

# Leadership Change Ending Blindness and Igniting Intention Measuring and Graphing Change

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After being a certified coach for 6 years while I performed a management role in a large corporation, I moved in a full-time leadership coaching and organizational effectiveness position within a large factory site that creates state of the art micro- processors. In this new position, I started forming coaching partnerships with various senior and mid-level managers. I asked one of the senior managers that I was coaching if I could observe him in action in a meeting. During the meeting, I was struck by the overwhelming mood of low energy and lack of smiles and laughter. There was no celebration of the small wins the team had achieved or appreciative statements during the meeting. (In my 25 years at the company I had not experienced this level of resignation) The team had been solving many difficult problems, and had much success but not enough recognition of the amazing things they accomplished. There were still many more problems to solve so the emotional state, the internal narrative. There is no light at the end of the tunnel. It's just our fate to work and work at never-ending problems. This was like watching the myth of Sisyphus in action.

The factory site had a culture that did not reflect its own desired state and the collective leadership behaviors did not reflect external research on best practices. A lack of trust and openness caused employees to be reluctant to ask their manager for help and to cling to behavior of self-preservation ("I'm going to watch out for myself and my own area"). In addition, a number of leaders radiated their own stress throughout the organization, generating a downward mood and state of feeling overwhelmed. My observation data revealed that often 70% of the leaders multitasked in critical forums, reducing engagement and positive leadership energy. Lead our People behaviors were insufficient with the dominant focus on task only and little focus on relationship. The common form of motivation was negative attention that research shows is three times the weight of positive, causing employees to use energy to avoid pain versus igniting possibilities. There was a general lack of encouragement, engaging the fire within that helps create a high performing team and individual productivity. The lack of desired behaviors were invisible to those immersed in the culture.

I started observing meetings to baseline what behaviors were occurring and what was missing. Since I had worked with engineers all of my career, I realized that they could connect to graphical representations of observations. This visible made what was perceived as soft and less tangible. At first I selected seven foundational behaviors, for four months, and then at a strategic meeting showed the staff graphs of their collective behavior. The behaviors I chose were based on research in neuroscience, studies of human behavior and consequences along best known practices. I tracked laughter as a representation of light up energy and positive energy being brought into the meeting. I tracked Open questions (what and how) that invite

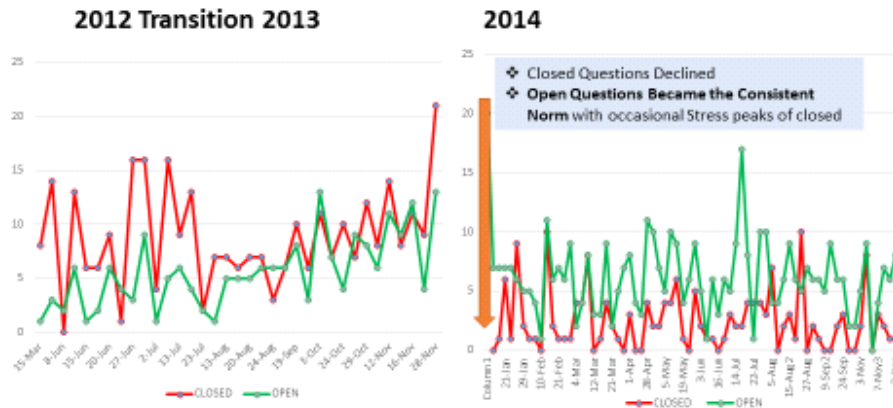
exploration, learning, reflection and dialog. I also tracked closed questions that were predominately being used and in a meeting felt more like presenters were being interrogated so I could compare and contrast the change over time. I had encouraged the senior leader to begin meetings with recognition and to offer appreciative statements based on the research that at least a 5-to -1 Ratio of positive to negative statements will help to build relationships and high performing teams. I tracked asking for help and making offers, building mutual support and summarizing that demonstrated listening. When I showed the staff the graphs, one engineering manager said out loud, "She graphed our behaviors". Along with showing the graphs I spoke about why these behaviors are important to high performing teams, organizations and their effects on human productivity and commitment.

The next step was to facilitate small group dialogs for the staff to determine what leadership behaviors they would commit to start doing or do more of. In addition, I asked each one of the leaders to make a personal commitment. Using research around forming habits I asked them to commit to one or two the behaviors to build into new leadership habits.

