

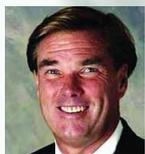
# Management Focus

dynamic intelligence for today's leaders



## Featured article

Leadership: experience is the best teacher



## Guru interview

An interview with Tim Connor

*Interview by Debbie Read*

# Welcome to Management Focus

... and welcome to the November/December issue.

The challenge to companies aspiring to sustained high performance is both breathtakingly simple and daunting: they must grow more leaders over a larger terrain and faster than ever before.

The advances in learning models, information technology and leadership research strongly suggest that new approaches like experience-based learning hold strong promise in helping companies meet the high performance challenge. Find out more about this with our article on leadership.

Tim Connor is a speaker/best selling author/trainer/consultant and business coach. He is also President and CEO of Connor Resource Group and Peak Performance Institute.

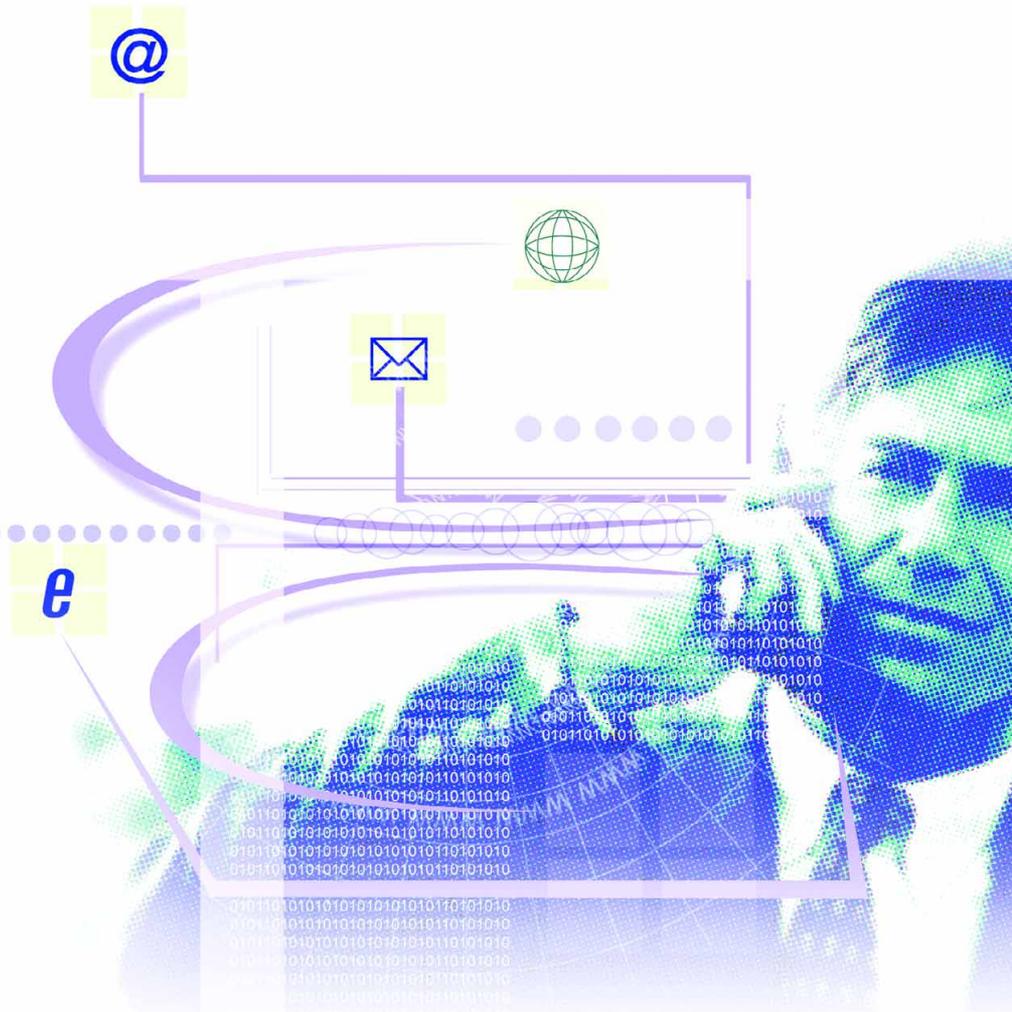
Tim has been a full-time professional speaker and trainer since 1973, and he has given over 4,500 presentations in 21 countries, to a wide variety of sales, management and executive audiences. How does he keep his presentations so energetic and fresh? Find out in this exclusive interview with Tim, where he also discusses the challenges faced by today's sales professionals.

