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Leading from the Inside Out: The Power of Deep Blue Leadership

By James K. Hazy, Ed.D., Founder & CEO, Leadership Science LLC

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One of the most profound and difficult aspects of leadership is instilling in individuals deeply held, and yet generally shared principles to motivate a common purpose. Leading by influencing one's sense of identity and purpose is both powerful and mysterious. Like the deep blue sea, it is also a source of energy and diversity. In this first of twelve articles exploring the spectrum of leadership influence, I address the question: what exactly is deep blue leadership?

The Story Part 1: The Conundrum

When Lynn, the long time leader of a growing organization, drove into the office parking lot at 7:41am, something didn't seem right. He had arrived home late the night before after an extended overseas trip. He was still experiencing jet lag but the parking lot seemed empty to him when compared to six months earlier. He remembered feeling that things were going well then, that everyone seemed motivated, excited and happy. They came in early and stayed late. They were genuinely happy to be back each morning and cheerful when greeting co-workers. The pace of action was quick and efficient. Now, in contrast, people seemed to be dragging. They were just doing their jobs. Morale, it seems, had sagged. As he parked and walked, he made a mental note: "Our leadership activity needs a shot in the arm," he thought.

Analysis and Perspective

In his leadership role, Lynn was appropriately, if informally, monitoring a leading indicator of performance when he noted the waning level of engagement by the organization's members. He appropriately hypothesized that this decline was related to a reduced "velocity" of leadership across the organization, the amount of time spent on leadership activities. Because reduced engagement and intrinsic motivation are expected outcomes of a decline in a specific type of leadership influence, called deep blue leadership influence, he realized that he needed to initiate programs to reenergize this type of leadership in the organization.

Lynn's experience and training had taught him that three steps were required: first gather information about the current situation and diagnose the issues; second, initiate specific leadership activities designed to shore-up the deeply held, social identity of the team members with respect to his organization, the sense of purpose that provides intrinsic motivation; and third, institutionalize change by integrating these initiatives into the organization's culture.

Lynn realized this would not be easy. His leadership teams must find ways to influence members' deeply held sense of identity, toward an organizationally appropriate collective purpose. This sense of purpose, identity and vision would provide the intrinsic motivation to increase engagement, quicken everyone's pace and fill the parking lot.

Case Study Examples

Many organizations face periods where weariness or ennui sets in, where motivation drops. Up and down cycles naturally occur in individuals, even Lynn was dragging that morning, but when reduced

motivation occurs broadly across the organization, leadership intervention is required. Otherwise, the culture itself may change permanently.

When Lucent Technologies was preparing to spin-out from AT&T, the employees felt discarded. Their identities were injured, their motivation low. Although CEO Henry Schacht didn't have a name for it at the time, he knew that deep blue leadership influence was needed.

He began with an intense data gathering effort and a thoughtful assessment and diagnosis of the situation. This was followed by an organization wide identity creating effort that used as many people as practical to develop a shared vision for the IPO "road show". Over and over he and his team communicated the essence of their collective experience using the theme "the opportunity of a lifetime." They were careful to hone their vision statement in a cascading effort that energized the organization.

In a matter of a few months, Lucent employees went from being crushed to being enthusiastic leaders in their own right. Their motivation soared and pushed the organization to a successful IPO and years of strong growth¹.

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When Steve Jobs returned to Apple after many years, he found a demoralized team and a shattered identity. Apple had lost the desktop wars. Collective identity was shattered. There was no vision to motivate people.

Like Schacht, Jobs also recognized the need for deep blue leadership. At Apple, deep blue influence was signaled through an advertising program, "think different." This was aimed as much at employees, Jobs says, as customers. The idea was to reawaken the strong identity and purpose that had made Apple a successful innovator in the past. Apple needed to recapture its identity and its vision: to build the most innovative product possible. To do this, people had to "think different," not just building "the same old, same old".

You can't systematize innovation, Jobs says, "you hire good people who will challenge each other every day to make the best products possible.... When I got back, Apple had forgotten who we were.... Fortunately, we woke up"².

These stories demonstrate the power of deep blue leadership. When leadership operates on people's deeply held sense of identity and purpose, motivation comes from the inside out.

The Story Part 2: Resolution

When Lynn arrived in his office, he immediately asked some tough questions. "How often are teams getting together to talk about opportunities to realize our vision? Are we passionate about process improvements? How about new ways of thinking? Do we critically review project plans and budgets? Do we talk seriously about personal and career development? Do people share a common vision? What is it? How does the situation compare with six months ago? How engaged are our people? These were difficult questions, but ones that could be answered. The process took several weeks, but once the data was gathered and preliminary analysis was completed, the trend was clear—leadership activity aimed at identity and purpose, deep blue leadershipSM activity, had fallen off in the organization.

When he had these answers, Lynn called his leadership team together to share the findings and

express his concerns. "We seem to have lost our edge," he said. "I don't feel the energy that I did six months ago, and data that shows our lower activity levels support my concerns. Our leadership velocitySM in the areas supporting our collective sense of deep significance, identity and vision has dropped off. To be the strong company we need to be, we have to do better. How can we bring back the excitement?"

