

BEYOND EARTH: THE FUTURE OF HUMANS IN SPACE

Stage Three Leadership: From Good Ideas to Unified Action

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As we move toward space, a new standard for leaders is necessary. Cooperation and coordination at a level currently thought impossible will become essential. "Stage Three Leadership" is a blueprint for developing humane, competent leaders who can fulfill the possibility of Unified Action in an unforgiving environment.

Unified Action means sharing the same boat, while traveling one's own path to a common destination. You don't have to like or agree with the other voyagers, but your mutual dependence is absolute. To live in a condition of Unified Action is like being a trapeze artist -- you had better catch the other person, and they had better catch you. You need not agree on style, but timing is critical.

In practice, Unified Action demonstrates concern for the needs and interests of everyone involved. This is immediately obvious when it comes to your own children, job or close friends. It is less obvious, but equally real, when it comes to the future of humans in space. Moving beyond the planet of our origin is literally a global issue. As with issues such as weapons of mass murder and the destruction of irreplaceable ecosystems, the fate of humanity as a whole is involved. Only a cooperative response beyond anything we have previously achieved as a species can enable us to successfully address these issues. Yehezkel Dror⁽¹⁾ calls this collective response "Raison d' Humanite," and declares it a normative imperative. This imperative is the cornerstone for Unified Action for the future of humans both on earth and in space.

The Talmud says that there are thirty-six righteous people in hiding who, if they can find each other, will transform the world. This is a suitable metaphor for the quest to find, develop and support Stage Three Leaders. These rare individuals embrace Dror's normative imperative at a global level and are also competent in achieving technical, administrative and financial bottom lines. They think on a scale of generations while acting in real time. Developing Stage Three Leaders is akin to nudging evolution, like teaching fish to crawl from the sea to the land.

Through thirty-five years of helping private and public organizations manage change, we have distinguished three discrete developmental stages of leadership excellence. Stage One Leaders are successful by conventional measures and produce results. Yet they often undermine the creative process of moving good ideas to Unified Action by devoting excessive attention to immediate trans-actions, instrumental relationships and bottom lines of order and control. We are all familiar with Stage One Leadership -- a mindset in which leaders and groups are usually reactive to circumstances regarding constituents, strategy, structure, process and people. They do what is necessary to meet the requirements of the moment, but seldom look further ahead.

Stage Two Leaders are also successful and produce results. They are more aware of the need for coherent and managed approaches to Unified Action and change. They are more willing than their Stage One counterparts to try such approaches, particularly in times of crisis. However, these innovative approaches usually give way to 'normal' prior practices after the crisis has passed. Results-focused Stage Two Leaders often do not persist in "walking their talk" with respect to Unified Action, but continue to be moved by circumstance and 'business as usual' ideology.

Stage Three Leaders creatively bring people and organizations together. Given human nature, and the almost inescapable pull for conformity from institutional culture, Stage Three Leadership is a tall order. It calls for uncharacteristic ways of seeing the world, and turning some commonly held beliefs and assumptions on their heads. What's

needed is to embrace a new set of beliefs and practices, while replacing old paradigms without compromise. This leadership challenge in no way diminishes the absolute requirements for competence, judgment and experience.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." For Stage Three Leaders, "being the change" means thinking and speaking the language of possibility. It means personally and always standing for the imperative of Raison d' Humanite -- to be humanitarian on the widest scale while producing both tangible results and Unified Action. "Being the Change" also means moving ideas from the abstract realm of concepts to the arena of coordinated action, often in partnership with discordant individuals and groups. It demands that you confront your own attitudes, behaviors and self-limiting beliefs, to get yourself out of your way. It means becoming an ambassador from the future you want to see and intend to create.

Many of our basic social institutions fail to meet this standard. People who control the most valued resources and carry senior accountability in large organizations often act as if they care more for order and control than for the rights and wellbeing of the people whose efforts sustain those systems. In schools this means that interests such as state test scores become more important than individual children's learning. In corporations this means the company's quarterly earnings outweigh its long-standing employee pension commitments. For the future of humans in space, this means that parochial bureaucratic, scientific, commercial and national interests collide in ways that impede success. Short-sightedness reigns precisely where the need for leadership vision and Unified Action is greatest.

Processes and prescriptions for Unified Action abound. Methods for constructive conflict resolution, searching for common ground, and coordinated action are easy to find. What we lack are leaders committed to using them. Institutional cultures are merciless in their gravity and grip on people to conform. This usually stops people from "helicoptering" and seeing events from perspectives above and beyond what is already

sanctioned by the culture. It is difficult to apply new knowledge, however productive it may potentially be, when it runs counter to deeply embedded beliefs.

