

# Q: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ADMIT YOU DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER? A: FREEDOM.

**Written in late 2016 having loved the Leadership Trust emerging concept of 'love the don't know' and then being asked to explain it.**

*Why would any business—or any leader—love the idea of not knowing? I think there's one very good reason.*

What advantage can plunging headfirst into the unknown hold? It's a baffling and paradoxical notion. After all, it's in our nature to prefer knowledge over ignorance. Sometimes we even pretend we know when we don't. It's all part of our collective need to have power over the future, by claiming we know what it contains.

At the Leadership Trust they believe it's this pretence—the 'bluff' that we pretend to know what is ultimately unknowable—that's often at the heart of organisational dysfunction.

To thrive in the unpredictability of 21st century business we need to adopt a different mindset, one that breaks from the mechanistic and bureaucratic approach of the past. One that watches for the future intelligently with a shared purpose.

We've all heard how our world is now moving faster than the speed of thought and that uncertainty is everywhere. Some of us have even embraced these challenges and realised the opportunities this uncertainty offers. But, most of us, individually and collectively, remain in denial.

As seasoned leadership development consultants we want to enable viable businesses for shareholders, stakeholders and customers; to contribute to a new spirit of organisational life; to shed old complacencies and shallow commitments to service. Our vision is of organisations that are communities of human beings. Our aim is to help them perform superbly under pressure in pursuit of a shared purpose, and to be able to respond quickly and confidently to the signals of change, never cowering from them.

When people are deeply engaged in a shared purpose, the unknown is less frightening... and more promising. When we

share a purpose our early warning systems combine to work like sophisticated radar sweeping the horizon. That's very different from the lone sentry standing guard against the future—an approach embodied by the 20th century ideal of the 'heroic' leader or top team.

For us, early warning is as much about seizing the initiative as it is about avoiding threat. We recognise that it takes just as much courage to be challenged as it does to challenge. This is what leadership means to us.

## How we came to this conviction

We have been on this road for decades, ever since our founders left the Special Forces to bring the performance standards and ideas of their outstanding units to civilian organisations. Their paramount value was, and is, *humility*. A deeply held belief that, irrespective of rank, skill or expertise, they did not and could not know it all.

The collective had to be empowered to argue and even dare to disobey in order to win. The collective watched the horizon as a team, not as a solitary sentinel.

Once we free ourselves and our leadership styles from the shackles of having to have all the answers all the time—or pretending we do—then we're free to really spot the patterns and potential of the future.

That's what Loving the Don't Know means to us. Freedom to succeed.