

leadership

ANNE GADD

Quite ewe-nique

Despite the playful protestations of her golden retriever, Hunter, Zaid Kriel did manage to chew the, er, mutton with Anne Gadd



Sheep are without a doubt some of the most mundane animals around. And boring as all hell, with little to no sense of individuality. Their very nature has given rise to the popular euphemism, "sheeple", to describe people who simply follow the crowd (herd?) and clothe themselves in the wool of conformity. In fact, I would go so far as to say that sheep are the very apotheosis of conformity.

Anne Gadd has made a successful living and acquired much positive acclaim for visual interpretation of this dinner plate mainstay.

The popularity of Anne's "wacky sheep" as she put it, in both art circles and the mainstream, speaks of her skill in putting complex concepts in simple terms.

Her work is in some ways reminiscent of the genius of cartoonist, Gary Larson.

But where Larson's topics were oftentimes quirky for quirky's sake, Anne has much more to say.

The ultimate irony then is that Anne, author, painter, businesswoman, Reiki practitioner, publisher and more, has managed to use this humdrum farm animal as a symbol of excellence, ambition and individuality.

Combining her most popular painting subject with one of her other past projects, the self-help book, Anne may have achieved the impossible: a self-help book that actually, you know, helps.

Meeting at her windswept home in West Beach near Cape Town, *Leadership* sat down with Anne to talk to her about her latest book, *The Ambitious Sheep*, and a few other matters of an ovine nature.

Why sheep? Where did that come from? Were you merely experimenting?

We are much like sheep – and I include myself in this as well. We do things the same way repetitively and we seldom stop to ask ourselves, "Why am I doing this? What is the point of this? What is my purpose here?"

They mirror our human condition.

But the sheep doodle, the illustration itself, how did it come about? Were you intending to paint a sheep that first time?

Without boring you with my life history, I had hit a stalemate in my actual painting. I was an artist for many years before I started painting

sheep – which many people don't realise – but I had painted a couple in a different style and that sold, but I never really thought there was much in it.

Then my husband was forced to close down his company and I suddenly needed to start selling many more paintings than I had before.



and I was stuck. I couldn't do anything. Fear freezes one up.

I was sitting in the garage, it was pouring with rain and this voice kept saying, "Paint sheep" and I said: "Right, sheep it is".

I painted seven of them and I took them to a gallery. They phoned me on the Monday and said, "Look, we've actually sold them. How quickly can you paint more sheep?"

Your work seems to say much with very little. Was that intentional?

The first sheep were much more complicated.

The more I simplified them, the more people liked them.

I think it's bringing it down to its simplicity that makes it more profound. If you'd filled it with too many complicated things, you'd miss it.

So coming to the book, *The Ambitious Sheep*; why did you actually write it?

I wrote the book *The Ambitious Sheep* for two reasons: Improve service delivery in general;

and improve personal growth and self-empowerment/self-esteem of individuals.

But I've written six self-help books [before] and I thought, what I wanted to do is take the complicatedness out and simplify this like the sheep.

A friend of mine said, "My husband loved your book, because he could read it on the loo in one go."

So I'm getting to a huge number of people who would never normally read my other books, because let's be honest, most of the people who read those books are actually women.

The trick with this book was to take this much thinking and put it down in a few words that would be understood easily.

When you got cottoned onto the idea of combining your painting with the book, what made you think it would be successful?

I was wary to bring the irreverent artist side of myself to the serious self-help thing because, I asked myself, how are people going to see you in terms of being able to give them wise words of wisdom if they see paintings of wacky sheep?

But I thought, this is actually me! This is who I am. I've never been conventional. I've never followed the rules as such and I believed this when I first wrote the book – and I wrote it literally over one weekend.

I gave it to a friend of mine, who read it and said, "Anne, this is the most amazing book you've ever written!"

I gave it to a couple of other people – my brother, a businessman his whole life; and Leon Vermaak, the CEO of Telesure. He came back and liked it and I thought, "Wow, I really have something here."

You had quite a successful career in the corporate world. How did the move from the boardroom to the gallery and writer's desk come about?

I had always wanted to write and paint; that's why I went into advertising.

But I had always believed that you couldn't earn a living from writing and painting. I had this huge fear and it was only when Anthony [her husband] lost his business that we were literally forced to confront our deepest fears.

He is now a full-time artist and he is loving what he's doing. He paints naked women, for goodness sake!

Are you saying that something bad had to happen before you could come into your own?

Today I call it the best thing that could have happened. At the time it seemed bad, but we almost had to be pushed into the situation.

Anthony wanted to be an artist. I wanted to be an artist and writer.

My subconscious, if you like, was programmed into believing I couldn't make a living as an artist, so I'm simply re-enacting that on a daily basis.

So as long as you believed that, it was never going to happen?

As long as I spend my life wanting to be an artist, I'm not going to be an artist. It took an enormous amount of courage the first time when people asked, "What do you do?" to answer, "I'm an artist".

It was such a fantasy and now it has become a reality.

So that is basically your purpose in writing the book, to get people to realise their life's dream?

The purpose in writing the book is to empower people, to make them responsible

for themselves, to stop blaming, to make them realise that anything is achievable if you do what you say you're going to do, by when you say you're going to do it. And to push yourself out of your comfort zone.

I think for many people, that is difficult to work past. "Well, why didn't I do the things that I said I would do?" How do you actually move past that?

