

Tempting Eve – The Garden of Good and Evil

Ricky Burges

Chief Executive Officer

Western Australian Local Government Association

Research shows that we have around 50,000 thoughts a day – well, some of us have one thought 50,000 times. After spending three days looking at Leadership, Transformation and Human Capital in the company of such an amazing group of people and being lead by two of the world’s most distinguished professors, I imagine that the number would significantly increase and probably explains why some of you are exhausted and need lots to drink to help you feel better.

I feel very privileged to be invited to share in your celebration and also to be invited to be a guest speaker. Rather than deliver another academic paper, I decided I’d rather talk to you about attitude and values and the difference you can make as you continue on the leadership path you have chosen; and also tell you a story about someone who overcame the most awful life circumstances and spent many years of his life trying to share a message of hope, purpose and meaning with the community.

Well, what sort of attitude do you have towards life, towards others? Is it loving, kind, giving..... for whatever it is, it will influence your thinking. Feeling flows from thinking and values only come to life when we live them out.... And so, think well of yourself.

I have discovered that essentially life is extraordinarily good and precious. It hit me like a brick only a couple of weeks ago when a close friend was diagnosed with leukaemia. She is desperately sick and

only a couple of weeks earlier we were planning an exciting future together... today she is fighting for her life.

I have also come to appreciate the signature strength or gift that each one of us brings to the relationships we have and as we are constantly influencing people, for better or for worse, how much better it would be if we are able to not only know what that special and unique gift is, but that we can let it become part of us and use it all the time. How do you know what it is.... ? Well, let me give you an example, it is the feeling you get when every instrument in the orchestra hits the notes and the melody just right; when the music soars and you close your eyes and feel like you've just found heaven. When you are using your signature strength, or gift and you are able to influence and shape the ground where you are working so that the team come together; or the problems fall into place; or the systems and processes are aligned you get that same feeling.

Today, I want to tell you a story about someone who also searched for insight and emotional wholeness. I suggest that the search for insight is our mind's desire for awareness and wisdom. Each of us likes to think that we know the truth. Yet this is clearly not so, since things we know to be true often prove to be inaccurate. Hindsight is a wonderful thing. (Hindsight and awareness brings insight. Hindsight without awareness brings blindness). Usually the best we can do is to have partial awareness. As we expand our awareness and accept and adopt more complete truths, our journey follows a path of increasing complexity as we search for purpose and meaning.

I want to tell you about Arthur Stace, an unremarkable person who lead an unremarkable life but who had a profound effect on others in his search for purpose and meaning.

Arthur was born in 1884 in Balmain, just west of central Sydney. His mother, father; two brothers and two sisters were alcoholics. As a child he often used to hide under the house to escape his parents drunken brawls. He frequently stole milk and biscuits from neighbours homes or fled to his sisters; brothel operators who were constantly in trouble with the police. He grew up in poverty looking after himself and stealing food to survive. At twelve he was made a ward of the state and at fourteen he found his first job in a coalmine. At fifteen he was in jail for what was to become a way of life for him and he was well on the way to alcoholism himself.

In his twenties he lived in Surry Hills in Sydney's inner south, running liquor between pubs and brothels, and was involved in petty theft until the start of World War One. He served in France, returning partially blind in one eye and suffering the effects of poison gas. From then until the middle of the Great Depression he slid further down into alcoholism, until he was drinking methylated spirits at sixpence a bottle, and living on handouts.

On August 6th, 1930, he attended a meeting for men at "Barneys", as St Barnabas' Church on Broadway is generally known. Most were there, for the food, but there was a message first.

Noticing six tidily dressed people near the front (in marked contrast to the bulk of those attending), he asked the man sitting next to him, a well-known criminal – "who are they?". "I 'd reckon they'd be Christians". He replied. Stace said "Well look at them and look at us. I'm having a go at what they have got". – and he slipped down on his knees and prayed.

Hardly a remarkable event on the surface of it, but he found that he was subsequently able to give up drinking, and said – "as I got back my self respect, people were more decent to me" – and so he was also able to find steady employment.

Some months later in the Burton Street Baptist Church in Darlinghurst, of which he was later a member for many years, he heard a noted “give-em-hell” preacher, the Rev. John Ridley speak, or rather shout “ “I wish I could shout ETERNITY through all the streets of Sydney!”

Stace, recalling the day said – “He repeated himself and kept shouting ETERNITY, ETERNITY and his words were ringing in my brain as I left the church. Suddenly I began crying and I felt a powerful call from the Lord to write ETERNITY. I had a piece of chalk in my pocket and I bent down there and wrote it”.

Now, Stace had received a very limited education which had left him barely able to write his own name legibly however, he found that he could write ETERNITY quite elegantly two foot wide on the pavement!

The next day Stace was up at 5.00am and after praying set off to write ETERNITY every hundred metres or so on the pavement. He’d get back by 10 am to do his job as cleaner at the Burton Street Baptist Church. He went all over Sydney town, Wynyard, Glebe, Paddington, Randwick and Central Station. The messages were the subject of intense curiosity by the public, the press and of course the city council! He continued his crusade for years.

