

Sporting chance

Experts, work and other experiences



The freewheelin'

Peter Geyer

Rules and regulations, who needs them?

Throw 'em out the door

Graham Nash

What do they know of cricket, who only cricket know? To answer involves ideas as well as facts.

C L R James

I just look in my book of liars for your name

Walter Becker

Peter Geyer (INTP) sells his ideas through training courses, with mixed feelings regarding the method.

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In a recent newspaper lifestyle supplement, the nutrition expert Rosemary Stanton dismantled the notion of fad diets with some simple facts about food and exercise (2005). In doing so, Stanton bemoaned the malign influences on diet, such as marketers and celebrities, wondering why experts don't get similar responses from the public.

Of course, this may have something to do with the language of food measurement. In my decades of life I've never seen anybody produce the amounts prescribed for a portion, serve or standard drink, which makes them fairly useless in a practical sense.

Food is everywhere, so you might not think you need someone to tell you about it: but recipe books continue to sell in droves in this country, for reasons that escape this cook. And the female market, at least, is filled with magazines that tell you how to live your life—perhaps with celebrities as role models, which is a little frightening, particularly when you work out that their lives aren't like yours at all.

From looking at a collection of *New Idea* magazines at my local fish and chips shop (just the covers, really, but I know no-one will believe me), it seems that celebrity life is continual angst and trauma, not really something to be emulated at all. Perhaps the stark reality and lack of nutritional correctness in such places encourages reflection on those lines, when gazing at people who probably wouldn't want to be seen in a fish and chips shop, were they even to know that such places exist.

In these publications, words such as 'fear' and 'tragedy' seem to overwhelm 'happiness' and even 'love', much like others such as 'anger', 'fury', 'shock', 'outrage' and 'shame' that proliferate around the media

these days. It suggests that celebrities, if not the general populace, are bordering on something akin to road rage or some other passion at all times, and that the quiet cup of tea in the kitchen is no longer a part of our frenzied world, with energy drinks the new pick-me-up.

C G Jung would probably suggest that all of this relates to the unconscious, and that there's no real decision-making going on here, at the conscious level at any rate. But there's nothing irregular in this, unless you don't like what people are doing and would prefer the practice of calmer or 'higher' pursuits—or things you'd like, anyway.

What celebrities say can sometimes be a little incongruous as well. Graham Nash wasn't alone in making quasi-revolutionary statements during a Crosby, Stills and Nash concert in 1983, recently available on DVD (2003). The music and the harmonies are excellent, but tarnished in some way by the spectacle of these rich men expressing outrage in a setting where, from memory, ticket prices were fairly steep. It's another world, I suppose, and unconscious at that.

The mercantile world has been around for quite a while, probably predating civilisation at one level. But it seems that buying and selling is now part of every activity, and that it's expected that you'll advertise this or promote that, without the qualms that now belong to a former age.

A few years ago, an ESTJ senior manager with whom I had dealings on the MBTI stated baldly that we were all salesmen, anyway. This made me squirm a bit, as I don't see myself and what I do in that way at all. I thought this an extreme view of customer service principles. I considered ideas, at least, to be exempt from this view, but that wasn't the case for her.

Position, influence and wealth don't necessarily mix with **sagacity**

Business rhetoric pervades the language of our politicians, our professionals, our academics, even our athletes.

Business customs have infiltrated schools, universities, the public service, even volunteer organisations.

Gideon Haigh,
The Cult of the CEO

Gideon Haigh writes lucidly on this topic in his *Game for Anything* (2004). One of his themes is that the organising of international cricket is now dependent, as are many sports, on sponsors and corporate benefactors.

Haigh is not anti-business, as one might have expected, but he's not averse to critically regarding the efficacy of business methods in various situations, including the motivations and abilities of the people who operate in this manner.

