

## The Leadership Perspective Roundup with Amanda Lang

### Sound Bites

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*“Asking the right question is better than rushing to the answer.”*

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*“Information and access to ideas is the key to prosperity.”*

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*“Why?” or “Why not?” asks us to think about things we weren’t thinking about, do things we didn’t plan to do and stop things we were already doing.”*

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Our last leadership perspectives event of 2013 featured Amanda Lang; bestselling author, award-winning journalist and senior business correspondent for CBC News, in which she reflected on the critical connection between creativity, innovation and economic growth.

Amanda started her career in journalism with the Globe and Mail. From there she went on to join the Financial Post and became the paper’s New York correspondent. While in New York, she switched to television as an anchor and reporter with CNN reporting from the New York Stock Exchange for American Morning. Returning to Canada in 2009, she became an anchor for the Business News Network (BNN) and host of both SqueezePlay and The Commodities Report, before moving to CBC to launch the Lang and O’Leary Exchange with Kevin O’Leary. Keeping on top of daily stories and trends in business, politics, and economics has given Amanda a valuable perspective on the power of curiosity and innovation to increase productivity.

What follows is a summary of Amanda’s key messages:

#### **Productivity is the single biggest indicator and lever we have for economic health.**

In Canada today, we are facing a productivity crisis bigger than the credit crisis. Our productivity is falling relative to our biggest competitors, which means we are becoming poorer in the long run.

While everyone wants to talk about innovation, most people don’t really want to talk about productivity. It’s boring and hard to get your arms around. But innovation and productivity are two sides of the same coin. If you innovate, you will (almost always) get better productivity.

How do you create a culture of innovation, and environment that allows for creativity? You have to create an environment that allows for “Why?” and “Why not?” Asking the right question, in the right place, at the right time can be a very powerful mechanism to produce new results.

It sounds simple, but then you stop and think about it for a minute and it’s actually very hard. If businesses ask themselves ‘why’ or ‘why not’, they run into something called the status quo bias.

There are two main areas within organizations that can facilitate innovative thinking — HR and IT. Unfortunately they often stifle it. It's not the people within the departments that are to blame, but the processes they put into place. Organizations tend to cling to these processes. *"Ideas can get lost or stifled inside organizations, by people, by egos, by titles, by process."*

The third biggest facilitator of creativity and curiosity comes from leadership. Anyone with direct reports has a responsibility to foster innovative thinking. It is easy to say that one will behave in a curious way, but this is easier said than done. It is critical in an organization to identify bottlenecks, people and/or systems that hinder creativity.

Curiosity is the heart of innovation. Toddlers ask why for a living. That's how they figure out the world. Often the response to a child's curiosity is negative. It is not seen for what it is; a beautiful young mind at work. Sadly, this continues throughout our education, where we are taught that there are only right and wrong ways to think. One innovator I met said he thinks our "style of thinking" is the last bastion of diversity. It is the thing that defines you more than anything else.

### **Asking the right question is better than rushing to the answer.**

All of this can be boiled down to how we operate as individuals today. Curiosity is an innate trait, one that we all had as children, and it was irrepressible. Our brains understood that our curiosity was the way to learn about the world, the way to solve problems, the way to become smarter. But somewhere along our path, thanks to our parents, our teachers, and our bosses, we have learned to repress this curiosity.

Passion, creativity and initiative are not for sale. These are gifts that we give to each other. They are gifts that your employees can offer you. But you can't possibly get any of those things with someone who is not engaged. We can't make everybody's job more interesting, but we can make everybody feel more connected to their job and help them to believe that their brain is full of interesting and useful ideas.

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Amanda's talk was full of inspiring anecdotes and stories from her research into innovation and productivity. Her book *"The Power of Why"* was chosen as a finalist for this year's National Business Book Awards.

Stay tuned for our **2014 Leadership Perspectives** line up. If you would like to be added to our mailing list for upcoming events, please email [events@weirfoulds.com](mailto:events@weirfoulds.com).

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