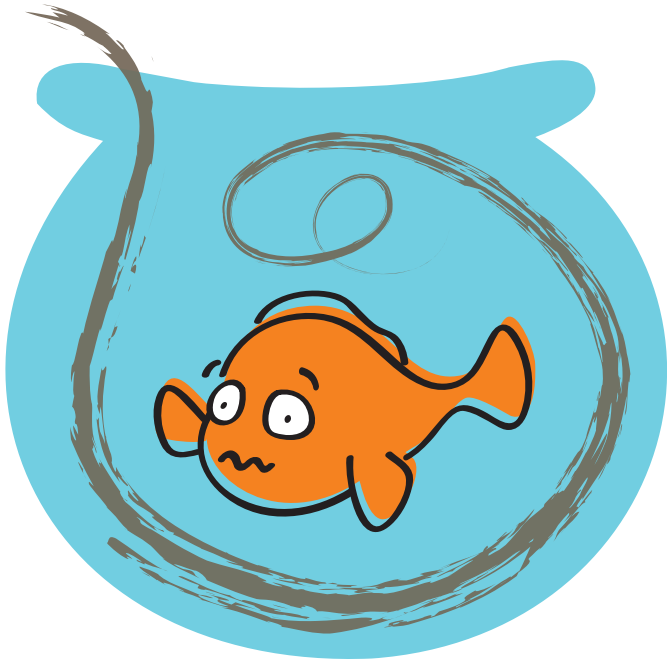


# WHO'S POLLUTING YOUR WATER?

*The Secret of Happiness and  
High Performance in Work and Life*



LIAM FORDE & THE ZONE

## Who's Polluting Your Water?

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Monte Carlo and Auckland.

[www.thezone.co](http://www.thezone.co)

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# WHO'S POLLUTING YOUR WATER?

*The Secret of Happiness and  
High Performance in Work and Life*

*This book is dedicated to the people and clients who believed in us, and had the courage to change the game.*

*One of those special CEOs was Grahame Maher who left us too soon. Thank you Grahame. Your love has been the light for many, including us.*

*If you are up to changing the game, we are here to help.*

**the zone**

[www.thezone.co](http://www.thezone.co)

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# | INTRODUCTION

*“He aha te mea nui o te ao?*

*He tangata*

*He tangata*

*He tangata”*

*What is the most important thing in the world?*

*It is people, it is people, it is people*

*New Zealand Maori proverb*

It is time for a new paradigm at work. It is up to all of us to change the current model to one that truly puts people at the heart. Unlocking our human spirit and using our collective intelligence are the keys to our future.

People and culture should be key topics for every leader. In a recent survey, retention and engagement was rated second only to leadership as most urgent.<sup>1</sup> Research shows the significant impacts that culture can have on employee engagement, performance and customer satisfaction, and enlightened leaders give it serious executive time and attention. Studies have shown repeatedly over the years that performance, creativity and happiness improves in parallel with improvements in the workplace culture.<sup>2</sup> By enhancing the culture,

we achieve significant results time and time again with our clients. By understanding the 'human dynamic' and applying some simple tools, anyone can make a positive impact and create an environment where happiness and high performance are possible. It starts by making people and culture a priority.<sup>3</sup>

Work is an important part of society, it is how we collectively get things done and most of us spend at least half our waking hours at work, including travelling to work, and thinking about work. Work is pervasive, yet the evidence is clear, we don't have it right. Stress is rising along with depression, sleep deprivation<sup>4</sup> and a sense of overwhelm<sup>5</sup> - something is broken.

There is also a significant hidden cost, not to be ignored, the negative impact on human spirit. The Zone believes human spirit is the *real* outcome of every organisation and that a decline in human spirit is at the root of many workplace and world issues.

When people are happy, purposeful and engaged, things get done. When they are unhappy or disengaged, work drags and this negativity impacts everything. People become passengers not drivers. As leaders and co-workers we can enhance human spirit or destroy it - the choice is ours, and every moment makes a difference.



Chapter 1 “The Insight” is the wake up story and the birth of The Zone.

Chapter 2 “The Fish Bowl” highlights how work can be unfulfilling and frustrating for many employees and provides data on the current state of the global workplace. You might find the research alarming. The cost on society is huge, as is the cost to your bottom line, you, your family and your environment.

Chapter 3 “The Exercise” is a real workshop we regularly do to improve teams across the globe. Enjoy it as our gift to you and please let us know how it goes, any insights, improvements or additions. We love learning from you.

As every successive generation joins society, it brings new ideas, new ways, and new innovations. With it comes new-found needs and expectations. This brings the prospect of a new culture. The old business models of communications, music, newspapers, photography, medicine, banking and dozens more industries have been severely disrupted by the digital era. Those who embrace the new will stand out and thrive.

A CEO we once worked with told us, “You can’t bake a cake without breaking some eggs. With every new cake comes a few disruptions, we have to expect it, be aware of it and work with it - that’s our job.”

To be healthy, an organisation, just like nature, needs

openness and flow, otherwise you risk creating a stagnant pond rather than a vibrant ecosystem. In society, when the system is open we see evolution and adoption of new ideas, new ways. However, when the system is 'closed' we see conflict, revolution and oppression- often with tragic consequences. Conflict consumes far, far more resources, including human spirit, than harmony.<sup>6</sup>

Appreciation, collaboration and responsibility are essential ingredients for our future.

