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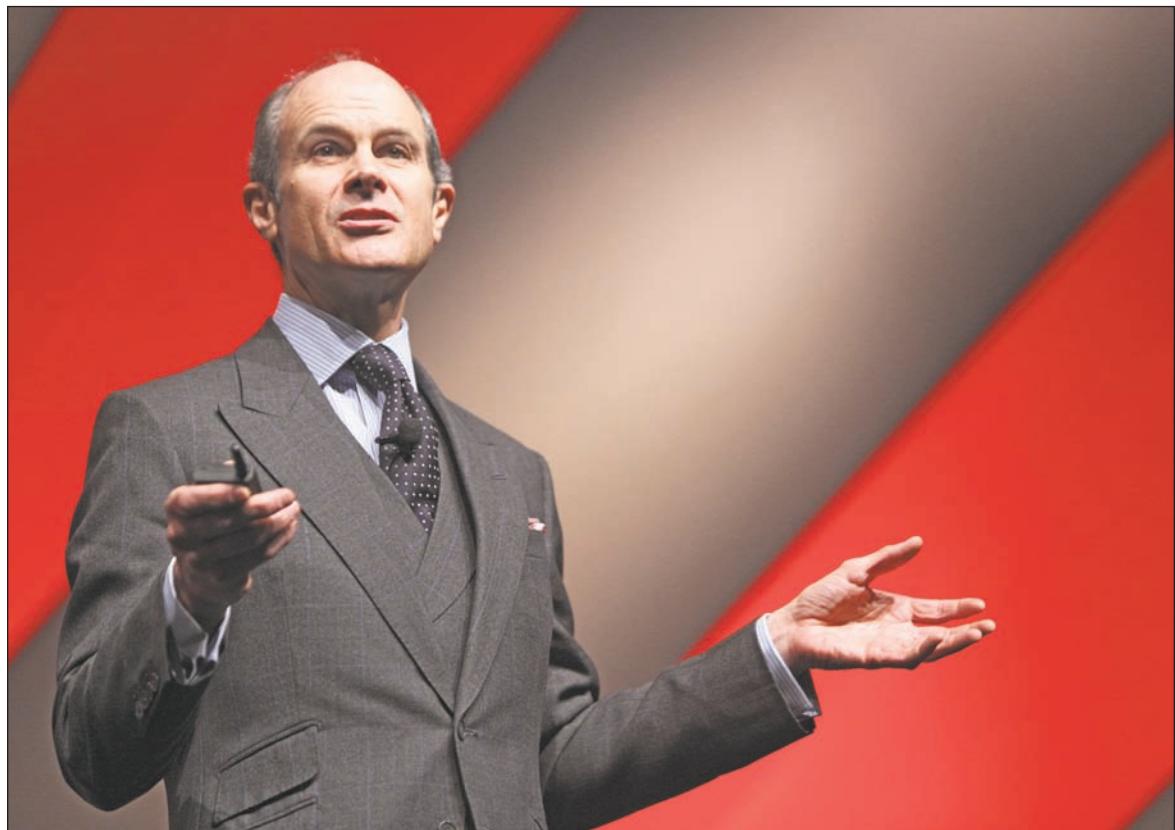


Photo by Tim Fraser

Fortune Magazine editor at large Geoff Colvin told his audience at the Human Resources Professionals Association conference in Toronto that in today's competitive world companies need to tap into employee talent as effectively as possible.

Race goes to the determined more often than the talented

By IAN HARVEY

The old joke says the way to Massey Hall is "practice, practice, practice," but according to *Fortune Magazine* editor at large Geoff Colvin it's also a template for organizations.

In giving the keynote address at a Human Resources Professionals Association conference that brought 5,500 registrants to the Metro Toronto Convention Centre, Colvin drew from his book, *Talent Is Overrated – What Really Separates World-Class*

Performers From Everybody Else.

His premise is disruptive, suggesting much of what we think we know or believe about performance, raw talent and hard work is wrong.

In fact, he said, great performance is a learned response which comes from hours of practice, feedback and careful development, and organizations can integrate the principles which drive performance and get instant results.

It turns out we knew the answer all along, he said. Success is also said to be one per cent inspiration and 99 per cent hard work, and that's part of what the research into the phenomenon of stellar performance suggests — but not in the way most of us think.

"It's an important question," said Colvin. "Because today we live in a world where standards are rising and everything is

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CGA Ontario pushes forward with unification

By JEFF BUCKSTEIN

In a stunning development, CGA Ontario is taking another step forward in unification of the accounting industry.

By signing a memorandum of understanding with the other two legacy bodies in the province, the organization is committing itself to merger discussions and potentially an agreement with CPA Ontario and CMA Ontario that didn't seem likely just a few months ago.

Ontario, home to about 45 per cent of the more than 175,000 professional accountants in Canada, would become the last province to complete a merger agreement when it is finalized.

However, count Al Rosen, who is a member of all three Ontario bodies, as one vote against the merger.

"I see this as really sad days for accounting and auditing in Canada," said the founder of Rosen & Associates Limited in Toronto. "I don't think people understand what a huge mistake this is [going to be] in terms of going with one voice, one party line ... where dissent is not permitted."

The signing of the MOU also represents a dramatic turn of events as CGA Ontario, the province's second-largest accounting body, only re-entered merger talks last October. That was more than a year after they withdrew from discussions because of disagreements

over key issues, including protection of minority rights within the new body, and governance structure.

