

A New Career for a Football Legend

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An excerpt from:



Imagine That!

Celebrating 50 years of Synectics
Edited by Vincent Nolan & Connie Williams

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ISBN 978-0-615-41377-8
First Published 2010

Imagine That! celebrates the first 50 years of Synectics, a set of highly specific innovation techniques and behaviors that help individuals and teams work together in creative ways that are positive and action-oriented. Elements include strong collaborative approaches that invite speculation, fun, courage and idea development.

They originally derived from observational analysis of thousands of audio and videotape recordings of live invention sessions and meetings. They have been used successfully around the world in a wide variety of situations over the last 50 years.

The book is a collection of stories and articles from current and former staff members, clients and other associates.



A New Career for a Football Legend

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George Cohen became a British football legend as a member of England's 1966 World Cup winning team. It is the only time England has won the Cup and George, along with his team mates, was a national hero. He also happened to be my neighbour.

Sadly a severe knee injury ended his career prematurely and after spending a while on the coaching side of the game, George began to consider whether he wanted to spend the rest of his career in football. However, having left school at 15 with only one exam pass (in Technical Drawing) and done nothing but play football since then, he had no obvious experience or qualifications for anything else.

My wife and I had just returned from our first Synectics training course in September 1971, with the intention of setting up a Synectics business in the UK. We invited George and his wife Daphne to let us try out our new-found

skills on his situation. Our 14-year-old daughter Ruth joined the group as an additional source of ideas.

It emerged from the session that George had a keen interest in the world of property development, but needed a practical way to get into it. An approach was developed whereby he would invest in a new property project (using the insurance money he had received as compensation for the termination of his football career) on condition that he would be allowed to work on the project and learn the business.

Nearly 40 years later, none of us can remember much of the detail of how the result was achieved. George describes it as 'uncanny'; Daphne remembers commenting that she had no idea George was interested in property development; Ruth remembers the shift in the emotional mood, from initial gloom on George's part via the laughter created by the wild ideas and excursion to the Wow! of seeing a practical way forward. She also enjoyed the freedom to offer any ideas that occurred to her and felt pleased when George chose an idea of hers as an interesting approach. I remember an excursion story involving an archaeological dig on

a Greek island, the high point of which (for me) was a long-legged girl in hot pants and high heels digging in the ruins!

I believe that the key factors contributing to the productive outcome of this session were the encouragement in the Synectics process to express deeply felt wishes, the positive attitude towards overcoming difficulties and the mood-changing effect of the techniques. Above all, George was an open-minded and strongly motivated Problem Owner.

What the session provided was no more than a starting point. George took the proposal to some contacts he had in the property business (directors of George's former football club). They were enthusiastic about it and arranged for him to spend two years working in the offices of a leading firm of architects, while investing in the project. The 1970s proved to be a turbulent time in the UK property market, as for the UK economy as a whole and George's new career had its ups and downs.

However, looking back, it seems clear that the session was the catalyst for a major change of career direction for George.