

# Follow the Joy to Performance

## *The Changing Role of the Manager*

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Dawna Jones, host of the Evolutionary Provocateur podcast on <http://Management-Issues.com> interviewed Nick Zeniuk as we continue to explore the scientific and spiritual roots of well-being, high performing communities and organizations, and global sustainability.

### **An Interview with Nick Zeniuk**

As a senior executive of Ford Motor Company, Nick Zeniuk directed up to \$5 billion of luxury car business and investment worldwide. His work in building the 1995-1998 Lincoln Continental, which set company performance records in multiple measures of quality, timing, and cost savings, was the subject of an MIT case study and subsequent book, *Car Launch: The Human Side of Managing Change*. Known for his results oriented approach, Nick's story has been featured in Fortune, Personnel Journal, Automobile and on PBS Television and National Public Radio. In addition, Nick's role in creating high performing teams through organizational learning was depicted in *Working with Emotional Intelligence*.

Based on his success at Ford, Nick has developed Team Learning Labs and Performance Leadership Labs. These Labs provide a facilitated process for engaging leadership to institutionalize performance through social networks. The Labs develop organizational capability for supporting, integrating and sustaining change.

Nick is also the co-author of *Project Based Learning* and contributor to *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* and *The Dance of Change*. He has written numerous articles appearing in *Managing the Rapids*, *The Systems Thinker*, *Reflections*, and *Ford's Engineering World*. After retiring from Ford in 1995, Nick began working as a consultant, executive coach, lecturer and research affiliate at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He also founded KINSOL (Knowledge and Innovation Network of the Society for Organizational Learning).

### **Nick, what do you mean by follow the joy?'**

It is an interesting question because when you study performance and you follow performance you will find joy. If you want to find performance in an organization you follow the joy in that organization. All of the research we have done so far over the last five to ten years around social networks would indicate that to be the case.

### **What is a social network?**

Any network that interacts with each itself and each other is a social network. We have been studying the networks of performance. These are sometimes called the informal networks that are dynamic, ever changing, self-organizing and strongly goal driven.

### **Can you give us an example?**

The traditional managerial system is based on the concept of control which was a reasonable concept 50-100 years ago when managers and senior managers knew enough about the business where they

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could effectively control the business. The idea of control implies controlling people and their behavior. So much of the managerial systems in our organizations are based on controlling behavior: the performance systems, the reporting systems, the reward systems, the various processes, quality control mechanisms like Six Sigma is nothing more than a form of control. At least it has evolved into a form of control, controlling the employees around quality. That is no longer a valid system, it is slowly disappearing and managers have been realizing this over the past several decades.

I think I realized that when I was working with Ford that the idea that we can control the result or the behavior is an illusion. The realization that we were operating under the illusion that we, as executives, could control the outcome was quite startling discovery. What I discovered personally and what we are discovering now is that our focus needs to be redirected from a focus on control and behavior to a focus on results or performance because when we are focus on performance we are focusing on those attributes of performance that enables us to achieve the results what we want.

We went out and started studying those examples of performance, those examples of accomplishments in organizations; we discovered that the people involved in that accomplishment were rarely identified by the organizational chart. The formal organization chart was designed to control. When we looked performance we discovered that there were networks of people and employees including managers that transcended the formal organization chart. In fact, when we looked at some of the networks we studied in Hewlett Packard and the US government, we discovered that there were people from almost every activity in the company at from almost every level working on a particular objective. In one interesting example in HP the people that developed the first digital projector was a group of about six to seven engineers. When we went back and looked at the six to seven months it took to achieve that accomplishment there were about ninety people in that network who contributed. Most were outside of HP and it included customers, competitors, suppliers, and just about anybody you could think of, who needed to be a part of that accomplishment.

So when we talk about networks of performance and accomplishments we are talking about networks that are mostly invisible to us. We intuitively know they exist but we don't how to see them because we don't have a methodology for seeing them. When I work with managers as a consultant, I ask them about the social networks and invariably they will they say, "of course that is how work is done; that is how we achieve our goals but we don't know what they are. We have asked around a little bit and we have a sense of who they are but we really don't have a sense of how deep they are."