Instead of destructive conflict we need *creative conflict*. Creative conflict is a healthy tension between new and old, between emerging forces or competing forces (e.g. between culture and strategy in organisations). When creative conflict is not allowed or discouraged, conflicts go underground, create disharmony and undermine performance. Left unresolved, conflict will trigger destructive behaviours. The unspoken thoughts become louder than what is said in meetings, and the water cooler conversations become where the real discussions take place.

When people in organisations become insincere and pretense takes over, rituals and politics start to flourish. In these environments human spirit wanes or dies, organisations become lifeless and machine like. Rules replace responsibility, pretense replaces honesty, and misalignment spirals into waste. Compliance replaces creativity. Organisations need effective ways to handle

conflict, as a creative process, to reawaken engagement and authenticity.

Of course every coin has two sides.

We also want to acknowledge the pioneers in this work, the founders, leaders, researchers and writers who have continually believed that people and culture are paramount to success in business. There are lots of great books and a host of organisations who are role modeling the importance of people and culture and showing the world happiness and high performance are not mutually exclusive. We regularly discover more of them as the good news spreads - and the results emerge.

Science and psychology, East meets West, philosophy and physics. Things are changing as our collective intelligences merge, integrate and unlock our human potential.

This book sheds some light on what culture is, and what you can do to shape it. It reveals some secrets about the human 'being' and why we need to nurture and expand, versus subdue and contract, our human spirit. After analysing and working with dozens of organisations, thousands of leaders and tens of thousands of people globally, we keep discovering the same recurring issues: self serving egos, misalignment, destructive conflicts, hidden agendas, silo thinking, conflicting performance measures, ineffective meetings, brutal management,

dishonesty, greed, internal competitiveness, politics, stress, frustration, unhappiness, running so fast there is no time to think....the list goes on. Worse still, this is often hidden or shielded from the Executives who are too busy fighting their own fires and steering the ship. Of course some don't care.

We believe there is an epidemic and a crisis, and although there are bright spots, the typical workplace needs an overhaul - and the benefits are not only economic, they are social and human. We want our children, your children - every child, to grow into a new paradigm of work. One that nurtures human spirit and is equipped to tackle the problems we face; economic, social, political and environmental. Work is too important to get it wrong.

Only collective intelligence, where our rich diversity of viewpoint is honoured, will create answers we can all live with, share, and get behind. Collective intelligence is created when people spend time *in the zone* together. This is an essential skill for organisations and the planet. There are tools and processes that enable groups to access and employ collective intelligence effectively, and unlock creativity, energy and new solutions.<sup>7</sup>

We invite you to read this book with an open mind and an open heart. If you recognise yourself in the stories you will then recognise we need to change the game together.

**The Zone is our legacy for generations to come.**

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| THE  
INSIGHT

## *The Insight*

It was 1998, I had returned to London at the request of my partners to discuss the future of our business. This was a company I had started and owned since 1978. It was managed by my two partners, Nigel, the CEO, a close friend and my first employee, and Brian our Financial Director and our former Auditor. Over 20 years it had grown large enough to sell. We now had over 600 people on the payroll and a great reputation.

Although I owned 75%, we each had one vote. We agreed this before I moved back to New Zealand with my family, so they could have operational control. I relied on weekly calls, monthly reports and bi-annual Board meetings in Hong Kong to stay actively involved in the business. My return to New Zealand in 1993 had



opened new horizons, and since 1995 I had been on a different path. I was studying and teaching human potential and group development courses. It was a magical time in my life, so much had changed. I was happier, healthier and more fulfilled than ever. Returning to London and the memories of my old life was quite unsettling. I saw my past with fresh eyes and I think my partners could sense this too.

In parallel to this business trip I had organised a personal development workshop which started on Saturday, this same week.

My partners had asked to discuss selling the business to them. Over the week we had some unusually hard and sometimes-aggressive negotiations. I felt something had changed during the last year. Nigel and Brian had become very closed and I started to get a nagging feeling.

This gut feeling got a lot worse after one very unusual Board meeting. I felt like I didn't know these guys any more, they were belligerent, demanding and aggressive. I was now really worried and decided to do some digging.

Naimah, our head accountant, was working late so I asked her to show me the cash forecasts and budgets. Abruptly, and offhandedly she said, "Sorry Liam, I am not allowed to." I stepped back stunned, my stomach churned as fear began to well up inside me.

I retorted, "We all have defining moments in our careers.

This is one for you. I know Brian and Nigel have said not to show me anything, but I am the major shareholder, for that reason I am asking you again...I will give you a few minutes to decide, then I will come back." I will never forget the look on her face. The next 5 minutes seemed like an eternity.

When I returned, she looked very scared. She took a deep breath and said, "OK." She continued by saying something I will never forget, "Which ones do you want to see, the real one, the bank one or the one they send to you?" My heart stopped. At that moment I saw the fear in her eyes meet the fear in mine. I said, "I want to see all of them, and tell no one I have these." Naimah was crying, but lost in my disbelief I could not console her. I said, "Don't worry, you did the right thing, as long as you are *clean*, I will not take this further, but I suggest you resign next week and find a new job." I left with a sinking feeling. It was Friday 6.40pm. The workshop I was teaching started at 9.00am the next morning.

On the way home I called Nigel and said, "We need to meet urgently, 7am Monday morning." I told him it was personal.

I spent the weekend post workshop agonising over the data trying to build a real picture of the business. The numbers were confusing, I needed more information, nevertheless it was clear something was very wrong.

