



Brett Johnson

Founder

Institute of Innovation, Integration and Impact

At the time of this interview, Brett had founded The Institute for Innovation, Integration & Impact, Inc. He brings together corporations to envision and create new business opportunities. Brett has over twenty years experience helping major corporations develop and implement creative solutions as a partner with some of the world's leading management consulting firms. His particular skills include strategic planning, helping executives achieving focus using proprietary frameworks, and creating models for sustainable impact. He has spoken at numerous business and philanthropic events, and has authored a book entitled *Convergence*, and co-authored (with Gary Daichendt, former EVP of Worldwide Operations at Cisco Systems) *I-Operations: the Impact of the Internet on Operating Models*. He has consulted to philanthropic organizations in Africa, Latin America, Europe, North America and the Pacific Rim. Brett was a partner at Computer Sciences Corporation and KPMG Peat Marwick, and was with Price Waterhouse for fourteen years. He is a Chartered Accountant with a Bachelor's degree in Commerce.

professional

What character qualities do you look for when hiring?

We have an extensive hiring process. We do a virtual internship. First thing we do share the vision of the institute. We look for people who have a similar worldview to us. We don't simply go for character, but we go for a match on worldview. That gets to the question of operating models. There are lots of people who say that they want to accomplish the same things as us, but they're not prepared to have a different operating model. Now, an operating model is the guts of how an organization works. And in the business community, we speak a lot about risk. Well, for us, risk and faith are the same thing. They're very closely tied together. And built into the core of our operating model is both risk and faith. If God doesn't show up, then we don't have a business. If we are not prepared to have a risk element, then we shouldn't get the reward. The second thing we look at on our virtual internship is the question of values. We will share our values with people and we will reject people who have skills but don't have the same value set as us. Before we hire somebody, we look for alignment with values. I interviewed somebody recently and they spent four hours with me and numerous hours with my colleagues. We'd flown the person in from another city. At the end of my first two hours I asked this person what are our values. And they couldn't articulate one of them. The end of the second session I asked the same question. Still couldn't do it despite the fact that we'd made them fairly clear. And so we rejected the person, not because of their skills, but because of their values. So alignment with vision, worldview, values, those are the things that we look for. We can train for skills, but we need to have a person of good character.

What makes a great leader?

I think a leader needs to understand what type of leader they are. We see stereotypes around leaders that we don't think are broad enough. In the business world, we see two types of leaders: entrepreneurs and managers. You hear a lot about those two types of leaders and we typically make heroes out of the entrepreneurs and not out of the managers. But those are two good leadership types, but we see three others. One is illuminary, another is entrepreneur, then managers, then organizers and networkers. So we have a model of leadership called "Lemon" leadership. So expanding on that, illuminary is somebody who leads with ideas. An example would be a Chuck Colson or somebody in the scientific field who's a genomic scientist and leads typically by ideas. I've had several clients recently where the primary leader is illuminary. And entrepreneur goes off to opportunity. Opportunities are the key thing that they will go after. Managers are typically based on



policies, procedures, process. They're very good at building organizations, good at building teams, building people. Even if they don't have the most earth-shattering ideas in the world, they're very good at building organizations. I'll go to networkers. Networkers are an interesting breed and are needed more and more, given the nature of organizations nowadays. Networkers are people who are very, very good at stringing together organizations, people within organizations and causing something to happen. And for them, relationships are key. Final one is organizers. Organizers are very good at short-term projects, getting things done quickly. They're not as deliberate as managers, in that they typically can't explain how they've got something done, but they just get something done. And we find that we like to craft a team that has a mix of these people, but recognize that whoever is leading the team will change the dynamics of that team. We believe that people need to understand what type of leader they are because they lead out of their leadership type, not out of style, not out of some book that they read, but out of their DNA. They need to understand how they're made. If they understand what type of leader they are and the strengths and the weaknesses of that type causes them to see things, then they can lead out of their identity. And so having a settled identity is crucial. With that, security. If you are secure in yourself as a leader, then your people will be secure and will not be restless. You will also make decisions based on principle, not based on politics. That's crucial for us, understanding what kind of leader you are. For me, I need to know what my leadership type is. And then the second thing there is that traditional leadership development will tell you, if you're this type of person, then you'll become more like that under pressure. And our view is that you need to become like the other types. In other words, you need to prefer the other types or regard them as better than yourself and learn to adapt to other leadership types and to figure out what leadership type is needed in each situation. A perfect leader would have a good blend of all five of these areas.

