Values

We believe ... mindset, attitude, character and behaviour matter. It is vitally important to be clear, consistent and authentic. This is especially true when serving as a "trusted partner" to the organizations who work with us.

We commit ... in all aspects of our client relationships, to being:

Progressive - forward thinking, ambitious and pragmatically radical

Thought Leaders - innovative, audacious and imaginatively bold

Passionate - loving what we do and creating passion in others

Customer Driven - dedicated, involved and fully committed

Responsive - fast acting, intense and able to anticipate

Agile - enthusiastic, nimble, adaptive and courageous

Our Approach

We support ... progressive leaders and ambitious organizations in developing relevant Business Performance and Human Capital strategies that have an immediate impact.

We partner ... with them to create and implement robust strategies, solid frameworks and pragmatic solutions, allowing them to lead with confidence and deliver results.

We achieve ... this through a commitment to:

Providing - a comprehensive, integrated set of organizational effectiveness tools

Focusing - on building customized solutions to meet performance challenges

Supporting - mission-driven leaders with their transformational agendas

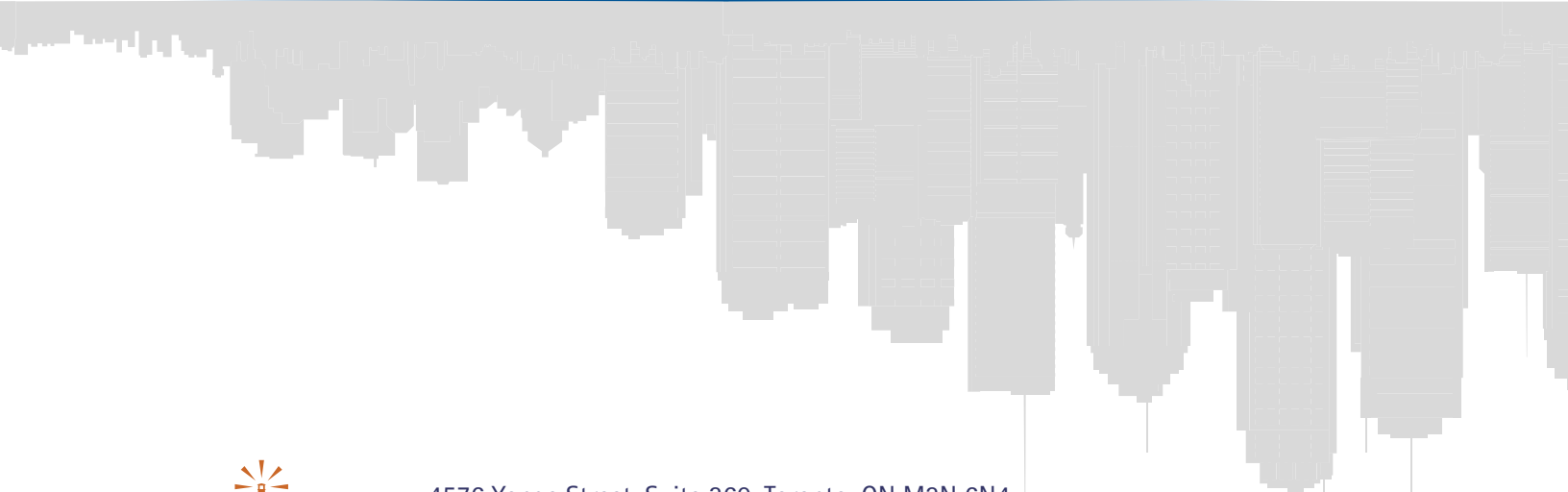
Appealing - to those with a pragmatic, no nonsense approach

Executing - our work with punch, panache and know-how

Delivering - results that make a difference



Strategy | Culture | Talent | Leadership



4576 Yonge Street, Suite 360, Toronto, ON M2N 6N4
416.229.0605 | 866.240.3948 | www.thebeacongroupp.ca