

## Adaptability

### A Crucial Organizational and Personal Skill

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Today we find a need to demonstrate adaptability in our personal approach to leading organizations of all sizes. When we think of being adaptive there are many internal and external influences that justify the need to initiate change.

- Advances in technology
- Remote work teams and telecommuting
- The impact of multiple generations in the workplace
- Rapid organizational transformation
- A need to create new best practices

As leaders in organizations we must be adaptive to the trends and circumstances in which we find ourselves immersed. We are often moved by others' expectations, goals, and the climate of our organizations. We find ourselves limited by past practices. The ability to adapt our individual approaches for organizational change helps free us from past limitations.

In the mid-1990s the use of computers and the Internet was not viewed as a necessary tool for work. Now, we are almost in organizational gridlock if our computer systems go down. We rely almost exclusively on e-mail, Internet research, e-marketing and web access for outgoing and incoming data.

We adapt to challenges as our need to thrive and survive arises. Today's organizations often lack long-tenured employees who have been with the organization over 10 or 20 years. A realistic expectation for current employees who stay with an organization is about 3 to 5 years, which begs the question, what can leaders do to develop and keep talented employees? How can we position ourselves to be strategic and adaptive as we adjust to changing expectations?

When we look at the economic state of our country we are faced with the highest levels of jobless benefit claims in over 26 years—over 3 million jobs were lost in 2008, the most since 1945. Over 2,300 companies reported massive layoffs (50 or more jobs lost per company). Unemployment in January 2009 was over 7 percent,



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the highest in 16 years. Leaders of organizations are challenged to keep high potential and highly productive employees, who are then expected to work miracles during immense downturn. Leaders need to create an adaptive environment in order to be ready for the challenges every organization, leader, and individual face today.

What is *adaptability* in terms of a personal and organizational skill? It is an intentional way of being in order to embrace change. It is a state of readiness to be able to perform, the lens that permits or facilitates achievement or accomplishment. Adaptability is having the ability to change or be changed to fit altered circumstances. It is being flexible about change when everyone else wants to hold on to the past. It is important for leaders to be adaptable on a day-to-day basis and for them to help others adapt. There are three critical components that foster an adaptive culture:

1. Introduce *possibility* through a future-based conversation structure
2. Learn how to use *purposeful conversations through coaching*
3. Address *change* and re-frame the focus from resistance to skillful transition

Proficiency among executives, leaders, and individuals in these three areas will elevate the collective influence of an organization's leaders to influence others in order to build and sustain a culture of adaptability. The ability to create an *adaptive culture* tends to build on emotional and intellectual energy, expanding knowledge, and skill development and enhancement, all of which will nurture individual contributor loyalty needed to sustain a streamlined, yet highly efficient and adaptive organization.

Knowing what the culture is and changing the culture of an organization requires everyone's efforts to first identify what makes up the culture and then to implement the necessary changes to address the known components of the culture. Through changes in systems, espoused values, and deeply held beliefs the culture will

make needed adjustments. It is important to make clear why you do the things you do in the organization to make explicit the operational assumptions held at every level of the organization. When the leaders of an organization begin to take a look inward and address the culture from a lens of awareness and potential, they will see a cultural shift in the direction of possibility.

## Possibility—Create through Future-Based Conversations

*“Every man has the power to carry out that which he is convinced.”*

*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

The most basic method we have for influencing others is our conversations. The way we communicate and how we position our conversations has the potential to create or limit possibility to influence the people within the organization in a positive way. Our conversations have a structure and are time linked to the past, present, and future.

Conversations are the driving force behind positive change and growth to move people and organizations into the future. On the flip side they also contribute to resistance and organizational paralysis. Most people remain in the past in their day-to-day approach to conversing during meetings and interacting with colleagues. In his book, *Leadership and the Art of Conversation*, Kim Krisco conducted research on the structure of conversations. The results determined that 80 percent of conversations focused on the past, 15 percent focused on the present, and 5 percent focused on the future. In order to create action in the present we have to think about future possibilities. The future-focused ideas will create the action plans of today. When we allow the larger percentage of our conversations to focus on the past we remain in the state of stagnation. We take what already exists and attempt to make it better or different. This will bring about paralysis and generate more energy focused on



thinking that manifests *what was, we can't, it's been done*, and *we've already tried that*. People will hold on to the past because it is known, familiar, and comfortable, much like a relationship anchored to something that may not have worked or was clearly undesirable, yet hard to break loose.

