

PEOPLE ARE STRANGE THAT'S FANTASTIC!

We never thought we would quote Jim Morrison of The Doors when it comes to individual and organizational effectiveness so let me try to make some sense of it!

We are all born as unique individuals with innate traits, abilities, gifts and talents. Until you are five years old or so, life is great. You play, create, explore, wonder and develop. For the most part, you are your authentic self and show up that way in your interactions with others, young or old. You are not trying impress anyone or adjust to the "ways of the world." You don't think that being yourself is different or "strange" in anyway. It's who you are.

Then.....you go to school. For the next twelve years, at least, you are taught how to think, how to study, how to conform to rules and how to color inside the lines. You are rewarded for doing things the one "right way" and you are scolded for challenging the "status quo" or thinking differently.

Your individuality, your uniqueness is slowly being stripped away. You are told that being different, unique, edgy or strange is not what works in society. You must conform and be like everyone else.

Then.....you go to work. For the rest of your adult life, if you are not careful, you won't be a unique individual but a title in a box on an organizational chart. A title that has responsibilities, tasks and activities associated with it which are the same as anyone else with that same title. You won't be known as Steve or Kim that has a unique story and background with amazing skills and abilities to leverage. You'll be known as a Supervisor or Manager. How uninteresting, underutilized and unengaged!

Even if you fight this path; society, culture, family and friends may tell you what you should and shouldn't do and what is best for you. Everyone seems to know what's best for you except you. So you go with the flow and become.....average.

Hey, wait a minute! I thought I was unique, interesting, creative, innovative and full of imagination!

We are here to tell you that you STILL ARE! It's just been beaten out of you over the years from both schooling and the workplace. It's time to get back to your authentic "strange" self and be who you are meant to be. Create a grass

roots movement inside of yourself to embrace your true personality, skills and passions. Only then will you reach your potential.

This grass roots movement also applies to organizations. The ones that hire authentic people and allow them to be their authentic selves will flourish and lead their markets since they are hiring authentic people and tapping into all of the "weirdness" that makes people special.

Extraordinary things have never been done by the everyday conformist. It's always been the strange ones. They are the ones that have the biggest impact. Being strange needs to be embraced, not discouraged!

Here are some ways to create a "strange" workplace environment that makes a difference.

Culture - Decide that you are intentionally going to create and embrace a culture that fosters the uniqueness in the individual. Make it okay to be yourself. The goal is for people to work in a natural, uninhibited state. It is leadership's responsibility to create this environment and lead by example. Embrace Strange to Engage!

Hiring - Hire people that are comfortable being themselves. Ask interview questions that uncover this. Zappos actually asks the interview question, "How weird are you on a scale of 1 to 10?" It's not a number they looking for but your explanation behind the number to see how comfortable you are in your own skin.

Teambuilding - Assemble teams with different styles, personalities and approaches. Embrace the differences and capitalize on all of the different perspectives. If everyone thinks and acts the same, you will develop "group think" and miss opportunities to look at things from different perspectives. Creative solutions come from seeing things that others don't see.

Events/Activities - In meetings, quarterly reviews and company events, make it a habit to find out amazingly strange things about your co-workers. The worst job you had, the most embarrassing moment, the worst date, unusual talents (Claire's lipstick trick in movie The Breakfast Club, for example). The more we engage and celebrate individual uniqueness, the better we get to know each other and the more great things we can do together as a team.

These are just a few ideas to ponder. For more ideas on how to return to your authentic "strange" self and how to create highly productive "strange" workplaces, give me a shout. I'd love to hear some creative ideas and thoughts as well! The weirder, the better!