

## Harnessing the power of our imagination

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By [Gill South](#)

In his bestselling book *The Naked Leader*, David Taylor talks about the three things that decide whether we are successful leaders: experience, knowledge and imagination.

Which plays the biggest part? Not surprisingly, the people with experience say experience wins; the people with fresh knowledge - like new graduates - say knowledge conquers all. But Taylor says both are wrong: imagination is the key.

"It's imagination which plays the single biggest part in our achievements, our leadership and our lives, by far," he says.

Our imaginations are incredibly powerful - think of the horror movies which have us shrinking in our seats, says Taylor. He gives the case study of a prisoner of war who, because of his incarceration, did not play golf for seven years, but used his imprisonment to visualise his game, 18 imaginary holes every day, picturing the scene right down to what the grass smelt like and what he was wearing. It kept him sane, and when he played his first real game after seven years, he had cut 20 strokes off his average, down to 74.

Russell McVeagh partner Ed Crook was delighted to come across this thinking when reading *The Naked Leader* recently. As a lawyer, he is familiar with the experience and knowledge argument, but the fact that imagination is the glue that holds it all together reinforces a recent adventurous move he has made in motivating his property team. Crook has invited a new creative training programme into the firm, run by Creative Pathways' consultant David Kayrouz.

A professional painter in his own right - his work is in private collections around the world - Kayrouz trained as a copyist in Europe, working at the Tate and National Galleries.

Kayrouz also knows business. He trained as an engineer and had his own international furniture manufacturing business in the 1980s, but sold it after the stockmarket crash and decided to turn his hand to music and art.

He stresses that his workshops are not about how good a painter you are, but about using the skills of artists.

"Artists use innovation, communication and transformation in their work. They create new objects and experiences, often using minimal resources," says Kayrouz.

The Creative Pathways workshops introduce people to creative intelligence and encourage teams to apply lessons in art to other situations. The workshops aim to build stronger team spirit and to see and act on innovative potential.

Having already completed one series of workshops with Kayrouz, a personal contact, and after receiving excellent feedback, Crook wants to continue to develop his team's creative intelligence, satisfied he has



David Kayrouz sets a safe environment for inquiry and change. Photo / Supplied

their "buy in". The workshops to be run this year, entitled "Development of Imagination", are an "opportunity for us to engage in a process to assist with developing creativity and imagination", he says.

"We accept that an imagination and creativity skill set assists everything we do, so we have engaged David as creative personal trainer," says Crook.

Interestingly, unlike so much of his business, Crook is not anxious to measure the success of the workshops.

He is happy that the workshops have "unlocked the capability that they were not previously using". The benefits are intangible but there.

"It is likely to help unlock the process of lateral thought," he says.

Lawyers work in a very sterile environment, says Kayrouz. His aim is to allow their creative behaviour to emerge.

"It is much more involved than left brain, right brain," he says.

A recent participant, Graeme Free, area manager, property finance at BNZ, says: "The goal was to take personal ownership of ourselves and our development - it was going to take some creative and open-ended thinking to get us there - particularly in an industry like ours where we work in a regulated environment.

"We were wanting to step outside of our comfort zone, go beyond a 'bankers' view' of the world, and look at the world a little differently. The session did just that, the team enjoyed it and rose to the challenge, which was to leave preconceptions at the door and take a fresh look at things." he says. Having sat in on a morning of Creative Pathways' "Surfacing Creative Behaviour" workshop, I can vouch for the fact that being faced with a blank piece of paper and some paint was a refreshing mind opener.

The first ice-breaking exercise was to find pictures within a random picture of swirls and splodges.

This artistic chaos was then shown to another member of the group who saw additional pictures on the page that I had failed to notice.

Kayrouz's aim with this initial exercise is to get people's engagement. "I'm not telling you anything; here's the opportunity to express yourself. Some people freeze, afraid to express themselves, they feel they'll be shown up and judged," says Kayrouz. "The first thing to do is create a safe environment for inquiry and change."

In another exercise, the group was asked to paint their perfect place. Having got halfway through the picture was taken away and, rather disconcertingly, given to someone else, who made their contribution and then handed it back to the original owner.

An interesting exercise is having something personal taken away from you and seeing how you react - and what you do with it when it's back in your possession.

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