

## THE DRUCKER CENTENARY APPROACHES: DEVELOPING, MANAGING, AND SHARING STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE

by Guy St. Clair

For many who work with strategic knowledge - and by now most readers know we're not speaking only of Peter F. Drucker's "knowledge workers" - the upcoming Drucker Centenary carries with it something akin to confirmation or affirmation. Considering Mr. Drucker's contributions to the management of organizations and his attention to the importance of individual skills, competencies, and knowledge in organizational effectiveness, the observances focused around 19 November acknowledge that we are ready to move to a knowledge society. For many of us, we can't help but be grateful that - as a society - we're getting beyond the affectation of ignorance that seemed to characterize such a large chunk of our recent past.

As we think about what is available to us as citizens, about how each of us can now participate in the broader management function we think of as knowledge services, the development, management, and sharing of strategic knowledge becomes something of a lightning rod for us. In today's workplace, strategic knowledge as a construct provides us with the opportunity to clear out what no longer works (even if it worked in the past), to move forward in taking advantage of the innumerable opportunities we have for knowledge development and knowledge sharing (what some of us refer to as "KD/KS"), and to find in the effective management of strategic knowledge the bridge to our shared culture as a knowledge society.

Such are the thoughts that come to mind after an evening with colleagues in [The Drucker Society of New York](#). As we work with strategic knowledge and seek to implement our many different approaches to knowledge services - that management methodology we define as the convergence of information management, knowledge management, and strategic learning to achieve organizational effectiveness - we find ourselves very drawn to the idea that what we are doing is part of another picture. It's a larger scheme - if we are willing to think of it this way - to take our intellectual gifts and use them to support and sustain a world in which knowledge and the purposes of knowledge are employed for more than what we do in the workplace.

It is - this scheme - more than the confirmation or affirmation I alluded to above. It is a step on the road to greater success as a society, taking the work we do with strategic knowledge and linking it to goals that benefit society at large. That is, after all, the Drucker Society's own goal - to "convert the Drucker principles into action across the community - and who better to carry out this mission than Drucker's own knowledge workers, the very people who work with strategic knowledge on a day-to-day basis? There are enormous opportunities for us - as knowledge workers, as knowledge thought leaders, as strategic knowledge specialists or professionals in whatever field of work we find ourselves - to take the lead in using our own KD/KS tools and techniques to bring and to use the Drucker principles in the larger society.

And those principles are...?

Well, I don't have to list them here. They are posted everywhere nowadays, especially as the management community begins its observance of the Drucker centenary. Take a look at, for example, the latest issue of *Harvard Business Review* or *The Economist* or any of a variety of the latest writings about Drucker. The man's ideas practically pop out at you.

And such was the case at the New York Drucker Society's latest meeting. The ideas flowed, and while it would be extremely gratifying to capture them all, highlights must suffice. Not a difficult job, as it happens, as they all on this occasion came bundled together in a framework that Lee Igel, the group's leader, used to guide the conversation.

The meeting had been described to society members and visitors as a "fireside chat" type of discussion, a conversation between Bruce Rosenstein and Frances Hesselbein. After introductory comments, Igel invited his distinguished guests to talk about what he called their "defining moments," those times or events in their lives that helped connect them with their association with Peter Drucker.

Hesselbein is Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Leader to Leader Institute (formerly the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management), and Bruce Rosenstein is the author of *Living in More Than One World: How Peter Drucker's Wisdom Can Inspire and Transform Your Life* (written about here on another occasion because - full disclosure - Bruce is a longtime friend and teacher and for whose graduate studies program I sometimes guest-lecture at Catholic University in Washington). As might be expected from these two expert storytellers, the evening became one of shared experiences (not only from the two of them, but from audience members as well) and their memories of their defining moments provided strong insight into our thinking about Peter Drucker and considerable inspiration for how each of us can look into our own lives for our own defining moments.

Hesselbein, for example, went back to her childhood and told a heart-wrenching story about how her grandmother had impressed upon her the importance of diversity, inclusion, and the necessity for human kindness in our lives. Observing how her grandmother had - and the only person in her community to do so - shown respect to an immigrant who was trying to make his way provided Hesselbein with a lifelong desire to follow her example not only in her personal life but, of course, in her career and as she performed her functions as the chief executive officer of Girl Scouts of America of the USA from 1976 to 1990, during which time she got to know and worked with Drucker.

Rosenstein, too, had his moment that he was willing to share. A little different, but just as valuable because when he had his experience, he knew that he had made the right decision to go in the direction he had undertaken. Rosenstein's experience had to do with his decision to write about Drucker, whom he had long admired, and whose tenets and philosophies he had long shared with others. As the book project was being discussed, Rosenstein realized that it had not yet quite taken shape, and he and his editors were struggling to find just the right perspective or point of view. They found it when, one day, he was asked to describe what he really wanted to say in the book, and he remembered that in an interview Drucker had spoken about how all the many "parts" and "pieces" of one's life - personal affairs, business, professional activities, volunteer work, faith, philosophies, and so forth - all come together to make up the whole

person. In the conversation, Drucker use the phrase “living in more than one world,” and Rosenstein knew he had his direction. His project - and his continuing connection with Drucker and his philosophy - could go forth.

We all have these moments. For some, the defining moment comes when - in a secure profession or field of work, perhaps, one which could even become a sinecure of sorts, requiring little effort and still provide a steady paycheck - there’s a desire to do *more*, to put one’s self on the line and seek work in which one either supports organizational effectiveness or finds one’s self on the street looking for a job! And, yes, we’re speaking personally here, for as a young librarian my defining moment came when I decided that I wanted to be accountable for my work. The positions in which I had been employed up to that time were not asking enough of me, and I wanted very much to be judged for my professional performance. At about the same time, something led me to specialized librarianship, where my work would either be part of organizational success or I wouldn’t have a job. It was that simple, my defining moment, and it led me down paths I never even knew existed.

As the Drucker Society meeting continued, another of the members asked about the differences between the “approach” (for lack of a better word) to Drucker’s ideas and philosophy in North America and in other countries, especially in China, from which Hesselbein had just returned, having spoken to hundreds of people in several presentations having to do with Drucker’s work. The success of organizational, community, and personal attention to Drucker’s ideas is phenomenal in that part of the world, and Hesselbein found herself often asked to describe what it is about Drucker’s work that causes so much attention.

As it happened, Hesselbein’s response at the meeting might just have been another defining moment for many of us, for she described how, in Asia, she was often asked what it was about Drucker’s work that is so appealing to his followers there. So she described one situation which obviously made quite an impression. One man, she said, simply pointed out that what Drucker had to share with us is “the truth.” Drucker did not attempt to cover up, overstate, or pretend that things are other than what they are. He did not engage in predictions. He “looked out the window” - as Hesselbein put it - and described what he saw. And then he shared what he saw with his listeners.

So it is something of an affirmation after all, isn’t it? One definition describes affirmation as “a positive statement or declaration of the truth or existence of something.” For those of us looking to understand the place of strategic knowledge in our lives - and our professional roles in developing, managing, and sharing strategic knowledge - it is something of a pleasure to be so affirmed.