It wasn’t until 1956 that the puzzle was solved when he was caught writing ETERNITY on the pavement and when confronted with the question “Are you Mr Eternity?” Arthur replied, “Guilty, your honour”. Then on the 21st June 1956 the Sunday Telegraph published an interview with Arthur Stace and it was all out in the open. Arthur, though continued as he always had, leaving his now slightly less

enigmatic message all over the city just as before. He died of a stroke on July 30, 1967, in a nursing home, aged 83. But his word ETERNITY persisted in the public mind, with vigorous exchanges in the papers and in Sydney Council meetings regarding suggestions of the need for a statue or a plaque to be commissioned in his memory. Two years after he died, the Sydney poet Douglas Stewart published the following lines about the graffiti artist:

*“That shy mysterious poet Arthur Stace
Whose work was just one single mighty word
Walked in the utmost depths of time and space
And there his word was spoken and he heard
ETERNITY, ETERNITY, it banged him like a bell
Dulcet from heaven sounding, sombre from hell:*

And, Architect Ridley Smith used pebbles to write ETERNITY 21cm high in Sydney Square.

When the State Library of New South Wales hosted an exhibition of the lives of Sydney’s most notable eccentrics, his name was prominent in the introduction, as perhaps the best public symbol of a group to which he was not, in the end, admitted. Because eccentrics are lighter than life. You take them or leave them, you find them amusing, diverting, escapist. But that is not how we respond to Stace’s **Eternity** and so, intuitively, we exclude him from their company. Not because of any superiority to that group, but precisely for the opposite reason: eccentrics are often gifted and astonishing people but really, he was not – he was a normal man, one who pretended nothing more, who’d had a hard life, but who was driven along by a calling, and whose impact was just the normal and the natural impact of a sublime idea.

And finally, there at the very end of Sydney’s half-hour fireworks spectacular, on the New Year’s eve of the new millennium, just as all had reconciled to the inevitable let-down of it ending, there emerged, out of the dissipating clouds of smoke and light, the word again, and hung there for hours out of time – ETERNITY. Crowds of partygoers on the foreshore, many of whom knew nothing of the term’s significance cheered spontaneously. It was the word for the moment.

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Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA)**

Ignatius Jones who produced the celebrations in Sydney said that he had chosen to honour Stace's legacy as a fitting way to mark a new era saying "It's incredibly Sydney. It symbolized for me the madness, mystery and magic of the city. On the one hand there's the meaning of the word in its temporal sense and on this night of fellowship and good cheer, it shouldn't just be about one night, the celebration should be eternal in human life."

But it also says a lot about Arthur Stace who grew up in a brothel, came back from war shell-shocked and became an habitual criminal and an alcoholic, that he should be able to reinvent himself and try to bring joy and meaning into people's lives.

And so, what about you? How do you choose to earn your living? Or did you choose, or did other people or life choose for you?

How do you behave towards colleagues, bosses, clients and customers?

How do you view your paid work in relation to all other areas of your life?"

Is 'work' your primary identification?

Do you give your best self to work, and bring home what's left over?

These are uncomfortable questions for many of us. But worth addressing. Yet issues of work and values don't stop there. Even when we are lucky enough to have some choice about where and how

we will work, we may still face some painful situations where we feel torn between self-interest and integrity. Or when our personal values clash with the values of our workplace.

I heard someone say at a conference last week that *“I want this job but hate it that we’re not always straight with clients”* and someone else saying *“yes, I know what you mean, there’s bullying at work but I’m scared to speak up”*. And, one of my lawyer friends saying to me recently *“my firm gives lip-service to family-friendly policies yet the partners only really care about how many hours you can bill”*

Behaving in ways that feel compliant rather than authentic in order to keep a job or gain a promotion can add huge stress to your life

It also creates an uncomfortable and potentially harmful split between your so-called private and public lives. You want the job *and* you want to be ‘yourself; you want to feel valued. Yet you don’t want to have to surrender self-worth in order to achieve that.

To maintain a genuine sense of self, you need to be able to stay in harmony with your deepest values and cultivate and express the same values in whichever situation you find yourself. This can require you to be subtle, diplomatic and discerning – and sometimes courageous.

In extreme cases, it may require you to consider what you value more; approval from others or self-respect; approval or integrity; freedom or security; competitiveness or co-operation; honesty or expediency.

Whatever you wish there was more of, *be that.*

Whatever you want your relationships and friendships to be, *be that.*

Whatever you want the world to be, *be that.*

If you want there to be less fear and more love in the world, *start with yourself.*

If you want there to be less stress, anxiety, depression and tension in the world, *start with yourself.*

If you want the world to be a more peaceful place, fairer, more generous and compassionate, *start with yourself.*

Mega-motivator Anthony Robbins said “Any time you sincerely want to make a change, the first thing you must do is raise your standards. When people ask me what really changed my life....I tell them that absolutely the most important thing was changing what I demanded of myself. I wrote down all the things I would no longer accept in my life, all the things I would no longer tolerate, and all the things I aspired to becoming”

Another amazing author and motivator Stephanie Dowrick talks about the ‘power of presence’ which is where I’ll finish my story telling. She says “*Your wit, beauty, talent and riches are lovely. And probably other people enjoy them too. But what matters most is your gift of presence.*

Presence is what will remain longest in other people’s minds when they think about you. It is what will eventually determine whether you affect them positively or not.

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Be aware of what your presence brings to other people. Stand in their shoes.

- *Listen to the tone of voice you use when you speak to others.*
- *Be honest about your moods. Other people sense these before you have spoken a single word. Nothing is more powerful in its effect on others than your mood (and the thoughts that drive your mood).*
- *Recognise how like others you are in the fundamental things – however different your outward self may be. Know that what affects hurts, or pleases, you will affect them in almost exactly the same ways.*
- *Let yourself remember how a brief kindness ‘makes your day’. Free yourself to be kind to other people. Recognise your power to do that and **be kind to yourself also.***

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