Who are your heroes and why?

What are the 2-3 most valuable lessons you learned in your career?

Firstly, promotion doesn't come from one's own activities. We live in a society where time on the job is not valued. We lump into people ... particularly during the dot com area, where they want instant success. And so the old concept of apprenticeship is not valued very highly. And yet character development takes time. So there are times that we'll spend in certain jobs that are straightforward skills building times. We need to be willing to bide our time until we're ready to move onto the next thing. When it happens, don't fight for it. Be prepared to take your time. I called somebody this morning to congratulate them on a promotion. This young lady is somebody who comes from a faith-based perspective and she responded and said, "I'd like to hold off on that promotion because I don't feel that I've produced the deliverables that would make me worthy of your promotion yet and I think it will be disruptive to the organization if I get promoted. So I'd like to hold on that now." You see that principle in action. There is a saying that says a promotion doesn't come from the east or the west or the north or the south, but promotion comes from the Lord or from above, if you like. Second thing is, learn from the failures. It's hard to go through failures. But if we can understand why things went wrong, we can learn from those. An important thing there is that of course, an entrepreneur doesn't have failures. They just have learning experiences. And entrepreneurs are quite open to having failures. Managers hate failure because it means that they didn't plan correctly. But if we can take the time to understand why we went through difficult circumstances, sometimes I call that "The University of the Desert". We need to learn a lot from the desert and not rush out of the desert before our time. I will only partner with people who have desert sand in their ears, who have been through difficult circumstances and who recognize that they can't do it all on their own.

What was your worst career decision or mistake?

I don't think that I had a worst career decision, but I have had some very deliberate decisions that looked pretty stupid to people. I'll give you a series of those. I came out of college and I joined Pricewaterhouse and was on a career track to become a partner. They sent me to the United States for a year's tour of duty which is a pre-partnership tour of duty. The career thing would have been to go back to South Africa and become a partner. I decided to stay in the United States. The second thing was, I then moved into the consulting group out of the audit group when they advised me to

remain in the audit group and become a partner. Rather than do what they felt I should be doing, I decided to go the latter route which is do what I felt I should be doing. Then I was a partner at Kape and DP Mallick and I resigned from the partnership and I resigned for several reasons. One is I felt I'd learn all I was going to learn in that situation. The skills building was over. Secondly, it was a family decision. My daughter was 11 at the time; my clients were all around the country and around the world. I was spending a lot of time on the road and those are crucial years where I felt that she needed me to be at home and so I resigned from the partnership. When I did that, I took a job that paid less on paper as a base salary. That looked like a not very smart move. Then when I told them I was leaving to start the Institute, they offered me all sorts of different positions and told me that they thought I was making a mistake, leaving. But for me, it was a point where I could pull together all the different threads of my life and it came together in my current work situation. So if you look at it from a human perspective, I made some career-limiting moves. But for me, I wasn't on somebody else's career track, but more on an internal track and that's crucial. I think one of the big mistakes that we make is we try to do stuff that's good for our résumé and particularly young people lack an intellectual framework for making good career decisions. And so we make decisions that look good for the résumé, but they aren't good for our life.

How did you get involved in the career you are in?

I'm founder of the Institute for Innovation, Integration and Impact. And we say we only have eyes for you. We're in Redwood City, California. We're doing three things: forums for leadership development, consultations with clients to help them through issues or discover new opportunities and deals where we put clients together in partnerships.

p e r s o n a l

How do you define success? How has your definition evolved?

