



*Grasping the Nettle* brought together Phil Jones and Don Sull. They pushed the boundaries of how we think about business and life.

## **Phil Jones**

Bob Mackenzie introduced the first speaker of the day, **Phil Jones**, the UK Chief Executive of technology firm Brother. His session on *Unlimited Potential* aimed to help us find our own purpose, values and principles. Phil structured his presentation into 4 parts, each one of them supported by insightful personal examples and stories.

### **Step 1: Up!portunity**

Phil explained how he had to learn the art of leadership as his early career began in the unlikely environment of east-end pubs and clubs and selling fax machines. He implored us to figure out who we really were, find our syntax and define our code, through reflection and thinking about our lives, and being open and curious. *“Live your life on purpose, not by accident.”*

He introduced the idea of Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and through the “Death Row Breakfast” exercise, he underlined our individual uniqueness.

### **Step 2: Up!dating**

He then talked about finding our “Ding!” - the moment we attain a state of clarity through establishing our values and principles that underpin our vision (what we want to be remembered for) and mission (daily actions to achieve our vision).

### **Step 3: Up!State**

Reinforcing the idea of being the CEO of you, Phil presented the triangle: Mind – Body – Soul. Authenticity is a prerequisite for successful leadership. Successful leaders share the same values across their personal and business lives.

### **Step 4: Up!Standing**

Situational awareness is critical. Invest more in **crystal moments** (that can’t be taken back) rather than process driven **rubber moments**.

In wrapping up, Phil reminded us *“When you are prepared to figure out who you are, then you will have that moment when your leadership journey starts!”*

## **Don Sull**

Bob introduced Don as “one of a rare breed of rock stars of management thinking”.

Don focused the first half of his session on strategy execution, and why the failure to execute is almost entirely due to the strategy itself being flawed. His latest survey, conducted among 400 global CEOs, showed strategy as their number one challenge - ahead of innovation, revenue growth or political volatility. As Don went further with the session, he debunked the most important myths around the concept of “strategy”.

**Myth 1. Strategy is good but execution is poor** - usually executives are trying to find the faults in execution, when it is the strategy that is poorly developed and understood. According to Don, a strategy should not be a vision, a financial projection, a thick report, “a laundry list” (too long, complex and difficult to understand) or a description of the company’s activity. Instead, a good strategy must offer understanding and guidance about the key trading points and should focus on four essential components: who and what the company/brand is, what the must-win battles are, who the target is and how the battles are going to be won.

**Myth 2. Communication = understanding.** Even though executives constantly focus on communicating the strategy, there is little understanding of it within organisations. The focus should also be on making employees really understand what the strategy means, what are its key components and what the priorities are in order to bring the strategy to life.

**Myth 3. Execution = alignment.** The majority of managers describe execution as vertical alignment and resource allocation up and down the chain of command. However, when strategy fails there is usually within organisations a breakdown of collaboration or co-ordination both between employees and teams and from employees towards their high level executives - which is usually translated into failing to deliver to customers, passing on opportunities, outsourcing or even duplicating the effort needed to fulfil a task. Trust is an essential characteristic of successful organisations.

**Myth 4. Execution means implementing a plan.** The problem with plans, Don explains, is they usually change often, since “no plan survives contact with reality”. Successful execution requires a strategy that is adaptable to take advantage of opportunities..

**Myth 5. One size fits all.** Given there are three dimensions of execution: **alignment, coordination and agility**, organisations should decide on and prioritise which dimensions they need to focus on.

Don went further in helping us understand the steps to successfully execute a strategy. Create a simple strategy that everyone can understand and remember. Communicate the strategy, rather than broadcast it. And create a collaborative environment in the workplace.

## **Don Sull (contd.)**

Don then switched his attention to adaptability and what organisations need in order to survive in volatile markets. Given the current economic and political environment and a high number of variables that influence the business landscape, organisations and leaders are currently facing high unpredictability. Recognising that volatility will become a constant feature, there are two corporate characteristics that help to deliver success in volatile environments: **agility** (the speed and effectiveness needed in order to spot new opportunities) and **absorption** (the resilience needed to adapt to change).

Agility itself can be approached from three angles: operational agility, portfolio agility (redeploying resources from past businesses into future projects) and strategic agility (spotting golden opportunities).

When talking about absorption, Don highlighted factors such as accessibility to cash, protected core markets, low fixed costs, and tangible assets.

Using a boxing-inspired metaphor Don illustrated the relationship between absorption and agility, and how they combine to help organisations reach successful outcomes.