

Members Quarterly

Summer 2014 Edition

feature

Dare to 'BE' Different

Create the work space and the place to 'BE'

This final article in the Energy on the Frontline Series builds on the concepts in earlier articles where we invite you to explore who you are as a leader, develop the skills to coach by changing your thinking, learn to ask powerful questions and explore the beliefs you hold about others. Now we pull it all together. We also close the loop on HOT: Honest, Open and Transparent. We also add possibly the hardest to achieve, AUTHENTICITY, as a key ingredient to leading others. This is about evolving from 'doing' as a manager to 'being' a leader.

It's interesting. A close colleague read all of the articles and said, "I've worked with many managers who don't get this. They don't get that the work is the people. They don't get that they have to show up in a way that invites others to bring their best forward." Her observation and question is rich with opportunity and invites us to challenge our 'being' as leaders.

Work happens through relationship. Genuine relationship happens when we show up as our authentic selves: vulnerable, transparent and real. Leaders have to be real. Leaders who realize just how much impact their positions have and who work to make that positive open up possibilities. We can build relationships and create affirming environments by understanding our impact, learning to 'be' different and to coach. We can lean into our strengths and be transparent about our developmental opportunities to bring out the strengths in others. Our work as a coach shifts to asking powerful questions and building positive, affirming and growth-producing relationships full of possibility. How do you do this? How do you shift to be seen as a leader who can really 'be'?

First you have to create TRUST. Whether you believe trust is earned or freely given, trust is critical to a leader / coach's success. Know who you are and be HONEST, OPEN, and TRANSPARENT with others about what you need from them. Get curious about how others see you. Do you behave in ways that build or destroy trust? How can you find out? What are you prepared to do with what you find out? Have you created the environment where people can be really honest with you, say the hard thing and tell truth to positional power? If not, then that's a great place to start. Start asking the people who will share their truth about your impact.

Second, you need to be VULNERABLE. This can be tough and some will say does not belong in the workplace. We see it differently. Are you able to be honest, open and transparent about your leadership and what you're learning about your development opportunities? Have you had a conversation with your team about your leadership style and whether it motivates them to bring their best? Have you told them you'd like their help in becoming the best leader they've ever had the opportunity to work for? Have you shared your development plan? Are you authentic in conversation with them? When you can be real about this, it frees employees to take risks with you and to let you know what they need from you to be successful. It creates 'we.'



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Third, believe that OTHERS ARE CAPABLE. When you do, you open the potential for creating an environment where appropriate risk is taken and mistakes are viewed as growth opportunities. People want to come to work, to work, to feel like they belong, to make a meaningful contribution and to add value. They want to make a difference. They might not always know the best way to go about it but that's what they want to do. It's as simple and as complex as that. What does how you think about others say about their potential? What attitude do you hold about their positivity and productivity? How have you clearly communicated what you need and want from them? What conditions have you created to enable them to deliver what you've asked? Are you just telling them how to do their jobs or are you coaching them to success?

Next be HONEST, OPEN and TRANSPARENT about how they are doing. When we as leaders hesitate to provide feedback, we miss a coaching opportunity. What do you know about where the hesitancy might come from? What reluctance might you have about hosting an authentic, HOT conversation? When you dig deep and be HOT with yourself, if you find your answer is a lack of confidence or competence, then what are you prepared to do to grow the skill you need so that you can grow others? What happens when you hold others big and trust they can hear the feedback when your intent is to coach and enable their growth?

And finally LEARN how to COACH. There are basic tenets to coaching others. Believing that people are whole, fully capable and wanting to show up giving you their best is critical to your success as a leader who coaches. You also need to develop coaching skills. That starts with great listening and by developing the ability to ask powerful questions. It is important to resist the temptation to provide the answer. And finally, you have to show up in the coaching space as a partner, someone who works with employees to co-create different. Coaching opens up opportunities you would never have dreamed possible.

We conclude this series by saying we believe that when leaders make the shift to coaching, they show up differently. Leaders who coach understand their contribution to relationships, are authentic and capable of honest, open and transparent conversations. They know how to 'be.' Coaches lead by partnering with employees to seize possibilities and enable growth.

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Silence is a Question

Silence can be the largest tool in the exploration tool box. It is also really uncomfortable. As a coach, asking a question and then letting the space hang waiting for the answer creates a place where the employee can really examine what's going on for them. Wait long enough and they will engage. Some of the most profound statements and learning often emerge from that quiet place of introspection. Feel free to give space and resist the urge to fill it up.

Enable Exploration of Barriers and Impact

Powerful questioning can also provide a 'test run' and allow an employee to safely explore potential challenges and implications to their plan of action. Asking questions to identify what will get in their way, how their approach might be perceived by others and the implications of their actions gives the person the place to critically think through their plan. Anticipating the pitfalls and giving thought to potential strategies to address them will position the employee for future success – that 'staying power' after they leave your office.

'A' is for Accountability

Powerful questions need to inspire action and ownership. A conversation without the person positioned for forward movement is a nice interaction but it is not coaching. To make it last, the employee needs to leave your office with definitive action. Asking questions about next steps, time frames for completion and follow-up are key to the employee's accountability including application and transferability of learning. Employee accountability honours their capability and creates independence.

And Remember, There's No Perfect Question

Finally, we believe that daring to be curious regardless of the 'perfect' question opens the space for collaboration, co-creation and innovation. Sometimes, as a coach you are more concerned about crafting the perfect question rather than just listening and trusting yourself to let them flow based on the employee's needs. Even if a question doesn't quite land, it elicits some thought process in the receiver and opportunity for them to say "No, that's not quite it, it's more like this". Powerful questioning is about making space for them. If you 'hold them big', you trust that they are resourceful, whole, capable and able to find the solution themselves.

In summary, think of powerful questions as the wind in the sails. The leader as coach provides the environment through powerful questioning to safely propel the individual into uncharted waters. This questioning can supportively push the employee outside their comfort zone to a place of new opportunity.

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