The ideal blend of how much of your conversations should be focused on the future or present is determined by what you observe is getting accomplished. What is getting done as a result of the future-based conversations? The desired actions that arise as a result of these identified possibilities will indicate the appropriate level of future-based conversation in which you are engaging. It will vary with each person and organization as people adapt to what they need and what produces results.

A concerted effort to shift the focus from the past to the future to create current action will naturally concentrate the larger percentage of your conversations on possibility—future first and then the present. Use past experiences to create context of what you need to do. Use the experiences from the past as a benchmark and way to create new best practices in the present; learn from the past but do not dwell in it. Acknowledge past accomplishments and be mindful to resolve significant problems, but avoid total concentration on the past. However, if you totally avoid past achievements, processes, and ineffective organizational norms and practices you run the risk of repeating them.

## The Influence of Preferences

A difficult cultural aspect of creating possibility is the population's personality preferences. When we look at how people gather information in order to make decisions we can predictably categorize people into two groups. One group looks at the details and facts and prefers sequential order relying on the five senses and what is tangible through experience. These are the *sensing* preferences. There is a natural resistance to possibility within this group. They are very slow to get to possibility without first understanding the steps to achieving the end result. Their natural preference is to resist first before considering a new idea.

The second group is known as *intuitive*. They look at the big picture—more imaginative and abstract in scope. They are future-oriented and value inspiration through ideas and possibility. They are comfortable with non-sequencing and get energized when they see possibility—the end result linked to current circumstances. This group is generally unimpressed with details and can shut down when there is too much focus on the past. Intuitive's make up 30 percent of the population.

Both of these patterns of behavior come from the Myers-Briggs Psychological Type Indicator or what is commonly referred to as MBTI®. The theory postulates that there is a preferred way of gathering information that influences how people make their decisions with the information gathered. The sensors, according to the

### Time Structure of Conversations

Time Structure	Past	Future	Present
Future-based conversations lead to engaging active responses to possibility and will consciously shift the energy and focus from the past to the future, creating action in the present	<b>Stagnation (no choice – paralysis)</b> *80%	<b>Possibility (identified potential)</b> *5%	<b>Response to Possibility (movement – change)</b> *15%
	Aim to reduce the focus on the past. Leaders need to become skilled at moving the conversation forward in order to begin the shift toward adaptability.	Actively engage in future-based conversations. Increase your opportunities to focus on potential and possibility to shift the percentage of your conversations into double digits.	Partner your future focused ideas with powerful action. As your response to possibility increases, so does your commitment to action, which escalates productive energy.

Consulting Psychologist Press (CPP) make up 70 percent of the population, which means seven out of ten staff members tend to resist the idea of possibility. Unless they're given enough facts and step-by-step information to understand how the future is possible they will be lost or appear to be resistant to an idea. The job of organizational leaders is made more difficult getting *sensors* to move into the possibility of new processes, ideas, and ways of being. We are challenging their preferences—what is known and comfortable for them—and moving them into an area of discomfort—the abstract or vision of what could be. In order for the sensors to move into the future of possibility leaders can:

- Provide a clear chronological view of what it will take to move to possibility (end result)
- Involve *sensors* in the planning and development of the future
- Use a brainstorming technique to solicit ideas from *sensors* on how to fill the gaps

