

A Commonwealth of thinking

By PROFESSOR EDWARD DE BONO

CHAIRMAN, EDWARD DE BONO FOUNDATION



EDWARD DE BONO is widely known as one of the world's leading creative thinkers and is regarded at home as a Maltese 'national treasure'. He is the originator of 'lateral thinking', and his books have been translated into forty-three languages, with some receiving forewords from Nobel Laureates. His ideas have been used and hailed by some of the world's leading politicians, artists, scientists and businessmen. He has met and advised numerous Heads of State and corporate CEOs, and his clients have included IBM, Du Pont, Prudential, AT&T, British Airways, British Coal, NTT, Ericsson and Total.

I have fond memories of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. I last spoke to CHOGM in 2005 when the meeting was held in Malta. At the end of the meeting there was a reception. Her Majesty The Queen and Prince Phillip were in the receiving line. When I reached the Queen she asked 'Do you live in Malta or London?'. Prince Phillip standing beside her stepped forth and said 'He lives in The Albany in London!' It was quite extraordinary of him to remember that and I was most impressed. I do now technically live in Malta but still retain my place in The Albany.

Research shows that ninety per cent of the errors in thinking are in perception, not logic. If the perception is faulty the logic may be perfect but the result is rubbish. Research shows that teaching this thinking as a separate subject in schools raises the performance in every other subject by thirty to a hundred per cent. When I was last in China there was talk about implementing this in 360,000 schools. While this is important work, so much more needs to be done internationally to educate people to think.

Many years ago I had several meetings at the UN in New York, one of which was attended by the Secretary General Kofi Annan. I was trying to set up a group to generate further ideas, new ideas, and creative ideas about world issues. The initiative at the time seemed impossible because they told me they were not at the UN to think but to represent their countries. This is logical and understandable; but there is an absolute need for creativity in international affairs. I would like to see the Commonwealth do more than



Edward de Bono lectures worldwide on creative thinking

exist for matters of economy and diplomacy. I see an opportunity for the Commonwealth to take the lead in the world for 'new thinking'.

Humour is by far the most significant behaviour of the human brain, although it has been largely neglected by philosophers and psychologists. Humour is significant because it indicates that the brain uses patterns. Here's a scenario: An old man of ninety goes down to hell. As he wanders around he sees a friend of his, also aged ninety, with a beautiful young blonde sitting on his knee. As his friend seems to be having a good time he asks if this is really hell. The friend replies that it is indeed hell and that he is the punishment for the young lady. In humour, the result is very logical in hindsight. This is what happens in patterning systems.

In 1969 I wrote a book titled *The Mechanism of the Mind*. In it I described how the brain forms patterns. This book happened to be read by the leading physicist in the world, Professor Murray Gell-Mann who received his Nobel Prize for discovering the quark. He liked the book so much that he commissioned a group of computer experts to simulate what I had suggested in terms of brain patterns. They reported that the system would indeed work exactly as indicated in my book. He also told me that I had been working on chaos and complexity fifteen years before mathematicians had started to do so.

The point is that if the brain works in patterns there is an absolute and logical need for creativity. The need is to reach ideas that are very logical in hindsight but not easily accessible. With this in mind, I am planning to set up an organisation called the 'Palace of Thinking'. Its primary function would be to receive new ideas from anywhere and to publish the best ones. The second function would be to set up task forces and conferences specifically to generate new ideas on world problems and issues. Once the organisation is established, different nations would be invited to send 'thinkers' to the Palace with the sole task of generating creative new ideas on a range of matters. I see this as a wonderful opportunity for the Commonwealth to pioneer such an initiative. I believe the Commonwealth could thus become the source of new and creative thinking for the world. No other international organisation is doing this, and at a time when the relevance of the Commonwealth is being questioned, it would be the perfect statement. **F**