

# ARL™ NEWS

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## Christmas: and a Story of Multi-cultural Sensitivity

**I**n Holland December 5th is the special night when the children get their presents from Sinter Klaas and his African helper, Zwarte Piet. ('Black Pete's ' origins are a subject of debate but he is considered to have been a Moor and thus introduced into the Dutch conscience at the time of the Spanish occupation of the Netherlands in the 16th century.)

We were conducting the 3rd week of a 4-week Leadership Development Program, and had unwittingly scheduled an activity for the evening. It became apparent during a Reflection and Dialogue session that the Dutch participants--one of seven nationalities that make up the entire group of Syngenta Vegetable Seeds managers in the development program--were upset that they were missing this special evening with their children. They had accepted the situation-- reluctantly.

Right after the session two members of the team that I was coaching came to me and said that the Dutch should be excused from the activity that night. After a caucus with all four teams, the decision was made, the program was changed, and the Dutch managers were with their families that night.

It was a vivid event in the life of this group of 28 people. One major objective of the program is to "Develop multicultural management skills and behaviors", and this event was an immensely powerful example of the sensitivity required in managing across cultures. Now, it was two Spanish participants who took the lead in this cross-cultural sensitivity--which has its ironies. First, Sinter Klaas and Piet are alleged to come from Spain, and second, if a Dutch child has been bad, he or she is threatened with being sent to Spain. For those familiar with winter in Northern Europe, the threat seems a delightful option.

**Submitted by Tony Pearson, Partner, New York.**

## Be your Best

**This** quote by Abraham Lincoln has always inspired me:

"Whatever you are, be a good one."

I think he summed up a lot in those few words. Each of us has special talents. And the key is to know and use them to be the best we can at whatever we do, to follow our dreams and to live life to the fullest.

**Submitted by Ronald Waugh, Associate, Santiago, Chile**

## Unlock Your Power

**A**s I was flying home with a colleague from a business trip, he read to me a quote from a Learning Organization Journal. It said:

*"We don't see things as they are. We see them as WE are".*

Good quotes are like good jokes or haiku poems; they are able to convey a powerful message with just a few words, they express more meaning than we would expect coming out of only a handful of words. I like quotes – which I remember, contrary to jokes, which I never am able to repeat. The good of this is you can tell me a joke many times and I will always laugh like the first time. Quotes give me guidance; remind me of values I've chosen, of principles that I have set for myself. This quote in particular, reminded me that we get easily confused by events and situations, and we interpret them constantly – and very fast- to make meaning out of them. It's a natural reaction: we see something and we classify it, as good or bad, trustworthy or not, promising or frustrating, exciting or threatening. That puts a lot of weight on the events, on the situations – or on the people we are classifying. They are "good or bad" for us ... period. We are lucky or unfortunate, and have to cope with them. This quote shakes that perspective. It says that things are neither good nor bad, but that it we who make meaning out of them; we interpret them according to how we are. It puts the weight of the responsibility back on us, inviting us to take charge of what we make out of each situation instead of blaming the circumstances. When we do this something magic happens: it frees us from being helpless victims of events. We are empowered.

**Submitted by Isabel Rimanóczy, Partner, Florida, USA**

## High Performers

**A**s we supported organizations to become high performing and sustainable over the last year, I ran into a book by Jerry Fletcher titled *Patterns of High Performance: Discovering the Ways People Work Best* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1993). According to him everyone can be a "high performer", and he demonstrates it by pooling up a database that he himself collected during a period of over 10 years, containing High Performance Patterns of more than five thousand people.

Some of my favorite quotes from his research are the following. I hope you find them as provocative and challenging as I did.

“Anyone who thinks about it long enough can identify high-performance experiences in his or her own life, experiences that produced results far exceeding those anticipated.”

“Any company that equips its employees to produce their own better than expected results will see across-the-board improvements.”

“People will produce better results if they are allowed, supported, and encouraged to work in the way that they work best.”

“What sets extraordinary performers apart is their effective use of their unique qualities. People don't ever become really successful by imitating others.”

**Submitted by Mauricio Cardenas, Associate, Florida, USA**

## Stop and Reflect

Something that I heard, and that has come back to me again and again over the past many years is this quote:

Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing ever happened. Sir Winston Churchill

Many times I have found myself in a moment, the kind that Churchill talks about. And those are powerful moments for me, to remember not to pick myself up and hurry off, but to stay there. Even if staying there is painful. Mostly it has been really beautiful. What I also learnt when I slowed down, is that an unhurried sense of time is in itself a form of wealth. The other thing about truth that has been a discovery for me in a very real way, while working with managing dilemmas and polarities in my life, is better stated by Niels Bohr:

The opposite of a correct statement is a false statement.

But the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth.

Niels Bohr

**Submitted by Beena Sharma Vilas, Associate, Alabama, USA**

## The Power of Feedback

**F**eedback is a gift. However, all too frequently we are reluctant to ask for it even though we

desperately want it and need it. This year I've experimented with different ways of giving and receiving feedback and have discovered the power of 'fishbowl' feedback. Here's how it works. Each member of a team or group gets an opportunity to first ask for the specific feedback s/he wants. Then after the other members have taken a few minutes to individually collect their thoughts they have a 6-8 minute spontaneous fishbowl-type conversation with the person who asked for the feedback turning his or her back to the group and simply listening and taking notes. So within 10 minutes or less each team member gets powerful feedback and probably learns more than through a direct conversation. The process is easy, fast and very valuable. My hunch is that this process could be a great holiday activity with families and friends as well.

What a wonderful Christmas gift!

**Submitted by Ernie Turner, President, Florida, USA.**



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