Michael Phelps the Olympic gold medalist in the 2008 summer games in Beijing, China won 8 gold medals against the odds. Many experts in the sports world (athletes, writers, and the media) told him the record couldn't be broken. The previous record of 7 gold medals won in swimming had been held for 36 years, since 1972. Michael Phelps chose to ignore the critics and was determined to create the possibility of achieving this record. His determination to achieve his goal influenced the way he trained. It changed the language he used and motivated his teammates to work harder to achieve the goal with him. He captivated and inspired the nation and the world as he won one race after another. Some races were easy victories, others were close photo finishes. He never lost sight of his goal. He created powerful present action by looking at future possibility. The final tally showed he had achieved what was considered an impossible goal of winning 8 Olympic gold medals. As a result he became Sports Illustrated Athlete of the Year for 2008.

between the current state to a desired future state—possibility

- Refrain from making large leaps to the end result without checking with the *sensors* to ensure they understand the steps to achieve the end result

## Coaching—Use Purposeful Conversations to Achieve Desired Results

*“The real act of discovery consists not in finding new lands, but in seeing with new eyes.”*

*Marcel Proust*

Coaching is a technique that requires skill in inquiry to view situations with new eyes. In terms of how we see our organizations and roles in them we tend to glaze over what has become commonplace or the perceived norm. We revert to the past and miss the opportunity to create something new and innovative. An example to highlight our sense of filtering is when a new employee is hired. The new employee is fresh in the sense of not being biased by organizational history or political influence. Therefore he or she looks at everything in the organization with “fresh eyes.” The employee's successful transition to join the organization is based on being able to identify cultural norms, learn new processes, build relationships, and demonstrate behaviors that add value to the new organization. Without the historical context limiting the new employee he or she very often brings new ideas to create possibility and begins to influence the culture. For leaders to be adaptive we need to develop the ability to view and process what we encounter every day with fresh eyes and not be limited by what was or is a commonly accepted organizational process or norm.

Years ago there was a movie that showed a simple example of people seeing with new eyes. It was about a private school teacher who was try-



ing to get his students to view life with wonder and possibility in order to be creative to generate new ideas for writing. One approach he used was to get the students to see a place they had known with a new outlook. The room was so common to them it could not hold any newness or luster or could it? He asked them to form a line at the front of the room and one-by-one to stand on his desk. He wanted them to view their classroom from a different perspective. The students stood in amazement. The same room, that minutes before brought no energy or incentive for them to think bigger, now elevated their enthusiasm, provided new focus, and stimulated their creativity through the experience of seeing something differently. There was awareness and energy in the room—a shift in perspective expanded possibility. They saw newness in what was once old. The teacher put them in the position of self-discovery and allowed them to see something ordinary with new eyes; this is the essence of coaching, to create a new way of being.

Coaching is about putting yourself and others in position to see what needs to change. It is a technique to become aware of what it takes to break the cycle of ineffective behavior that limits us from achieving the results we want. Coaching is consistently engaging in focused conversations to identify beliefs, assumptions, and paradigms that drive behaviors and then to self-discover, or help others self-discover solutions to implement desired change. The results offer greater clarity to how one interacts with others and moves throughout an organization. It broadens one's self-assessment and welcomes clarity and flexibility in changing one's self to achieve desired results.

## Listening

An additional skill that results from coaching is a greater capacity to listen. In order to create relationships that reach people at a core level, leaders must be able to listen deeply. The range of listening encompasses three levels:

**Level 1.** Listening at this level is considered a surface approach to conversations. There is more energy devoted to yourself and whatever you're focused on in the moment. There is significant "self-talk" occurring and internal distractions that take greater precedence than the actual conversation. When in this mode you're more at risk of missing important elements of the conversation due to internal distractions. Because you've missed a significant part of the conversation due to misdirected focus there is more energy required to catch up and to clarify what was said. The result is frustration for the person you are communicating with and often a feeling of being discounted or not taken seriously.

**Level 2.** You are more invested in the conversation, but not really there for the person with whom you are conversing. At this level you're listening to respond and begin formulating your answers well before you've heard a complete sentence or thought. The tendency is to formulate your answers before the other speaker is finished. There is less focus on what is being said and more energy devoted to getting your point across at the risk of not hearing the complete message from the other person. People often demonstrate level two listening by multi-tasking as they hold a conversation, such as reading e-mail on a computer while talking to someone or answering a cell phone text message and talking at the same time. They very often do not even look at the person with whom they are communicating. People describe this as fighting for air-time and not being heard because they couldn't get their point across. The other person's filters were obstacles to processing the information as they were multi-tasking or something else was a priority. One question to ask yourself, "Are you really present?"