What does balance mean to you? How important is balance to success?

I don't think balance is important at all. In fact, some of the most successful people in history haven't been what we would call "balanced" people. When we try to allocate so much time to the country club, so much time to church, so much time to work, so much time to family, we lose it. The number one pressure that people feel is time pressure and they feel time pressure because they have things compartmentalized. They have work in one bucket and they have home in one bucket. If they get to it, they'll have their life work or calling in another bucket. For us, the key is integrating these things. Now, if you can increase the extent of overlap between these different areas of your life, the less time pressure you face and the more fulfilled you will be. So if your work can also be your calling, and if your career can include your family, as it did prior to the industrial revolution and if your work and your family and your calling can include creativity, which is not pottery, but it's co-creating because we're made to be creative, if you can do that, then you don't have a problem with balance, but you do have this wrestling with integration. And the simple premise is that God is for the whole of life. And so all of what we do, should be integrated. And when we make career decisions, we should be asking questions, will this decision lead to a greater overlap of the circles of calling, career, community and creativity? Will we be able to blend these things more seamlessly together? Or will this decision pull me away from my family or delay me pursuing my life calling? It gets very practical at that level. The other question is, is there a difference between ministry and work? I do this for work and I do this for ministry. And we need to recapture the philosophy that says that all of work is worship, all of what we do in our work is done as something that reflects our Creator, that reflects why He has made us. And so if we began to view work as worship, then we wouldn't spend time at work and then carve out little bits of time for ministry. I like Michael Novak's book, "Business As a Calling". And for us, business is a calling. Business is ministry. And there is not distinction between business and ministry for us.

How do you prioritize your time/values? What are your priorities?



What are some reasons to seek the deeper issues and evaluate your life?

Convergence is the integration of four different areas in your life. One's calling, one's career, one's creativity, which includes a co-creating side of what we do and one's community, which includes family, church, interest groups and so on. That is one definition. Another is that season in the life when the different threads of life come together and they're woven together in such a way that it forms a picture which causes you to say, "Aha! This is me. This is who I am. This is my life purpose." In arriving at convergence, one typically passes through seven major seasons and you've touched on some of them earlier. One is faith, which includes knowing who you are and knowing who you are in the context of who made you. Another is discovering your gifts and how you work. How do you hear things, how things come to you. Some call it how you hear God or fearing and hearing God. That's another element. And it's an element which is very inherent in business as people come up with ideas and that sort of reflection of that sort of thing. Another piece is skills building which takes time and isn't very popular nowadays. Often can take ten, 15, 20 years to build the skills that we need to do what is our long term calling. Another season which is pretty interesting is what I call re-choosing your spouse. And this is the antidote to the mid-life crisis. Mid-life crisis is a pretty real thing for people. But if we would stop at that point and rediscover why we came together with our spouse in the first place and go to a greater level of functioning together, a re-blending of our ministries. Then we would avoid the mid-life crisis and I think that's a crucial season. Another is what I call the "University of the desert", which is when we typically go through difficulties and go through some failure and certainly go through a dry period where we learn not to trust on our own abilities. We come out of the desert with a greater dependence on God and with Him having the ability to trust us with a whole lot more. So those are some of the seven seasons. The seven seasons aren't linear. Some of them run in parallel. They come in different orders for different people. It's not uncommon to see some of these things happening at the same time. So in my own life, I was having a great time in my career with skills building while from a so-called ministry perspective, I was in a really, really dry place and not being much at all. And so you can have things happening in parallel. The length of the season varies. There's a view of time which is very much a Western view of time which is chronus ... we get the word "chronology" from that. There's another view of time which is cairus, which has more to do with seasons and other cultures, the African culture, some of the Asian cultures are more familiar with cairus and much of what we read in Scripture as saying time, for example, redeeming with time, has to do with seasons, not to do with chronus, as we understand it. And God is far more concerned about seasons in our life than He is about the ticking of the clock. We, of course, are caught up with quarterly results, monthly returns, weekly schedules. And so we don't have much of a sense of cairus and a key to coming to convergence is recapturing a sense of cairus and God's seasons that He has in us. I recently spoke with an associate pastor at a church who was facing a decision and said, "I think I'd like to be a senior pastor". And in five minutes, I outlined the seven seasons for him. And he said, "I'm still in the skills building season. I have got at least two years to go. That settles my decision." And when I'm interviewing staff, I ask them, "What season are you in", try to understand it doesn't take too long. And if we understand what season we're in and what we're heading in to, then we can counter the cultural pressure to go for the "brass ring", or to go for the gold or to try to reach prematurely for our ultimate destination or the ultimate job or the ultimate promotion.

