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## 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



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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.



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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."

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



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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 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

### 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 21<sup>st</sup> century portfolio workers

### ***The network is female***

I'm a big fan of an independent news site called the Yellow Times<sup>1</sup>. It has a core of journalists and industry experts who write articles of the highest quality on a voluntary basis. Paul Harris, a Canadian freelance consultant, wrote a superb article a couple of years ago called *Women have ruined the world*<sup>2</sup> that illustrates a point I want to make. He says;

"It has been my experience over a half century, most of that alive, that women tend to be much better people than men: more honest, more loyal, more caring, more thoughtful, more trustworthy, and much less dangerous. But women are to blame for the state of the world because they have utterly failed to take charge of it." But wait, he goes on to say;

"I am proposing a "new world order" - not that crap that George Bush the Elder was always talking about or even the biblical stuff that believers are always trying to force on others. I mean something real, something substantive; something designed to fix the mess we're in. *I am proposing a political movement whose sole purpose is to convince all the nations of the world to change their laws so that only women can hold political office.*"



The article ends with;

“Think this is an idiotic notion? Then think on this: If men don't run things, there is no Hitler. There is no Mussolini. There is no Napoleon. There is no Hirohito. There is no Attila. There is no Genghis Khan. There is no Inquisition. There are no Crusades. There is no Robert Mugabe. There is no Ariel Sharon. There is no Stalin. There is no George Bush. Wouldn't that be a safer and happier world?”

I happen to agree with him. For all men in power, the difference between rape and seduction is only a question of salesmanship. In general, my experience of participating in online communities, mostly in the past few years with Ecademy and Ryze, is that despite their male dominance (Ecademy is over 70% male) the posture, attitude and expression of these communities are predominantly female. By this I mean people are genuinely welcoming, offer unsolicited benevolence, guidance and assistance and freely give the most valuable thing that anyone can give; their time. It's not always peaches and cream and people do fall out – a very small minority have to be banned. Many Ecademy women feel completely comfortable attending events on their own without fear of being hit on, or their proactive approach to networking misinterpreted as a 'sure thing'. This isn't normal for other types of male dominated organisations. When anti-social behaviour arises, the community mostly polices itself in zero tolerance fashion.

I remember a film in which Jack Nicholson played a grumpy, paranoid author of romantic novels. In one scene where he's signing books in a store, a fan says to him “How do you, as a man, manage to capture the heart and mind of a woman so well?” and he says, “I write the book as a man and then I take all the *reason* out of it”. I'm making a serious point here. Is there a connection between The Prisoner's Dilemma and *not doing*, both of which are predicated on individuals behaving *irrationally*?





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To this day, I have no idea what particular combination of software, ethos and policies these networks have implemented, that attracts people to exhibit these female qualities online, but it's basically changing people's behaviour, and that behaviour is female in nature.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.yellowtimes.org](http://www.yellowtimes.org)

<sup>2</sup> Paul Harris, Yellow Times, <http://www.yellowtimes.org/article.php?sid=669>



## 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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## Business For Good Publishing

*Winning by Sharing* is the first publication from Business For Good (BFG), founded by Anna Pollock and Léon Benjamin.

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**RATIONALE** – Business For Good is an expanding, global community of servant leaders with a diversity of backgrounds, skills and expertise who share this common Credo, and who have dedicated their professional lives to making a living by making a difference.

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## And finally...

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