

Perspective

A newsletter for widening your point of view

2000

Issue 2



Richard Bach, in his book *Illusions*, states a handy aphorism: **Perspective – use it or lose it**. Every six months, this periodical shares amongst recreation and tourism management professionals, such as yourself, several tools and concepts which will help exercise your perspective. This issue considers ethics, since an understanding of what is 'right' should underpin all our decisions. The problem is, what is 'right' depends on a wide range of considerations, not the least of which is culture. I don't believe that there are any hard and fast rules, but I do believe there is 'good perspective'.

Perspective is distributed by **Rob Greenaway & Associates** as a service to the recreation and tourism industries.

Subsidiarity

I received a lot of feedback about the concept of 'reverse delegation' in the previous issue of *Perspective*. That concept refers to a manager delegating an entire project to their team, expecting the team to delegate the tasks they cannot achieve upwards. It seems worthwhile to consider from where Charles Handy extracted the concept in his book, *The Empty Raincoat*¹.

Subsidiarity is the source – and a guiding principle in the European Union's (EU) founding document, the Maastricht Treaty. Article 3b of the Treaty states that, "In areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Community [ie, the EU] shall take action, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community."

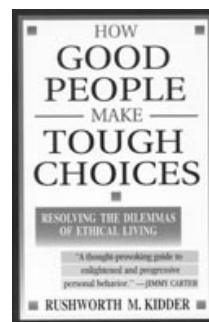
The idea is: if something can be achieved at the community level (or at the level closest to the citizen) then it is not appropriate for a 'higher' body (one further removed from the citizen) to confiscate responsibility. The Roman Catholic Church coined the word, intending to encourage 'moral' decision-making. That is, decisions which are best for the citizenry. ❖

Ethics

Ethics is not a concept I'll attempt to define. Aristotle in his third-century treatise *Ethics* argued that it was up to the State to determine what was 'good'. "Like a piece of land, which has to be prepared for the seed that is to grow there, the mind of the pupil has to be prepared for the inculcation of good habits, if it is to like and dislike the things it ought."²

Unlike Aristotle we seem to accept that people cannot be made 'good' by an act of parliament, but possibly via the media. A common business maxim is, 'don't do anything you would be embarrassed by if it appeared in a national newspaper,' which is good advice.

Rushworth Kidder, of the grand-sounding New York-based Institute for Global Ethics, in his book *How good people make tough choices*³, suggests that we almost always know the difference



between right and wrong – but often lack the moral fibre to act accordingly (his report on the level of cheating in exams in American tertiary institutions is frightening).

Kidder's book discusses our ability to make the right decision when faced with a dilemma – when we face a decision that has more than one 'right' option. He believes we should be able to work out a right-versus-wrong decision with little

trouble – and it's hard to disagree. Dilemmas are tougher.

Kidder suggests that all dilemmas fit within a typology. That is, they all fall within one or more of four paradigms:

- ➔ **Short-term versus long-term.** Do we act now and fetter future options, or forgo current opportunities for later benefits? Is a bird in the hand worth two in the bush?
- ➔ **Justice versus mercy.** Do we react to an infringement by simply referring to the rulebook, or do we consider an individual's personal situation and reach some compromise? Do we risk being considered hard and dictatorial (or firm and fair), or soft and inconsistent (or flexible and considerate)?
- ➔ **Truth versus loyalty.** Do we spill the beans or do we hide the truth due to our relationship with the transgressor – which may be an employer? Would you send your sibling to prison?
- ➔ **Community versus individual.** To what degree do we compromise the rights of the individual for the good of the community (or vice versa)?

Kidder offers a toolbox with three concepts to help solve these ethical dilemmas:

The first he calls **ends-based thinking**. Most of our legislation is based on this concept: how to gain the most benefit for the greatest number of people (that is, utilitarianism – maximising utility). This requires understanding the consequences of our decisions; hence our current interest in carrying out cost-benefit analyses, often in the wrong places.

The second Kidder calls **rule-based thinking**. This requires you to play a mental game whereby you imagine that your action will define a universal law that all future decision-makers should follow. The philosopher Immanuel Kant suggests we can never know the end result of our actions (we cannot judge whether our decision will actually create the greatest utility – which would appeal to chaos theorists). However, if we do what we believe is 'right' in all

¹ Handy, C. (1995) *The Empty Raincoat*, Arrow

² Thomson, J.A.K. (1955) *The Ethics of Aristotle*, Penguin

³ Kidder, R.M. (1995) *How good people make tough choices*, Fireside, New York. A difficult book to get hold of.

circumstances (often what existing rules specify), the end result should be the best (but unknown).

The third is **care-based thinking**. You'll recall the golden rule: do unto others, as you would want them to do unto you. This requires you to mentally trade places with the individual(s) affected by your decision.

