



WINNING BY SHARING

A new way of working, a different way of doing business

Léon Benjamin

A

BUSINESS FOR GOOD
making a difference, one enterprise at a time

PUBLICATION



For my wife Kerry, and our adorable children.



Thank you

Chantal Benjamin, my brilliant sister. Bianca, my indestructible mother. Anna Pollock, my best friend. Christine & Alan Kirtley, Mable MacAteer, Paul Billinge, Mark Evans, Tom Harper, Henry Smith, and Leo Rutherford, for their life saving support. My colleagues on the management team at Ecademy, Glenn Watkins, Thomas Power, Julian Bond, Andrew Widgery, Penny Power, Paul Sherman. Every member of Ecademy.com. Helen Bassett and Andrea Gutwirth for their 'final push'. Kerry Santo for showing us the way.

IN REMEMBRANCE

My twin brother, Adrian Benjamin.



These companies and individuals are *Winning by Sharing*. Without them, the publication and distribution of this book would not have been possible.

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Forward

During the development of this book, I sent friends, family and colleagues the first draft to read for their review. One of these is from a friend and collaborator who gave up his career in IT to become a teacher – a transition which he does not regret making. His response largely describes the purpose of this book:

“There is a lot in what I have read so far that resonates. In fact, you could say, that the reason I am no longer a corporate clone is because for years I felt exactly, as you say, that 80% of what I was doing was a complete waste of time.

I have fantasised for some time about writing a book called "My Life as a Cog" (I don't know if you get the cinematic reference) which would be an account of the empty and meaningless experiences I had working for some of the largest international companies in the world.

It is a shame that (a) I was not 10 years younger when I first met Ecademy, and (b) I was such a disaster at running my own business, otherwise a lot of what you are talking about in the book could have made a difference to my career decisions”.

Consider this book as news from the front; for those who belong to upstarts, call centre agents who've lost their jobs to the Far East, the talent that is being forced out of large companies and the risk-takers among the big companies, who are willing to bet more heavily on the future than they do on the past.

"Winning by Sharing" is for anyone for whom the Internet has caused a fundamental change in attitude towards work and the realisation that a 'career' has ceased to be a feasible way to organise working life. Despite the difficult and sometimes painful transition I am still making to cope with the network economy, I now view work as an instrument of self-development and personal autonomy, and entrepreneurship not as a status symbol, but as an attitude. An attitude I think everyone is going to need.

Like many authors, I'm re-cycling other people's material and re-interpreting it based upon my personal experience, relationships and market knowledge, to tell people that there is an alternative way of working and a different way of doing business. My approach is based on Albert Szent-Györgyi's insightful dictum "Discovery consists of seeing what everybody has seen, and thinking what nobody has thought."



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It's become commonplace in commerce today to apply the biological metaphor to solve or explain complex business problems, and I guess I'm no different. I've always been fascinated with chemistry. When I was eight I wanted a chemistry set and when I was nine, I wanted a bigger chemistry set. I didn't want to create explosives and blow up the garden shed, or make cheap alcoholic drinks to accompany my midnight feasts. I found the whole concept of creating something with completely different characteristics from its constituent parts totally captivating. I was particularly drawn to which elements created stable compounds and which ones created unstable compounds.

It took several years for me to realise why. During this time I read Mendel's laws of genetics, which still hold true today 140 years after his discovery; Watson and Crick's Double Helix on the discovery of DNA and by the age of sixteen was determined to become a genetic engineer. In my year out from school in 1981, I advised Prudential Bache Securities in London on which startup genetic engineering companies were the best long term investments despite the preponderance and huge budgets of the incumbent pharmaceutical companies. My 'big bet' was always Genentech that is now hugely successful. Had I the money to invest at the time, I would have been a rich man ten years ago.

I've continued to be quite adept at picking these winners, particularly in my chosen field of computing and specifically communications. Right now my big bets are on Bowstreet, a web services software vendor whose product concepts are introducing completely new business models, influenced by Don Tapscott's ground breaking book Digital Capital; and ResponseTek, whose real time customer feedback software is, for the first time, telling brands what customers really think of them - but more on this later.

