A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

An inspirational festive tale.

A Week Before Xmas

You're driving home from another long day in the office, its dark, you have had a tough week and know you will have to work when you get home to prepare for tomorrows meetings. You idly switch on the radio and come across a short version of the Christmas Carol being read out

Ebenezer Scrooge is visited by his long dead business partner Jacob Marley who wandering the earth in chains shackled to his money boxes from a lifetime trying to make money for his business at the expense of his staff. Scrooge is then visited by 3 ghosts showing him how he may end up with the same fate if he doesn't change his ways. The ghost of Christmas Past shows him receiving love and support from an elder who mentors him in business, while also showing him that his ambition lead to him losing the woman who loved him. Christmas Present introduces Scrooge to Tiny Tim, who will die if his poor family circumstance doesn't change and also to characters called Ignorance and Want. Christmas Future sees him dying a lonely hated man, and also sees the sadness and compassion being shown to the family of the now deceased Tiny Tim. Scrooge waking up the next day after lots of reflection begins to treat everyone with kindness, generosity and compassion, embodying the spirit of Christmas.

As the story finishes it reminds you of a conversation you had with Ty Nitim earlier. You had asked her how she was and got a long tirade…….

Ty is REALLY looking forward to the Christmas break, she needs it, she's been working flat out on a very exciting change programme at work, one that's going to make life so much easier for everyone in the future. It's going to help everyone collaborate more easily, share data, instant message, support video conferencing and will be accessible on their phones, tablets, laptops and even some fancy TVs. Ty is quite tired though, she's putting full hours in at work, getting into the office at 7 (mostly to avoid traffic and ensure a parking space), leaving after 5 (which means she gets stuck in traffic every night and often means she doesn't have time to go to the gym) and after a day spent mostly in meetings, gets home, spends an hour or so with the family before getting to the days 60 or 70 emails she's missed. As you listen you reflect this is not just Ty's life, it's yours too. How did it come to this? Especially when you are the leader, the change agent, the manager of a big department, where you pride yourself on creating a healthy and happy workforce? You spend a lot of time supporting staff as needed. You help them do their jobs by providing the latest tools and kit to make life easier & work time more effective and productive. You embrace the work life balance policy, communicate regularly, always engage with staff on change. And you also develop yourself, leadership courses, conferences, staying abreast of the next big thing. And yet everyone is exhausted… All the time…

Are you the unintentional modern-day Scrooge you wonder?

Evening Time

Later you grab 30 minutes of quiet time by having a long hot soak with the bathroom door locked you come back to the thoughts you had earlier and try to work out what your ghost of Christmas Past would show you? You were fast tracked through the system,

you had a great leader and mentor who recognised your passion for change, for problem solving. You were always pulled into projects about the future, about anything digital. One of your first big project leadership roles was to implement the use of mobile phones with email capability into the organisation. You had to select which areas would pilot it, what projects would benefit from it. Everyone wanted this new technology, it wasn't a difficult sell. It's hard to imagine today why "access to emails from wherever you are" might have been so exciting but it was. Everyone thought it would make them much more efficient and effective. You even won a national award for leading a "workforce of the future project"

Fast forward to today and now email is the one thing everyone complains of. Too many, too much, and given everyone spends most of their workday either in meetings or travelling to meetings or writing papers for meetings, these emails build up and build up and start to eat into staff's own time, something they feel they need to do once they get home. It turned out that the mobile with features was less of a time saver and more of a work increaser. Permanently tired staff working excessive hours you have to admit does not make for a better business or meet our modern-day work life balance ambitions.