Another issue involved allowing members of legacy bodies to retain existing mutual recognition agreements (MRA). Under an agreement, "existing MRAs will not be terminated without cause prior to expiration," said Doug Brooks, chief executive officer of CGA Ontario in Toronto. "We believe that a unified profes-

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Work ethic beats being gifted, says speaker

Continued from page 1

changing rapidly. Take the iPod. If they had built it in 1975 it would have been the size of a house and cost \$3 billion."

Organizations need to continually innovate and coax the best performance from their people, both at the front lines or in the C-suite.

Coming up with constantly evolving standards and better designs is critical to any company's success, he said, and the reality is that today those companies are competing in a global economy and more critically, in a global labour market.

"Standards are rising and so is human performance," Colvin said. "We are in an unprecedented time of the first large-scale labour market. As a result all of us are up against the best and the worst in the world."

Software developer jobs are scarce in the U.S. and Canada, he said, because they've been outsourced to India and China.

"Not only are they cheaper but they are better," he said. "Why is that? World-class performance gets thrown around because everyone wants to be world class. Increasingly, though, it is both literal and figurative."

Understanding great performance drivers will drive busi-

"Standards are rising and so is human performance. We are in an unprecedented time of the first large-scale labour market. As a result all of us are up against the best and the worst in the world."

Geoff Colvin, author

nesses, he said, but get it wrong and the results could be disastrous.

The assumption is that people work hard for 20 years and ascend in their careers, but research shows people in fact work hard and perform in the early part of their career and then slow down. They still work hard, he said, but they don't perform at the same level.

"Some people actually get worse," he added.

Natural talent is also overrated, he asserted, as is the belief that great performers are exceptionally smart and have great memories.

"Some grandmaster chess players have average IQs but are exceptionally good at playing chess," Colvin said, adding that being a child prodigy is no indicator of adult performance and success. "A study of child prodigies found most did not go on to be exceptional performers as adults."

Studies and research into successful performance have found the greatest influence on outcome is how much time each person puts into practising on their own, how well they are mentored and nurtured within the corporate culture and how far they are pushed beyond their immediate capabilities, even to the point of failure.

For example, he said, a prestigious German music academy long believed that its students naturally fell into three groups: those who would go on to illustrious careers at world-class orchestras, those who would make a decent living and those who would go on to teach but not perform.

It was a curious assumption because all the students were essentially seen as equals when they arrived, having come from similar backgrounds with similar teachings and skills.

An exhaustive and detailed research program, however,

found the reason why one group succeeded over the others was because of the hours of individual practice.

"Not playing in class, not playing in the orchestra, but alone," he said. "They found that the first group actually arrived at the school with 7,500 hours of solo practice time, the middle group had 5,000 and the last group 3,000 hours."

"The researcher called this deliberate practice," he said.

It applies in business as well, Colvin said, and related a story about a medical equipment maker who applied the concept of deliberate practice on launch of a new product.

The sales team was sequestered for six weeks to learn about the new product, develop a presentation to teach how it would be used, and then videotaped as they presented over and over again.

Additionally, they were trained on how to use the device

on a medical simulator which is incredibly life-like, said Colvin.

"The first thing that happened of course is that the sales people pushed back," he said. "This wasn't how they did things. They wanted to be out selling."

However, when the team went into the field the results were spectacular.

"Conversions went from 25 per cent to 95 per cent, well beyond management's wildest dreams," he said.

Innovation is also seen as a driver of great performance, but there's an assumption it strikes suddenly. In fact, he said, the reverse is true. Innovations come not from the outside but incrementally from the inside, from the people whose knowledge about the subject is greatest and who have invested the most time working with it.

Sometimes, however, organizations make it difficult for innovations.

"Why didn't Sony invent the iPod?" he asked. "In some organizations the top-level executives might say, we don't have the right people whereas the lower levels of their organizations might say, we have the right people, we just don't have the right culture."

The same principals of great performance can be applied to leadership, he continued, noting how legendary General Electric CEO Jack Welch picked an obscure young manager to spearhead a critical recall of fridges, the largest recall in appliance history.

"That manager knew zero about recalls," Colvin said. "And later he said it was hell on earth, but Jeff Immelt would never have become the next CEO of GE without that assignment."

The job pushed him to and beyond his limits, feedback was constant and he was at it every day, said Colvin. It galvanized the qualities in him to be a great performing leader.

The bottom line, he said, is encompassed in two more questions: First, what do you really want?

"If you're not doing what you want to do you won't want to change to be a great performer," Colvin said.

The second is: What do you really believe?

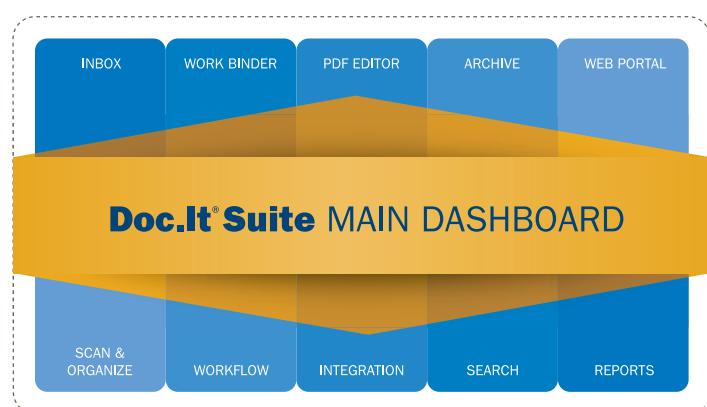
"If you believe that great performance comes from a gift, and either you have it or you don't, you will have difficulties," he said.

"It's not easy to introduce these innovative principles, much less follow through," Colvin said. "It will feel strange. There will be constant mistakes and failure. But if you really believe that deliberate practice will work, then you will find that great performance is not reserved for the pre-ordained few, that it is available to everyone."

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