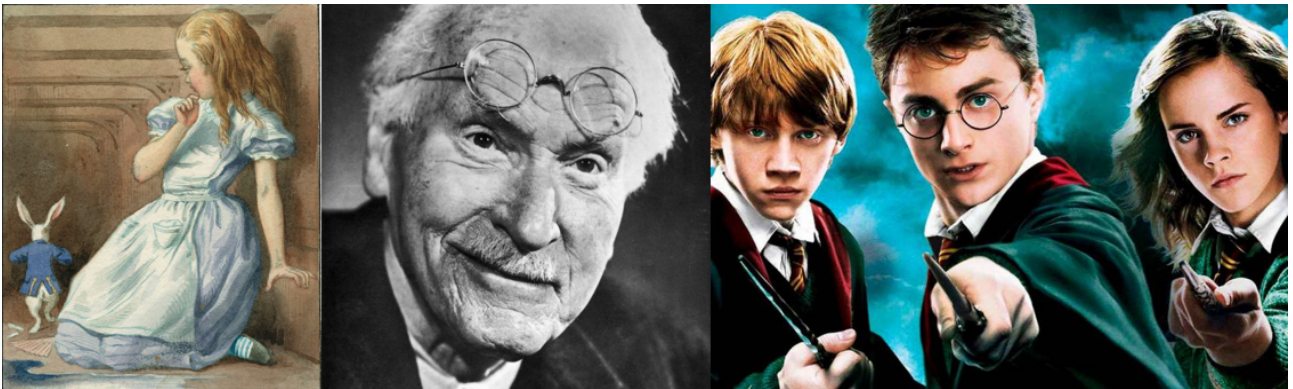


# **Crisis? What crisis? It's the magic that matters.**

*Lessons from Alice in Wonderland, Carl Jung & Harry Potter*



(by Robert Griffiths - 2009)

Yes, this article was written in 2009, when there was yet another crisis.  
Plus ça change!

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## Introduction

Talking about the crisis is a well trodden path. However, when we talk about the crisis, we tend to think about it in terms of what is happening out there: out there in the world around us. My belief is that the real crisis is somewhere else:

The crisis is not out there. It is in here. It's the opportunity of a life time.

The solution is not out there. It is in here. And it is possible.

It is the magic that matters.

When I talk about magic, I mean the creative and transformational ability that is in each one of us.

It starts with self-awareness, goes through a transformational process which identifies our vision of the world and defines our purpose in life.

This discovery and acceptance of who we are as an individual, and therefore who we are in relation to others and the world we live in, releases a powerful energy which I call enthusiasm.

It brings our vision and our purpose out of ourselves and makes it a reality.

This is magic.

Since it is my belief, that all printed words should come with a Health Warning, I have decided to do so in the words of Harry Potter's Headmaster at Hogwarts: Albus Dumbledore:

*'The truth.'* Dumbledore sighed.

*'It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution.'*

Just in case you don't have time to read 17 pages of text and pictures, or the thought of doing so is simply too exhausting (in today's sound-bite world our attention spans are limited), the main message of this article is summarised at the end in a bullet-pointed summary, specially designed for people who are so busy rushing around, that they have no time for rabbit holes.  
(Pages 16-17).

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## Putting things into context: an anecdote about choice and responsibility.

When my 7 ½ year old daughter asked me the other day, “Papi, what does crisis mean?” I knew it was time to turn the evening news on the TV off.

The end of the world was coming: the economic crisis, the flu crisis, the ecological and climatic crisis, the political crisis... a feast of fear, blame, guilt and complaint. Every day, 24 hours a day.

Normally at that time of the evening we would be reading Alice in Wonderland or Alice Through the Looking Glass, neither of which seem to dwell much on the word crisis. This does not mean that Alice did not encounter moments of crisis, on the contrary, if we take the literal meaning of crisis as a turning point or process of transformation, and the original Greek word “krisis” meaning decision point, then Alice’s adventures are nothing more than a series of crises.

I thought for a while before answering my daughter’s question. Clearly, my version of crisis and what she had just heard on the news was similar but not quite the same thing: this particular media used the word to signify danger and sell fear, my intention was to give it a more positive and, I believe, more accurate spin: one of change and transformation where opportunity is just as present as danger.