Newspaper stories are crammed with these dilemmas. It's an interesting task to review a few with Kidder's typology in mind. Such an exercise will improve what Kidder describes as your 'ethical fitness'. Contact me if you want a copy of a conference paper I gave on this topic (as it relates to recreation) in 1998. ❖

Honesty

An article by Elizabeth Light in the July 1999 issue of *NZ Business* reminded me of ARD Fairburn's attitude to 'corruption' and his sinister interpretation of 'bad taste'.

The *NZ Business* article describes Auckland-based developer Andrew Krukziener as believing that, "Quality, both from an aesthetic and durability perspective, is important as is honesty of material and design... If it's timber make it timber, if it's stone make it stone and don't make one thing look like another." He suggests, "Auckland is beautifully situated and lovely to look out from but ugly to look back at... Paris is badly situated on a dirty river but its magnificent buildings and public spaces make it beautiful⁴."

Krukziener argues that tenants and developers have the same desire for mediocrity. "All they care about is the dollar per square metre rather than the visual quality of a building."



This would have excited New Zealand's poet, artist and commentator Rex Fairburn. In the decade of Formica and chrome (the 1960s) he penned a stirring article titled, *The Corruption of Taste*⁵.

"The basis of good taste ... lies in honesty; in a willingness to let things *be what they are*, and to value them as necessary parts of the world in which we live... Such things as wood, canvas, brick, stone, rope, paint, iron, and glass all have a particular character, a quality that is pleasing when we touch it or look at it.

"If people are content to like the *qualities* of things for their own sake, if they abandon pretence and don't try to make things look more expensive than they really are, or absurdly different, they will not go far wrong in their aesthetic tastes. It is the element of humbug, the basic dishonesty, that creates pretentiousness and vulgarity."

And now the sinister bit. In his closing argument, Fairburn queries

whether it matters if people's tastes are, "vulgar or not?"

"Well, ponder this thought: if people are dishonest – even unconsciously, by the way of self-deception – in their aesthetic tastes, have we any reason to hope that their ways of thinking and feeling will be any more admirable, any more honest and real, in politics and business, and in the general conduct of their lives?"

"Corruption can't be kept in watertight compartments." ❖

The Panda Principle

The panda bear has no thumbs. Rather, it has ten fingers and a fleshy lump on the side of each hand. It uses these lumps as opposing digits to grip its meals. These 'thumbs' are not very good at their jobs. The panda would do much better if it had real thumbs, with bones and joints. The problem is, some quirk of evolution has never given the panda this option. Its 'fifth fingers' are loafing about on the end of each hand, while a poor cousin does their dirty work. Why hasn't evolution forced the lazy fingers to locate themselves more efficiently? The answer is the Panda Principle.

Ecologist Stephen Jay Gould, who identified the concept,⁶ argues that the 'survival of the fittest' is not a universal principle. An inefficient organism (or a part of it) can survive if it can prevent competing organisms gaining access to key resources. His favourite analogy is the QWERTY keyboard – the one we all use. This was designed to slow typists to prevent the jamming of mechanical typewriters. A faster keyboard has been designed – the Dvorak. But can it gain a foothold? Not while the QWERTY board hogs all the resources (such as manufacturing and distribution systems and our training).

Isn't it odd that we know of a better way but will not implement it? What other inefficient systems are in operation because they were 'first' and currently hog the resources? Before you get too excited, ask whether is it 'right' to remove these inefficiencies. Consider that the Panda Principle applies to New Zealand's fauna. Introduced animals that gained access to resources so much more effectively than the locals caused numerous extinctions. The trick is, an ecosystem can operate very happily at a local optimum. Bring in a new set of creatures that operate at, perhaps, a global optimum (mice are globally more effective than our local weta), and look at what gets lost.

You would therefore think it was good news to have whom Pam Corkery describes as "New Zealand's only free-range panda" heading the World Trade Organisation. ❖



For Your Interest

It appears to have been a busy few months for many businesses. **Rob Greenaway & Associates** has not been an exception, but by working with very effective teams the workload has been enjoyable. A highlight of the end of last century was the development of several economic profiles for the agricultural, tourism, manufacturing and fishing industries for the Southland District and Invercargill City Councils. Research economist Geoff Butcher and Key Research and Marketing were excellent allies in this job. Asset management work continues and it has been interesting to advance various methodologies and to better relate Councils' numerous strategies and policies (such as Funding Policies) to the current and historic performance of parks, reserves and various community assets. This has given managers a lot more food for thought.

Over the past six months projects have been carried out in Western Bay of Plenty, Nelson, Dunedin, Whakatane and Waimakariri. Some tourism concession work continues in Queenstown, and a variety of journalism projects face completion as time allows. Numerous prospects are on the horizon. Although this century will be – individually – our last, it looks fine to date.

⁴ Despite Napoleon destroying 27,500 working class houses in the process of creating his vision (Saul, J.R. (1992) *Voltaire's Bastards*, Penguin).

⁵ Fairburn, A.R.D. (1967) *The Women Problem and other prose*, Blackwood and Janet Paul.

⁶ Gould, S.J. (1992) *Bully for Brontosaurus*, Norton.