We met in a small local café close to the workshop, and apart from a few early morning builders eating breakfast, we were alone. Nigel sat down, I handed him the documents and said, "Explain these." He turned white, his eyes dropped, he was speechless and nervously sipped his tea. He mumbled and stuttered "It was all Brian's idea." The story of deceit unfolded. I sat there astounded as he rambled on, taking no ownership for anything.

By my rough calculations we were £300,000 in the red and unprofitable. I could see a possibility to turn it around with some urgent and hard adjustments, but I didn't have all the detail I needed. I suspected their plan was to get the business from me cheap and make a fortune when the dust settled, but right now I could not prove it.

I had a dozen people waiting for me at the workshop, so I instructed Nigel to cooperate fully with our Auditors and together with Brian devise an emergency plan. I also demanded that effective immediately, all unnecessary expenditure was to stop and I needed to sign off everything. I knew I needed control. I feared the worst, but the worst was yet to come.

After Nigel left, I called Frank the managing partner of our Auditors and gave him the full story. He was shocked, Brian was once a partner at his firm. He said he would personally supervise the investigation. I trusted Frank, he was old school, and we had been his client for 15 years.

What seemed at the start of the week like bad timing for the workshop actually turned out to be grace. The course heightened my self-awareness, increased my personal responsibility and compassion. Without this, the final outcome of this torrid week would have been very very different.

Sunday, 7:35pm, just as the workshop ended, I got Frank's call. I was dreading his response. "It's over" he said. I felt devastated. It was worse than I had ever feared. Frank said Nigel and Brian were on their way to his office and he asked me to join them.

## **The meeting**

That meeting proved to be a defining moment. It would present a crossroads in my business life, my role as a leader and as a human being.

Frank spared no time turning to the report in front of him. He had interviewed senior staff and had long and intense one on ones with Nigel and Brian. "Bottom line" Frank said, "The business is bankrupt. You need to cease trading tomorrow or face potential legal proceedings for trading while insolvent." The real debt was much bigger.

Over the next 10 minutes Frank outlined the story of 'malfeasance' (wrong doing). He pointed the finger at both Nigel and Brian and recounted their blow-by-blow

actions of malpractice, cover ups and manipulation. However his scorn was directed mainly at Brian and he asked me if I was intending to prosecute.

“No”, I said, “I have forgiven them. I don’t condone, and will never condone what they did, it was very wrong. I am to blame as well. Their consciences will be punishment enough. They know what they did, let’s move on.” Brian’s jaw fell open and his look was one of disbelief. He and Nigel were expecting the worst, criminal proceedings. They were expecting my rage - the old me. Nigel was crying. Frank was shocked.

## **The insight**

Earlier that night, after Franks call, I was in my car on the way to the meeting. I felt betrayed, belittled and fooled. I needed someone to blame and attack. Despite the rage of my ‘old’ self, my ‘new’ self said, “Liam how did you create this?” It was hard to swallow. I knew I had played a part, but what? My chest tightened. I felt like a victim and wanted revenge.

I knew my old pattern of blaming just didn’t work any more. Somehow I had made this happen, owning my part was my only hope to be free of hatred, hatred that could ultimately destroy me.

As I drove up Shaftsbury Ave I was struck by a flash of light, an insight so profound that it physically weakened me. I had to stop the car. Everything in my surroundings suddenly looked surreal.

What I saw in the mirror of my consciousness would reshape my life and change everything. I realised how I was actually the author of it all. I watched it play out from when I had first arrived in London. I saw the actual events and the actions that had created it. I had modeled abuse of power and this shaped the future downfall of the business. I was stunned for the second time that week.

I saw myself as a naive Kiwi that had started the business at age 21, on the smell of an oily rag and then ran it by the seat of his pants. The business grew and before long he had a couple of dozen employees and a reputation for work hard, play hard.

Clients loved the parties and the business was the talk of the industry. Money was flowing and he was riding high on success. He started to feel invincible, like he could do no wrong. Unfortunately, his ego was growing out of control.

I could now see I had become arrogant and people were afraid of me. I had great people in the business, but I had shown them that it was all about money, power and looking out for yourself. They followed my lead. I had become greedy and insensitive. I was the archetypical

ruler of my kingdom, I could do whatever I wanted and no one would challenge me. 20 years later I was a shallow version of the ambitious, 'straight up' Kiwi who landed in London.

I created a hierarchical environment of greed, ego, insensitivity and abuse. To get the power they had to become like me. Now my partners ruled the kingdom, they did to me what I had done to everyone else. I had trained them well.

As I explained to Frank, whether I contributed 10%, 30% or 100% to the final outcome was not the point. The point was my ego had blinded me and my insensitivity had hurt people. I had disconnected my head from my heart. Without my heart connection, the fall was inevitable. My insight had awakened me to how critical leadership and culture are - they are paramount. Something in Frank recognised the truth of my words.

After Nigel and Brian left, Frank and I spoke for another 45 minutes. I outlined a rough plan to recover and if necessary, close down with minimal collateral damages. Turnaround was almost impossible, but I needed Frank's OK to continue and try to repay creditors. He had to believe it too, or risk his and his firm's reputation, or even prosecution. I know that my compassion that night swayed Frank, he agreed to help where he could, and stave off the executioners as long as possible. For that moment I felt back in control of my life. I felt the old me return, the

21-year-old pioneering Kiwi kid. I saw a way back.

As an aside, I did fire them both, Brian the next day and Nigel a month later, but I never prosecuted and I never saw them again.

