



## PAT MCLAGAN //

CEO and Chair, McLagan International, Washington, D.C., and Cape Town, South Africa

McLagan specializes in development and change—both organizational and personal. She has been in the training industry since 1969 and has worked with many major companies during critical periods of technological transition. She has also been active in multiple large-scale change projects in South Africa since 1984. She has authored more than 100 books and articles and is also a member of the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame, and a recipient of ASTD's Gordon M. Bliss Award for extensive contributions to the field of training and development.

### Q | WHAT WERE SOME OF THE LESSONS YOU LEARNED WORKING WITH ORGANIZATIONS LIKE NASA AND GENERAL ELECTRIC, ESPECIALLY DURING THEIR TRANSITION YEARS?

A generalization I can make is that if the company feels an urgency about something, it will take action. NASA knew it wasn't going to get unlimited funding. They knew that they were going to have to be more responsible. That's what launched them into a management development program, which they had never had before.

Same thing at GE—GE had an incredible management culture. Normally for companies, there isn't a lot of tangible urgency to do things such as help people set goals, communicate well, or have a good succession plan. What I'm always trying to do is to help people find the urgency underneath whatever it is they want to do.

The best companies are thinking longer-term. They're not just looking at their financials. I want to see people have culture goals, people goals, and process-improvement goals.

### Q | WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST JOB, AND WHAT LESSON DID YOU TAKE AWAY FROM IT?

I peeled potatoes all day Saturday at a drugstore that had a little restaurant attached to it. I was 14. I made 70 cents an hour. I loved that job, which sounds really weird, but it was part of a personal sense of empowerment. Every week I tried to peel more potatoes than I did the week before, and I literally filled garbage cans full of potatoes. I made it into a game. I just think there's no such thing as a boring job.

### Q | ARE THERE ANY EXPERIENCES YOU HAD IN SOUTH AFRICA THAT HAVE SHAPED YOUR VISION?

I was working for South African Breweries, which is now one of the biggest beer companies in the world. They wanted to bring more participation and power to the people within the company. So I ended up meeting with both the people on the board as well as the people running the labor unions. There was energy on both sides, but I think working with all the political overtones was really pretty fascinating.

Companies are a part of their environment, and they can help shape it, but they are also shaped by it. My core ideology is very much participation, and for power and responsibility to be shared. I just found a lot of receptivity for that, even for people who were illiterate. It was really pretty amazing.

### Q | ONE OF YOUR STRATEGIES IS PROMOTING HIGH LEVELS OF PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY. WHY DO YOU THINK THIS IS IMPORTANT?

We live in a knowledge world. Most of the work today is something you can't proceduralize, so you have to rely on people to manage exceptions well. You have to rely on people to come up with creative ideas; to move into higher levels of quality; and to find better, faster, and cheaper ways of doing things.

If I don't see my work that way and if I'm not in a place that accepts that from me, then I run the risk of being an automaton. A healthy, growing adult grows in responsibility and contribution. At the end of it all, they call it generativity.

I think the healthy company also reduces as much overt supervision as possible. I believe it's good financially, for the human spirit, and for quality and creativity in a company.

### Q | WHAT DO YOU DO IN YOUR FREE TIME?

Most of my time these days is spent on pro bono projects. I think that there are a lot of organizations and causes that need what we do—facilitation, training, and organizational development. It's what I've decided to do as I move into semiretirement mode. I'm the vice chair of the Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation, and there's a real timeliness in this cause. They're going to be building a center for convening in South Africa.

I'm also working with the World Conservation Union, which is the biggest conservation collective. It is also the only nongovernmental organization that has a nonvoting seat at the United Nations. Anybody anywhere who volunteers for organizations that she cares about is going to make a huge difference in shaping the world for tomorrow.



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