

Carayol Quarterly



By Business Guru and MLN Ambassador Rene Carayol MBE

As we find ourselves increasingly talking about recoveries and upturns, rather than downturns and recessions, one thing has become crystal clear.

Values-led organisations are enjoying an unprecedented renaissance. Over the past year we have focused on culture, leadership and vision, with the downturn proving more than ever the necessity to be unique, special and different in today's expectant marketplace.

This has led to the battle of what we call 'personality vs organisation'.

Let me explain.

In every sector there are the non-descript, almost faceless, organisations that have simply become too big and too inward-looking to have a personality that matches what they internally perceive as their brand.

I'm talking about the likes of British Airways. Or maybe even the BBC.

On the flip side there are competitors that are hungrier, more agile and more 'in your face'; organisations that 'get it' and have a customer-centricity that gives them a genuine competitive advantage.

For every BA there is a Virgin Atlantic with personality, for every BBC there is a BSkyB and for every Microsoft there is a Google.

The recession forced customers in to being more discerning, and this in turn has hardwired some striking changes across businesses in the UK (and the world) over.

We are now seeing customers picking brands that reflect their own personality.

Whilst some have moved seamlessly from organisation to personality, such as Apple (who transformed from a faceless computer supplier to the uber-cool passion brand of today), there are others, such as Amazon (who were THE personality of the dotcom era), that have morphed backwards into an organisation.

For every transformation like that of the once moribund Top Shop, which sat amongst other struggling, non-descript brands in the Burton group to then become the influential, Kate Moss-inspired fashion centre that it is today, there is a fall of one of the 'personalities' such as Marks & Spencer into the corporate mediocrity that it sits uncomfortably in as we speak.

Toyota also went from personality to organisation with their crass and less than honest handling of the recent recall debacle. Many years ago when they launched the Lexus in North America, they also had a seemingly disastrous product recall scenario but they handled it so openly and transparently that sales actually went up and we loved everything about them. Different leaders preside over different values.

And of course we see anomalies such as First Direct, who have by far the most 'spike' in the bland banking industry, but are fully owned by HSBC; itself a global superstar but devoid of any personality.

So who do YOU work with, shop with, bank with or resonate with?

And who does business with you?

Is YOUR brand simply that of an organisation... or a personality?

We intend to find out.

The Inspired Leaders Network is returning for 2010 with a star-studded line-up of those at the very top of UK Plc; people that have driven the leadership, culture and personality of their organisations and have the battle scars to prove it.

From the likes of Kwik-Fit founder and mastermind Sir Tom Farmer to the much-vaunted return to ILN of Allan Leighton, and from Sainsbury's CEO Justin King to communications legend Alistair Campbell, it promises to be an explosive return for the network as we aim to put leadership firmly back on the agenda of the progressive and the far-sighted.

2010 also marks the network's continued expansion into Africa, with events planned in the World Cup frenzy of Johannesburg, the rapidly growing and increasingly influential Gaborone, the quintessential African metropolis of Nairobi and the vibrant African west coast boom town of Accra.

These are exciting times. And we want to share them with you.