In the end it cost me everything I had, but I did it right. We closed the business 6 weeks later and within two months, with my help, a core of the former managers had picked it up from the Receiver for a bargain. They trimmed it to a base of £10 million revenues and today it is a very successful business. They are millionaires and still my friends. They asked me to join them, but I had moved on. I have no regrets.

What is the cost of integrity, of doing things right? A lot, but I found the gains are far greater.

Over the next weeks the insights dug in harder and harder, and the bigger ripple of my behaviour stretched out in front of me. I was faced with the real responsibility of leadership - the impact on future generations.



## **The Zone is born**

Between the remorse and the soul searching I made a decision. I now knew my mission, my purpose. Everything else was secondary. I decided to embark on my new adventure with greater wisdom and humility.

I knew that I was called to spend my life teaching and helping others not to be like me - to spread the word. I had viscerally experienced the damage a corrupt culture and bad leadership creates. I now knew the only way to build culture was through the heart, not the head. I started the journey to create The Zone.

### **The Zone's purpose is**

“Awakening and accelerating the evolution of human spirit.”

### **The Zone's mission is**

“Getting organisations into the zone, the place where happiness and high performance co-exist.”

### **The Zone's vision is**

“A world of enlightened leaders and enlightened organisations.”

The insights I gained through my lessons can be seen playing out time and time again in organisations around the world. It doesn't matter whether you are a global brand, a local business, an entrepreneur, a small partnership or

an organisation with 1000's of employees. The issues are universal.

Organisations are a collection of people and the power of any organisation is the collective intelligence of its members. Creating a new paradigm in business where happiness and high performance co-exist is The Zone's work.

Since 1999, together with a team of amazing colleagues, we have worked in over 28 different countries, from Asia Pacific and Africa to America and the Middle East, in Russia and in Europe, helping people and organisations live more from their hearts and find purpose in their work.

The next chapter, "The Fish Bowl" is a story that we use to illustrate these insights, and the following chapters reveal tools we have developed to help organisations change the game.

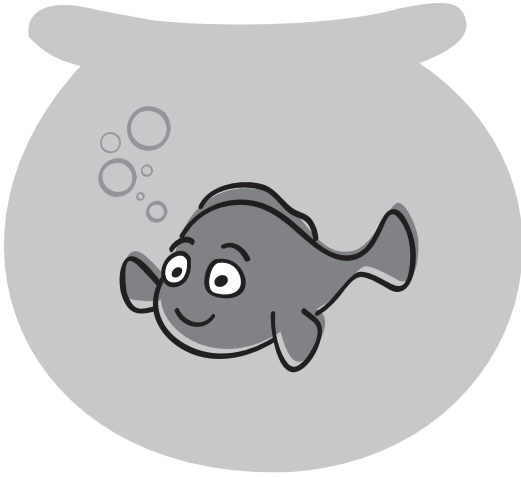
Liam Forde  
*CEO and Founder of The Zone*  
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*For further reading on this phenomenon (I wish I had read this earlier!).*

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| THE FISH  
BOWL

*Who is polluting your water?*



ENGAGED WITH CLEAR  
VALUES AND MISSION

## *The Fish Bowl*

A bright fish called Corina joined her new company. She was excited to start because her new employer had a good reputation in the market and she was eager to show what she could do.

Their Values and Mission statements were prominent on their company website, big posters in reception and smaller framed versions that hung in every meeting room. This made her feel like she was finally joining a company she could trust.

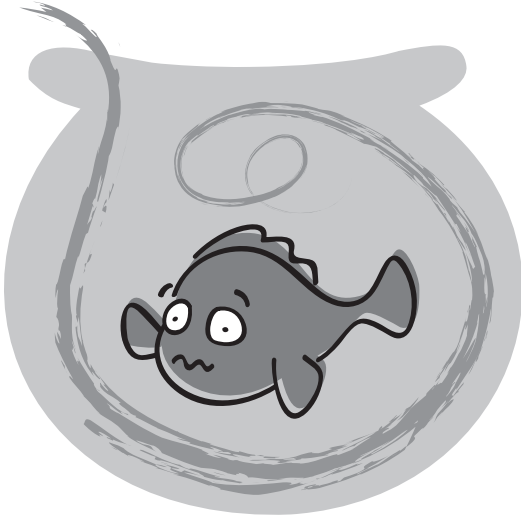
### *Values*

*One Team, Ethical, Innovation, Quality*

### *Mission*

*To serve customers and make them happy*

*Who is polluting your water?*



SILOS  
POLITICS  
MISALIGNMENT

A few weeks into the job she noticed getting things done was not as easy as she had first thought. She encountered Brenda, who seemed more interested in the performance of her own function than ensuring the whole business succeeded.

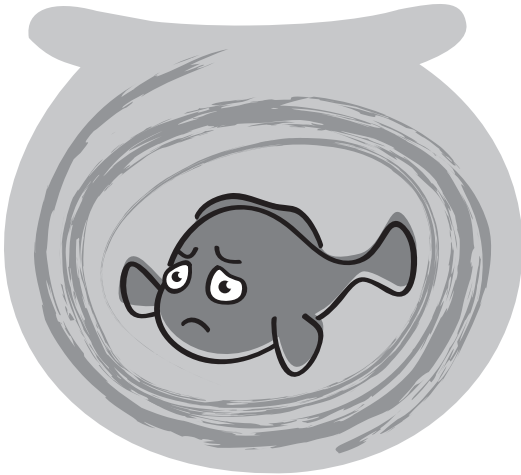
Brenda said “Look I am sorry, you have your targets, and I have mine, you will just have to find another way!” Brenda seemed stressed. Hmm thought Corina, my KPIs and Brenda’s are creating **silos**. Corina worked hard and found a ‘work-around’, but it wasn’t ideal and took a lot of extra work out of hours.