“A time to decide: to make a big choice”, I said.  
“Do you remember the Cheshire Cat?” I asked.  
“Yes”, she said, not convinced.

So, I got the book and went back to the part where Alice finds the Cheshire Cat up in a tree:  
'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?'  
'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,'  
'I don't much care where. . .' said Alice.  
'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat.

“Is that a big choice?” my daughter asked.  
“Yes,” I said, “Alice has a choice to make: to choose one path or another. If she knows where she wants to go, then the decision of which path to choose is an important one, and she will be aware of her choice.

If she does not know where she wants to go, then it does not really matter which path she chooses, and she will probably not even be aware of the choice she has made.”

“So, is it better not to know where you are going?” she sort of asked.

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"No, I think it's always better to know where you are going: but that too is a choice. It's like being on a sailing boat: you can choose to go in a certain direction, in which case you will do whatever you can to get there, or you can sit back and let the wind take you wherever it blows.

The latter may seem easier, but that's because you let something or someone else take responsibility for where you go.

Either way, whether you like it or not, you made a choice!"

She looked at herself in the mirror, smiled, twirled and said, "Papi, I'm a princess!" and ran off squealing with delight.

## Crisis? What crisis?

One of my English teachers at school often used to say: "It's all in the word. Choose your words carefully."

The power of words, particularly the written word, is often over-estimated by the reader, and under-estimated by the writer. Or is it the other way around? (I never did listen to my teacher closely enough).

A good example of this is the press. CRISIS! WORLD ON VERGE OF PANDEMIC!

Headlines such as these sell newspapers: the journalist or editor knows that if the title read that 26 people out of a population of over 6 billion, have died of porcine flu, compared to millions every year from normal flu, this would not sell.

What sells is often not the truth, but FEAR.

And if panic ensues, that's even better, because your next edition is guaranteed to sell even more as people desperately seek potentially vital information about what is going on.

The eye of the camera does not focus on the millions of people living and working their daily lives in blissful ignorance, but on the 100 or so in the airport covering their faces with anti-bacterial masks.

A child, an adult even, sees this and assumes that this must be widespread, universal, Armageddon; and in the process (if they are not careful) will transform a half truth into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Such is the power of the word. Such is the power of the image.

Which would you rather have to combat a crisis, or even a virus?

A panic-stricken group of humans in anti-bacterial masks constantly looking over their shoulder with life-threatening suspicion waiting in fearful paralysis for a "magical" cure to fall out of some pharmaceutical company; or a team of positive thinking individuals

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acknowledging the problem, doing what they need to do in order to minimise the risks, but focussing on the solution rather than the problem and asking the question "What can I do about it?" rather than what others can do about it.  
I know which I would prefer.

Why is this relevant?

It is important, because our actions are based on our thoughts and feelings, and our thoughts and feeling are based on our beliefs.

If we believe there is danger, we feel fear. If we feel fear, our thoughts and actions will be based on fear: paralysis, panic, suspicion, anger, violence etc.

In of itself, fear can be a useful tool: it can make us more alert to the resources at our disposal and gird us into needed action, however, if we get stuck in fear (and we all too easily do), it no longer becomes a useful tool, but a weapon against ourselves.

All the more so, when we do not distinguish between the adrenalin-fuelled fear of present danger and the fear of some possible doom or dread in the future.

The former is real, the latter is just a fantasy. For the same price, fantasise something good.

If we believe that the economic crisis is a terrible thing, the resulting feeling will also be fear.

And decisions based on fear tend to be counterproductive, unless we are facing imminent death.

And even that is questionable.

As Dumbledore put it:



If on top of it, we believe that someone else is responsible for the crisis and that we are not part of the problem; the likelihood of us being part of the solution is negligible.

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In these situations, we tend to resort to complaint and blaming others. Not a great recipe for finding solutions.

If, on the contrary, we see and acknowledge a crisis for what it is: a process of change in which opportunity is as potentially present as danger, then we become more aware of our choices, and we can begin to question our own beliefs rather than pre-judging those of others.

If we spent a little more time flexing our psychological muscles instead of our material, economic and physical ones, we might not be in such a mess, and our ability to weather storms would dramatically improve. In fact, we might even find there are fewer storms to weather.