On a different note, our resident expert discusses what factors should be considered when increasing corporate responsibility and how well can this be aligned with the overall corporate strategy. Read his thoughts in our popular *Management Matters* section.

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Best wishes

Debbie Read and Alistair Craven  
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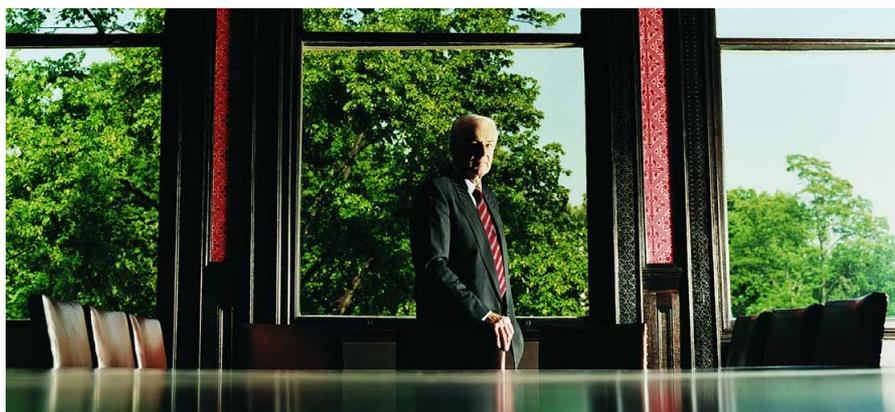
# Leadership: experience is the best teacher

High performance businesses will achieve a sustained competitive advantage over the next decade by operating from the premise that good leadership begets much more good leadership throughout the organization.

Organizations that develop this multiplier mindset will increase the number and diversity of their leaders and will enjoy, as a result, more innovation and greater flexibility and adaptability. But it won't be easy. Central to building this important capability is an understanding of the role experience plays in creating leaders.

It is becoming increasingly clear that experience is the best teacher of leadership. In an Accenture study, leaders, entrepreneurs, corporate executives, social activists, and elected politicians unanimously agreed that they had learned more about leading from real work and life experiences than from leadership development courses or MBA programs. They credited the latter with helping them become more competent technically, but they concluded that formal programs do little to help people learn fundamental lessons or how to extract wisdom from experience.

This does not mean that companies should rush to scuttle their development programs or training budgets. Innovative new approaches to leadership development that blend formal training, e-learning, coaching, and knowledge sharing should be employed to extend and amplify the experiences acquired on the job by employees at all levels. These approaches should all be part of experience-based leadership development, a method of helping organizations grow the leaders they need to achieve high performance.