It wasn't until I re-took my chemistry 'A' level, that I re-acquainted myself with the concept of valency. This is basically how it works. Elements in their purest form have one or more positive or negative charges. At an atomic level, when these elements combine to form compounds they give up electrons, absorb electrons or share electrons. The most stable compounds are created when electron sharing occurs. The light went on for me. I instantly identified with the relationship between sharing and stability in just about every facet of life and what happens when you give or take too much. I spoke at a conference in Brussels, twenty years later in early 2002 and learned that recent European research had unequivocally found that the most sustainable, non-destructive means of creating value was by sharing competencies, relationships, and intellectual capital across traditional company boundaries. In other words, the most economically productive approach to commerce was by cooperating in a more profound way than has previously been practised in business, and so I co-opted the dictum 'winning by sharing'.

Welcome to those people who recognise the changing concepts of value, from hard assets to intellectual property and relationship capital, for knowledge workers and micro-businesses who



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are crucial to global economic regeneration and have realised that the career, as an institution, is in un-avoidable decline. Unfortunately, public policy is still based on the assumption that careers are the most desirable form of employment, and that they can be offered to more and more of us.



The future of work

Chapters: *HR stands for Hardly Relevant* • *The unit of work is no longer a whole job* • *Feast and famine* • *Ki work - People on demand* • *The network is female*

Highlights

- Eventually most people will be portfolio workers
- Companies will be able to source people on demand, globally and virtually
- The transition will be difficult but will bring about disproportionate rewards
- The support economy has arrived to serve 21st century portfolio workers

William Gibson the science fiction author famously said, “the future is here, it’s just not evenly distributed”. I read a lot of ‘future reports’ from The Work Foundation, and The Future Foundation, to Demos and Gartner and a variety of other think tanks, but I don’t intend to formulate a rigorous argument to support the views I’m going to make in this chapter. I’m merely recounting some experiences (mine and others) to describe what’s happening ‘on the street’ as it were, because I instinctively feel it’s a microcosm of what will be, in terms of the future of work.

In the past month alone, I’ve met two people whose careers have unexpectedly and abruptly ended. One man is a lawyer who had a senior, well paid job with an investment bank in London. The other is a woman who worked as a project manager at an outsourcing company. Both of them have been through the panic stricken stage of “what the hell do I do now?” Both of them (and they don’t know each other) seem to have evaluated the same options and asked fundamental questions of themselves; Do I look for another job? Am I still employable? What do I really want to do with my life? Do I really want to go back? How will I survive and pay the bills? Do I need social security? Have I failed my family?



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This trend isn't just anecdotal and the frequency with which I see voluntary exits is increasing, with many citing mental cruelty as the main cause. For example a recent email dialogue with a mobile telecoms employee;

LB: This is not a sales pitch but you should join Ecademy if you want to explore doing all those other things you wanted to do. If you want to accelerate your networking and business connections think about joining BlackStar.

Employee: It is a sales pitch ... :-). I cannot look at my private messages on Ecademy! Sorry I need to pay for that privilege. But that is ok! The charge for sending messages is fine - receiving should be free! But then that is your business model- and hope it works!

LB: One day you'll realise this is not a sales pitch. I'm working on bringing blocks of over ten thousand new members. Why am I bothering to give you so much airtime?

Employee: Your comment about airtime is arrogance of the first degree?? Did you work for my company at any stage? :-) It is a conversation and I would welcome any opinion on something I am trying to sell ... Oh well please feel free to dismiss me and I hope you fix whatever really bothers you ... Sorry to see people in pain of any kind.

LB: Come and see me - you don't get it because of your corporate life!

Employee: You are right. Corporate life is crap. But please understand - I've been in corporates for only 5 years. And I want to get out before they kill me mentally. Sad. I was a professor and had my own business and wanted to taste corporate life!!! As part of personal and professional development as it were. The cost of corporate life is too high for me, far too high. I wanted to get out for ages - sorry just waited for a pay off!

If this is happening on even a small scale the implications for corporate productivity and innovation are severe. If you have a large workforce (with its attendant turnover), and people are exiting like this, the potential dilution of brand equity is significant. Ex-employees will relate their experiences and whether they're good or bad, they'll tell everyone.

Just before I started writing this book, I was randomly scanning Ecademy whilst responding to some of my online private messages from other members. I love the surprises that arise out of the randomness of networks. Two women popped up out of the blue, Helen Basset in Australia and Andrea Gutwirth (who runs a charity for women in relationship crisis called- SoulTalk) based in Hong Kong. They both remarked about the concept of winning by sharing in my profile and I mentioned I had been thinking of writing a book on the subject. They both gave me the final inspiration and impetus to actually sit down and write this book. Helen described to me why the concept struck a chord, by telling me her own story, which I reproduce with kind permission;



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"I am so glad I have helped you - yes I would love to represent you in Australia. I am very passionate about helping other women because I know what it has done for me - particularly in terms of self-esteem.