Instead of the media all too often peddling fear and us buying it; instead of blaming everyone else but ourselves for the state of the world's economy, the world's institutions and the world full stop; and instead of forever complaining that politicians are all corrupt, that President Bush is or was responsible for all ills in the universe, and that our neighbour is ecologically criminal, we could start by believing again in magic.

We all need magic in our lives. And if you think you don't need it, think again.

As children, we have no problem in believing it; and as we believe in it, not surprisingly, we find it and bring it out of ourselves.

After years of being told by adults what we should and should not do, what is possible and what is not, we end up being adults, and somewhere along the journey, we either forget or simply stop believing in magic.

And if you don't believe in magic, then one thing is for sure: you will never find it. Shell Silverstein, a children's poet, said the same thing, somewhat more poetically:

Listen\* to the mustn'ts, child.\*  
\* Listen to the don'ts.\*  
Listen to the shouldn'ts,  
the impossibles\*, the won'ts.  
\* Listen to the never haves,  
then listen close to\* me...  
anything can happen child,  
\* anything can be. \*

\* -Shel Silverstein

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## The Magic of Teams

Most of us, whether we like it or not, live and work in teams.

Whether we call them family, marriage, a football team or a project team, companies, organisations or institutions, our livelihood and the realisation of our dreams and goals depend to a large extent on our ability to work, play and live with others.

We live in an increasingly interdependent world where effective teamwork is no longer a luxury, but a necessity.

Whether it's paying for the roof over your head, putting the kids through school, doing your job, satisfying your global customers or solving the world's social, political, moral, economic and ecological problems, the only way to do it is through communication, coordination and collaboration: in other words, teamwork.

Not just any old teamwork. High performing teams are those that create magic.

We all know what it feels like when we succeed as a team: it is a feeling that is easy to recognise, but not so easy to define or replicate.

In my experience, there are three critical elements, without which, no individual or team gets to that magical level of high performance; the level of "all is possible":

- 1. Risk**
- 2. Learning**
- 3. Fun**

Put in a Harry Potter context: courage, curiosity and enthusiasm.

Risk is about doing things differently, relinquishing control and accepting uncertainty.

Learning is what you get when you do things differently and relinquish the idea that you have to be in control of everything. This means tolerating error and being prepared to "fail".

Fun is an essential ingredient of the learning process: it opens your mind, body and spirit.

In a world that often takes itself so very seriously, fun is seen as frivolous, childish...even dangerous and undermining. Therefore, highly risky.

Indeed, fun and play is a state of total spontaneity: it is emotional, not rational.

In a state of play and spontaneity we are no longer "in control": we are therefore vulnerable, human. And it is this vulnerability that creates trust between people. And there is no teamwork, no effective leadership without trust.

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There is of-course a long list of other skills, competencies and resources which help to make high performing teams succeed and sustainable, but whatever the resources thrown at a team, however competent the team members, if you don't take risks, you can not learn anything new, and if you don't learn and learn together as a team, it's pretty hard to have much fun, and if you don't have fun, it's hard to trust and hard to give your best.

Teams are essential: you can not do it all on your own. Even Harry wouldn't have succeeded without his team of friends, teachers and accomplices.

Basically, we're all in the same boat, we're all at Hogwarts: and that's a good thing, because magical things can happen in boats, as they do at Hogwarts and as they can anywhere if you get the attitude and conditions right.

You don't need to be Harry Potter to defeat the dark wizards of ignorance, fear, blame and guilt, but as in Harry Potter's adventures, magic is required.

And it's amazing what you can do with a little help from your friends.

### **It's the magic that matters. So, what is this magic?**

The magic is really quite simple: it's the positive, creative and expanding energy created when certain ingredients are thrown together in a certain environment in a certain way in a certain time. When people or things connect.

That's the easy part.

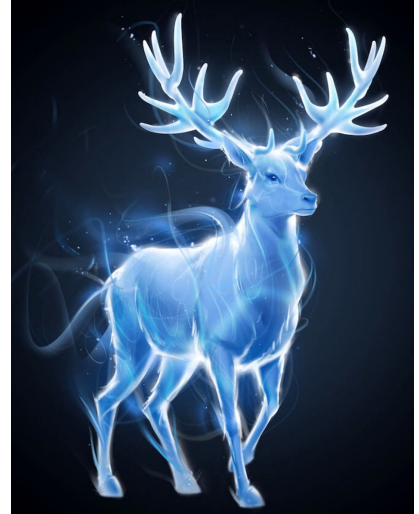
After all, we all know what satisfaction, joy, love or the sweet smell of success feels like: the problem is not recognising them, the problem is creating the necessary conditions for conjuring them, again and again.