Haigh's essay 'The Cult of the CEO' (2003) covers similar ground on the unevenness of human capacity and vision, and is worth a read on specifically business issues. This is a reminder, if we need one, that position, influence and wealth don't necessarily mix with sagacity, irrespective of type preferences and development courses.

The proliferation of business language in sport is a case in point. It may be fine to describe cricket and football grounds as workplaces or 'another day at the office'—but people don't come into offices to watch others work.

There's something else in sport that drags people along, even when its managers and promoters make play with individual earnings, as in golf and tennis. Not all sports, and not all people, of course. But it's not about role models or risk avoidance. In some respects it's like music and other arts, where there's scope for difference, even eccentricity, amid a cavalcade of 'normal' people.

Part of that is the association of sport with culture and consciousness: why people do get involved in some way, for instance, and why that might have a deeper meaning for individuals than what, on the surface, is just chasing or hitting a ball.

Martin Flanagan recently examined some of the complex interactions of Australian Football and war (2003), beginning with his anxieties about the (then) impending war in Iraq and how that reflects football and the people experiencing war, now and in the past. The well-documented appeal of this game across genders and classes makes it an interesting study, and suggests deep cultural links.

Peter Roebuck's recent memoir (2004) presents some of his experiences and views as a cricketer, teacher and writer, in his characteristically terse style, and invites us at times to see the attraction of a game in which he engaged against the wishes of his father. Curiously, apart from his topic, Roebuck is now fairly much doing what his father wished.

Facts and experts come into cricket and football too; not necessarily regurgitating interminable statistics, but what was done and said, apart from the myths and legends. Haigh quotes C L R James to effect here. The West Indian thinker and cricket writer suggests that cricket—and, by implication, other knowledge—requires an appreciation of life beyond the boundaries of that field.

Haigh points out that the reality of the life of Donald Bradman is now not only non-discussable, given his god-like status, but also a brand name: a postmodern amalgam of the collective unconscious and marketing, perhaps.

In any case, facts can get in the way of a good story. Former MP Cheryl Kernot felt compelled recently to write to *The Age* from London in response to a somewhat jumbled article from Gabriela Coslovich on people who have 'pulled the plug' on a career to do something else. Kernot points out that she did not feel compelled to 'quit by a whiff of scandal', but actually lost her seat (2005).

In the same edition, Ross Gittins notes the economic falsehood of holidays being bad for the economy, without even having to get to the obvious benefits for tourism and entertainment. Perhaps some corners of business still find 'working smarter, not harder' hard to grasp.

As with cricket, so with other sports. In his excellent book *A Game of our Own* (2003), historian and football follower Geoffrey Blainey points out, with succinct reasoning and analysis of both data and context, the impossibility of Australian Football's direct origins in either Gaelic or Aboriginal games. An unwelcome expert, perhaps, in some quarters. One suspects that Blainey's research won't stop debate in these areas, just as adherence to particular principles can sometimes bewilder.

In Victoria it was recently announced that 'high-performing' but stressed school principals would be provided with coaching 'in a bid to improve leadership skills, prevent burn-out, and balance work and personal lives' (Tomazin 2005). Leaving aside the inherent contradiction between 'stress' and 'high-performing' (perhaps the latter is budget-related), one might have thought that the system and work practices need to be re-examined, rather than having coaches.

It's a complex issue, of course, and we're back to 'smarter, not harder' again. But I wonder where 'education' fits in all this?

In education, management and elsewhere, there can be a tendency to think that one method fits all. This is something that is challenged by ideas such as psychological types, of course, and one wonders what headway is being made in explaining an alternative perspective.

For example, an organisation promoting action against depression, *beyondblue*, appears to promote cognitive behaviour therapy as *the*—not *a*—method. This is unfortunate, but they seem to have expert status at the moment.

That's not to say that type is purely and simply the answer, as there are quite a few entanglements with business and other aspects of the current system.

