

## Learn to Glow

**Create a co-operative environment within your organisation and you will radiate energy, innovation and success, says Professor Lynda Gratton.**

In times of recession and job uncertainty, it is more important than ever that each one of us can prove their worth to our employer. Whether we like it or not, it is survival of the brightest, and team members that can match earning potential with creativity, and who also work well in a team, who will survive job cuts.

Recessions lead to an overriding focus on a company's finance function, and budgets are inevitably cut in the more creative areas such as innovation, research and development, and marketing. However, this does not mean we should spend our time counting costs; this renewed focus on operations leaves the door open for the adoption of new innovation practice and the learning of new habits and skills. These pressures and fissures within an organisation – while difficult at the time – can over time yield fresh ideas, engaging experiments and interesting adaptations.

Rather than focusing on the past and asking what we did wrong or could have done differently, the challenge is to be receptive to change and open to new ways of working. This will require us to question fundamental assumptions about the way we work and how businesses are run. We have the opportunity to change how we work – for the better. For organisations, this means fostering teamwork and knowledge share; for the individual, this means broadening our knowledge and skills base, and unlocking new ways of co-operating with colleagues and within our networks.

Work is how we increasingly define ourselves as people: it's what we spend the majority of our lives engaged in. Each one of us deserves to live a fulfilling work life and to do this, we need to work on creating a great environment for ourselves, and for our colleagues. In this ever-changing world, we must stay ahead of the curve and be the first port of call when new opportunities arise. We can do this by *Glowing* - by radiating positive energy that fosters a great working experience, that excites and ignites others through our own inspiration, and delivers superior value through our work.

Only too often though, we think that to be invaluable means being first into the office and last out; working on our days off; and taking on every task asked of us. That just isn't the case any more: thanks to technology and cheap outsourced labour (as well as young graduates snapping at our heels in a shrinking job market), there is always someone who will do the task faster, quicker, and cheaper.

My research has shown that the majority of people spend less than 20 per cent of their working lives feeling energised, engaged, and innovative. To stay ahead of the curve, you have to work with more energy, more enthusiasm, and most important of all, more innovation. It is this combination that will bring

you long-term success in this technology-enabled world.

The best way to protect yourself from cheaper competition in the job market is to provide those human facets that are invaluable to an organisation: a creative mindset, inspiration and teamwork. Following years of research, what I discovered is that people who *Glow* have mastered three distinct areas of their life:

- they have built deeply trusting and cooperative relationships with others (a co-operative mindset);
- they have extended their networks beyond the obvious to encompass the unusual (jumping across worlds);
- they are on an inner quest that ignites their own energy and that of others (igniting latent energy).

Supporting people in organisations to create fulfilling work and innovative performance has been my overriding mission for the past 20 years. Together we have been able to provide the tools for companies to develop Hot Spots, by supporting teams to buzz with energy and work together to create value for the bottom line. However, what we cannot guarantee is that a company will provide this fertile working atmosphere for us, so we have to learn how to motivate ourselves, our colleagues, and our business community to build the environment we need to *Glow*. By enhancing our working patterns and our relationships with others, we can go some way towards creating a favourable working environment, whether in a bricks and mortar office, or in cyberspace.

For example, the vast majority of the many thousands of volunteers around the world who every night build and repair the Linux platform have never met each other in real life. Theirs is a community built exclusively in the virtual world, powered by a compelling vision and shaped by individual commitments – the type of commitments I mean when I talk about a co-operative mindset.

It is no surprise that the majority of the Linux volunteers are under the age of 30. Their generation has already discovered the power of e-based social networks and how purposeful relationships can be created with limited if any face-to-face interaction. Even more traditional companies, such as British Telecom, have proved that home working (when done properly) can be more productive than office work – again, proving that co-operative relationships and a creative environment are key to allowing individuals to *Glow*.

There are a number of ways that you can bring innovation and flair to your working life. Turn to colleagues you trust – and who trust you - and ask them for advice and insight into your tasks. This is particularly relevant when you search for new projects and opportunities that may be outside your comfort zone. The power of networking was proved with Barack Obama's election campaign, which used social networking tools to build grass-roots activism and fundraising. As well as helping you build a co-operative mindset, online networking tools are the easiest way to facilitate the jumping across boundaries that I refer to, and to consult people outside your normal networks and with totally different mindsets.

When you reach out to your wider network, you will come across people whose experiences and views differ significantly from your own. Opening yourself up to these new ideas will dramatically increase your ability to *Glow* and to innovate in your work. The further you “jump across worlds” to communicate with people from vastly different profiles, the fresher your perceptions will be.

How do you implement this principle on a daily basis? People who are good at jumping across worlds place a high value on their network and know precisely what their network is doing for them. They make sure that when innovation is important, they have access to people who are different and can bring fresh perspectives and insights.

When you have become well-versed in cooperation and jumping across worlds, you create what I call latent energy, that is, you have generated within yourself and in your immediate community the potential to become really energised. But in order to maximise the potential within yourself (and by association, your organisation), you need to be able to ignite the latent energy, to create real innovation.

Three actions support the principle of igniting latent energy. The first is to ask questions that spark energy, to engross and interest others as well as your own curiosity. The second action is to create visions that compel. These are visions of the future that you and your colleagues can buy into, that encourage others to imagine the future and to become excited about being involved in that future. The third action you can take is to co-operate with others to craft meaningful and exciting work.

These relationships improve the working environment for all concerned, and support the principle of cooperation. Once you have developed habits and skills of cooperation, you need to become adept at listening to others and engaging in good conversations with others. Finally, you need to be proactive in ensuring that where and with whom you work is conducive to you being able to *Glow*. Do not be afraid to leave a job where cooperation is limited in order to move to a new company where cooperation flourishes.

The ability to *Glow* has never been more important than it is today. A strong foundation to your network will become essential, since you will lean on them more and will not have the benefit of face-to-face interaction. Cost-cutting measures and a freeze on travel budgets are likely to lead to the emergence of flexible virtual teams, which cannot possibly function efficiently if they do not consist of individuals that *Glow*.

- *Lynda Gratton is a professor at London Business School and bestselling author of 'Hot Spots: why some teams, workplaces and organisations buzz with energy and others don't'. Her new book 'Glow: how you can radiate energy, innovation and success', is published on April 2 by FT Prentice Hall and Berrett-Koehler.*  
[www.hotspotsmovement.com](http://www.hotspotsmovement.com)