And clearly our track record in this area is rather patchy, at least for most of us "muggles".

Our experience shows that collective and organisational transformation does not really happen unless it is preceded by or goes hand in hand with individual transformation.

*"You can lead a horse to water but you can not make it drink".*

Whatever the need for change may be, however pressing or critical, human beings will not change their behaviours or beliefs unless they perceive and acknowledge the need for change.



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The force for change needs to exceed the resistance to it.

This resistance usually takes the form of inertia, a very powerful force, lead by laziness, a preference for the easier way or the path well-trodden, and preferring the devil you know for the devil you don't. Why fix a bike that ain't broke (yet)?

This is why we tend to have crises on a repeated and cyclical basis.

It's like the story of the boiled frog: if you throw a frog into a pan of boiling water, it will react immediately and try to jump out. If you put a frog in a pan of luke-warm water and bring it gradually to the boil, the frog will stay there, will adapt to the rising temperature...until it's too late!

(I've never actually tested this theory, but you get what I mean).

## **How do we conjure it? What are the ingredients?**

Alice found magic when she jumped down the rabbit hole and ventured through the looking glass of her dreams. Time, space and Alice were transformed.

Harry had a wand, but in order to conjure the most powerful of charms - the Patronus charm – he had to delve into himself and recall a moment of intense happiness or joy.



Jung took us on a journey into the depths of our hearts in order to find the vision within. The magic is inside of us.

### **Ingredient N° 1 is your self. Yourself and self-awareness.**

Awareness of who you are and how you are: why you believe the things you believe, why you feel the things you feel, why you think the things you think, and why you do the things you do.

Like Alice in Wonderland, you need to go down the rabbit hole.

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This is not an easy process, but it is necessary.

It is a journey of self discovery and acceptance, and at times can be rather bumpy.

Along this journey one comes across all sorts of Jaberwockies, Humpty Dumpties, Tweedle Dums and Tweedle Dees, and other assorted and fearful characters, some of whom are extremely difficult to swallow.

So much so, that we are tempted to pretend they don't exist and hide them under a cloak of pretence.

The problem with that strategy is that however hard you try and hide them, they have this nagging ability to keep popping up when you least need them.



The journey of discovery is full of surprises, some of them not very comfortable.

The road of self acceptance has its ups and downs. You may meet up with anger, fear, sadness, frustration or even resignation, none of which are the end objective of the journey, but are part of the course.

There are pleasant surprises too: you will meet with calm, courage, joy, success and acceptance.

The compensations far outweigh the difficulties, but no-one can know it for sure, unless they have the courage to jump down the rabbit hole.

And of-course it does not end there: like a muscle, it needs to be trained, toned and kept in regular exercise in order to keep fit. It is a continuous process.

The journey of a life-time, perhaps?

This is why many companies and individuals do not bother to go down this path. It can be difficult, requires a lot of effort, it takes time and is not cheap. The easier option is to scratch the surface, and be seen to be trying.

Send your managers on a training course; provide them even with personal coaching sessions for a while. If some positive changes result, which of-course they often do, then you can justify your decision.

If nothing really changes, you can blame the coach or the individual, or both. But is it enough? Did it result in a meaningful and sustainable transformation?

And what about the team? Did it all result in "magic"? Did it transform the impossible into the possible?

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Did it overcome the huge inertia and weight of routine of Monday Morning back at the office?

The answer, all too often, is NO.

What then?

The options are endless:

Oh well – that didn't work quite as well as we had expected, let's try a different coach, trainer or motivational guru. Or, let's stop wasting money, and learn on the job.

Another frequently used alternative is "Now is not the right time" or simply ignore the question, and assume we are doing the best we can (the ostrich-head-in-the-sand approach).

Whether we like it or not, self—awareness and acceptance is part of a process of freeing up one's talents, one's vision (as Jung called it) and one's "magic".

We can scratch the surface, and hope that one day we will have dug deep enough to unleash our full potential. When the next crisis comes of-course, it might be too late.

On the other hand, we can make the choice of jumping down the rabbit hole, and discovering that although the risks are greater, so are the rewards.

