

How to imagine a bigger future

Fiona Stark is a champion of Future, Engage, Deliver in E.ON. That's not her official role; her titles include being General Counsel, Director of Corporate Affairs and Company Secretary but it could be said that in all these roles she uses the spirit of FED to fuel her ambition and deliver results. In this article Anthony Landale highlights exactly how her powerful and visionary leadership is acting as a catalyst for change.

The possibility for change that Fiona Stark has seen lies with the external legal firms that the company uses to support the in-house team. What she has recognised is that the traditional way of relating based on a well-practised business model isn't delivering in the way she needs it to and which she believes it can. Typically these legal firms pitch their services to E.ON, are instructed on particular matters and frequently bill by the hour. It's not that they do a bad job - after all these are very professional and well reputed firms - but often there is not enough real value being added, no spark; it can all be rather transactional.

What Fiona Stark has started to envision is something altogether different. So she recently called together all those external legal firms in order to explore the company's 'changing energy' agenda. It could have been a dry affair of course with all the usual presentations and manoeuvres - so right from the start she decided to set a new context.

"I knew I had to engage these lawyers in a radically different future so instead of setting out the day's agenda and embarking on a presentation I started by asking them just to relax and imagine what a different future could look like," she explained. "I asked them to imagine a future where they would be proud of working with us to the extent they were all E.ON customers. I asked them to imagine a world in which they would be as passionate about our customers as we are. I invited them to imagine the possibility of



Fiona Stark

working with us in partnership - where they would be bringing their innovative ideas to the table rather than just pitching to us. And I asked them to imagine a relationship where they would be billing us by value rather than by the hour - because at the end of the day our customers are paying their bills".

The day then continued and the team explained the framework in which E.ON operates and the challenges and dilemmas that the company faces. But in setting the context for the day those firms that were present began to recognise that something quite new was being asked of them. They were being asked to think and behave differently. They were being asked for collaboration, for openness and for creativity. They were being asked to consider that the old business model between service provider and client might no longer be appropriate and that opportunities for the future might lie, at

least with E.ON, in enduring partnership.

Some of those firms attending the day were probably uncomfortable. Some might have found the idea of such deep relationship off-putting. But that too is part of the FED journey. Big results get delivered when big relationships have been developed and Fiona Stark has a huge delivery agenda.

"We've already started having very different conversations with some of those firms that attended," she said. "I think that those who are most forward-thinking already recognised that the old way of working was limited. They understand our challenges and they want to work with us. More than that they know we don't have all the answers and there is a real sense of understanding why they are being invited to come inside the tent.

"They also see our passion, our pride as a team and our commitment to E.ON. That is a very attractive proposition. Who wouldn't want to be involved in making a significant contribution to a company that is leading the debate in energy? Of course we need their expert help but we believe they have much more to offer and those firms that partner us in the future will be those that embrace the idea of bigger

relationship, better collaboration and commitment to each other's success."

Your FED vision

Remember that vision starts with knowing what you care about and connecting that with what you are up to. So what is it that matters to you or excites you about the future? If you don't know then spend some time getting clear on what you have a passion for.

Once you have done that then you need to link what you care about to what it is that you want to make happen in the future. For example what do you want to take action on? What results do you want to achieve? What will start to occur in tangible terms if you are aligned with what you care about? And to stimulate you further just consider now what one conversation or action you could take that would further this ambition? That's what Fiona Stark has just done. She's opened up a new conversation with her partners at work. The same opportunities are open to any of us when we flex this leadership muscle.

By Anthony Landale, FED consultant and coach. Also Editor of Future, Engage, Deliver and Leadership Plain and Simple