**Level 3.** This is where effective coaching takes shape. At level three you're completely focused on the person before you. You maintain eye contact; your body position is face-to-face; you're less focused on what to say and more focused on what is said. You're not listening to respond, rather you're listening with a deep sense of

curiosity. You are consciously focused on leaving your “distinctions” outside of the conversation. It is important to be as objective and curious as possible to truly hear what is being communicated.

Distinctions—the cognitive elements that direct your focus, which can be distracting; assumptions that elevate judgments, the opinions that lead you to begin formulating answers and responses based on what you know and have experienced. Resistance arises in response to what you believe is true, which may be in opposition to the other person’s point-of-view. Your filters are created by the experiences that make you who you are, the beliefs you hold deeply, and the values you live your life by. These are all results of your upbringing, your education, your view of the world, and your successes and failures that determine how to proceed. All of your biases tend to cloud and restrict the deeper level listening required for effective coaching.

When the deepest level of listening is enlisted people on the receiving end of this experience begin to open up and invest in the relationship because they feel validated. The information shared at this level is given openly and freely because there is a belief that what is shared in the conversation will be protected. It will be respected and appropriately honored. Trust is a significant outcome of this type of listening. When the element of trust is present, deeper levels of sharing naturally occur. As trust builds through the coaching relationship so does the belief that the leader is reliable, genuine, and approachable.

*Followership develops and people begin to support change more easily because of the belief in you as a trusted leader.* Like putting deposits in the bank, you are investing in them and they in you through coaching, building trust, and validating the things they consider important. When future circumstances require you to ask your team to meet an impossible deadline or work beyond the boundaries of a current norm you will see the

benefits of your coaching efforts. People respond seamlessly through the difficult challenges as they are invested in you and the organization. They spend less time deciding whether or not they will invest their discretionary energy to support you or the initiative and more time focused on making things happen. They adapt to the new expectation and produce results with a genuine sense of purpose and support.

## **Support Systems: An Important Element of Coaching**

Support systems are important in the successful achievement of agreed upon objectives that are identified through coaching. When we look at support systems in terms of aiding us in times of crisis and change we generally tend to focus our attention on close friends and family for that support. When in the midst of change we are by design moving away from the known into areas of unknown, which require us to reframe our expectations. This is a time that demands the stability of friendly and comfortable connections as in our reliable support systems. Over the course of the last decade when groups of entry-level employees to senior leadership teams were asked what size their support systems were, the responses were generally in the range of 3 to 10 people consisting of family members and close friends.

An approach to consider when seeking support during times of change offers a more resourceful and expansive scope to shift one’s paradigm of what a support system is. If you include anything that will provide information, insights, experience, and resources to add value and influence the situation with a positive result you increase your ability to adapt to changes at every level. Begin to access subject matter experts for their knowledge and experience. Turn to professional organizations, mentors, self-help books, colleagues, topic specific networks, the Internet, and any resource that will give you the answers you need to make intelligent decisions or gain confidence in your actions to employ a new strategy or solution to a high priority initia-



tive. Capitalize on your networks from degree programs, certificate cohorts, past instructors, professors, and past work teams. Find ways of learning from them, tap into their experience and insights on how to move the needle in the

area of your current need. The more you use these resources the more comprehensive your approach will be in preparing your solutions and strategies, which broadens your ability to adapt to changes.

### A Coaching Story

In working with the senior leadership at a large regional government organization I had the opportunity to coach seven executives to help them adapt to a new leadership style. One experience in particular illustrates the power of using inquiry as a technique for leading and being adaptable to support a struggling employee. An executive had a direct report who was disenchanted with his role in the organization and was demonstrating insubordinate behavior on a regular basis. He could be found sitting in the executive's office for a meeting with his feet crossed on the executive's desk, while leaning back in his chair with arms folded and a glazed faraway look of discontent on his face. There was enough documentation to proceed with disciplinary action as he was on the verge of termination. Instead of letting him go, the executive chose to coach his employee and use inquiry to help his direct report see the organization and his role with new eyes!