And the dividends get paid quickly and consistently.

### **Ingredient N° 2 is other people**

Alice was not alone in her adventures, nor was Harry. As Jung puts it:

*"The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed."*

Although self-awareness and acceptance is ultimately an individual process – only you can discover yourself – the journey need not be a lonely one.

Indeed the power and energy of a group is not only hugely beneficial in speeding up the learning process, it is essential. It is part of a fundamental human need to connect, to feel connected. Learning in groups is a powerful mechanism.

Learning in a team with a common vision, common purpose and a practical task or project, is even more so.

It harnesses the "magic" and applies it directly to the purpose of the team.

Going down the rabbit hole with others allows you to see that the difficulties and obstacles you encounter are often shared by others: if not identical, similar.

Witnessing others struggling down the path of acceptance makes your struggle not only easier to bear, but helps you to learn and succeed.

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The path is not all trouble and strife: on the contrary there are increasing moments of clarity, illumination, relief, joy and abundant energy, which are made all the more powerful by focusing collective energy on a common purpose.

It makes the journey worthwhile, and gives you the energy to persevere. As Jung said:

*"your vision only becomes clear to you when you look into your heart"*

and when it does, enthusiasm overflows.

(Enthusiasm, from the ancient Greek word enthousiasmos, literally means inspired by god.)

So the first 2 ingredients are you and others: us, the team and a looking glass to venture through.

The other ingredients are effectively part of a process, a process of transformation:

- Preparation (or self-awareness)
- An initial diagnosis always helps to assess where you are, as an individual and as a team.
- You need to know where you have come from, where you are now and where you are heading.
- The process of transformation, particularly when it involves others, may be a need, but if it is not perceived and acknowledged, if there is no willingness to venture through the looking glass, you need to be aware of this. Collect and share as much information as possible for others to see and acknowledge the need. Remember, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.
- It's always easier if you feel you are not alone.
- Environment: Everywhere, but not anywhere. Choose it carefully: it needs to be different, new, intimate and conducive to learning and magic...a castle, a boat, a country cottage, even the pub. Somewhere different...not routine. It needs to help break down barriers, not re-enforce them.
- Doing the same thing in the same way tends to produce the same results.



*"I never teach my pupils,  
I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn."*  
(Einstein)

- Time. Don't waste it.

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- The only time you have is NOW. The past is a present memory, the future a present fantasy or a fear. Neither is real.
- As the saying goes:

*Yesterday is history,  
Tomorrow a mystery  
But today...  
Today is a gift!  
That's why they call it the present.*

- Measuring: If you can't measure it, you can't manage it.
- Practice & Meditation:
- Keep your muscles tuned and fit: your powers of observation, your ability to be present at all times, your ability to be sensitive to what is happening to you, others and your surroundings are skills that improve with practice.
- The most effective way to do this is through a combination of physical exercise and meditation.
- Meditation is key: it is a process of stilling the mind, of observing one's thoughts, rather than identifying with them and being controlled by them.
- As Alan Watts, a self-proclaimed spiritual entertainer and admirer of Jung put it:

*"A person who thinks all the time has nothing to think about except thought.  
So, he loses touch with reality and lives in a world of illusions.*

*By thoughts I mean specifically, chatter in the skull, perpetual and compulsive  
repetition of words, of reckoning and calculating.*

*I'm not saying that thinking is bad; like everything else it's useful in moderation, a  
good servant but a bad master.*

*All so-called civilised people have increasingly become crazy and self-destructive  
because, through excessive thinking they have lost touch with reality, that is to say, we  
confuse signs, numbers, symbols, ideas with the real world...this is a disaster, for as a  
result of confusing the real world of nature with mere signs, such as bank balances  
and contracts, we are destroying nature.*

*We are so tied up in our minds that we have lost our senses.*

*Time to wake up."*



- Continuous improvement. Yes, it's a life-long journey. A self-discipline, and preferably a daily one.
- You are one person, a whole: the person that sleeps, that works and plays are all the same.
- The more you separate your work life from your home life, the more you alienate yourself from yourself and others.

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## What do we do with the magic?