The majority of leaders and organizations I have known operate in Stage One or Stage Two. Most of these are fine men and women, stuck in human and institutional paradigms which guarantee that their futures will look pretty much like their past. For Stage One and Stage Two leaders and organizations, their personal and cultural point of view is more important than anything else. Their very sense of survival is tied to their already existing beliefs about what is possible and what's right or wrong with technology, politics, identity, and economics. Anything that threatens this point of view is endured, ignored, suppressed, or attacked. This identity-driven mental defense mechanism, which we all share, prevents good ideas from turning into Unified Action. It prevents both leaders and organizations from taking risks and seeing possibilities with others who have different points of view. Without evolving leaders who are able to transcend their own point of view, Homo Sapiens will arrive at a development-al dead end.

Courageous, unified, and coordinated action is widely recognized as important in public, private, international, interdisciplinary and inter-govern-mental situations. Too few players are willing to step up to this personal and global challenge. Uncommon commitment is missing. From greed to self-interest, to the immovability of existing structures, there are many reasons why Unified Action seems impossible and the exercise of power and position is the best leadership we get.

For developing Stage Three Leaders on earth and in space, there are hypotheses to test:

1. If a small group stands for the emergence of Stage Three Leadership for the future of humans in space, it will propagate broadly over time despite entrenched disagreement and resistance. Theories, political philosophies, models and intelligent

proposals open the conversation and point the way. What will move these from concept to reality is what people stand for, and what they are irrevocably committed to.

2. Stage Three Leadership is imperative for the future of humans in space and on earth, to prevent the catastrophic negatives that have occurred internationally and institutionally throughout history.

3. Stage Three Leadership needs to be demonstrated now, in preparing for a future in space, if we expect to achieve it there. We can't get there from here. We need to put the organization of the future in place now in order to create the organization of the future. Flexibility can't be invented from bureaucracy.

We can expect little agreement for a new paradigm of Stage Three Leadership or for the Future of Space. In the absence of broad agreement, the development of Stage Three Leaders calls for training and mentoring in certain uncommon assumptions and sensitivities. These assumptions include:

Unified Action is the new bottom line. A new bottom line looks crazy to others with different bottom lines. Unified Action will find little agreement as the new bottom line in a world where money, power, technology and territoriality are primary. Unified Action as the new bottom line is not simply a matter of process but a matter of context, process, and outcome together. A new bottom line of Unified Action requires an emotional and spiritual context of relationship, a physical process of coordination, and a commitment to outcomes that include peoples' needs for freedom, money, technology and social order. Institutional and social forms we will create from this new bottom line cannot be known at the outset. With a new bottom line, all we have is conviction, uncertainty, and faith.

Leadership is plural. It takes two to see one. Without some dedicated 'other' committed to our commitments, our own blind spots keep getting in the way of our higher

intentions. An effective coach is the bridge across the gap between who we are and who we can become. Without dedicated mentors and coaches to help us achieve 'escape velocity', it is difficult to sustain Stage Three Leadership individually or Unified Action together.

Thought is largely collective. Physicist David Bohm⁽⁵⁾ offers evidence that thought is largely a collective phenomenon, even though it seems to us that we are each individually doing the thinking. It is only through open-ended dialogue that shared meaning and unification can occur. Debate, opinion and sharing information are not dialogue and rarely result in shared meaning.

Reality is constructed of possibilities. Quantum physics shows us that the universe, at its most fundamental level, consists of an infinite set of possibilities, literally evoked by the questions that we ask. Creating new possibilities for moving good ideas to Unified Action requires the commitment of leaders and groups dedicated to inventing new questions that evoke and precipitate energy and action simply by posing the unpredictable possibility.

Power comes from holding opposites in your mind. Victor Sanchez, a teacher of ancient Toltec Indian philosophy and practices, says that the source of Toltec success as a harmonious society was the practice of "Kinam" -- the ability to hold opposites in their minds without contradiction. To achieve large scale Unified Action, our Aristotelean "either/or" thinking must be displaced by a more inclusive mode of understanding. One pioneering investigation into the essence of creativity studied the milestone contributions of fifty-eight famous scientists and artists, including Einstein, Picasso and Mozart. They shared a common pattern: all breakthroughs occurred when two or more opposites were conceived simultaneously, existing side by side as equally valid, operative and true. In an apparent defiance of logic or physical possibility, the creative person consciously embraced antithetical elements and developed these into integrated entities and creations.

Problems are often good. Michael Reid, a gifted trainer and coach, said that most problems are not as bad as is normally considered. Rather, if problems are used to reveal underlying commitments, and these commitments are used as a basis for action to produce breakthroughs, a world of opportunities emerges.

Stage Three Leadership also calls for sensitivities for reliably moving good ideas to unified action. Out of many such sensitivities, the following are primary:

Energy Sensitivity. Systems with the most focused energy will prevail. In fostering Unified Action, energy is the decisive context. In any moment, energy, vitality and inspiration are either strong or weak. Stage Three Leadership creates an energy envelope in which others can operate. While everyone knows this, few leaders act as if energy makes the critical difference. Red Auerbach said that, as coach of the Boston Celtics, his main job was to assure 'team spirit.'

Again, while the truth of this is broadly accepted, it is usually not acknowledged as the leader's main job, especially if they don't think they can control the parties involved.