The executive wanted coaching specifically on how to change the relationship with his direct report. He began to ask his direct report, the supervisor, open-ended questions about his career and what he envisioned going forward. As the coaching engagement progressed he noticed his employee uncrossed his arms, removed his feet from the desk, scooted to the edge of his chair and leaned forward. He saw interest begin to take over and heard energy in his responses. The executive could not write fast enough to capture everything his employee was sharing about his goals and what he envisioned for himself in the organization. The executive couldn't stop smiling as he continued to ask questions that moved his employee to self-discovery in areas of development and future direction.

He continued to learn more about his employee's goals, dreams, and ideas for how he could contribute to the organization and develop professionally. His direct report wanted to change his work schedule, be challenged with more responsibility, and receive training in an executive training program. The relationship between the executive and his direct report changed to one of great respect and achievement. His employee had become a trusted and reliable supervisor simply because of the insights gained through coaching. He soon acquired needed skills and developed to the point of becoming his most effective supervisor. When the executive was asked to transfer to another facility in the region to improve efficiency, he didn't hesitate to bring this supervisor with him to the next organization. He was his go-to-guy and one he wanted working for him.

This executive learned through the coaching process to be open, flexible, and adaptive to a new way of leading. He learned to ask questions and help his direct reports self-discover ways of being valued as significant members in their organizations. He helped them expand their roles and functions to contribute more to their organization and learned new ways of reaching people at a level much deeper than before. Whether a leader coaches or is coached, the ability to engage in this process supports creating a culture of adaptability that benefits everyone involved.

The disenchanted supervisor only focused on what wasn't happening and was headed in a downward spiral in his career until his manager enlisted a new approach to leading. His manager chose to coach him, which helped redirect his focus to achieve a different more positive end result. The power of what we focus on can lead us to great heights if we focus on possibility and proactively design what we want to achieve. Being able to understand the impact of our thinking and what we focus on is explained in "The Thinking Path."

Remember to construct conversations that focus on possibility and be open to coaching in whatever way brings you a new way of seeing your situation. A broad range of resources leads to options to expand the scope of your support system, which offers you choices to focus on possibility. The more opportunities you create, the easier it is to shift and adapt or change the current reality within your organization.

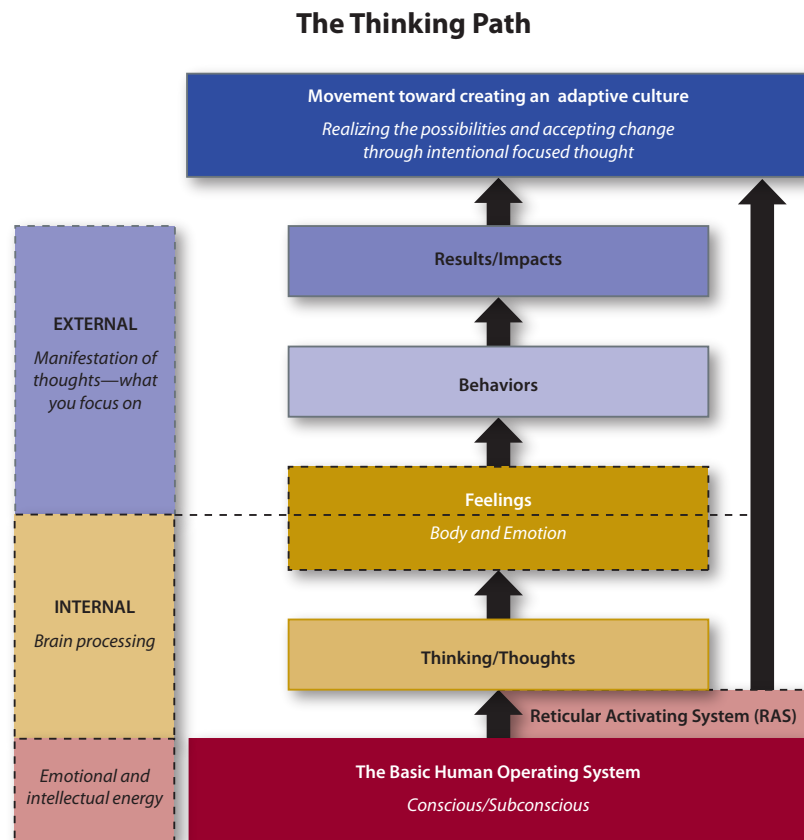
## The Thinking Path— Understanding the Power of Focus