To put it bluntly I handled it very badly when I was made redundant. It happened very suddenly. Here is the basic story:

I had a great job - flying around Australia with a TV celebrity promoting Internet safety, I was well paid and had just built my dream house on a mountain overlooking Hobart with stunning harbour and mountain views. I don't have a partner so I was responsible for the mortgage and everything else.

Like many women I had a huge fear of financial insecurity. I was so scared of what would happen when I was made redundant, I spent 12 hours vomiting into a bucket. I then spent the next 3 days feeling so sick I wished I would die!

Shortly after that I was driving down the highway and was about to turn left to go home when, on a sudden whim, I went the opposite way to the beach. That proved to be a life changing decision.

Ahead I saw a car with the logo "Head Coach" and a mobile phone number - I rang the number said "I think I need your help" and that was the turning point! I enrolled in the personal development program and began the mental and emotional "relearning" needed to unlock the belief that I could succeed.

Head Coach is a personal development company and I have now been involved with it for 4 years and I have seen many people change their lives dramatically.

I sold my dream house, bought another house and sold it, made heaps of money on both sales, and now live in the best part of Hobart virtually on the waterfront, so it's true the Phoenix does rise from the ashes!



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Please let me know if I can help promote our concepts to women. I have just created an online training course which shows them how to set up an ecommerce business, but my real passion is getting them motivated and to have the courage to start - too many women let fear rule their lives.

Get the book finished - there is a great need for it!!"

This year I've had more approaches from outplacement firms and career guidance companies about implementing online community than from any other sector. I've learned they are dealing with large numbers of displaced workers of all ranks and industries and that networks are the only means for them to get emotional as well as practical support from their peers (remember the definition of online community? "*Collections of people who share the same cause, situation, or vocation*"). It's this emotional support that gives networks female characteristics.

The future of work is only about one thing and that's change. It makes no difference if you're an employee, an entrepreneur, a small business owner or freelance consultant, and the means by which we will secure the work we want that suits our individual lifestyles, will be by cultivating relationships.

At the Arab Strategy Forum in December 2004, it was proposed that a simple framework for this new era of the globalisation of work could be understood by the following phases.

Business 1.0: 1492-1800 countries globalised

Business 2.0: 1800-2000 companies globalised

Business 3.0: 2000-2040 individuals globalised

Thomas Friedman whose forthcoming book *The World is Flat*, spoke at this conference, and described the key government policies required to enable their citizens to succeed. More tellingly, he emphasised that the *era of lifetime employment is over* and that individuals will migrate to geographies that support *lifetime employability*. One day we'll see Scottish call centres agents



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working in India for US companies, in the same way we have Nigerians issuing parking tickets in London, for French owned service companies.

When I ask employees what interest lists they subscribe to, or what online communities they're members of, I rarely get a show of hands. This is understandable because their companies provide them with all the relationships they need – or at least that's what they think until they leave or are ejected. I know of some senior executives who were running departments with hundreds of people who have become plumbers (and loving it!).

I've read stories of microbiologists becoming plasterers because it pays the bills and a Reuters executive becoming a teacher. My colleagues and I see this happening every day, and witness the most dictatorial executives truly humbled when their reigns on corporate power come to an end. It's not a blip; it's an increasingly ferocious pattern that is more than a trend or "correction in the market". The reality is that most people will have to deal with the transition that "we" (in the network economy) have been through, but when you come through it, the return is so disproportionately rich, you wonder like Helen Bassett, why you even bothered with a 'career' in the first place.



About the author

Léon Benjamin practises dialogue marketing – *the art of speaking to customers with a human voice*. His passion and domain of expertise: the Network Economy. His service: helping companies and individuals thrive in the network economy.

He was born in Freetown, Sierra Leone in 1963 to a Maltese/Italian mother, and a Sierra Leonean/Gambian father, and has lived in the United Kingdom since the age of seven. Léon has led Ecademy's community consulting practice since 2001 and has managed a number of successful online community implementations with clients including the UK government, Microsoft & BT.

Enjoyed this book?

Need an insightful speaker on the future of work? Want to understand how dialogue marketing can transform your public relations? Need to understand the impact of social software on business and society? Contact Léon Benjamin at:

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