I believe we all think that we're in our integrity. We all do. I thought I was until I actually monitored it: the number of times that I said to myself, "I'll go to the gym three times a week" - the week goes by, I've been too busy; I'll phone so and so; I'll finish filling out my tax return, whatever it is - all the stuff we don't like doing, because it's easy to do the fun stuff.

I'll have coffee with friends, "Yay, no problem".

The stuff that sits with us burdens us down, it drains our energy. When you have something you have to do, but you don't really want to or are scared to, you feel elated after you do it.

There's very little energy left then to do what really inspires us. Because we're so

burdened with the 'shoulds': "I should do this or that."

I don't wait for that stuff to build up. I do it as it happens. I haven't phoned so and so. I must phone so and so.

At the end of every day, I try not to leave any e-mails unanswered, any invoices unsent, any queries unattended; that leaves me much more time to do what inspires me.

But most of us don't have that time because we're so burdened by all the things we should do and then to avoid them, we find some way of escaping it all.

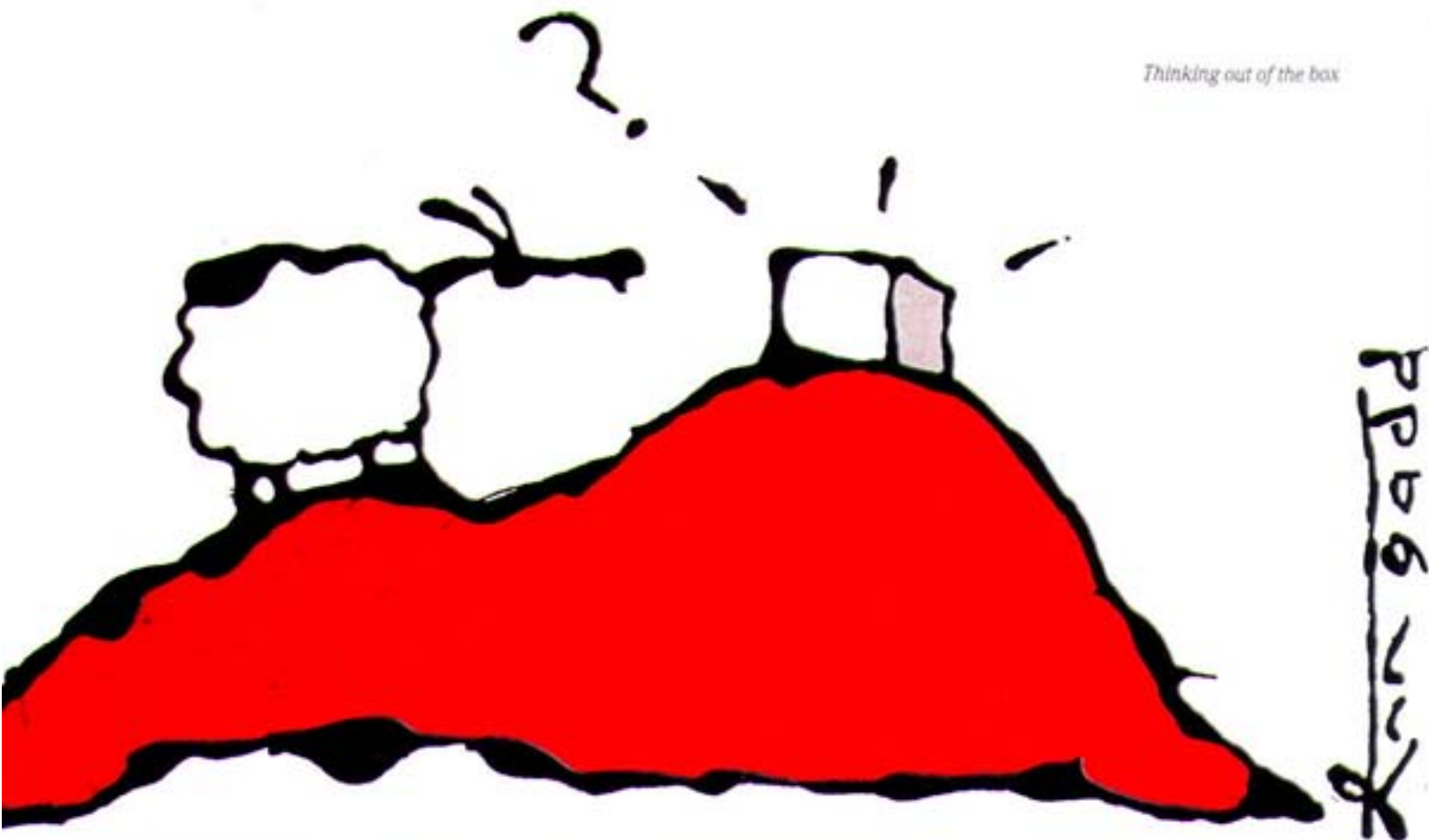
So is there an ultimate purpose for Anne Gadd with these books?

Absolutely. If I can shift the consciousness, or the awareness of people out there by even that much, then I would have paid homage to everything that I've received; that's helped me achieve a state of peace, if you like, within myself.

I certainly didn't have [that] when I was younger and it's an evolving process. Each year it's better and sometimes it slips back, but it's in an evolving process. ▲

Zald Kriel

Thinking out of the box





Climbing the corporate ladder