*“We tend to become what we think about.”*

*William James*

Along the lines of seeing with new eyes is looking at what we focus on in our organizations and individual lives. *The Thinking Path* developed by Alexander Caillet and Ken Manning, offers a simple explanation of the brain’s process of taking information and processing it to achieve desired results. When we focus on the past, the negative aspects of what isn’t working in our organizations or any unproductive element that keeps us from achieving the results we want will most assuredly manifest outcomes linked to our errant focus. The same goes for the positive elements on which we focus: what is working, ideas that generate possibility, and innovative approaches to improve best practices all have the potential to manifest desired results.

We receive what we focus on because of a biological process in the brain known as the *Reticular Activating System (RAS)*, which is a key element in the Thinking Path. Considered the learning center it is responsible for alertness or, better termed, awareness to see what our environment is showing us. At any given moment there are two million bits of data surrounding us, which is information for us to process. How much information can we process at one time? The human brain can process 134 bits per second and allow us to clearly focus on approximately 5 to 9 bits at once. What does this mean? We cannot focus on everything so we focus on what we need to survive, what we believe is necessary for our well-being and what we deem important in any given moment. Our RAS helps us to focus on things we need to learn such as a new process on the job, things to avoid to remain in good standing, or finding the right piece of data in a library of information. An example of efficiency in our reticular acti-



*The Thinking Path was developed by Alexander Caillet and Ken Manning. Used with permission from Alexander Caillet.*

vating system can be seen when we are working for simple things such as deciding to buy a new car. What car do we see all over the roads? The car we want to buy! The RAS also shows itself when in a truly threatening moment of survival. The Washington Metropolitan Area experienced a tragic period in 2002 when a sniper began to randomly shoot people throughout the region. For anyone living in the area at the time knows there was a climate of fear for survival. The one thing everyone in the region focused on due to early media reports: white vans! Everyone in the region was seeing white vans. Did the heavy truck industry decide to saturate the region with white vans? No, yet everyone in the area could identify them throughout the region the entire time the sniper was at large. The collective population's reticular activating systems were in full function as they kept an entire region of people sharply focused on surviving by knowing where the white vans were.

The RAS functions to protect us yet it can become a trap if we choose to focus only on things that are wrong with an individual or with a process or an organization. Understanding the function of the reticular activating system then provides context for how to use focused thoughts or thinking to create desired results. This links to future-based conversations, seeing with new eyes, creating possibility and truly listening on a level that fosters trust among the leadership. When the thinking of the leadership is representative of a culture of adaptability sustained through purposeful conversations as in coaching engagements it leads to achievement and desired change. The next component to support an adaptable culture is to embrace change and become skillful at the transitions required during times of change.

## Change—Breaking with Your Current Identity or Current State

*“Change can either challenge or threaten us. Your beliefs pave your way to success or block you.”*

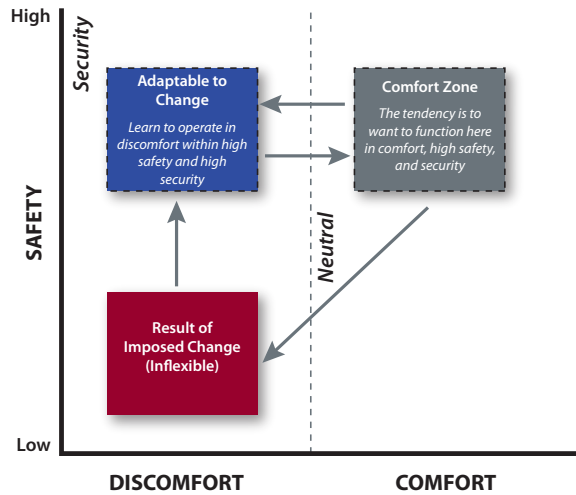
*Marsha Sinetar*

The successful handling of change is the third component in creating an adaptive culture. Leaders who effectively introduce change and reduce levels of stress brought on by change create conditions for sustained growth and adaptability.

