

# **Sporting Chance: Experts, work and other experiences**

*Peter Geyer*

*Rules and regulations, who needs them?*

*Throw 'em out the door..... Graham Nash 1983*

*What do they know of cricket, who only cricket know?*

*To answer involves ideas as well as facts .....C.L.R.James 1995*

*I just look in my book of liars for your name.... Walter Becker 1994*

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

Of course, it may have something to do with some of the language of food measurement: In my decades of life, I've never seen anybody produce the amounts prescribed for portion, serve, or standard drink, which makes them fairly useless in a practical sense. Standard plates and glasses seem to imply something else, anyway.

Food is everywhere, I suppose, so you might not think you need someone to tell you about it, although 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 really like yours at all.

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

In these publications, words like "fear" and "tragedy" seem to overwhelm "happiness" or even "love", much like others like "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 more a part of our frenzied world, with energy drinks the new pick-me-up.

C.G. Jung would probably suggest that all 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 you would prefer the practice of calmer, or "higher" pursuits; things you'd like anyway.

What celebrities say can sometimes be a little incongruous as well. The songwriter and musician Graham Nash wasn't alone in making several quasi-revolutionary statements during a Crosby, Stills and Nash concert in 1983, recently made available on DVD (2003). The music and the harmonies were excellent, but tarnished in some way by the spectacle of these rich men expressing outrage in a setting where from memory admission charges 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 civilization 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 now belonging to a former age.

A few years ago, an ESTJ senior manager who I had regular dealings with on the MBTI stated baldly that we were all salesmen, anyway. This made me squirm a bit, to be truthful, 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 and considered ideas at least to be exempt from this view, but it wasn't the case for her.

Gideon Haigh writes lucidly on this topic in his *Game for Anything* (2004) a theme being the organising of international cricket, now dependent as many sports are on sponsors and corporate benefactors. Haigh is not anti-business, as one might expect but he's not averse to critically regarding the efficacy of business methods in various situations, including the abilities and motivations of the people operating in this manner. A previous publication on CEOs (2003) is worth a read on specifically business issues and covers similar ground regarding the unevenness of human capacity and vision. It's a reminder, if we need one, that position, influence and wealth doesn't necessarily mix with sagacity, irrespective of type preferences and development courses undertaken.

The proliferation of business language in sport and elsewhere 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 if a sport's managers or 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, something like music and other arts in many respects, where there's scope for difference, even eccentricity amidst 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 and why that might have deeper meaning for individuals than what on the surface is chasing or hitting a ball, for instance.

Martin Flanagan (2003) recently examined some of the complex interactions of Australian Football and war, beginning with his anxieties about the (then) impending war in Iraq and how that reflects Australian Rules 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 book (2004) presents some of his views and experiences as a cricketer, teacher and writer in his characteristically terse style and invites us at times to see the attraction of a game he engaged in at odds with the wishes of his father. Curiously, Roebuck is now, apart from his topic, fairly much doing what his father wished.

Facts and experts come into cricket and football as well, not necessarily as regurgitating interminable statistics, but what was done and said, apart from the myths and legends. Haigh quotes the West Indian thinker and writer on cricket, C.L.R. James to effect here, suggesting that cricket (and, by implication, other knowledge) requires a wider appreciation of life than the boundaries of that field

Haigh points out that the reality of the life of Donald Bradman is now not only undiscussable, given his now god-like status, but is 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. The former MP Cheryl Kernot felt compelled recently to write to the *Age* from London in response to her appearance in a somewhat jumbled article by Gabriela Coslovich on people who have "pulled the plug" on a career and done something else. Kernot pointed out that she "did not feel compelled to 'quit by a whiff of scandal'", but "actually lost my seat" (2005).

In the same edition of the *Age*, Ross Gittins points out the economic falsehood of holidays being bad for the economy, without even having to get to the obvious benefits to entertainment and tourism. Perhaps working smarter, not harder is still something hard to grasp in some corners of business and its associated worlds.

As with cricket, so with other sports. The historian and football follower Geoffrey Blainey in his excellent *A Game of our Own* has pointed out with succinct reasoning and analysis of both data and context the impossibility of the direct origins of Australian Football in Gaelic or Aboriginal games (2003). An unwelcome expert, perhaps, in some quarters.

One suspects that Blainey's research wouldn't stop debate in these areas, just as adherence to particular principles can sometimes bewilder. Recently, it was announced that "high-performing" but stressed school principals in the State of Victoria 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 "high-performing" and "stress", (perhaps the former is budget related) one might have thought that the system and work practices might want to be re-examined, rather than have 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 There can be a tendency in practice to think that one method fits all, both in management, education, and elsewhere. This is something that ideas like psychological types challenge, of course, and one wonders what actual headway is being made in explaining an alternate perspective An organisation promoting action against depression *beyondblue*, appears to promote cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) as *the*, not *a*, method, which 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, or other aspects of the current system. One of the

dilemmas, perhaps contradictions, of the MBTI for the people who use it 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 its publisher and distributors and how they decide to develop or promote a product, regulate its access and so on impact not only on the hip-pocket nerve of the professionals purchasing materials but also on interest groups, academic institutions and public perceptions.

Whether this is a good idea or not is fairly much up in the air and in some respects 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 area spend their time developing saleable products, rather than conducting research per se. It's a necessity, but there are difficulties in appreciation when an idea or philosophy is associated with a saleable product, perhaps one trademarked in some way to restrict 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 been essentially 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 a business or otherwise associated with it puts something out about its product, say Pfizer and *Prozac*, there are going to be some parts information and other parts advertising. How do we tell the difference? In instances like this, 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, and for me part of the answer was to read more, read more widely, and read people who engage you 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 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 bylines of politicians, corporations and other institutions, whose main aim seems to be to defend or declaim something, rather than discuss it.

In a recent discussion in Victoria, reports of individuals becoming seriously ill after accidentally swallowing Yarra River water were initially followed up with a government statement that informed us, somewhat incongruously, that the waterway was not dangerous to health. Don Watson's recent dictionary is a compact interpretive guide and his definition of personality demands reading (p. 249, 2004).

Journalists are a more complex beast, in that you can generally presume that their topic knowledge is limited when starting out, but that 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 Daniel Goleman or Annie Murphy Paul.

But, as the veteran journalist Martin Woolacott has pointed out, they 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 Woolacott's examples of Pol Pot and Winnie Mandela as people whose depredations went unreported for some time because of profound antipathy to the activities of the regimes that these two people opposed.

Some people are sloppy with facts, others are more interested in a good story than truth, heading perhaps for Walter Becker's book of liars, or similar personal, or even public compilations.

Is all 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 of a 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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