

# Shedding light on creative thinking — Interview with Dr De Bono

Aug 31st, 2010

## Lateral thinking expert to share experience with locals

Sunday Times, Aug 29, 2010 12:00 AM | By Margaret Harris

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Edward de Bono, a leading authority on creativity and lateral thinking, will be in South Africa in October.

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He spoke to Nicola Tyler, chief executive of Business Results Group, about some of the issues he will be addressing at The Progress Congress, on October 14 in Cape Town.

### **What are you planning to discuss at the conference?**

I will present some of the tried-and-tested models, and the history of how the brain works. However, there is some background information that supplements my thinking and I believe, at this conference, I will be encouraged to share some of the history of my work, and how I came to some of the conclusions, medically, philosophically and in the world of business. I also hope to share a number of examples of how businesses internationally have used and benefited from the development of thinking and, in some instances, how they have succeeded by applying some of my tools and concepts directly. Businesses, governments, individuals and institutions all seem to have been willing to explore the benefits of the work.

### **What do you mean by thinking? How is it different to the thinking we do all the time?**

Perhaps a better question is what do we mean by creative thinking? Thinking itself is involved in arranging information so as to realise our values. We seek out the information that best supports our own point of view. Creative thinking, what I prefer to call lateral thinking, is perhaps a better consideration. In creative thinking, we are making a deliberate effort to find a new or better state or to progress. How do we move people from an existing state, to a new or better state? Thinking alone may not do that. However, creative thinking, again what I call lateral thinking, is concerned with moving people forward from the existing state to a new or better state.

## **What are you looking forward to the most about interacting with South African businesses?**

South Africa is an emerging market, in terms of global markets. Emerging markets are playing an increasingly key role in the development of the global economy. It is exciting for me to have an opportunity to present to an emerging market, one where new thinking can be both embraced and deployed simultaneously.

## **In South Africa, there's a lot of talk but not much walk – does teaching people/business how to think inspire them to act?**

René Descartes, French philosopher, said: “I think, therefore I am.” For a number of years now I have said: “I do, therefore I matter.” If the thinking behind an action is inadequate, then the result will be inadequate too. One cannot operate in isolation of the other. In the early 1990s, I wrote a book for the British Police Force, titled Six Action Shoes . This book focused on doing - the skill and art of getting things done ... Progress can only be made if we both think and act.

## **Does being able to think make you happier/more successful at work or in your career?**

That is an interesting point. Many years ago, I wrote a book called The Happiness Purpose. I outlined a number of points about what makes people happy – what is happiness, what is love, and where does it come from. Recently, I presented at the Happiness Conference in Sydney, Australia, which has proved to be one of the most highly attended events ever to be run in the region. Why? Because happiness is what people ultimately strive for, everyone wants to be happy. However, what makes you happy may vary from person to person. When you teach thinking, it does not necessarily induce a certain level of happiness, but what it does do is empower the individual to think for themselves – to become aware that problems can be solved by your own thinking and the ability to think. That is empowering. Does empowerment create a level of happiness – I would contest that yes, it does. It may, therefore, logically follow that teaching thinking supports the pursuit of happiness.

## **Why are thinking skills/employees so important to the industries of today's economy?**

Africa, largely considered China's partner of choice, is becoming an important player in growing the global economy. Emerging economies are faced with a number of challenges – skills shortages, economic uncertainty, political instability, and poor education and healthcare. If you are a company that is looking to grow, be it in South Africa or in any other country, for that matter, then new thinking is required.