Change is often associated with discomfort. When people are forced out of their perceived comfort zones by some form of change they experience elevated stress levels. It shows up in many ways within the organization and takes a great toll on the individual. As leaders of organizations it is important to understand how stress impacts the people within their organizations. Without appropriate support for people experiencing imposed change the stress that arises from the transition will have a negative impact on the change initiative and create resistance within the organization. It will increase people's focus on negative energy and further elevate inflexibility around processes, resistance to new initiatives and reorganization.

The *Comfort/Discomfort Matrix* is a visual model of what we experience during times of change. People have a tendency to stay in their comfort zones and are naturally resistant to anything that pulls them out of them. Many people are currently dealing with imposed changes such as a reduction of customers and staff due to downward spiraling economic conditions. People will begin to feel the effects throughout their organization as they are moved to *discomfort* with *low safety and security*. They will be less flexible and will start to demonstrate behaviors counterproductive to achieving at high levels.

## Comfort/Discomfort Matrix



The advent of stress manifests fear and physical discomfort in many forms—knots in the stomach, increased heart rate, headaches, and sweating to name a few. Employees start to use their personal leave, call in sick, show up late, or leave early when thrust into discomfort without a feeling of safety and security. Negative energy thrives through gossip, extended breaks, wasting time on the job, and making up stories of what is happening in the organization. People want to hold on to what they know and are reluctant to accept change. Emotions pique and the body releases stress hormones—cortisol and adrenaline—to handle the stress induced by change. The human body needs cortisol and adrenaline to give us that edge that keeps us sharp when challenged. It helps us get focused and hit our most productive state, sometimes referred to as being in the zone. One significant result of excess amounts of stress hormones in our systems is saturating the amygdala (an almond-shaped neural structure in the anterior part of the temporal lobe of the cerebrum; it plays an important role in motivation and emotional behavior). When flooded with the stress hormones the amygdala increases emotional reactions to change and shifts the body into a fight or flight mode. The blood circulating through the body redirects to increase blood flow to our extremities and redirects blood away from the frontal

cortex in the brain to our emotional center: the amygdala. It reduces the blood flow to our core organs and frontal cortex to prepare us for the fight or flight interaction or imposed change in this circumstance.

During this state we actually reduce our ability to think rationally and intelligently as the brain experiences blood loss in the cerebral cortex. We begin to function in a higher emotional state and can experience what is known as an *amygdala hijack*. The point at which there is so much cortisol and adrenaline in the amygdala we experience emotional rage. It is known as a gateway to the point of no return. Once we've accumulated enough of the stress hormones to have an amygdala hijack the results will unleash severe uncontrollable emotions that impact all who are unfortunate enough to be in our immediate surroundings. To illustrate the amygdala hijack we can look at a common situation most of us know through experience if we've traveled on any congested highway system: road rage! It occurs for many reasons, but generally when people cut someone off in a traffic lane or drive too slow in the far left lane on the highway we see damaging consequences. It happens daily as people mind their own business driving calmly in heavy traffic and then experience another driver who abruptly cuts them off by changing lanes. You've seen tempers flare, inappropriate gestures, tailgating at high speeds, and reckless driving because the amygdala has accumulated too many doses of stress hormones, has become highly sensitive to negative influences and reached the point of no return. People in this condition have become hair triggers waiting to be pulled because of their excess levels of stress hormones coupled with negative external stimuli feeding the impulse to pull the trigger. "The straw that broke the camel's back."