## Experience-based leadership development

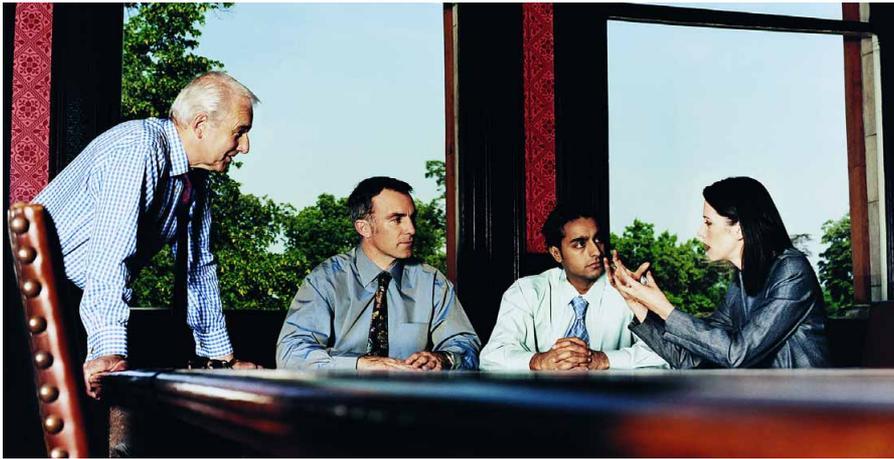
The experience-based approach represents a comprehensive way of developing leaders. It knits together on-the-job experience, life experience, and specific skill development, rather than presenting employees with a smorgasbord of classes and programs that is tenuously linked to career development, succession planning, or business objectives. The experience-based method can be adapted to the developmental needs and opportunities of people at all stages of their careers, and also to the changing needs of organizations operating in complex and uncertain environments.

Experience-based leadership development consists of three major processes – preparing, developing, and preserving – that together produce skills needed by leaders at all levels as well as a concept of leadership practice that encourages lifelong learning.

## Preparing

Helping people understand their own best learning style is key to preparing leaders. Leaders must recognize how their own motives, aspirations, values, stereotypes, and expectations shape what they see. There is no shortage of tools that can be used to these ends. But in many organizations, such tools are difficult to find outside a formal classroom setting and are usually quite expensive to acquire or licence for one-time use.

Experience-based leadership development makes these tools available when people need them – often through web- and portal-based technologies – and links them to an individual's specific developmental stage and work situation. For example, the experience-based approach leverages the dramatic improvements that have been made recently in the use of simulation and virtual reality to present learners with truly encompassing leadership situations.



Boeing's simulation for the as-yet-infant underwater transportation industry is a case in point. Originally an outgrowth of Boeing's desire to integrate two major acquisitions, Rockwell and McDonnell Douglas, the simulation centres on "AquaTek" and two other fictional competitors. Participants in the simulation are assigned to all the major functional roles one might find in a small but growing business and are given realistic budgets and constraints. They draft learning contracts based on their experiences during the simulation and these, in turn, become a vital guide for the coaches responsible for follow-through. Even during the simulation, coaches review the experience with participants as individuals and in their teams.

The whole process is ideal preparation for future leaders and has the added benefits of providing a crossroads for the company's far-flung leadership and giving peers the opportunity to witness one another's business strengths directly. In that respect, it is far superior to teambuilding exercises via white water rafting or egg-drop competitions.

### Developing

Useful as such simulation tools are, they are not sufficient for leadership development. In order to grow in the role, leaders need to hone their sense-making skills – not only to ensure that they make the most of their experiences but also to increase their ability to communicate what they've learned and to make practical use of their insights. Some of these skills complement one another in powerful ways; for example, training in

emotional intelligence makes individuals far more aware of the sentiments and motivations of others, and skill in storytelling increases the impact a leader can have in communicating information. Familiarity with – and the opportunity to practice – different decision-making and leadership styles increases the odds that a leader can better match his or her behaviour to the demands of a given situation.

**Leaders must recognize how their own motives, aspirations, values, stereotypes, and expectations shape what they see.**

### Preserving

The third part of the framework is preservation of experience. Leaders must be able to communicate the lessons experience has taught them; they need what leadership expert Noel Tichy has called a "teachable point of view". But the teachable point of view must be open to adaptation, amendment, and change as an individual's newer and different experiences dictate.

Some of those experiences will be personal and unique, but they can and should be

supplemented by the lessons shared with a community of leaders. In the preparing process, leaders should build their own advice networks – people to whom they can turn for honest, critical, and timely advice. In the preserving phase, those same people serve as a learning community, a forum in which insights can be shared and where personal dilemmas, problems, and achievements are presented and discussed. Experience-based leadership development dramatically enhances the ability of people to document their experiences and to take on the role of coach or mentor to potential leaders of the future.