### **What does that mean for managers in a hierarchical structure who know it is the informal social networks that achieve the goals?**

It really gets tricky. I was working in Europe with a big organization and introduced them to the concept of social and informal networks and suggested that we study these informal networks. To study the performance networks you must follow the pathway of joy. It is a biological pathway. You can't discover these networks through email or questionnaires. You must sit down with the people involved and ask them, "Who did you do this with?" and if they trust you they will tell you. What we are discovering is that these networks are all biological.

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When a manager discovers these networks the question is what do they do? In this particular case we introduced the manager to the network that was providing the data across several countries in Europe and most of that network was unseen and unknown to those managers. When that senior manager saw that network her first inclination was “Wow, so this is the way we get things done. I didn’t realize that this was the way we were doing things. Now we can improve it, redesign it and make it better.” There were a few supervisors listening in shaking their head realizing that the moment you decide to redesign these informal networks is the moment that the network goes underground and disappears. These networks are self-organizing. You cannot design them and they emerge around goals.

The most important thing a manager can do is make sure that these networks understand the goals, and the strategies for the organization. The next logical question is what is the purpose of the formal organizations? We aren’t really sure; it is something we must discover, but I think it is there to enable the informal networks to performance. Our role as leaders and managers is to enable these networks to emerge and to supply them with goal driven tasks, along with the resources and necessary processes to enable them to achieve their goals.

**What does that mean to the personal or micro skills managers must embody to enable this performance. Is there a pivotal moment where the manager can shift how they perform their role?**

They have to shift very dramatically. When I was with Ford, and I realized that the transformation on the Lincoln that the social networks were beginning to operate and that was the nature of performance I began to question myself as to what my role was. If my job wasn’t to tell people what to do, to direct them, if my job was not to make their decision for them then what was my job? What does it mean to enable? There was a long period of time where I struggled with that question because I grew up, like many managers today, with the idea that management was about directing, making decisions, controlling individual behavior and performance.

None of that I believe is the role of the new manager. The role of the new manager is to listen, understand and appreciate what is emerging around them and to conserve that performance so we allow it to expand; to begin to institutionalize the processes that emerge from these new levels of performance. This reminds me of when Hewlett Packard developed the HP way. What is interesting about the HP Way I realize is that it is it is the essence of management. Dave Packard said, “The first thing a manager should do is to listen; the second is to understand. And the third thing is to show appreciation for that opportunity.” These are the first three rules of leadership and management and I believe that is the essence of much of what leadership is all about. Much of the work I do now is about listening.

Why is listening so important? Because the employees have the knowledge. In our complex organization knowledge is distributed in complex webs of relationships. There is no way that any one person or manager can know even a small portion of the knowledge necessary to achieve the goal. The only way we can understand that is through listening. When we begin to do that we begin a symbiotic relationship between management who define the goals and resources, and the employees who provide the knowledge and skills for achieving the performance.

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When we think about knowledge the most important kind we have is tacit knowledge. The interesting thing about tacit knowledge is that we don't know that we know what we know. The question is how do we discover that? We can't direct it, demand it or control it. It emerges in excitement in relationships of creativity in the form of a flow and it is the role of the manager to create the condition and the environment where there is excitement around the goal or accomplishment. Because where there is joy there is creativity and where there is creativity then the continual transmission of tacit knowledge to create the results you want.

**Here is an adage that whatever you focus on expands**

Something you learn in Taoism that life is what you pay attention to; what you focus on. If you focus on control, on the negative what happens to the emotional energy for what you want to accomplish. If you focus on what we want to accomplish, on the performance, on the joy of working together what is the emotional state? It is in the state of joy that tacit knowledge emerges.

You see little children playing all the time. Someone asked how often does a child laugh? 500 times a day. How often does an adult laugh? 30-40 times. Laughter has something to do with learning and learning has a lot to do with our emotional state.

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