About 4 months into the job she was invited to the Regional meeting. Corina was eager to meet her colleagues from around the country. She would be away from home and family for 3 days. She set off at 5.00am bushy-tailed.

On the plane she sat next to Fred. Fred had been with the company for over 10 years and he was quick to tell Corina the ‘lay of the land’. He told her about Jack (the Southern Regional Manager) who liked things his way. Jack had been around the industry for years and loved being the ‘expert’. He could get rather prickly and did not like to be challenged. He was known to have a big ego.

Bill (the Northern Regional Manager), on the other hand, was very much a ‘big picture’ player. He was interested in where the market was headed and big trends.

*Who is polluting your water?*



EGOS  
AGENDAS  
BUREAUCRACY



He found detailed reports distracting and often inconclusive. Fred explained that Jack and Bill didn't always see eye to eye, so she would need to 'adjust' to suit - he stressed that although it meant a lot more work, if you wanted to get ahead you had to play the game!

Hmm Corina thought, sounds like **misalignment** and **politics** rather than a company that values One Team! Corina felt confused. She was not clear what to do...was this just Fred's view or was it 'real'? Her water was getting murky.

The conference was back-to-back presentations and meetings from 7.00am to late evening. This is how it had always been done. Corina thought, "Wow I don't have much time to get to know people" A little more pollution crept into her fish bowl when she felt how the **egos** and **bureaucracy** drove the conference agenda.

"When do we talk about the real issues?" she thought, "like removing the roadblocks I am encountering so my team can focus and deliver for the customer."

The conference was the 'usual' success and Corina's head was full of facts and figures. She arrived home late Sunday night exhausted. She did worry about how she should approach her presentations to both Jack and Bill on her important new product launch. Should she be direct or more 'politically correct'? This played on her mind.

As Corina became more and more familiar with her new environment, she realised she could get lots of great information around the water cooler and in the café. People were much more relaxed out of meetings, when they weren't 'on show'.

The water cooler and café were the only places where people could unwind and relax for a few minutes, have a laugh and share about families, sports and other passions. It was also a place to get the gossip, and some tips and tricks to navigate the business and leaders like Jack and Bill.

One thing everyone dreaded was presenting in front of the Executive Management Committee (EMC). The 'water cooler group advice' was to pre-meet with the key players, particularly finance, "otherwise you just won't get a great reception for new ideas" they said. The 'cafe group advice' was to be very, very, very well prepared. They told her that the EMC could drill down at any point, and if she was unable to answer every detail, it was 'downhill' from there. It sounded pretty scary and her feeling of apprehension rose. She had a presentation to the EMC in two weeks.

The pre-meetings really cut into her already packed schedule. Her thinking time was now taken up with meetings, and the Finance guy was really pedantic. He wanted projections and details for everything. It seemed like his sense of power lay in the details.

Her slide deck was growing by the day, and there were strict rules on how the slides should look, and how much detail was 'appropriate'. Corina worked late nights knowing how important this meeting could be for her career and upcoming review.

Her family started to notice her distraction and irritability. Her husband was worried about her lack of sleep and increasing stress. Corina felt torn but knew the job would win. Everything was riding on her first presentation. She needed the EMC to approve her new launch otherwise the delays would be catastrophic!

On the day of the EMC Corina got in early to make final adjustments. She felt nervous but she also felt she had finally got the 'perfect' slide deck that would clearly outline her case and get the approval she needed.

As usual the EMC was running late and Corina had to change all her following meetings, which had a knock on impact. She felt under pressure because getting time slots for meetings was a real mission. She would need to work through lunch again!

Finally her name was called at 11.30am. The EMC seemed rather faceless from the front of the room. The air was still thick from the previous session and they were up grabbing another round of coffees. They had been in there since 8:00am. Some smiled whilst others were on their phones texting or typing intently on their laptops.

She wasn't quite sure if she should start or wait. Corina felt her confidence drop.

Corina got her approval, but it was hard to read the commitment. Two members said virtually nothing, so she was unsure if they agreed, disagreed, or didn't care. Each EMC member had their own agenda and focus, so the presentation was side tracked several times and took 20 minutes longer than planned. It was a success, but somehow it didn't feel like one.

Corina quickly 'swam' to her next meeting, now 20 minutes late. She felt a little angry and that was strange. She could see why the EMC had a bad reputation. It seemed like power plays rather than teamwork. The water started to get even murkier.

A few weeks later Corina's boss, Gillian, finally set the time for her first review. She found Gillian quite distant, and getting time with her was tough. She was always in 'important' meetings, so getting her across updates and plans was virtually impossible. She would take days to answer emails. Everyone complained that they had no real thinking time and were overwhelmed.

Corina had prepared a long list of questions about critical work issues. She knew this meeting was meant for her review, but the issues were mounting and she wanted to maximise this precious face to face time.

In the review, Gillian did most of the talking. She had a very different view of the EMC 'success'. She told Corina, the EMC were not convinced and it took her another 30 minutes to get Corina's project finally signed off.