The team had a difficult time at first, uncomfortable with the meta-perspective Lynn brought to the discussion. "Isn't it manipulative to target activities that influence deeply held beliefs about identity and purpose?" one manager asked. What began as a one-hour discussion, continued in a follow-up two-day session, the second day of which included a much broader array of leaders. It became clear from the interaction that even among the leadership, cracks had formed in the common sense of purpose. Renewal was needed. As Lynn knew, it had already begun.

In the course of the discussion, it was agreed that monthly half-day sessions among members of the leadership team were needed to evolve and communicate the collective identity. The process cascaded into the organization until a consistent, invigorating vision became evident to all members of the organization. The quarterly cultural survey in use was modified to include targeted questions about personal versus collective vision, purpose and identity, to provide on-going feedback. The vision was NOT developed by a small group, and communicated downward, but left to emerge in the context of guiding principles.

After six months, the vision meetings were integrated into the organization's planning process again. Excitement was evident and morale was high. To close out the cycle of leadership, Lynn asked his teams to propose ways the interventions could be proactive, with continuous feedback and action. He realized that leadership is hard work, and nothing works forever. At the same time, he didn't want to

wait until something seemed wrong again.

Recently, Lynn told a reporter from a national newspaper: "Sometimes I feel like we're all sailing on the open sea. At once, what we do is both exciting and mysterious. But I must say, leading from the deep blue is one of the most satisfying parts of my job." When his teammates read his words, they smiled. They knew exactly what he meant. They had been on the journey with him.

1Nadler, D.A. A Success Story: The Case of Lucent Technologies. (1999) In Conger, J. A., Spreitzer, G. M., Lawler, E. E. (eds.) Leaders Change Handbook. Jossey Bass: San Francisco, 3–26.

2 Mandel, Michael. This way to the Future. (2004) Business Week. October 11, p. 96.

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On St. Valentine's Day, Or Any Romantic Interlude, Woo Your Sweetheart With Chocolates,

Roses ... AND A Leadership Talk

By Brent Filson

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Summary: Leadership authority Brent Filson asserts that wooing one's sweetheart can be done with a special kind of communication methodology which he has been teaching leaders worldwide for 21 years.

On St. Valentine's Day, Or Any Romantic Interlude, Woo Your Sweetheart With Chocolates, Roses ... AND A Leadership Talk
by Brent Filson

On Valentine's Day, or any romantic interlude, lovers should woo their sweethearts with chocolates and roses — but also a Leadership Talk.

My experience in teaching the Leadership Talk to thousands of leaders worldwide for the past 21 years confirms that the Talk is a boon for leaders of all ranks and functions in their jobs and careers.

But I've also learned, to my surprise, that many leaders are employing the Leadership Talk effectively outside their jobs in their personal relationships.

Giving Leadership Talks helps leaders get a lot more results in organizations. Leaders see how much more effective as motivational tools Leadership Talks are than speeches and presentations.

Speeches and presentations communicate information. But Leadership Talks have you establish a deep, human, emotional connection with your audience.

That human connection is important in getting great results in your job; but it is also important in getting great results in your personal life — even your love life.

If you want to win or sustain the fondness of a loved one, a Leadership Talk may just make it happen.

Mixing leadership and love may seem like mixing apples and oranges. But great leadership and love share common elements. For one thing, when you are wooing your lover, you may be taking the lead. And for another, using a Leadership Talk, you're fostering a deep, heartfelt relationship — as great leadership often does.

Here are a few pointers on giving a Leadership Talk that you can put into effect this Valentine's Day or any other interlude for love. Before you speak, simply ask three questions: Do you know the needs of your lover? Can you bring deep belief to the relationship? And can you have your lover take action? If you say `no' to any one of those questions, you can't give a Leadership Talk.

The questions apply to lovers as well. To foster a deep, human emotional relationship, you must know what your sweetheart needs, the deep belief you bring to the relationship, and finally, the action you want your sweetheart to take.

However, the questions are not meant to be stumbling blocks to your Leadership Talk but stepping stones. If you answer `no', step back and assess your situation. Think through what you might say so that you can `yes' to each question. Then speak. Give a Leadership Talk. And, by the way, don't forget the chocolates and roses.

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The author of 23 books, Brent Filson's recent books are, **THE LEADERSHIP TALK: THE GREATEST LEADERSHIP TOOL** and **101 WAYS TO GIVE GREAT LEADERSHIP TALKS**. For more than 20 years, he has been helping leaders of top companies worldwide get audacious results. Sign up for his free leadership e-zine and get a free white paper: "49 Ways To Turn Action Into Results," at www.actionleadership.com

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AND A Leadership Talk

The Color Blue: What Does It Mean to You?

Make The Elephant Jump — Leading With A Kind Heart

Seeing the Talents of Effective Leaders

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