

## LAW FIRMS: IS YOUR ICEBERG MELTING AND WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?



Shaun Jardine in action

I've just emerged from two days' of total law firm immersion at Legalex – The National Legal Exhibition and Conference. There, Shaun Jardine, CEO of Brethertons LLP gave an unforgettable presentation entitled "My Iceberg is Melting." He hammered his point home by performing in a full penguin suit. Why on earth would he do such a thing? Well, he certainly grabbed my attention but this was more than a publicity stunt.

Shaun shared with us the leadership challenges he has faced and how he has tackled them. His bible for change leadership is "Our Iceberg Is Melting," written by Harvard Business School Professor, John Kotter and long-time collaborator, Holger Rathgeber. On the face of it, this book is a fable about a penguin named Fred who lives with his colony on an iceberg in the Antarctic. Fred, an unusually prescient penguin, identifies the potentially catastrophic implications of their iceberg melting. As the tale unfolds the penguins learn how to adapt their lifestyles in order to survive. Unbeknownst to the penguins, they are applying Kotter's celebrated eight step process for successful change. The authors have made sure that these principles are not buried too far below the surface to be accessible to readers of this parable.



### How is your iceberg looking?

No firm has been untouched by the enormous upheaval in the legal profession. Sustained client activism brought on by the financial crisis may have forced you to abandon the comfort of charging by the hour and to address the issue of how to provide demonstrably better value for money. This in turn may be

pushing you towards embracing “leaner” ways of working which reward efficiency rather than hours worked. A review of your appraisal and reward systems (usually delayed for as long as possible) can then only be around the corner. Perhaps non-lawyer, new market entrants are snapping at your heels. You might be looking for salvation through merger but this is no panacea without a unified strategic vision and a great deal of post-acquisition integration.

If you've been trying to engage your partners and colleagues on these subjects without success, you will be familiar with the resistance and denial that Fred's first attempts to raise the consciousness of his colony meet with. Kotter's prescription can be paraphrased as:

- Create a sense of urgency;
- Pull together a guiding team;
- Develop the change vision and strategy;
- Communicate, communicate, communicate;
- Empower others;
- Produce quick wins;
- Don't let up and
- Make it stick by embedding the new culture.

The authors explain that their goal in reproducing Kotter's academic work as a simple tale was to “draw on the incredible power of good stories to influence behavior.” As a business coach I am aware of the power of metaphor as a means to help clients to understand and express their feelings. Neuro Linguistic Programming, for example, teaches us to use a metaphorical story to bypass the conscious mind and make people more accepting of ideas that they might otherwise flatly reject. I will admit that I had been a metaphor sceptic until this point. I could not imagine launching into a fairy tale with a client and either of us keeping a straight face, or indeed gaining anything useful from it. However, this little penguin has worked his magic. If it is good enough for Kotter, it is good enough for me!

If you would like to share your stories with me, and see how we can stop your iceberg from melting then please feel free to get in touch:

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