

Dickens' Christmas Carol

A Journey to Excellence

Dickens' tale of Ebenezer Scrooge is a Christmas classic which is responsible for solidifying a number of Christmas traditions. It is also a tale of a journey to excellence (and not just because Dickens always wore a purple waistcoat when reading his works in public).

As the story opens, we find Scrooge, a seasoned and successful businessman in his own mind. However, his success is narrowly defined and focuses only on financial results for his business' shareholder, himself. We also see his clerk Bob Cratchit whose hard work and loyalty go unrewarded and whose family is struggling to make ends meet. Any excellence assessment would have found very few positives to note if Scrooge had been wise enough to request one. Fortunately for him, at Christmas sometimes people get gifts that are a surprise and he was given the gift of an assessment by three Christmas spirits, the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future.



The ghosts – as those who know the story are aware – do an outstanding job of showing him how his leadership, strategy, people management and communications are all critically sub-optimal and what the consequences of his non-holistic approach and narrow focus on financial results will be.

The first opportunity we see for excellence, is that Scrooge opens his mind and is prepared to learn from the ghosts. He decides to embark on a journey to excellence and so changes strategy, orienting on a revised set of values. As he executes the new strategy he sees results improve – for all stakeholders, earning him a welcome inclusion in the Cratchit family and providing us with a happy ending.

Historic Note: In an era when child labour was growing in the UK and a “hard heart” was equated with “good business”, Dickens was concerned about the gap between the rich and the poor and wrote the story partly to communicate that employers have a responsibility for the well-being of their people. Less than a year after it was published, the 1844 Factories Act limited working hours for children under 13 to 9 hours a day, 6 days a week, with a lunch break.