Corina was shocked. She thought, "Why didn't they say anything at the time?" and "Why has it taken this long to get that feedback!" She could feel herself start to boil. The murkiness turned to slime!

She got a "needs improvement" rating.

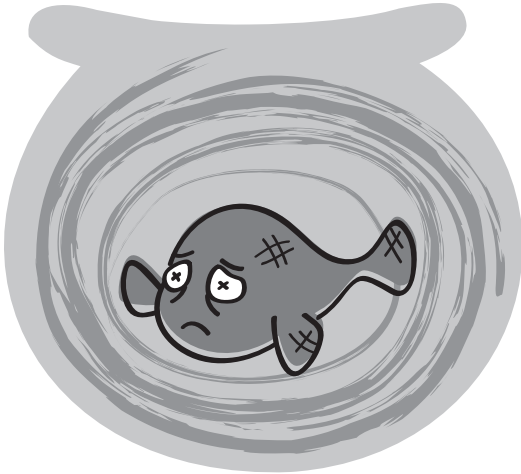
Corina was furious. She had worked so hard to make the grade; battled the silo thinking, worked around the bureaucracy, agendas, egos, and juggled the misalignment to try to get things done. Gillian had never given her the support and direction she so badly needed. She felt alone, hard done by and frustrated.

She called her husband but he didn't pick up.

The water in Corina's fish bowl was now really slimy and it was hard for her to distinguish the friendly fish from the sharks. Who was on her side and who was not. She was exhausted, hadn't exercised in a while, and her stress levels were higher than ever.

She could feel a wave of **negative thoughts** building as she cancelled her next appointment and headed to the cafe. She could not wait to get this whole mess off her

*Who is polluting your water?*



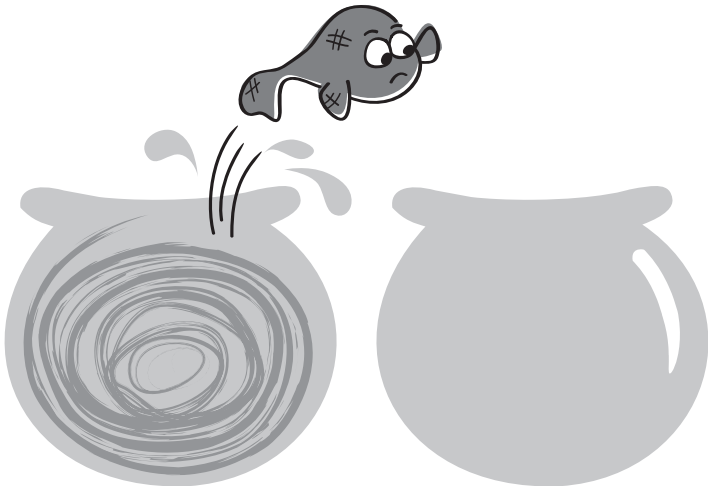
NEGATIVE THOUGHTS,  
WORDS, ACTIONS &  
REACTIONS... !@\$#

chest and get some sympathy from the 'cafe advice group'... she felt herself contracting... sinking to the bottom of the fish bowl.

*(Corina was now contributing to the pollution. Her mind was being reprogrammed. The circle of victim was complete. She was now part of the problem).*

## Key Question

DO YOU CHANGE THE WATER OR  
DO YOU CHANGE THE FISH?



*Who is polluting your water?*

During her cafe conversation Corina had an insight. She heard her own negativity and saw the blame game, how she was now at the effect of other people and the system. She realised she was polluting the fish bowl with her blame, negativity and frustrations. Even her unspoken thoughts sent negative ripples, through her body language and mood. She had become a **victim**. In that moment she decided to change and instead of being a victim, to make a stand and change the game.

The beginning!

*What is your story?*

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This was only a story right?

Wrong!

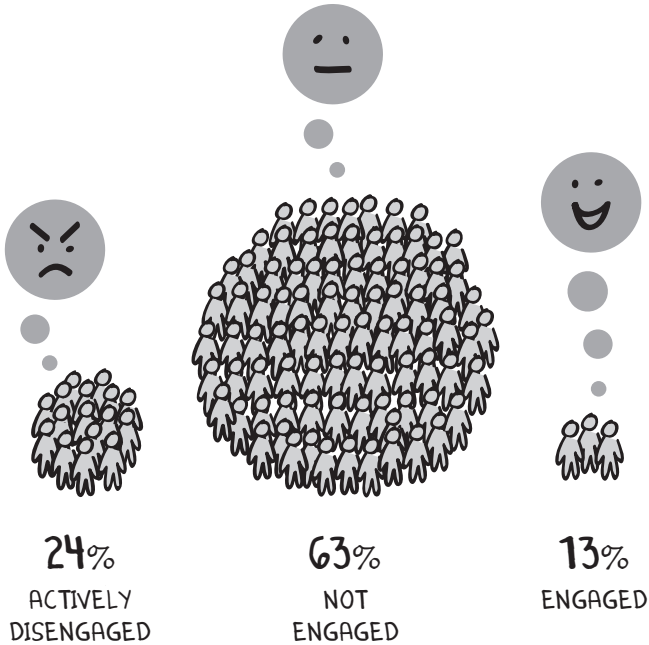
The situations outlined in the story are typical, and in our many years working across the globe we have found very few organisations who don't have politics, egos, silo thinking, personal agendas, bureaucracy and misalignment.

