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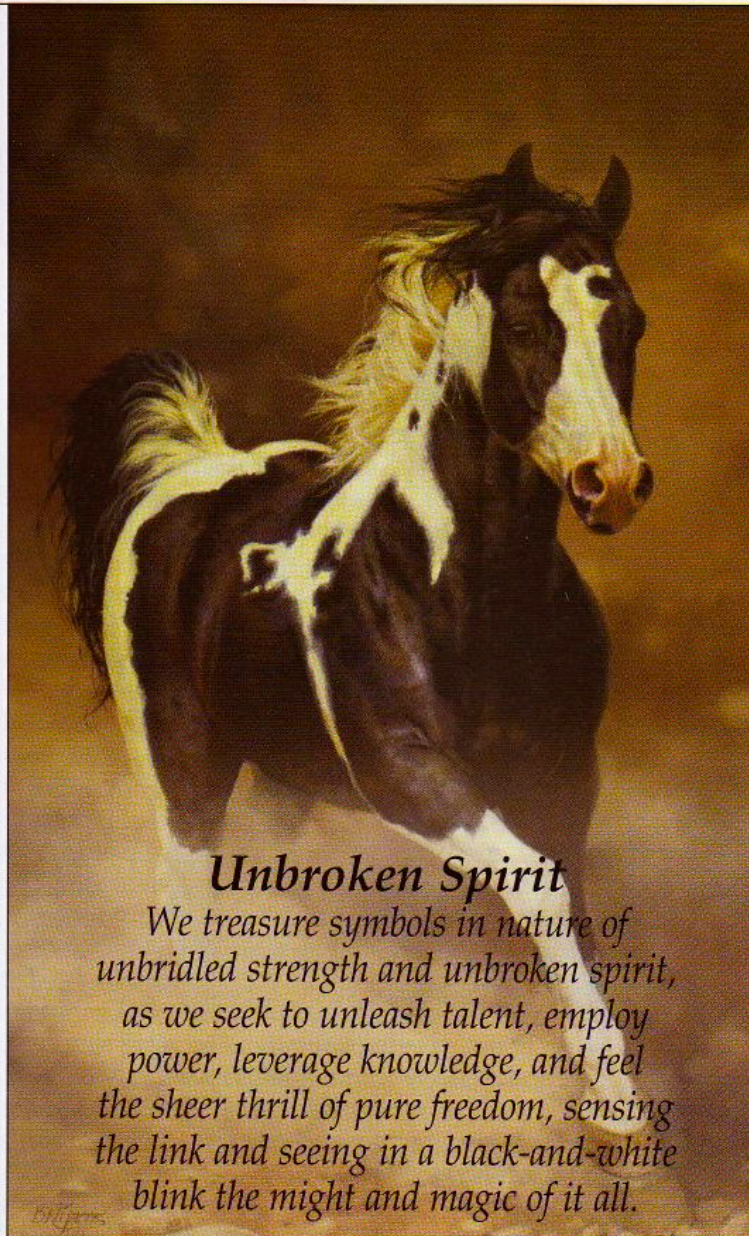
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*We treasure symbols in nature of
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as we seek to unleash talent, employ
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Conscious Competence

Become a role model of flexible thinking.



by Isabella Allan

ON A DAY-TO-DAY basis, people within an organization need to know how to work with inflexible thinking, attitudes and beliefs that their peers, subordinates or superiors may hold. As leaders, our ability to role-model flexible thinking is a 'must have'.

So what model should we attempt to follow in changing inflexible attitudes and beliefs? If we start with the premise that we need to work on our behaviours, skills and thinking, then we could apply a fifth level to the four stages of the competency scale.

Five Stages

The five stages of competency would look like this:

1. Unconsciously incompetent. This is a lack of awareness of a new skill, yet we give it a try anyway. We have high excitement and enthusiasm.

2. Consciously incompetent. At this level we become aware that we do not have the skill or behaviour yet, but we are creative in the way we approach our learning—we try different things to help us master the new skill.

3. Consciously competent. At this level the skill is mastered but still new and we are aware of it each time we use it. Our thinking about it is still fresh yet starting to move towards an inflexible 'I know this now' approach.

4. Unconsciously competent. The skill is now mastered and has become second nature. We can execute it on 'auto pilot', we become habitual in our thinking, and inflexible in our attitudes and beliefs, because 'we know how to do this and it's all been done before'.

5. Competently conscious. We are masters of the skill/behaviour and have also competently mastered our consciousness or thinking about it.

The *competently conscious* level will ensure that we are competent in reminding ourselves about all levels of learning—that for every new idea, project, skill and behaviour, we need to continually apply an approach of continual innovation and awareness of our thoughts, attitudes and beliefs.

What Causes Inflexible Thinking?

Inflexible thinking centres around the fourth level of the competency scale. The road rage driver—a classic example of an inflexible person in level four—is unable to understand their thinking behind the need to get to their destination faster than others, or that everyone else on the road is a fool and that they are the most efficient driver. Many of us believe we have reached a sufficient competency when we arrive at level four, yet we stop developing our thinking and reflection regarding that skill or behaviour; in other words, we don't develop a fifth level of becoming competently conscious. The following



highlights some of the causes of our inflexible thinking:

- our knowledge, that is, the fourth level of the competency scale;
- inability to see more than one perspective or possibility;
- need to know that I am in control, have certainty and consistency;
- slower ability to cope with changes at work, home and in the environment;
- lack of experience and so the fear of failure; or
- past experience that is observed and believed to consistently reinforce just one view point or perspective.

Flexible Thinking Skills

If we consider the thinking that is needed for our future workplaces, we need to become competently conscious about our approach to our

work. This requires us to develop a number of key attributes, including:

- confidence through self-awareness; in other words, personal mastery;
- a daily technique or practice to raise awareness about thinking;
- resilience;
- energy;
- patience;
- whole brain thinking (IQ, EQ and SQ); and
- information to help frame new thinking options/perspectives.

Yet there are barriers and resistance points that we continually come across.

Barriers to Implementation

As individuals, we will be challenged in our implementation of our personal mastery because we:

- have a belief that we are time poor;
- are stressed;
- are unaware of the impact of our communication; and
- may have poor development in our reflection and contemplation practices.

For many of us in business, our minds are like a shaken snow globe—we need to let the snow flakes—our thoughts—settle so that we can become mindful of what they truly are. This requires daily practice.

Helping Others to Change

If we are to role model the idea of 'competently conscious' and help guide others to change their inflexible attitudes, beliefs and thinking, we will have already embarked on a journey of personal mastery. By attempting that journey we will understand that developing flexible thinking:

- is not instant;
- requires constant effort, energy and awareness;
- requires a clear articulation to ourselves about our own needs, expectations and values;
- means that we need to understand the triggers that return us to our old ways; and
- means acknowledging others may not be as inflexible as we once first thought.

As leaders, we need courage to change ourselves first—we need to become competently conscious of our own attitudes and beliefs so that we can role-model to others what flexible thinking is all about.

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Action: Become competently conscious