The approach taken integrated the research on positive-to-negative ratios, neuroscience, building new habits and high performing teams, power of feedback and removing blind spots, leader mood, motivating and demotivating factors, using the millions of moments every day to inform the change starting tops down. The methodology was: (1) Define the desired culture in terms of observable behaviors (2) Obtain leadership commitment (3) Baseline current state (4) Engage in observation (open up blind spots) (5) Provide feedback at individual and organizational level (6) Provide reporting showing graphical leadership behavioral change (visible barometer charting change).

**Results:** Over the next two-half years, leaders developed new behavioral habits and maintained and grew them during tough challenges, such as dealing with a 30% reduction in full time employees and a 50% reduction in vendor experts supporting the highly specialized equipment while hitting all time highs for output and supporting new technology start-ups. This site provided over 40% of the company's revenue in 2014. One hundred percent of the committed leadership behaviors continued to improve and even *doubled* in some areas (e.g. challenging the status quo/candor) as measured by observations graphed. It took 18 months for the staff norm to change from closed to open questions. Open questions now dominate meetings with occasional reversal to closed questions under high stress, but then revert back to the new norm.

# Open – Closed Questions

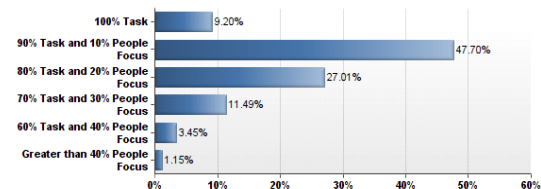
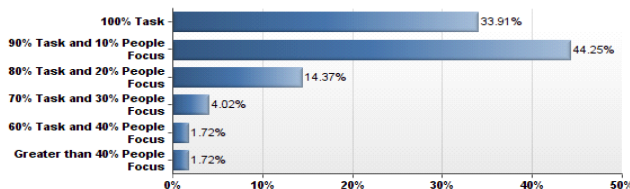


The mood of the leaders continued to become more positive and encouraging even during tough times. In 2012 positive energy went from zero to bouncing around an average of 5. In 2013 the energy results doubled and in 2014 doubled again.

# Positive Leadership Energy



The staff had taken the Leadership Practices Inventory survey at the end of 2013 then at the end of 2014. Scores from direct reports improved (10+% increase) across the five leadership categories. As reported by one of the vice presidents: *“This methodology resulted in a significant increase in trust and mutual support at the staff level. This was particularly evident as the factory moved into high output, the team demonstrated an increased ability to accept challenging goals and found ways to deliver them in a timely manner. The product priorities changed with significant pull-in requests. Even in this very intense environment, the energy level stayed high, with each manager willing to support what was needed. This would not have been possible earlier.”* The culture now promotes asking for help, providing appreciation, candor and a learning environment. The bell shaped curve for percent of task/relationship focus between employees and managers shifted from predominately 100% task to a 10 to 20% increase in attention to relationships.



The methodology can be used by any organization committed to changing leadership behaviors to create the desired culture. This approach can result in substantial change within a 12-18 month period. This approach combines different human behavior research to help shift a staff of leaders with key parts being observing, providing feedback and making the less tangible

more visible through graphic behavior change over time.

I learned as I went along on this journey with the staff. Below are a few observations and moments that illustrate what I discovered.

Some unexpected results in the beginning when I observed if there was a good amount of recognition at the beginning of the meeting then there were more appreciative statements. If there was fewer recognition then there was less appreciative statements they tracked together. Last year the habits became strong so I noticed recognition and appreciation now track independently of one another.

In one meeting when I observed the mood dropped the lowest I had experienced in a long time, I mentioned it to the vice president. He then went into the next meeting being intentional about the positive leadership energy he brought into that meeting which totally shifted the entire mood.

I have been struck by comments leaders make now that tell me they are better observers of themselves and others in a meeting. They will talk about changing their approach when they notice the body language going negative or about being intentional with a specific behavior to help encourage a team that is struggling, reminding them of the confidence they had in their ability to solve challenging technical problems.

An executive shared with me that he had observed a manager asking closed questions and saw the impact that had on the person the manager was talking with, the employee moving into a defensive mood and withdrawing. The executive provided a little coaching to that manager on open questions. Then manager he had coached later reported when he asked open questions he noticed the difference it made in the dialog and reaction of the other person.

What a difference it is now to observe meetings and experience the increased leadership behaviors. The leadership continues to take it to new levels. I am honored that I have been on this journey with them and proud that they have embraced and continue to expand their leadership habits and increase their intentionality.

There are now many meetings, I leave with a big smile on my face.