But this new project Ty is working on will help this. Won't it? The business case stacks up: Easier to collaborate; video conferencing to save travel; access to you work files wherever you are from the cloud. These should all help people work from home helping us deliver on our agile and flexible working policy. And instant messaging so you can be more reactive rather than relying on email should decrease all those emails and associated workload. *Shouldn't it?*

A knock on the bathroom door brings you out of your thoughts

 "Dinner will be ready in 20 mins"

"Ok" you shout, "I'll be down in 10"

As you re-submerge yourself in the bathwater you start to think more about this change programme and the future. You imagine your team in a few years' time. They all have grey faces, their enthusiasm and "can do" attitudes having disappeared long ago. The ones who could have left, fed up of never being able to get away from work, no longer feeling supported by you or the team. As office space is reduced to save money the team are forced to work home alone with the occasional video conference and have long lost the team spirit you worked so hard at building. By giving everyone the IT kit and systems to allow them to always be contactable and always have access to work content they are never allowed to really switch off, being instant messaged well into the evenings on all their different projects. Video conferencing never really works well and so it has been hard to build new teams with 2D technology where it's mostly one person talking while everyone else tries to clear a few emails. And yes there is still the email problem, in fact it's worse. As trust has decreased across teams, the copying in to cover yourself email culture has rapidly increased.

You wonder what the failure point was and conclude that you never really tried to change *HOW* you work, you just introduced technology to keep doing *more of the same* thinking it would save time, improve productivity and therefore staff would have to work less of those extra hours. You now realise that you used the technology to justify cramming in more and more of the same until everyone reached break point. Without giving the tools, principles or leadership of working in *different* ways you had in fact changed nothing, or at least nothing for the better. The technology and software, rather than releasing everyone from valueless task, rather than supporting collaboration and agile working, rather than making the team leading edge, had, in reality, broken everyone and you were now lagging behind and no longer seen as leading the way in the workforce of the future.

You blow bubbles and come up for air and having no idea what you could do to fix this inevitable future.

The Next Morning

The following morning you wake up with a sense of dread. How can you now support the programme Ty is leading on, and the rest of the team, when you've seen the future. You idly turn on the radio and are about to switch channels when something catches your ear.

"Our next guests are here to talk about the future of the workplace" says the host, introducing Prof Eddie Obeng, Director of Pentacle, the Virtual Business School and Nam Clockthorn, a change manager in a large organisation.

The show goes on to describe an entirely new way of working called QUBE. A way of bringing people together, from all over the globe if necessary into a virtual immersive space, an office, workshop space, auditorium or even a virtual art gallery. A space complete with over 400 Performance Enhancement Tools to help people work collaboratively at speed.

Where there are no meetings (where people talk about doing things) but instead drumbeats where the team get together frequently (weekly) for short amounts of time (30 minutes) *to do* what is needed to progress the project. The collaborative is open, trusting and removes hierarchy so team spirit is high, and everyone has a shared purpose. And because it's virtual it removes the need to travel so more likely to get attendance. Nam goes on to explain how unlike 2D VC it's so immersive that if fells like being in room with the team, who are all represented by avatars (qubots), and because your write things before talking you can see emerging common discussion points to focus on rather than focusing on whoever talks loudest. You also really listen when people do talk, properly listen, because you are so immersed it's hard to be distracted by say doing your email instead of joining in with the activity.

 "The speed we work at" she goes on to say "means if you ducked out to check your emails, even for 5 minutes you would miss quite a bit and feel a bit silly as everyone else would have moved on to the next thing. This results in everyone instantly feeling they have an equal voice creating a real sense of trust". Nam also explains that she's about 40-50% more productive but feels less "stressed", rarely works excessive hours and doesn't really get emails.

 "We don't need to email each other. We are all in this space, so we talk to each other as we need to. And because all of our work is done on whiteboards and stays there for everyone to see we don't need to write pointless papers for meetings. Pretty much everything I do now adds value which makes me feel like what I'm doing is really worthwhile. I mostly work from home but feel like I'm with my team all day. And we all take a proper lunch break to allow to refresh and reflect. I'm normally to be found up in the hills with the dogs taking stock of the morning and getting some exercise and gaining energy for the afternoon rather than having the post lunch office slump."

As you pull into the car park you can already see that

its unlikely that there will be any parking spaces left. It's still dark and although the office lights are on the greyness of the walls make it look gloomy and uninviting. Those arriving on foot are all bent over their smart phones, no doubt trying to catch up on yesterday's emails or working out how they're going to get anything done today when they have back to back meetings and papers to write for next week's meetings.

This can't be the future of the workforce can it?

Thanks to Scrooge you resolve to do something different ….

You pull over and google www.QUBE.cc