Alignment Sensitivity. Alignment sensitivity is seeing the chaos or distortion caused by individuals and groups. Higher levels of strategic alignment, coordinated action and cooperation are often a function of a specific shift in a leader's point of view about what s/he believes is possible. Even when the call for alignment comes from a shift in external conditions, competition, or new technology, the response may be limited or non-existent if there is no accompanying change in point of view.

Breakthrough Sensitivity. Breakthrough sensitivity is seeing and embracing opportunities for discontinuous outcomes. Most people will not promise themselves or others what they cannot predict. Unified Action in complex systems is not predictable, so it is rarely promised. Since commitment -- not reasoning -- does the mental sorting

to produce breakthrough results, readiness to throw one's hat over the wall and then follow it is necessary. For example, our government promised to go to the moon within ten years, before planning how it would be done.

"Thou" Sensitivity. Thou sensitivity is the recognition that all people are human beings, not objects to be manipulated, and to behave consistently with that awareness. Most public political and commercial communication is "I-It" based, often concealed in caring or solicitous language. When people feel they are being treated as objects, the opportunity for willing, Unified Action disappears. Treating other people as full human beings with an inner life and perspectives as legitimate as our own is a challenge in any relationship, and may be especially difficult for an impatient visionary leader. Coercion and manipulation are tempting shortcuts, but they foreclose the possibilities of Unified Action. Objects can be used, or refuse to be used, but they can never choose to partner with us.

Possibility Sensitivity. Possibility Sensitivity is seeing the world in terms of adjacent possibilities. This gives the ability to invent new possibilities in the face of apparent impossibility, and to give that which is chosen such compelling importance, it can't be resisted.

In the past fifty years powerful methods have been adapted from Marine, SAS, and Navy Seal training, and from intensive personal transformation programs, that provide people with a powerful experience in which they see for themselves the possibilities which arise from changing their points of view. Methodologies now exist to transform how leaders experience the world in ways that will increase the likelihood of Unified Action. These methodologies give them new choices for transcending their former points of view. As in an effective boot camp, there is a moment of truth, a moment in which leaders come to appreciate the terrible cost of their current segmented and self-centered world view. This moment is followed by seeing what is really possible out of

claiming their own courage and leadership. They then have a choice to move the best ideas toward Unified Action for the greater good.

In developing Stage Three Leaders for the future of space and other critical challenges, there are examples to follow. A former marine told me that his drill instructor's motto was, "Let no man's ghost say my training did not do its job." The same level of commitment and persistence is necessary in training leaders to invent desirable futures and unify intractable boundaries and conflicts. Steve Jobs, founder of Apple Computer, said in his 2005 Stanford University Commencement address that, "... it was impossible to connect the dots looking forward when I was in college, but it was very, very clear looking backwards, ten years later. If we can't connect the dots looking forward.., only looking backwards..., then we have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in the future. We have to trust in something — our 'guts,' destiny, life, karma, whatever belief systems we've grown up in or chosen. Believing that the dots will connect down the road gives us the confidence to follow our hearts, even when it leads us off the well-worn path.., and that makes all the difference."

The choice to stay where we are, or to turn away from the challenge ahead is always with us. Ultimately, the crossroad we face is whether to stay comfortable with and 'right' about our particular point of view, or to work together in service of our common humanity. The major challenge in formulating the training and development of Stage Three Leaders involves defining areas of agreed and limited goals, and assuring the imperative of Raison d' Humanite. It's not just a matter of implementation, but rather "to stay on a path of "experimentation and inspiration..., to let go and follow the course of what is emerging."⁽⁷⁾

When America was founded in the late 18th century, the dominant paradigm of the natural world was one of independent particles, mirrored by a society of individuals pursuing their own ends and only related externally through contracts. Today our world no longer exists in that way. Einstein and theories of quantum physics remind us that

the world is inextricably intertwined – on micro and macro-levels. Living in space, everything will be interdependent to a degree that is hard to imagine now. Without Stage Three Leadership and a prime directive of “humanity in space”, we can expect people bent on power, position and greed to duplicate the violence, inequity and lack of cooperation that often diminishes effectiveness and the quality of life on Earth. On our home planet we could (at least until very recently), rebound from the consequences of this behavior without overstressing the capacity of our environment to renew itself. In the habitats of space our closed biological systems will not withstand a crash in our social systems.

In the face of these vastly higher levels of complexity and interdependence, an atomistic theory of humanity is no longer relevant. Whether the subject is the future of humans in space, or controlling nuclear weapons, or reorganizing a government agency, our nation and the world urgently need more Stage Three Leaders to generate unified and committed collective action. This is a personal invitation to join in a collective hero’s journey, and to stand for their selection, training and support.

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Author’s note:

Given the challenge presented by existing designs of governance and complex, entangled cultures and infrastructures, numbers of research questions remain, including:

- What are qualifications for selection of potential Stage Three Leaders?
- What does success or certification look like?
- How do we train people to balance order, control and results focus in a context of what’s good for humanity, locally and at large?

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