### Designing experiences and learning to lead

People often face crucible experiences in their lives – transformative events or tests that come at them without warning. As Warren Bennis and Robert J. Thomas wrote in their book *Geeks and Geezers*, the principal types of crucible have a direct organizational analogue. In other words, organizations may in fact have the ability to incorporate the transformative power of crucible experiences to help leaders achieve important insights and chart for themselves a lifelong learning agenda.

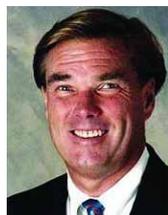
The challenge to companies aspiring to sustained high performance is both breathtakingly simple and daunting: they must grow more leaders over a larger terrain and faster than ever before. Competitive turbulence, market turmoil, and geopolitical instability demand it. Advances in learning models, information technology, and leadership research strongly suggest that new approaches like experience-based learning hold strong promise in helping companies meet the high performance challenge.

**Robert J. Thomas, Executive director of the Accenture Institute for High Performance Business, Massachusetts is also an associate partner in the Accenture Human Performance service line, and Peter Cheese, Global managing partner of Accenture Human Performance, is based in London.**

**Read the full version of this article in *Strategy & Leadership*, Volume 33 Number 3, 2005.**

# An interview with Tim Connor

Interview by Debbie Read



*Speaker/best selling author/trainer/consultant and business coach, Tim is the President and CEO of Connor Resource Group and Peak Performance*

*Institute. He has been a full-time professional speaker and trainer since 1973, and he has given over 4,500 presentations in 21 countries, to a wide variety of sales, management and executive audiences.*

*Each year over 85 per cent of his presentations are return engagements for the same clients on such topics as basic and advanced management skills, customer focused sales, peak performance motivation and real-world customer service. He is one of only 450 Certified Speaking Professionals in the country, a designation given by the National Speakers Association since 1974 and he is the founder of Master Speakers Int'l, an elite group of ten experienced veteran international speakers.*

*He is the author of 63 books including the international best sellers: Soft Sell, Your First Year in Sales, and You Call THAT Selling.*

**Q: You have been a full-time professional speaker and trainer for over 30 years, and each time your seminars and presentations are bespoke. How do you keep your presentations energetic and fresh?**

A: There are several things I do in no particular order.

First. Even though I may have presented this material hundreds of times it is the first time that this audience has heard it from me. I need to remember this so that I don't get too casual or arrogant about the topics I present.

Second. I read 100 books a year by a variety of business, self-help and fiction authors. The constant exposure to new ideas and new ways of presenting ideas helps me ensure that I never get stale.

Third. The value of any speaker is not in their content but in their ability to "connect" with each individual in their audience. This requires humility, vulnerability, self-disclosure and the ability to laugh at yourself and let the audience laugh at you without getting defensive or taking it personal.

Fourth. Learning can be fun but it can also be boring. If you have ever had to sit in an audience, classroom or seminar for more than twenty minutes listening to a bad speaker, teacher or trainer you know what I am talking about. It is my job to make learning fun, to keep the atmosphere light even though we might be covering challenging topics.

And finally, my role is to help people self-discover, not to teach. Everyone learns what they need to learn when they are ready to learn it. I never know person by person in my audiences who is ready for a concept, idea or change or not. So my presenting style is designed to help people understand that change in their life and career is their responsibility, not mine. My responsibility is to help them understand this simple yet vital concept – I am responsible to you but not for you.

**Q: Do you find that the challenges faced by today's sales professionals are the same across the globe?**

A: Yes and no. Generally speaking most people, around the world, regardless of their culture, nationality or gender want the same things in life. They want to be happy, secure and feel worthwhile. Sure there are others

and some people can behave as if these didn't matter but my experience speaking in over 20 countries during the past 30 years is that we are all basically the same. We may look different, talk different, have different mores but we are all more alike than different.

I would wager that salespeople who are successful in one country could be just as successful in other countries as long as they learned the language and became familiar with the uniqueness of the culture.