Have you ever had a wakeup call in your life?

Most of the wake-up calls come around my children, who are a fair mirror as to what's going on in my own life and we are conscious of the fact that we don't have them in the home for that long. This last weekend I was asking myself again, what are the things that I need to impart to my children before they leave the home? Because they're not going to learn it at a Christian school or they're not going to learn it from their teachers or they're not going to learn it from sermons in church. I have a list of things that I want to make sure that my kids get before they leave home. We've had several wake-up calls over the years that just point out the fact that we have to bed these principles into the lives of our kids. We look at situations where our lifestyle or our busyness might preclude that happening.

What was your best investment?

My best investment was to invest in the vision that I feel I have for my life. Part of my calling in life is to overcome the separation of my business life and the rest of my life. I have deliberately invested in

ventures and in people that bring together the different threads of my life. So for me it's not a stock market investment, it's an investment in going after the thing that God has given me to do. And for me, bridging the worlds of business and faith is crucial. For me, investing in that is my best investment.

s p i r i t u a l

Can you follow Christ and still have a successful career, family and such?

Key thing is that work and one's career is ministry. There are no second-class citizens in the Kingdom of God. Business principles are a subset of Kingdom principles. Everything we do for our career should be done as part of our calling or part of our ministry. There is no separation. There aren't religious people who do stuff or spiritual people and then guys who go to work to earn a living to pay them. It's crucial that people know my work is my ministry. If you're in a job where you do not believe your work is your ministry, change your job. But don't necessarily go and become "full-time". That's a misnomer. Second thing is develop a set of life tools for making decisions that will get you in the direction of discovering and walking out God's calling for your life. Don't build your career and then say, "Once I've made a whole bunch of money, then I'll do what God wants me to do." I met a gentleman who said, "Five years from now I'm going to be spending ten percent or 20 percent of my time in missions." I took him out five years later and I said, "What percentage of your time are you spending in missions? Zero." And that's a typical pattern. We need to integrate ministry into our work from the get go . . . from our first job.

Is faith critical to leadership or character?

Leadership is the intersection of two things, competence and character. That comes from a Jewish philosopher. We cannot have character and ignore the element of faith. So faith is part of one's make up. We cannot have effective character without having an objective set of truths and without having a strong faith foundation. Now, you can get people who are "good people", but leadership brings a set of pressures. One needs two wheels on one's leadership bicycle: a back wheel, which has to do with competence, and a front wheel that has to do with character. If you have a large back wheel and a small front wheel, it's like a dragster. If you have a large front wheel and a small back wheel, it's the Penny Farthing model or the missionary bicycle, as we call it. And we need both. We need both to compete in today's world and to be an effective leader. The one thing that I will say is that leadership shortcomings are more apparent today than they've ever been, in part because of the Internet. So if you have strengths, you can announce something, you can make a good decision and your stock price goes up immediately. At the same time, you can have an ethical issue or you can have a problem internally or a personal problem that you are masking and you have to count on the fact that it will get out there and it will get out to everybody, quickly. We cannot afford to have situations where leaders have confidence but they ignore the character issue.