



In the late eighties Charles Handy published a book called 'The age of unreason'. In the book he claims that if you put a frog in water and slowly heat it, the frog will eventually let itself be boiled to death. Handy also claims that we humans, if we are not careful, can respond to gradual changes that impact upon us in the same way. Since he wrote that book, most commentators would argue that the pace of change in our world has undoubtedly increased.

The contention of this article is that there are a number of people about to be boiled alive – caught out by a massive change that is taking place before our very eyes!

That change is the massive growth in importance of diversity and inclusion. By diversity, we mean the fact that people are different. Those differences may be visible, such as skin colour or invisible, such as the beliefs we hold. Diversity and inclusion is about the approach we take to those differences. What, I hear you cry, has that got to do with me – someone who presents and regularly pitches for work?

The answer has a number of strands:

1. The one that potentially hits the hardest is the point that in pursuing the diversity holy grail, many organisations have realised that their greatest point of leverage in driving change is when they decide to buy something from another organisation and consequently many - certainly the ones that are leading the way in this domain - are now incorporating diversity into their list of purchasing criteria when buying services. Government departments have long done this, but private sector organisations are increasingly adopting this practice. For example a global professional services firm recently took an idea to a global oil company in the UK and were told that they loved the idea but when they presented to the Board they should not bring the same team. What was the problem

they asked? The team was three white middle aged, middle class, straight men (male, pale and stale!), who happened to be extremely good at what they did, but nevertheless, one of the oil company's purchasing criteria was that any service providers needed to match their diversity standards as well as mirroring the audience they would be working with. If they had ignored the diversity issues, it was made very clear to them that they would not have won the work. In one sense they were lucky, because they found out about the criteria they were being judged against. How many clients have you pitched to where you were judged using standards you knew nothing about? This leads onto the second reason why any self-respecting work winner can no longer ignore the diversity issue.

2. It is widely said on selling skills courses that "all things being equal, people buy from people they like. All things being unequal, people buy from people they like!" Liking someone is closely connected to them being like me in some way and at the very least feeling some sort of connection or mutual understanding. If you have little in common with the people you are pitching to it will be very difficult to create that sense of connection and understanding. Because of momentous changes taking place in our society, the people across the other side of the table are increasingly likely to be different from you, such as in the following areas:

- **Age** – there are one million fewer people in their 20s than ten years ago. There are now more 55-64 year old than 16-24 year olds for the first time. 45-59 year olds now form the largest group in the labour force
- **Gender** – increasingly organisations are measuring the numbers of women in senior management positions and setting targets to increase their representation (Financial Times, 18.11.06 'A contested question of quotas'.)
- **Race and ethnicity** – if you are white and live in Birmingham or Leicester, it



is predicted that you will be in the minority within six years

- **Sexual orientation** – 6% of the UK population is gay, lesbian or bisexual and under the Employment Equality (sexual orientation) Regulations 2003, people have full legal protection against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation
- **Disability** – around 19% of the UK labour market is known to have a disability. Whilst the definition of a disability is a broad one, under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) anyone with a disability enjoys full legal protection against discrimination on the grounds of that disability
- **Working patterns** – supported by various pieces of legislation - are changing. People are working ever more flexibly (part time, job share, remote working etc) and in case you think this is just for junior people, senior people are embracing these options as well, for example one of KPMG's board members works part time and another champions their work on flexible working (Sunday Times 11.3.07)
- Whilst all of the differences mentioned above fall largely into the category of visible differences, there are a whole host of often related **invisible differences**, such as background, education, beliefs, personality etc. so whilst on one level we are all different to each other, the extent of those differences are growing.

If you're someone who is regularly presenting and pitching for work, what do you need to do about this?

When putting together pitch / presentation teams, you can:

- Consider, and if appropriate, ask the client what criteria they will be using to select their suppliers for the service

in question. You may want to explicitly ask about the importance of diversity

- Ask about who will be in the audience and where possible try to match, on some level, the people on the other side. There is a risk here that you look at visible differences and make all sorts of assumptions about what that means, for example one pitch team was presenting to a team who were all Asian and they therefore thought it would be good to have Asian people on their team. The client expressed reservations about this because the local Asian community was particularly tight knit and he was concerned about confidentiality issues
- Brief the team on any diversity issues, including the approach your own organisation is adopting
- Consider any issues of difference when developing the presentation, for example, I recently did a presentation where we used a CD of people talking. The speakers we used were supplied by the venue and were poor quality. At the end of playing it one person in the audience said he had a hearing impairment and did not hear a word of what was said! He actually told us, but most clients don't. The effect for him was that he felt excluded which is hardly the frame of mind you want somebody to be in when they are thinking about whether to buy your services. Had we checked in advance, we could have averted this situation.

In closing, if you are committed to be a world class presenter, diversity is something you can no longer close your eyes to. If you do, you will become like Handy's frog – eventually boiled alive!

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