When in the midst of change it is common for people to experience elevated stress levels on a day-to-day basis, yet they are expected to function productively in their organizations. The stress hormones are cumulative and remain in the amygdala over extended periods of time.

These stress hormones must be constructively depleted in order for people to remain functional and adaptable to change. Decompressing stress and using emotional energy in a positive way will allow much more open and adaptive efforts to become the norm during change.

*"...When our intellectual energy is not conflicted and used to focus emotional energy into passion, we will put ourselves into very powerful physical action."*

*Donald Klein, Ph.D. and  
Michael Broom, Ph.D.*

Think of a time when you were comfortably established in your organization, had learned norms of how to function in the organization and had created productive routines. It is much easier to operate in an organization when you know the players, the rules, the boundaries and the conditions for success and have the means and authority to achieve your goals. When you know your purpose and how to support the organization it is easier to be productive. In order to get to this state during times of change and transition the leaders in the organization can add value by creating an environment of safety and security through:

- Training to build skill required to support initiatives, new processes, or programs.
- Communicating what is happening in the organization. Communicate what is known and what is not known. Communicate often and consistently. Providing this forum for employees will reduce the rumors and gossip and limit negative energy in the organization.
- Sharing the vision of what is to be and how it will benefit the organization. Help each person understand what their role is going to be related to the vision.
- Giving encouragement to the people in your organization. Provide encouragement unique to each person, unit, department, or division.

- Sharing personal experiences related to similar situations you've experienced in your career. Become a mentor or provide mentors and coaches for people in transition.
- Celebrating accomplishments as you transition through the change. Acknowledge those making efforts to grow and develop in order to realize the vision.
- Adopting flexible schedules and introducing networks appropriate for building knowledge around new programs, projects, and acquisitions and restructuring of the organization.
- Keeping people's focus and attention on the possibility in their future and making a constant effort to redirect their focus from their old identities to create a new one.

Change requires a departure from our old identities. What we once thought of our organization, our role in the organization, and what it took to do our jobs, they are no longer applicable. *Breaking the identity of what was requires an adaptive culture to support the development of a new identity.*

When people see and feel the leaders of their organization are making efforts to provide for them during times of transition and change they will begin to feel a fresh level of comfort again. These strategies will help people to reduce or avoid the elevated destructive stress levels and begin to encourage new ways of seeing, accept new identities, and embrace new cultural norms. The comfort/discomfort zones will be active during this process as people will cycle back and forth from their comfort zone to an expected level of discomfort, which opens the door to adaptability.

It is the responsibility of the organizational leaders to ensure the cycle people experience on the matrix remains at the top of the matrix and doesn't plunge downward every time a change occurs. Change means discomfort, but it doesn't have to mean people are thrust into the depths of discomfort without an acceptable level of safety and security.

## Conclusion

In order to build a culture of adaptability organizational energy and momentum must be focused on self-development and self-awareness. Each person needs to understand the power of their conversations and how to create possibility through every interaction. When a greater percentage of the people in your organization engage in purposeful conversations through coaching engagements they will begin to break the cycle of old behaviors and see with new eyes. During times of change those people in the organization who become skilled in how to create and sustain safety and security in the organization will know how to effectively support the people tasked with making the change. It is crucial to understand successful change is about living with an acceptable level of discomfort, and providing the broad range of resources unique to each person needed to achieve the desired results sought by organization leaders.



## Possibility

- Be aware of where your conversations focus
- Shift conversations from the past to the future
- Create action today through future possibility

## Coaching

- See the current state with new eyes
- Achieve desired outcomes through self-discovery
- Engage in purposeful conversations

## Change

- Create a state of safety and security in discomfort
- Use your emotional energy to drive change productively
- Identify and use support systems in the midst of change

An adaptable organization is one able to make adjustments with a small measure of resistance. Adaptability requires everyone to see with new eyes and to break the individual and organizational identities of what was once effective and appropriate, but currently is viewed as “good enough, that’s how we’ve always done it!” When has “good enough” ever been considered innovative and fresh? Adaptability is having enough of your organizations’ identity sitting with the distinctions of being flexible, fresh, and willing to adapt!

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