

The Symes Report

Edition 4

Moving on up

Re-define your thinking,
future-proof your career



FULL STEAM AHEAD

What do we want?
Women in technology
When do we want it?
NOW

SAY SOMETHING

Resisting the bystander effect

UP FOR A CHALLENGE

Meet paralympian MATT LEVY

"Technology should be at the service of people, not the other way round." – Chris Stanley

The World Business Forum's World of Business Ideas invariably promises a formidable line-up of the most inspiring, progressive and innovative thought leaders in the world, and this year they didn't disappoint.

Speakers covered technological futurism and strategy in organisational architecture to insights from a F1 driver's seat; the 2000-strong audience were amply entertained as well as informed.

Wobi's content director Chris Stanley kicked it all off, spotlighting the humanification theme. We need to focus on the qualities that make us human, he said, and put people back at the heart of the business. He reminded listeners of the importance of tapping into the creativity of staff to understand and meet consumers' needs, and that technology should be at the service of people – not the other way around.

Leading authority on creativity and innovation Sir Ken Robinson has almost become the face of the event. His opening keynote, delivered with a trademark deadpan manner and biting wit – just this side of PC – once again made him a popular speaker.

The 4 Disciplines of Execution author Chris McChesney expanded on workplace culture, citing a principle from US statistician and management consultant W Edwards Deming – if a problem involves the majority of staff, for the majority of time, then it's a problem with the system, not the people.

The bestselling author explained why execution is more difficult than strategy (because day-to-day workload always feels more urgent), and that it relied on four basic rules: focus, leverage, engagement and accountability.

Focus means narrowing down the whirlwind of ideas; there will always be more than there is capacity to execute. First, ascertain the Wildly Important Goals (WIGs). Then, like air traffic controllers landing planes, leaders must track all WIGs, but ensure each team gives their attention to just one at a time.

Leveraging that focus means acting on the lead measure – it's more effective, easier to monitor and

influenceable by the team than the lag measure.

Keep a compelling scoreboard to engage team members. Moving it to game status and keeping score means people will play differently. Of course, the game needs to be ultimately winnable.

Finally, create a cadence of accountability. Strategise push, not pull – people won't disappoint their team. Have each member ask: What are the 1-2-3 things I can do this week to increase the lead measure?

Key takeaway? Always choose the urgent over the important.

Behavioural science expert Kelly Peters shared her insights. She explained how scientific method could be applied to marketing. By applying the basic building blocks of empirical observation, theories of root cause and hypothesised solutions, we can judge using quality of evidence. It's helpful, she said, to think like scientists who approach their observations by first trying to prove themselves wrong.

Technology futurist Shara Evans took delegates away from business strategy for a while and into the future.

Augmented reality, driverless cars, the 1200km/hr Hyperloop, aviation drones, artificial intelligence and regenerative medical technology are all on the horizon.

Such concepts were only recently wild imaginings, and the ability to execute them needed careful regulation. Ethics needs to be carefully considered, and robots will need to be taught empathy. Our new world looks volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous. It is up to us to design the future we want to live in.

Alan Mulally has an impressive backstory, originally heading Boeing in the US.

Eyed with suspicion when handed the wheel at ailing automotive juggernaut Ford, he silenced critics by promptly returning the company to profitability.

His big secret? Culture.

In pole position for a change was staff engagement. At his retirement in 2014, he had hoisted employee satisfaction from 40 to 91 per cent. It was a priority; 40 per cent meant: "That's 60 per cent who are only working for salary, not to build the cathedral."

And it worked. Ford was the sole major US car manufacturer to dodge a government bailout at the height of the late 2000s recession.

His advice in business? First, have a business plan, then repeat it at every opportunity – every meeting, every conference. Implement a communication strategy that ensures everyone knows it. And that means everyone; make sure all corners are represented on the leadership team (not just the cool kids).

Also vital: emotional safety. Humour in the workplace is encouraged – but never at anyone's expense.

Author and founding director of the Wharton Leadership Program Stew Friedman took the stage on the second day of the event.

Societal and cultural shifts meant we needed a different way to think about leadership, he said. And not just about work, about life.

Former professional race driver Mark Webber took the conference in a different direction.

He shared his insights and lessons he'd learned during his time reaching "the Everest" of motorsport, winning the Formula One, an exceptional feat for a non-European.

He said belief in himself was crucial to his success, that it was all about ego, hunger and tenacity. And, of course, the whole team.

Red Bull, he said, managed to pull together a group so passionate that in their first winning season they collectively put in 1200 hours of extra, unpaid work.

There was immense trust involved in motorsport teams, he said, so good communication was paramount, and any issues were dealt with immediately.

Bonds were also strengthened by keeping families involved (annual Easter egg hunts for the kids included), keeping the work environment enjoyable, encouraging members to maintain their health and fitness, and making decisions fast and with a minimum of political toing and froing. Relevant takeaways for any corporate leader. The World of Business Ideas conference, as always, provided a valuable and inspiring two days of innovative and exciting speakers. Symes Group is looking forward to it next year.