



5 Minute Strategic Mindset

"Would you like me to give you a formula for success? It's quite simple, really: Double your rate of failure." Thomas Watson, Founding CEO of IBM.



The joy of improvisation

Jasper, my son, is 10 and first picked up a saxophone in the last term of last year. He'd had a flirtation with guitar for a few years, but practising was always a chore. I remember this well from my own childhood piano playing days: feeling compelled to pound out yet another set of scales, or a boring Czerny piece (does anyone actually like Czerny?). His saxophone teacher has, however, hit on something remarkable. He asks Jasper, every day, to practice three things, all briefly: play a couple of scales, play two (very short) pieces -- and then just improvise for a bit. Play. Experiment. Muck about. Toot and squeak. See what happens. From upstairs this morning, I hear snatches of what sound like a middle eastern melody, and then **a Coltrane riff**. I go down and Jasper has a big smile on his face, and says, "Dad, listen to this!" He's excited, and so am I.

Question: What role can improvisation play in your working life?

Is this a genuine population risk?

Japan's Prime Minister Abe last night shocked the world by closing all of his country's schools for the entirety of March, as a way to stem potential coronavirus infections. But why, given Japan has not had a sharp increase in reported cases (so far 200 cases, 4 deaths)? Children especially are not easily infected, and if they are, don't fall seriously ill.

So, is this a genuine risk-based assessment? Not epidemiologically perhaps, but certainly politically. Tokyo's Olympics are looming, and with memories of criticism for how Japan handled Fukushima after the earthquake and tsunami in 2011, Abe wants to show that his country can be proactive about limiting the virus. "When there's a threat that people don't understand, sometimes you have to do something, even if it's not relevant," said Robert Dujarric, director of the Institute of Contemporary Asian Studies at Temple University. And relevance is key: what do the millions of working parents do while their children are unexpectedly at home all of March?

Question: "How do you plan proactive action when a political or reputational risk is greater than the actual physical or material risk?"

Could you be a 'desk killer'?

Over the summer, I read a remarkable book by **Dan Gretton, "I You We Them. Journeys Beyond Evil: the Desk Killers in History and Today"** which deals with what the Germans call *Schreibtischtäter*, or 'desk killers'. These are white collar workers whose tasks and decisions inflict enormous suffering, but who themselves don't harm anyone directly. Think of oil company executives and managers who (unwittingly or not) permitted environmental blight and human rights abuses in Nigeria, or more famously still, rail employees and chemical engineers in Nazi Germany who went about their daily tasks of scheduling human transports to death camps and designing and supplying the gas chamber technology within them.

This 'white collar supply chain' that led to the gates of Treblinka and Auschwitz, or to the atrocities of the Nigerian delta is what Gretton examines poetically, personally and factually. His summation is that all of this occurs because of a failure of large-scale empathy. We detach ourselves from others and thus don't think about the true and full consequences of actions that we believe are authorised from elsewhere.

Question: "When would you question negative consequences of your economic or professional activity?"

Andrew Hollo wins the international award for the Society for the Advancement of Consulting's **Consultant of the Year 2020**



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