Jung told us that

*"We are living in what the Greeks called the right time for a "metamorphosis of the gods," i.e. of the fundamental principles and symbols.*

*This peculiarity of our time, which is certainly not of our conscious choosing, is the expression of the unconscious man within us who is changing.*

*Coming generations will have to take account of this momentous transformation if humanity is not to destroy itself through the might of its own technology and science."*

We are those coming generations!

We are those with the responsibility to make sure that we don't allow our material prowess and the might of our rationale and intellectual minds to forget that we have hearts and souls.

That you, I, others, the planet and its mountains and oceans are all part of the same game.

One can not be separated from the other.

We have a responsibility: we need to respond to a planet that is creaking at the seams, to other living species that are dying from our irresponsibility; we need to respond to our own kind, most of whom struggle to meet their most basic of needs, let alone a chance to live their dreams.

This is not a luxury or a matter for the chattering classes.  
It is a question of survival.

We have a responsibility to be aware, not just of what is happening around us, but first and foremost at what is happening within us.

To care for others, we must first care for ourselves: for we treat others as we do ourselves.

Values based on responsibility, choice, excellence, service, respect and dignity, honesty and integrity do not fall out of the sky.

Nor do they get put into action by words or rationale thinking.

Our values, our visions are our beliefs. We choose to live them.

When we journey down into the depths of our hearts we realise that caring for ourselves and caring for others is one and the same thing.

The magic is about bringing our empowering beliefs out, living them.  
I can choose to be honest or dishonest. If I choose the latter, I hurt myself as well as others.

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I can choose to be more “present” – that is I can focus my energy on what is before me now, rather than on what was, or what might be.

If I choose to live in the present, I can give myself and others my 100%, my magic.

If I choose to live in the past or the future, I become a spectator of life, not an actor of it. I relinquish my responsibility to live, and I lose the opportunity to create magic.

As Dumbledore put it:

*"It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live, remember that Harry."*



## Conclusion

The crisis is not out there. It is in here. It's the opportunity of a life time.

The solution is not out there. It is in here. And it is possible.

It is the magic that matters.

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*For bullet-pointed summary of this article, see “A Journey Down the Rabbit Hole”, on the next 2 pages.*

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## A JOURNEY DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

### The Rabbit Hole: To be or not to be?

- A crisis is a fantastic opportunity to take risks, to learn and to have fun (amongst other things).
- An ideal moment to jump down the rabbit hole.
- It makes us increasingly aware of our choices and the decisions we take.
- It questions our beliefs and enables us to choose those which help rather than hinder us. It is a process of transformation.

### With A Little Help From Our Friends:

- We all live and prosper in teams, indeed, our survival depends on it.
- It's time we started getting much better at it.

### Tweedle Dum or Tweedle Dee:

- It's up to you: in other words, whatever the circumstances, whatever god, nature or men throw at you, you always choose the attitude with which to confront them.
- You, and only you, choose your attitudes.
- So too, your beliefs.
- Consciously or not.

### The Cheshire Cat:

- With freedom of choice, comes responsibility.
- Responsibility to choose wisely: choices that benefit ourselves as well as others.
- The responsibility to be more aware of ourselves and in turn more aware of our responsibilities.

### The Looking Glass:

- In order to choose wisely, we need to know ourselves and others, but first ourselves.
- No transformation is possible, whether individual or collective, without self awareness and acceptance.
- Passing through the looking glass is a pre-requisite.

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### **The Heart & Soul:**

- Know your purpose, know why and where you are going, as an individual and as a group, and jointly discover the values which will help you help yourself and others, and which will guide you on your journey.

### **Curiosity:**

- It is about questioning established orthodoxies as well as your own beliefs.
- It is about discovery and doing things differently.
- And thus, about learning.

### **Courage:**

- We can't learn if we don't take risks.
- Put in executive jargon: the only way to learn is if we get out of our comfort zone.
- Thinking out of the box is part of it, changing routines and the way we do things is another.
- It requires the courage to venture down the rabbit hole.
- (The word courage comes from the old French "coeurage", meaning revealing your heart...in other words to have the courage to speak and follow your heart).

### **Fun:**

- If we don't enjoy what we do in life – if our purpose does not inspire us - however good we are at it, it won't be enough.
- It won't be magic.

### **Magic:**

- Is inside, not outside.
  - It is possible, not impossible.
  - It is an attitude, not a result.
  - It is neither yesterday, nor tomorrow.
  - It is NOW.
  - It is enthusiasm.
-