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# LEARNING WORKS FOR ALL OF US

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## **"The Princess and the Pea"**

Effective leadership and clear communication is definitely in line with what is being modelled by effective leaders in various organizations. However, it still amazes me that with all the books and teachings that are out there, many leaders in many organizations have such awareness of what should be done but that is coupled with such ignorance as to what (or who) is in need of some focused attention. Why is that?

The old story of the Princess and the Pea might offer us some insight. In that fable, the Princess woke up in the morning with a backache after having slept on many soft mattresses the night before. Little did she know that someone had put a single pea underneath the bottom mattress. The pea was placed there as a test to see if this was truly a worthy person. When she complained of her backache, those around her knew she was worthy and the story ends with a "happily ever after" conclusion. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many organizations. As with the Princess, leaders in many organizations might have an ache or pain and not know the cause. The information they truly need is secreted away under many, many layers and hidden from plain view.

Hierarchical structures serve to preserve and protect the "mattress effect", sheltering the person at the top from the source of the problem. Communication processes that should serve to root out the underlying issues are often ineffective. The mattress factories keep cranking out the products and the leaders keep having aches and pains and don't get around to making their way through all the layers down to the heart of the matter. Policies designed to either outlaw peas or build softer mattresses won't do it. Communication processes that encourage positive interpersonal working relationships amongst all levels are critical.

In many ways, building effective teams and ensuring that high levels of communication exist help to get rid of many of the lumps and bumps that otherwise might cause some grief. It comes down to ensuring that there is no one out there who wants to slip a pea under the mattress in order to either ruin your night's sleep or test if you are worthy. Without that people connection, you may be in for some sleepless nights ahead. The Princess was fortunate in that she was told of the reason for her backache. Many

leaders are not. So the moral of the story is this - as passed down through many generations of parents to their children - Make your bed! Contributed by Gerry Parker

### **Newsletter Feedback**

Great newsletter! I can't help but think of my own stint as an Associate Dean and how I often learned the importance of open lines of communication, responsible role-modelling, and clear policies the hard way. I think too many institutions, particularly educational, assume that if a person has an advanced degree in any subject, they will automatically be able to be an effective administrator. This is not the case. While some may be "born administrators," most need some kind of training or guidance to become effective leaders. Companies like yours can certainly help in this regard.

Best

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### **Human Rights Update and Concerns**

On July 8, 2002, over 250 people attended the community forum on human rights in BC. The Forum was organized by the Committee for Racial Justice and the Human Rights Defenders.

The Panelists - UBC Law Professor Bill Black, and human rights expert Sheilagh Day - provided a historical overview of human rights development in BC and described Bill 53's impact on human rights protection in BC. Moderator Rosemary Brown facilitated the open discussion that followed. During the open discussion participants provided recommendations for community action against Bill 53.

Many concerns were raised regarding Bill 53, including:

- There will be no independent watchdog to speak out against discrimination.
- There will be no way to file a systemic human rights complaint - a complaint that has a broader social impact.
- There will be no agency that can file a complaint against the government.
- Free educational services regarding human rights will be eliminated.
- People who file a complaint may appear in front of Tribunal without a lawyer. The small amount of money the government will fund the legal clinic will mean that most complainants will not have a lawyer, or be able to afford one.
- People who file complaints may be required to pay the other party's legal costs if they do not win their case.
- The Tribunal can order mediation sessions and people who file complaints may be forced to accept an offer of settlement even when it is not acceptable to them.

## Breakfast Meetings

For those of you in the Vancouver area, our upcoming breakfast meetings are on the following dates:

- October 31, 2002
- December 12, 2002

This is a time for us to meet and share ideas. Please join us at 8:00 a.m. on the above dates at:

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*“The world in which we are born, is not the world in which we will live  
nor is that the world in which we will die.”*

**Margaret Mead, 1970**



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