

# Best Practices ...*the practice guaranteed to keep you small*

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Eileen and I were in the midst of a coaching conversation when it dawned on me that it was time to sit down at my trusty keyboard and draw together my thoughts about the lunacy of pursuing “best practices” in order to improve the operations of our organizations.

Because Eileen, like many other innovative, in-house thinkers was in the process of developing a rather advanced case of organizational concussion from pounding her head into the brick wall of supposed innovation called “best practices”. Her organization had a severe problem of long standing duration, so long standing, in fact, that the problem was structural and systemic. It was so much a part of the corporate air that she, her colleagues and superiors breathed that they were barely able to even detect its presence!

Eileen was fortunate in that she had personally sought out an educational process that had opened her thinking up to a whole new way of considering the problem and she had an approach that she knew would not only resolve the existing problem, but was powerful enough to open the door to transforming her organization. Using herself as a model of what was possible, Eileen had gotten the attention of a number of people in the organization who were committed to creating change and who had given her access to organizational decision makers. She had just completed an extremely well received presentation where it was clear to all that a revolutionary pathway to the future had just been provided to them.

And then the deadening “best practices” conversation surfaced: if this solution held so much potential, who else had adopted it previously? What other bigger, better, more powerful organizations had already integrated this approach into their success strategies? Where should they be looking to help ensure that they implemented a ‘tried and true’ solution?

What Eileen recognized in an instant was the limitation of those questions. Based on previous research, it was well known that this organization’s problem was one that was chronic throughout most large institutions. There were simply no solutions ‘out there’ that held the potential of what Eileen was proposing.

And it got Eileen thinking about how seduced we’ve become over the past couple of decades in our best practice approach to change: we think we are being innovative and creating more powerful organizational cultures, when in fact, we are stifling creativity and constantly playing catch-up when we play the best practices game. Eileen was very mindful that those companies who create approaches that are then emulated as ‘best practices’ don’t look to others to resolve their problems. They develop their own creative solutions. They lead, rather than follow. They invite creative thought and action on the part of their employees rather than paying big bucks to consultants who help them with customized “me too” solutions. They are smart in thought as well as action.

So my invitation to you is to look around and notice if you too have headed down a path that must lead to nowhere but to dispirited employees producing declining results. How dumb does

your organization need to become in its search to improve only as far as someone else's solution allows? How much of your employees creative genius and desire to contribute will be left on the sidelines (or eventually be harvested by someone else when they move on)? When will you develop the will to develop your own outstanding solutions that are then emulated by others perpetually committed to playing catch up?

*About Gwen McCauley:* Coach, educator, writer and veteran of the 'employee to entrepreneur' transformation process. With wit, wisdom and worldly experience, Gwen invites her clients on a journey of self-discovery, gaining clarity of purpose and increasing self-awareness and resourcefulness. Gwen brings a strong background as a corporate executive with extensive management experience to her work. She founded Odysseys Unlimited Inc. (OUI) in 1997 and is a co-founder of the WEL-Systems® Institute. Gwen has an MA in Human Systems Intervention from Concordia University and a successful track record as a coach, program leader and businesswoman. In addition to being a WEL-Systems Educator™, CODE Model™ Coach and Quantum TLC™ Facilitator, Gwen has studied Open Space Technology, Myers Briggs, Appreciative Inquiry, Generative Leadership and Total Quality Management. Gwen published her first book *"The Alchemy of Energy: Exploring The CODE Model"* in 2004 and co-authored *"Sekhmet Rising: the restlessness of women's genius"* with 17 other women in 2006. She is currently working on her third book.

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