The pace of organisational life has increased dramatically and many people complain that they have no time to think, let alone collaborate. The internal focus is often stronger than that of serving the customer. Our workshops are sometimes the only relief people get after months of back-to-back meetings, the deluge of email, and reports no one has time to read let alone digest.

We are not saying all organisations are like this, in fact more and more are waking up to the cultural and behavioural issues that impact employee engagement. What we are saying is that the current state of workplaces globally is far from perfect, and with some insight, some care and a little work, you can change it.

We see the huge cost to the people and to the business. We can see and feel the ripple effect on families, health, society, and most importantly, human spirit. Here is an alarming global statistic that highlights this crisis in the workplace.

## Global Employee Engagement 2012<sup>1</sup>



**Actively Disengaged Employees** aren't just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish.

**Not Engaged Employees** are essentially "checked out." They are sleepwalking through their workday, putting time – but not energy or passion into their work.

**Engaged Employees** work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.

Actively disengaged employees outnumber engaged employees 2 to 1. This is magnified when we realise that negativity has a significantly bigger impact on people's mood, and spreads wider than positivity.<sup>2</sup>

*Actively disengaged<sup>3</sup>  
employees outnumber  
engaged employees by  
nearly*

**2 to 1**  
            
          

The mass of inertia is the Not Engaged 63%. The big opportunity is to re-engage the core and ignite their passion. As they change, others will follow.

The Fish Bowl is an analogy for an organisation (the container), the water represents the culture and the fish your people. The fish bowl could just as well be any group, your family, your relationship or the planet. The analogy holds. What you put in affects everyone and everything, even if only by a drop.

We call these factors Pollutants and Purifiers.

| THE  
EXERCISE

## **Pollutants and Purifiers**

A dominant ego, a political player, misalignment, hidden agendas, dysfunctional systems, rules, processes, and unnecessary conflicts... these are examples of POLLUTANTS. Open collaboration, sharing, appreciation, helping out, being friendly and real caring... these are examples of PURIFIERS.

Culture is not built by words on walls, or websites, it is not built by having free fruit in the canteen. It is built by your thoughts, words, actions and reactions. The more organisational power you have the bigger the impact. Culture is built by what you stand for, stand against and **tolerate**. Tolerating bad behaviour POLLUTES your water, encouraging cooperation and appreciation will PURIFY your water.

These simple truths apply at work and in life.

We will show you how you can remove pollutants and add purifiers to improve happiness and high performance. We will share with you a simple and powerful tool that you can use and have some fun doing it.

Deciding to change is the first step, the next is to get into action. This is how you change the game!

Here is your first step.

**Ask your team to read the book “Who’s Polluting Your Water” before the workshop (if not add 15 mins to this workshop). And come with an open mind and an explorer’s attitude!**

## **Exploring Pollutants and Purifiers.**

Here is a simple exploration. It will reveal some things you are doing well (Purifiers) and some things you need to change (Pollutants) and your attitudes to constraints (victim or innovator).

This can be done solo or with a team, in pairs or with any group. The full version will take about 90 minutes. All you need is flipchart paper, sticky notes, note paper, pens and markers.

### **1. Solo Reflection**

Ask the team to individually record the pollutants and purifiers they observe, feel, experience or hear within their internal and external environment. Choose their top 3 Pollutants and top 3 Purifiers. Write one item per sticky note.

*Allow 5 mins.*

### **2. Group Collection**

Ask the team to get into smaller groups of 2-4 people (depending on the group size, but keep groups small

## *Step 1*

WRITE DOWN THE POLLUTANTS  
AND PURIFIERS YOU OBSERVE. FEEL,  
EXPERIENCE OR HEAR WITHIN OUR  
INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL  
ENVIRONMENT.

CHOOSE YOUR TOP 3 POLLUTANTS  
AND TOP 3 PURIFIERS.  
ONE ITEM PER STICKY NOTE.

maximum 4 people). Ask them to take turns to share what they wrote down and stick their sticky notes up on the flip chart in the column marked OUR as they share their perspective.

*Allow 10 mins.*

### **3. Part A: What we can't control (at least in the short term)**

Ask the groups to look at everything they have collected and look for any items, events, things that cluster or stand out that they don't have any control over.

We call these factors 'gravity' or real constraints (like Laws and Regulations) Comment: *"We don't have direct control over these factors"*. Ask: *"What do we have control over?"* - Answer: *"Our reactions (our behaviour)"*.

Now, let's take a moment to explore how we currently react to these things. In your groups write up all the ways you react - e.g. blame, negativity, complain, discouraged, give up, get grumpy, avoid etc. Give the group a couple of minutes to do this.

Then ask - *"Are these pollutants or purifiers?"*. Answer - *"Pollutants"*. Ask the group to add the words to the Pollutant side of the Flipchart.

*Allow 10 mins.*



# Worksheet

POLLUTANTS

PURIFIERS

OUR

ME

@TheZone

Notes on Gravity for the facilitator to share: "Gravity may seem like an awful constraint on life, yet look at all the creative ways we use gravity - flying, football, frisbee, gymnastics, skiing etc. The mindset when dealing with constraints needs to be 'innovation'. How can we influence? How can we shape? What can we change? If we can't change anything we can at least change our reactions from victim fish to appreciation. Enjoy the insights!"

### **3. Part B: What we can control.**

Ask the small groups to cluster the top 3 Pollutants and top 3 Purifiers that we can control. Vote if necessary.