Having said this there are some challenges that all salespeople face today more than at any time in the history of business. And that is that we are now much more of a global village than we have ever been in the past. Products that are sold in China could have been made in Singapore. Products that are manufactured in Mexico can be assembled in Canada and distributed in the United States. Being a global economy we are all directly or indirectly dependent on each other. If a company fails in Sweden that owned a company in the United States the ripple effects can be felt for thousands of miles and hundreds of thousands of consumers.

The internet has without a doubt contributed to this global village expansion and reduction. What I mean by that is you have exposure to more customers you can sell to around the world easily but are you losing business in your home town to a competitor 10,000 miles away? There are numerous consequences of this global village that impact all salespeople around the world.

**Q: If you could give one piece of advice to someone wishing to embark on a career in sales, what would it be?**

A: Never give up or in. If you believe in your product or service and how it benefits your customers, stick with it until you have achieved greatness. And, finally, remember that you are here for a little while then gone forever, so enjoy each day and each selling opportunity and each moment.

To read the full, exclusive interview with Tim Connor, visit [www.managementfirst.com](http://www.managementfirst.com) and select the "Marketing" community.

# Management Matters

Welcome to our Q&A section – Management Matters – where you can find actionable advice on today's top management issues from our resident expert.

**Q. What factors should be considered when increasing corporate responsibility and how well can this be aligned with the overall corporate strategy?**

**It's important to remember that unless social responsibility is seen to be good for business, it isn't going to hold up when times get tight. So don't make soft-hearted and soft-headed promises.**

Remember that what Enron, Tyco and the rest did wasn't just bad ethics – it was bad business! So don't try to make a socially responsible position fit within a strategy when it patently doesn't. You will just be fooling yourself and you won't fool your customers and community. "Greenwash" tactics just don't work.

**Some practical tips:**

Be honest with customers. If you can create a trust relationship with your customers, big profits lie ahead. Businesses don't sustain on duplicity or rip-offs. You will lose in the

market long term, and are increasingly likely to also lose short term in the law courts. Audit your promises to customers – in your contracts, in your advertising, in your market positioning – and come down hard on those who break them. What we call customer orientation is good, socially responsible practice.

Quality assure your reputation. Be futurefocused. Put your policies on the line with environmental protection groups, student lobby groups – anyone who can give them a good workover and really test their robustness. A friend of mine in a big energy company in Canada used to take his staff and policies to vocal and radical green groups, to expose them to challenges by the environmentally aware. Make sure you aren't featured on an Internet lobbyist site, or in the next "No Logo" or "Fast Food Nation" books.

Quality assure diversity. In Western society, discrimination is more than a moral issue, and more than a legal one. Be found out behaving badly to ethnic minorities, to women, to disabled people and not only might you feel bad, you will surely end up in court and, in some form or another, damage the net worth of your organization.

Managing diversity doesn't mean indulging blindly in the outer reaches of absurd political correctness, nor the adoption of mindless quota systems. In successful firms it means addressing the issue, that is to compete effectively for a very scarce commodity – top-notch knowledge workers.

And finally, in and amongst all this – keep your eye on the ball. Stay in business; stay successful. If you haven't got it, you won't be able to give it away. Ex-British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once famously misinterpreted the Good Samaritan story from the New Testament as a defence of capitalism; the Samaritan was only able to help because he had some money. You are an employer, and that puts you in a responsible position in giving or withdrawing work. Work defines most people's lives. Treat the power with respect and don't fail in your business.

**Our resident expert has over 25 years' professional experience in management, ranging from academic journal editor and management consultant to senior board member.**

**If you would like to send him a question, write an e-mail to Web Content Manager Debbie Read at [dread@managementfirst.com](mailto:dread@managementfirst.com) and the best submissions will be featured in a future issue of *Management Focus*.**



## Coming Soon...

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## Final thought ...

“Research indicates that workers have three prime needs: interesting work, recognition for doing a good job, and being let in on things that are going on in the company.”

Zig Ziglar

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