

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.

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 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.

Epilogue

By Anna Pollock, CEO of DestiCorp Ltd, London

If Leon had grown up in Hawaii, I guarantee that he would be a champion surfer and his preferred playground the beaches of the northern coast. Cursed to live in interesting times in North London at the turn of the millennium, however, he has developed surfing skills of a different sort. By riding the waves of enormous but subtle economic and social change, Leon has developed exemplary skills of observation, analysis and experimentation. His heroic tale of adaptability, agility and persistence would be worthy of Homer's focus were the ancient chronicler of adventurers alive today. True to his values, and with no hint of hubris, Leon has decided to share his journey with his peers. Those of us, faced with having to figure out what's really happening to and with our professional lives, will benefit from his generosity of spirit and insights.

Forced by both choice and circumstance to walk on ever shifting economic and financial ground since his early twenties, Leon has in his thoughts, words and deeds literally crossed the chasm that separates one way of viewing the world to another. Like the scouts hired by early explorers of exotic landscapes and unfamiliar territories, Leon has learned to read the signs and place markers for others to follow.

The book is like its author – accessible, passionate, intelligent yet unpretentious, and utterly sincere. This is no management report crammed with buzzwords, acronyms and jargon designed to impress but a set of musings, recollections and observations developed as a self-taught, white collar worker tries to make sense of the world and re-create himself in it and for it.

In the first section, *Tales of Power*, Leon explores the biggest change of all – a recognition that in a digitised, networked world, value is no longer vested in things but ideas and creativity. These invisible, intangible assets now determine the likelihood of success and prosperity for those who can generate and stimulate their appearance. Ideas, like diamonds, are mined from the creative sub and super conscious of the human mind. They emerge from people not the ground, or factories or offices. Their appearance and effectiveness is nurtured by the number and diversity of connections (i.e., relationships) between human beings; the depth and breadth of dialogue; the

degree of honesty, openness and authenticity that accompanies each encounter; as well as the amount of passion, commitment and above all caring associated with each engagement.

In the old order, personal and corporate power came from a hoarding mentality and closed, secretive approaches based on separateness, scarcity and exclusivity. In the emerging new order, power, energy and sustainability depend on an attitude of openness and sharing based on a reality of abundance, unity and inclusivity.

In human terms this shift is equivalent to the north and south poles switching places. Those of us born before 1980 and trained and brainwashed in the old worldview are understandably having difficulty coming to terms with the implications of the new. The forms and structures that will reflect this fundamental shift in perspective are only beginning to emerge and thankfully are still plastic and pliable.

In a world focused on hard, quantifiable and, above all scarce assets and resources, zero-sum, competitive games dominate and the organisational icon is the pyramid. Power is concentrated and leadership and direction emanate from the “top” of the hierarchy. In a world of hard things, change is slow and predictable. Even information is perceived as yet another scarce resource that must be protected and conserved. As each individual perceives that he can only succeed at the expense of another (there is after all only so much time, money, power, prestige to go around!) all encounters take on an adversarial form no matter how politely and courteously conducted.

This worldview collapses like a castle of cards when value is sourced from ephemeral, invisible ideas as opposed to things and when, as a result, the notion of scarcity is replaced by abundance. The organisational icon switches to a lattice, matrix and web-like structure or some form of telecommunications antenna beaming and receiving a constant stream of signals from the surrounding ether.

For ideas to grow, develop, morph and take on substance in this fluid environment of possibility they need sharing, discourse, and playfulness to the same extent that plants need water, air and soil. Connectivity and openness replace separation and secrecy. In a world of soft ideas emanating from the grey matter of organic beings, change is rapid and unpredictable. Inclusivity

and diversity are the hallmarks of successful networks be they families, companies, communities, or nation states.

Most importantly, power concentrations are atomised and vaporised. It is no coincidence that in a digital, binary world of zeros and ones, we are becoming aware that we are all extensions of each other where the zero represents the whole and the one represents the unique power and manifestation of the individual. In the section titled *The Network Economy*, Leon shares his experience in information technology to describe and explain how individuals and companies can best adapt to the new game.

Once your perspective has changed, i.e., you “get it” and join up the dots in a new way, the big picture changes start to make sense at a strategic level. But that does not necessarily make it easy to determine what one should do differently as an individual. That is why Leon focuses the third section of his book on *The Future of Work* because it is the workplace that acts as the interface between old and new paradigms - no wonder Leon talks about ‘Dispatches from the Frontline!’

In a network economy, we humans can return to being living, breathing human beings rather than doings or units of production and consumption in an inanimate economic machine. More of us can and will enjoy a higher degree of self-direction, autonomy and responsibility than at any other period of history.

Global connectivity enables us to address our social and emotional needs by participating in a multiplicity of on and off line communities that are shaped less by geography and more by common interest and focus. Increasingly we are seen and see ourselves as a unique mix of skills, experience, intelligence and aspirations packaged on two legs yet capable of transcending all geographical boundaries.

We are motivated by the project, the opportunity, the cause as much as the money or identification with a company or brand. We seek stimulation, fun, growth, meaning, purpose and variety. We know we cannot “go it alone”. We expand our connections, we share ideas and contacts, we learn when and how to trust strangers; when to be proactive, when to “not do”. Our

corporate institutions – especially those tasked with managing us as a Human Resource – can't keep up with our evolution as autonomous, self-directed yet co-creative, co-caring, often work sharing individuals.

The boundaries between our work and non lives blur. Our roles as employee-producers, consumers, advocates, parents, voters, carers, breadwinners, students, teachers blend. Smart brands, smart companies are realising that the worker on the shop floor has the same intelligence as their best customer and starts to tap the knowledge and wisdom of each by treating them respectfully as equals, as co-creators of value. Smart companies, smart brands recognise that any value that exists in a transaction emanates entirely from the need and desire of the customer to complete a task or fulfil a need.

They, therefore, create the ideal conditions in which that customer can pull towards them the goods and services they need. Seller and buyer experience their relationship as a joyful dance not an exploitative game. Sellers develop a web of commercial relationships with other providers to support their customers in accomplishing their objectives. These are the themes explored in the last section, The Future of Brands.

At no point in this book does Leon claim to be anything other than a fellow explorer. While his musings pose more questions than answers, that is as it should be. We are all joined together in a shared task: co-creating a new world more in harmony with natural law, as is now being more fully understood by modern science. Leon will no doubt be pleased if he has encouraged his readers to leave the comfort of their own or borrowed preconceptions and venture forth into a world of uncertainty and change. He will be even more pleased, if you the reader are encouraged to do likewise.

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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