Now as a team generate ideas to eliminate the pollutants and amplify the purifiers. Choose a presenter to report back your top idea for each later in step 5.

*Allow 10 mins.*

### **4. Personal.**

Give each person in the group 2 sticky notes and ask them to write down their answers to these questions that you have written up on a Flip chart. How do I pollute our fish bowl? How do I purify our fish bowl? Write down one thing for each question that you feel has the most impact. Eg. What can I take responsibility for? What do I think, say or do, tolerate or encourage that pollutes or purifies? Honesty here is important.

## *Step 4*

HOW DO I POLLUTE  
OUR FISHBOWL?

HOW DO I PURIFY  
OUR FISHBOWL?

*Who is polluting your water?*

Allow a couple of mins for solo reflection and then invite people to share with each other in the group. As the person speaks they can place the sticky note up on the flipchart under ME.

*Allow 10 mins.*

Ask people to record any personal insights on their own behaviour, make a plan of one behaviour change that will reduce or stop the polluting of our fishbowl and one purifier that will keep the fish bowl clean!

*Allow 10mins.*

## **5. Wrap up.**

Return as one large group and invite the sub-groups to share their top 3 Pollutants and top 3 Purifiers and their ideas to change the game (from Part B).

*Allow 15 mins*

Gather the insights and make a plan as a team and decide how you will track and monitor your progress (maybe even set a review time some weeks ahead).

*Allow 15 mins.*

To wrap up say: *(Allow 5 mins)*

*“Let’s have a completion round. Was this a useful exercise? What did you learn? What will you take away and apply?”*

Finish with a small celebration. Clapping, Hi 5s, hugs, dancing or pizza all work :)

We would love to know how it went, any insights, refinements or other things that worked!

Send your thoughts to: **hello@thezone.co**

## *Key Points for Fish*

- ➔ Don't be a victim in your own fish bowl.
- ➔ We are all responsible for keeping our fish bowl clean.
- ➔ Big changes start with small steps.

## *Key Points for Client Fish*

- ➔ Our experience over 15 years has demonstrated that the tools we have developed can be used to significantly improve the culture and performance of both small and large organisations.
- ➔ A word of caution - Some companies, because of the rapid and sometimes chaotic movement of business in the 21st century, think they don't have time to pursue this kind of change. What they don't realise is that the process can lead to progressively improved performance and innovation, and ultimately provide an organisation with a strong competitive edge.

**Footnote:** Our fish bowl story emerged a couple of years back after attending a Juice Master retreat in Turkey. Each year we get our leaders together and build Strategy in a different setting. Sometimes it is unexpected and the juice retreat was something we had never thought of – 7 days juice only! The retreat was a defining moment for our team. We learnt how to nourish our bodies and help prevent the ‘pollution’ that causes disease. You can build culture through the ingredients you add, you can build a more healthy life in the same way.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Gallup (2013) – State of the Global Workplace – Employee engagement insights for business leaders worldwide. Carried out among 142 countries and 225,000 employees.

<sup>2</sup> Gallup (2013) – State of the Global Workplace – Employee engagement insights for business leaders worldwide.

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<sup>3</sup> Gallup (2013) – State of the Global Workplace – Employee engagement insights for business leaders worldwide.

| CLIENT  
STORIES



## **Global Communications Co. Cultural transformation**

We have worked with them for over 10 years on various cultural transformations in Egypt, Qatar, Ghana, South Africa, Czech Republic, Sweden and United Kingdom.

Most of our work has been focused on culture, including executive, leadership, teams and organisational wide work on Vision, Purpose, Culture and Strategy, resulting in outstanding business performance well above market average, making them one of the most innovative and best places to work.

## **Multinational Dairy Co. Unifying culture through Purpose, Vision, Culture and Strategy**

The world's biggest dairy company by volume, formed by an amalgamation of several large co-operative dairy companies who were previously competitors.

Our challenge was to create a unified culture across this diverse business and to re-inspire the whole organisation around a common vision, purpose and set of values. We also worked with management to articulate the strategy more clearly and consistently, resulting in strong business growth and performance.

## **Iconic Fashion Brand**

### **Team performance and executive coaching**

Our client is one of fashion's most famous brands. We partnered with a leader who was in a new role and industry to create her leadership style and put a successful high performing executive team together.

We co-created roles, goals and culture for the team, have reviewed performance over time and created a spirit of collaboration and connectedness. The result is a high performing team enjoying delivering even under pressure.

## **Middle East Comms Co.**

### **Reshaping & leading their industry and the country**

This complex cultural change initiative required a whole new way of thinking to support the goal of the business not only to lead the industry they were operating in but to reshape and transform the way of doing business in the Middle East.

The process was accelerated through a series of initiatives to support the genuine change in people's thoughts and behaviours.

This all resulted in the company moving to the #1 spot in their country with outstanding levels of customer satisfaction, employee engagement & years on year increase of financial results.

*“Who’s Polluting Your Water?” provides invaluable practical insight. It offers specific tools to transform organisational cultures to the level necessary for success and our future. Liam Forde and The Zone team, have developed these tools over 15 years, and they have stood the test of time, transforming small, medium and large organisations. They are the same tools necessary to create a balanced and fulfilled personal and professional life.”*

James A. Cusumano PhD, Entrepreneur,  
CEO and Author of BALANCE: The Business-Life Connection

“Who’s polluting your water?” is a book for those who believe that people and culture make the difference at work. If you want to change the game, then this book is for you.

*Let’s change the game together!*

**the                      zone**

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