

Lost in the crowd?

Standing out starts here!

By John Mullins

A little while ago I came across a quote which I have started to use to describe the importance of standing out from the crowd. It goes like this, Distinct or Extinct.

It appeared in a Tom Peters book and I remember reading it and realising that often in my own life there were times when it was easier to go with the majority opinion than to stick to my own thoughts which may have been opposite to the group's view.

For a number of reasons I found it more comfortable to put my own perceptions, opinions, ideas and thoughts aside, just to avoid rocking the boat.

Maybe I was just brought up that way, but I guess it's true for a lot of you out there.

The problem is that it can end up being quite a constraint on your ultimate career development. You see the modern world of work no longer needs people who operate like robots.

As much as some companies still try to programme their staff to operate only in a certain way, it is becoming clear that we need people who can make confident and self-assured decisions in the workplace.

Companies also need staff to bring their individual gifts to the work place in order to benefit from their unique thinking and ideas.

You see, the only competitive advantage that organisations truly have is people.

Okay, now I know that you may well be sitting in a job where your work day consists of doing the same repetitive tasks over and over, with very little scope to change things, no matter how hard you try. I understand that, but it doesn't mean you or the company wouldn't benefit from a more distinctive and individual contribution.

Remember the quote.

It talks about being distinct or becoming extinct. Maybe it sounds a little dramatic.

After all, we are not really like the dinosaurs, we at least have the ability to make choices and change our circumstances.

The question is, are you really aware of how extinct you may already be? If you are still relying on your basic skills that you first developed in the workplace, or you merely follow other people's lead without question, then perhaps you are in danger of not adapting to the emerging new world of work?

Maybe you will no longer be relevant to the needs of the work place? Now let me just back up this argument a little.

I was amazed to read the other day that there are a number of social scientists trying to research and analyse the effects of the social-conforming process.

It appears that in many cases when confronted with having to make choices that could appear out of sync with group views, people would go with the group, even if it meant giving up their own opinions.

So much so, that they would even do this when group opinion was proved to be the incorrect view. Thus their conformance would change their own perceptions of what was true or correct.

The fear of standing out from the crowd appears so dramatic that incorrect choices or willingness to go along with something that is faulty is preferred. Wow, just think of the consequences.

In your career development, it starts with how you position yourself. Are you going to stand out, or merely fall into common group behaviour?

Even if you are already in a job, just think of the damage that you could be causing if you didn't take a stand. Now is not the time to back off, and go with the flow.

The working world needs upstarts. It needs you to make a difference. It wants you to build your image and stand out. So what are you waiting for?

Tips for standing out

Think beyond the group view

- Look for a different or distinctive angle in arguments (bring a new opinion to the table).
- View your work as your own creative space, and make effort a unique one.
- "Label" your work with your own personal brand or style.

Market yourself as often as possible

- Take whatever opportunity comes your way to market your ideas, thoughts and talents.
- Speak up when you get the chance (your silence could be damaging your image).
- Refresh your CV (make sure it is appropriate but distinctive).

Develop your talents

- Learn to express your talents either at work or in new assignments.
- You may be functionally competent in your job, but now you need to take the next step.

- Break free from the average and become a specialist.

Hit the refresh button

- Do a thorough analysis of your talents.
- Are they still relevant? Are you expressing them to the full?
- What more must you do to remain relevant in the world?

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