For people who use the MBTI, one of the dilemmas—*contradictions* perhaps—is the business associations that it is a philosophy or way of life, and also a saleable product competing in a marketplace. The adventures of the publisher and distributors—how they develop and promote a product, regulate its access and so on—impact not only on the hip pockets of the professionals who purchase materials, but also on interest groups, academic institutions and public perceptions.

Whether this is a good idea, or not, is up in the air. In some respects it is beside the point, as it's not likely to change.

The main teachers in type (including me) are also all in business. Several respected thinkers in the type field spend their time developing saleable products, rather than conducting research.

It's a necessity, but there are difficulties in appreciating when a philosophy or idea is associated with a saleable product, perhaps one trademarked to restrict its use or access. Countering critiques of the MBTI by saying, 'Why don't you come and do a course?' has inherent difficulties.

In any case, the history of psychological instruments has essentially been one of developers and publishers and businesses, the former usually associated with universities or similar institutions. Isabel Briggs Myers' lack of direct association with such bodies still casts a shadow over the utility of the MBTI—unfairly, in my view, but there it is.

This then leads to a general dilemma. If a business—or someone contracted to or otherwise associated with a business—puts something out about its product, some parts are going to be *information* and other parts *advertising*. How do we tell the difference? It's not easy to tell, because you may need specialised knowledge.

So, if I know about business or marketing, do I know about anything else?

If I know about type, what else is it that I know?

Who should we listen to and learn from?

A friend of mine asked me similar sorts of question about 20 years ago. For me, part of the answer was to read more, read more widely, and read people who engage with the topic and who more or less know what they're talking about.

True, there's *discussion*, but opinion isn't knowledge and you have to be able to make a distinction. Even when someone like Gideon Haigh drolly refers to Madonna as a musician, 'if that's what she does', you need to be aware of her performing history and associated controversies.

This latter part is becoming more and more important, as letters and opinion sections of newspapers and journals are cluttered with by-lines of politicians, corporations and other institutions whose main aim seems to be to *defend* or *declaim* things, rather than to *discuss* them.

There is a tendency to think that one method fits all

The search for blueprints is without merit.

Indeed, it is downright dangerous, because it has denied us liberalism, stoicism and much else, and put in their places fuss and the arrogance of those who believe the true course has been found.

Peter Roebuck,
Sometimes I Forgot To Laugh

In Victoria recently, reports of people becoming seriously ill after accidentally swallowing Yarra River water were initially followed with a government statement that informed us, somewhat incongruously, that the waterway was not dangerous to health.

Don Watson's *Dictionary of Weasel Words, Contemporary Clichés, Cant and Management Jargon* (2004) is a compact interpretive guide. Watson's definition of personality—'a cult'—demands reading.

Journalists are a more complex beast, in that you can generally presume that their topic knowledge is limited when starting out, but their role is simply to report rather than opine. In terms of personality, it may not get past the two opposites of fun and danger, but they might manifest themselves like Annie Murphy Paul or Daniel Goleman.

However, as veteran journalist Martin Woolacott has pointed out, journalists can act as a 'moral corporation' regarding what they find appropriate to report. This seems to be a feeling evaluation, but it doesn't have to be a dominant

function response. Quite the opposite, depending on the line you take on his examples of Winnie Mandela and Pol Pot as people whose depredations went unreported for some time, because of profound antipathy to the activities of the regimes that those two opposed.

Some people are sloppy with facts; others are more interested in a good story than the truth, heading perhaps for Walter Becker's book of liars (as quoted at the start of this article), or similar personal, or even public, compilations.

Is all of this relevant to how people teach and apply type?

Well, *yes*. No matter your type, you have to know whether something's factual or not, whether someone's statements on an issue are more a press release or promotional sheet than an addressing of queries and issues. Otherwise, type becomes the parlour game many say it is.

So, it's a way of gaining credibility, rather being on the edge of trivia. It's one way of giving yourself a sporting chance. ❖

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